

Iraq Is a Battle, Not a War

Losing or winning is a matter of definition

The Iraq War isn't one. It looks like a War. It has all the pain and suffering of wartime captured in human stories with individual names that scream in anguish, pain, and unspeakable love and pride. Measured by the long, dispassionate yardstick of history, the Iraq War is one battle in a much greater, grave World War IV. The distinction is significant to more than military historians. A battle can be lost and the war still won.

The Iraq War, in context, is a battle which may be lost in either Iraq or the U.S. It may be lost today or next year or ten years from now. It all depends on the meaning of 'losing' and 'winning'. If Iraq becomes a democratically-elected Shiite Muslim theocracy in the next 20 years, did the U.S. win or lose? What if a dictator seizes power? How about if Iraqis vote for representation by groups, but never secure individual rights for freedom of speech, religion and assembly? Define victory and how long it has to last or name your defeat.

If I may borrow from two metaphors, America's fight synthesizes key elements from Rome's long Strategic Defense and the U.S. Operational Offense through our Indian Wars. The mix of lessons portends, not pretends, how to envision some of our National challenges.

The exercise of imperial American power to destroy the clear and present danger of Saddam Hussein's Iraq, is part of WWIV, not a diversion. Saddam was a rogue threat. Sooner or later the Islamists would have used Iraq to get at us. Meanwhile, the Islamist 10% of Islam fights non-Islamist Muslims, the West, Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists. It isn't a war of the West vs. Islam, but it could morph into exactly that clash of civilizations. Muslims, not the West, will decide that fate.

Four years after 9-11 galvanized the Nation with a murderous attack, only a few historical seconds later, half of America wants to close the detention camp at Guantanamo, pull out of Iraq and pretend there is no war, but a criminal problem – provoked by our own misdeeds and collective historical guilt. The other half of America sends family and friends to fight for as long as their Nation asks, like the Roman legions and the U.S. Army on our Frontier.

Roman Legions lived and died in places they hated for over 400 years (1200 years for Roman Byzantium). America and Allies enter but the third year of war in Iraq. The Romans won battles and lost whole legions, but as long as Rome was willing to send reinforcements, Rome crushed any contender – like the siege of Masada – to send a message. Afghanistan (OEF) and Iraq (OIF) told enemies how far and how much the U.S. would do to defeat a threat.

Like Rome, ambitious immigrants are drawn to our power and wealth while everyone else in the known world will hate, fear, resent, and envy us – regardless of how we use our power and wealth. The purpose of our power is to create 'security and stability'

within real limits in the world order. Such is the odd lot of the reluctant Imperial Uber-Super Power of insular Americans.

Likewise, the small, hard professional army, our U.S. Army, fought battle after battle, called wars, through the later half of the Indian Wars (1608-1890). The culture of each Indian tribe shaped the circumstances of each unique war. Similarly, the transforming Army that evolves after deployment upon deployment will be different from the popular, citizen soldiers of the occasional large conflict.

Rome's decline from Republic to dictatorship to ruin began when Roman law became what men said it meant. When Rome wouldn't man its own Legions, the long decline tipped. Rome had the means, but lacked the Will to survive.

The Indian Wars were a different war of National survival, because the no-quarter clash of cultures was confined to the frontier. The understanding of the wars changed with each mile and year an American was removed from the threat of being killed by Indians.

Winning in Iraq means it isn't an Islamist base and is relatively secure and stable, non-threatening, among its neighbors. If Iraq produces oil, then all the better.

The Iraq War, however and whenever it is defined as a win or loss, is worth it, if it helps, through victory or defeat, the U.S. win WW IV. We lost the Vietnam War, but won the Cold War (WW III) – in part because President Reagan learned from the loss.

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