

**THE TRILATERAL COMMISSION**  
**2006 NORTH AMERICAN REGIONAL MEETING**  
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**DEVELOPMENTS IN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY**

**Robert Kagan**

Thanks very much, Henry, and let me just start by saying that I agree with a great deal of what Richard says. Don't worry. There will be some further discussion.

But what I most agree with is that if this is such an important task in Iraq, then we should have done everything necessary to ensure some kind of success, even if it wasn't the initial success that we wanted, but some kind of success. Clearly, from the very beginning of the conflict, we did not do that. We are today talking about emergency exit strategies, drawdown, disengagement, withdrawal, and whatever other term you want to use.

The truth is the administration has been looking for the exits from the moment it went through the entrance. The Pentagon's hope, I believe, the Secretary of Defense's hope—and this is not based on any reading of Bob Woodward's book, this is in the public record—was that the United States would be down to 30,000 troops in Iraq within a matter of months. If you go back and read all the news clippings, every six months or less, sometimes every three months, since we first went into Iraq, the military, the Pentagon, the administration, have promised a drawdown of forces by the end of the year, and every year it has not happened.

In fact, never has there been a steadier number of forces deployed in a place than in Iraq. I think where I differ with Richard is when he says—and I don't know whether we're in complete disagreement or not—if it's as important as George Bush says it is, because that implies that perhaps it isn't all that important, or at least not important enough.

I notice that Richard said that we cannot afford to leave Afghanistan, because then the Taliban and al Qaeda, or some variation of that, will come back, which I think is absolutely right. But I don't know how it's possible to say that we can't leave Afghanistan because those things might happen, but we can afford to leave Iraq.

I think that I want to pick up on what Henry asked, which is we have to look at what the likely consequences of our withdrawal are, work backwards from that, and decide whether we can in fact tolerate it. Our policy ought to be based on that rather than the sense that this is all mucked up and it's not going to work, because I think that whether you want to get out or not, and whether you are looking for ways to get out, however phrased, depends on whether you feel you can live with the consequences of your eventual departure.

I guess, Richard, we can have a further discussion about your proposal, but I think that in any withdrawal plan that I've seen, it's hard for me to see how you don't avoid sectarian violence. Now you're absolutely right, there is sectarian violence now, it's very bad, and it's probably going to get worse, but I don't think we should fail to have enough imagination to imagine a sectarian violence that is much, much worse than we are even seeing right now. We don't know how bad it can get, and it can get a great deal worse, it

could be a horrific slaughter, even more horrific than we are now witnessing.

But perhaps of even more direct consequence to America's specific interests, I have not seen, in any particular plan, how we can avoid winding up with some portion of Iraq in the hands of international terrorists, who will do what they would do were they to regain some portion, some safe haven, in Afghanistan, which is to conduct operations out of Iraq. If that is the case, because it seems to me, that at least in the Sunni areas, where they have been working together in common cause, for a variety of reasons I find it very hard to believe that in a Sunni autonomous region, if such a thing could possibly exist, that their number one priority would be to ensure that there were no international terrorist operations operating out of there, which would mean that almost as soon as we left and headed back over the horizon, wherever that horizon is, my question would be how many minutes before we have to head back over the horizon again to deal with whatever problem has erupted.

"Over the horizon," in my view, is not actually withdrawal, because the truth is, this president, or the next president, could find that the situation that had been left in the wake of our "over the horizon" withdrawal was simply intolerable and required us to come back across the horizon again. So while I agree, I think, with Richard's fundamental analysis, my own strategic sense, my sense of what is required, means that we cannot in fact tolerate the consequences of our withdrawal.

Now let's talk about the hope that there is some middle ground, and that is obviously what the Baker commission is searching for. It's sort of what you've articulated—some middle ground between "cut and run" and "stay the course." Let's talk about that possibility.

I have to say that if such a possibility existed, we might have discovered it by now. Now I'm willing to believe that the wise authors of the Baker commission—we know who they are—will come up with the magic solution on how we can do gradual withdrawal and disengagement without leaving a conflagration behind. But my sense of it, and I don't have any proof, is that our desire for gradualism will not be fulfilled by the parties on the ground; that a gradual disengagement or withdrawal will lead to crisis much sooner than we imagined; that the parties in the area will not participate and cooperate in our desire for gradualism; that they will see the opportunity of decreasing American presence to step up their own activities and bring things to a much more dangerous head much sooner than we would like to see.

And I feel similarly about the desire to move, to lower our sights from democracy, the idealistic goal, to stability. I am absolutely confident that if the administration could find a path towards stability, they would be delighted to do so, and I'm sure they would call it democracy whether it was or it wasn't. But surely stability is the administration's maximal goal at this point. The question is: Is it any easier to achieve stability than it is to achieve democracy? And I have to say I'm skeptical that you can achieve stability with a reduction of forces or probably even with the maintenance of the current level of forces.

The instability that we're seeing now is not an accident, and it is not easily resolved. When Richard calls for negotiations among the parties to work everything out, I must say, I'm reminded a little bit of the Steve Martin joke: You can be a millionaire and never pay taxes; first, get a million dollars. They are negotiating all the time. The notion that if only we could get them to negotiate, this would solve the problem, strikes me as, you know, not realistic. I don't believe that Zal Khalilzad is sitting in Baghdad not trying to get these guys to negotiate. I think he probably spends 23 hours a day working on getting them to negotiate, and the problem with is that the negotiations are not taking place in a vacuum. They're taking place against the background of incredible quantities of violence, violence directed at those negotiations, violence directed at preventing them from reaching a solution, and the violence that we, the United States, are supposed to be suppressing to make such negotiations possible.

Now everybody says, and I think quite rightly, ultimately this has to be a political solution, but our

problem has been not that we haven't sought a political solution, but that the political solution has been undermined by military incapacity. It's been undermined by the endemic violence that we've not been able to deal with.

If I'm going on too long, I apologize, because the punch line is I'm going to call for more forces. Getting back to the basic point, which is that if this thing is as important as I think it is and we think it is, you have to do what's necessary to have any chance of victory, and that obviously meant increasing the size of the force in 2003, it meant increasing the size of the force in 2004 and 2005, and it still means increasing the size of force, bad as things are, because there's one thing that you will hear from every commander, at every level of the U.S. military, trying to do any job that they're trying to do, and that is that they don't have enough troops to do the job.

Now it is said a little too flippantly, I think, that we don't have the forces to send. That's not true, of course, but what it does require to send the forces is to have a completely different attitude towards this war. It means treating the war the way we treated World War II. It means extending tours of duty that are very painful and unpleasant. It means activating more Guards and Reserves, and it means immediately increasing the size of the force.

Right now, the force is too small, but if you tell the Army commanders that in a year or two years even there will be more forces coming on line, they will be more willing and more able to make the sacrifices they need now. It's the idea that there is nothing coming down the pike that makes it very difficult, and that is breaking the Army.

Now the last panel will assure me that this is politically impossible. I must say we had two experts on politics. I'm choosing David Gergen as my choice today. I don't think it's impossible for the president to ask for more forces, regardless of what has happened in the elections.

And let me just say, if I were a Democratic presidential candidate, I would hope that the president will call for an increase of forces and try to get this thing in better shape in the next two years, so that I don't inherit the mess that is likely to come afterwards.

And what about Afghanistan? I think we need more forces in Afghanistan too. But, in any case, since we're talking mostly about Iraq, I think it is not inconceivable that if the president, regardless of his popularity ratings, and regardless of who's in Congress, said to the American people, we are going to give this a real shot at victory—or success or whatever term you want to use—that he would have a window of support, and he might even get bipartisan support, because it is not in the Democratic Party's interest for this thing to be a total catastrophe, if and when they take power in 2009.

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