

Strategic Overview on the War on Terror

by Steven Den Beste

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The purpose of this document is to provide a high level strategic view of the cause of the war, the reason that the United States became involved in it, the fundamental goals the US has to achieve to win it, and the strategies the US is following, as well as an evaluation of the situation as of July, 2003. Most of what is here has been explored in far greater detail in numerous posts made on *USS Clueless* (<http://denbeste.nu>). [It was adapted from [this entry](#).]

September 13, 2003: I have been making ongoing revisions to this document. I've been adding links to supporting information, and rewriting some sections which were misunderstood, whether accidentally or deliberately.

The original version of this outline can be found at http://denbeste.nu/essays/strategic_overview.shtml. (Please include this URL in any copy made of this document.)

I. WHAT IS THE ROOT CAUSE OF THE WAR?

- A. [Collective failure of the nations](#) and people in a large area [which is](#) predominately [Arab](#) and/or Islamic.
 1. Economically the only contribution they make is by selling natural resources which are available to them solely through luck.
 2. They make [no significant contribution](#) to international science or engineering.
 3. They make little or no cultural contribution to the world. Few seek out their poetry, their writing, their movies or music. The most famous Muslim writer of fiction in the world is under a fatwa death sentence now and lives in exile in Europe.
 4. Their only diplomatic relevance is due to their oil.
 5. They are not respected by the world, or by themselves.
 6. None of this has anything to do with historical Arab culture at its height, which was rich, powerful, and very impressive. It produced great literature and poetry, great science, and amazing architecture. It adopted and regularized place-value numbering, developed arithmetic and invented algebra. But that all largely ended several hundred years ago. All of the discussion above refers to the current culture of the region, and the people living there now.
- B. Since this is a “face” culture, shame about this has led to rising but unfocused discontent, anger and resentment.
 1. [A 2001 survey](#) of Arab teenagers found that about half of them wanted to emigrate.
 2. People in a face culture are not comforted by the accomplishments of their ancestors if they themselves have none. Others in the world don't respect a people because of what was done by their

ancestors. Thus the monumental accomplishments of Arab civilization at its height are not material to any analysis of the current situation.

- C. Some governments in the region have tried to focus it elsewhere so as to deflect it away from themselves. (The “Zionist Entity” is a favorite target.)
 - 1. There’s good reason to believe that the Saudis have actually made deals with al Qaeda and other dissidents. It’s been alleged that there was an explicit deal with al Qaeda that if it made no attacks in Saudi Arabia itself, in exchange the Saudi government would not interfere with its fund-raising in Saudi Arabia.
 - 2. The Saudi government has been involved in a devil’s deal with Wahhabist extremists for decades, letting them have full control over roving bands of thugs armed with canes who would beat women wearing “indecent” clothing or walking without male relatives, or anyone at all who acted in any way that the extremists thought violated their interpretation of proper behavior. The Wahhabists have also been given vast amounts of money (billions of dollars) to support their efforts to export their version of Islam around the world, both to Islamic and non-Islamic nations. In exchange for this, the Wahhabists have turned a blind eye to the decadence (and sins) of the members of the Saud royal family and have not agitated for revolution against them.
 - 3. All the nations in the region demonize Israel. Their schoolbooks are loaded with propaganda against the Jews, many of which repeat historical lies and slanders.
 - 4. This amounts to a culture-wide addiction to “[the cult of victimhood](#).”
- D. Ambitious leaders of various kinds of tried to use it for their own purposes.
 - 1. Khomeinei and the Taliban used it to support revolutions respectively in Iran and Afghanistan.
 - 2. Saddam used it to gain support for creation of a united pan-Arab empire ruled from Baghdad.

II. WHY IS THE U.S. FIGHTING THE WAR? WHY WERE WE ATTACKED?

- A. American success casts Arab/Islamic failure in sharp contrast. Politically, economically, militarily, technologically and culturally we set the standard and our accomplishments make their failure look particularly bad.
- B. America is the largest and most important supporter of Israel. Arab leaders have used Israel as a scapegoat for their own failure, and part of that is to blame us since we refuse to abandon Israel. They have provided enough support to the Palestinians to keep the struggle going, so that their own people have someone outside to hate, which is why Israel is top of their shitlist. But that also causes them to hate us for our support of Israel.
- C. [America is secular](#). Islamic religious zealots have been preaching that much of Arab/Islamic failure happens because Muslims have not been sufficiently devout. Allah has not been fighting on their side because they were sinners who have turned away from the teachings of the Prophet and a true virtuous life. The zealots claimed that only by embracing extreme forms of Islam could they again gain Allah’s favor and begin to succeed. But the US government and the American people do not follow those teachings, and America is a success. At the same time, in the nations where the extremists took power things got *even worse*. American success is heresy. In religious terms the only explanation for that is that America is in league with Satan, and Khomeinei said as much.

- D. American culture and American ideas are very popular with many of the people who live in the Arab/Islamic belt in question, particularly among [their young people](#). This is viewed with alarm by traditionalists of all kinds. Their own people were being seduced away from their traditional culture and extreme religious practices.
- E. America has earned a reputation in much of the world as being rich, well-armed, but also *cowardly*; full of bluster but having no guts. Such events as our defeat in Viet Nam, our experiences in Beirut and Somalia, our half-hearted and largely ineffectual responses to the attacks against us in the 1980's and 1990's, and many other episodes contributed to the impression that we would not fight back if attacked, and that there was little risk in attacking us, whether rhetorically or even violently.
- F. America is the "top dog" in the world right now, and there was prestige associated with attempting to take down the "top dog."

III. POSSIBLE RESPONSES, SMALL AND LARGE

- A. Some advocated appeasement: reduce our military spending, massively increase foreign aid, stop supporting Israel and throw it to the wolves, and apologize, apologize, apologize.
 - 1. Historically, appeasement doesn't work.
 - 2. Those proposing this generally hold strongly leftist, post-nationalist political positions and assumed that since the terrorists evidently hated the US as much as the leftists do, that they must hate the US for the same grounds. But there's no reason to assume that al Qaeda or the other terrorist organizations that imperil us have any sympathy with what Fonte calls [transnational progressivism](#), or that they would cease making plans for attacks against us if the US ratified the Kyoto accord or the ICC treaty.
 - 3. This approach claimed that poverty and American foreign policy missteps in particular were the proximate cause of Arab/Islamic anger directed at the US. But there's no reason to believe that this is true.
 - a. al Qaeda's original political statement regarding the US did not include any such claims. (Later statements sometimes did at least touch on such things because al Qaeda was trying to gain support from leftists in Europe.)
 - b. Most of the terrorists who carried out the attack on 9/11 came from prosperous families. None of them came from impoverished backgrounds.
 - c. There doesn't seem to be any difference in the degree of hostility expressed towards the West in Arab nations which are relatively prosperous (e.g. Saudi Arabia) and those which are less well off (e.g. Syria).
 - d. Arab and Islamic hostility towards the US even in nations relatively unaffected by American foreign policy is far greater than in nations which have suffered far more at our hands, such as Viet Nam (which has been trying for years to reestablish normal diplomatic and commercial relations).
 - 4. If the true root cause was anger and resentment caused by Arab shame at lack of Arab accomplishment, massively increased aid would not help. You do not make a man proud by giving him charity.

5. Irrespective of any other arguments against this approach, it wasn't politically possible in the US. The vast majority of Americans (especially America's [Jacksonians](#)) were in no mood to accept such a solution. The domestic reaction to those who advocated this solution was nearly uniformly hostile.
- B. The microscopic solution was to respond "proportionally" with a token counter-attack, and then deal with the situation as one of international law enforcement, by attempting to find and arrest those who were implicated in the plot so as to put them on trial for it after extradition.
1. That's what we tried to do in the 1980's and 1990's, and it failed. bin Laden was already under indictment for previous attacks against us, and all diplomatic efforts to gain control of his person for trial over a period of several years had failed.
 2. This policy in the 1980's and 1990's was part of what established our reputation in the Arab world as being cowardly.
 3. Doing this after an attack as devastating as the one on 9/11 would have further reinforced our reputation for cowardice. It would have raised the reputation of all terrorist groups by showing that terrorism was a valid (and successful!) way of striking back.
 4. Such a response would have encouraged further attacks against us which potentially might have been far more devastating, if the terrorists had managed to gain access to some sort of extreme weapon.
- C. The small solution was to assume that al Qaeda was the entire problem, and to eradicate al Qaeda and all others who could be shown to be directly involved in the attack in September of 2001.
1. If we had concentrated exclusively on al Qaeda it would have left intact other similar movements, equally dangerous but not directly implicated in the attack against us. al Qaeda launched the attack against us but were not the only ones who had the ability or will to do so, and other groups had been and had every intention of continuing to launch such attacks against other targets (e.g. Bali, Israel, the Philippines, Kashmir).
 2. This would have been a case of treating the symptom, not the disease. It would have left the deep discontent and frustration of the "Arab Street" intact, as fertile ground for the next demagogue to come along wishing to plant the seeds of *jihad* against the West.
- D. The large solution is to reform the Arab/Muslim world. This is the path we have chosen.
1. The true root cause of the war is their failure and their resentment and frustration and shame caused by that failure.
 2. They fail because they are crippled by political, cultural and religious chains which their extremists refuse to give up. The real causes of their failure is well described by [Ralph Peters](#). Most of the Arab nations suffer from all seven of his critical handicaps, and the goal of reform is to correct all seven, as far as possible.
 3. If their governments can be reformed, and their people freed of the chains which bind them and cripple them, they will begin to achieve, and to become proud of their accomplishments. This will reduce and eventually eliminate their resentment.
 4. Their governments would then cease needing scapegoats.

5. Their extremists would no longer have fertile ground for recruitment.
6. This is a huge undertaking; it will require decades because it won't really be complete until there's a generational turnover. But ultimately it is the only way to really eliminate the danger to us without using the "foot-and-mouth" solution (which is to say, nuclear genocide).
7. The primary purpose of reform is to liberate individual Arabs. This is a humanist reform, but it isn't a *Christian* reform. There will be no attempt to eradicate Islam as a religion. Rather, Islamism as a political movement, and as a body of law, and as a form of government must be eliminated, leaving Islam as a religion largely untouched except to the extent that it will be forced to be tolerant. The conceptual model for this is [what we did in Japan](#) after WWII, where only those cultural elements which were dangerous to us were eliminated, leaving behind a nation which was less aggressive, but still Japanese. No attempt was made to make Japan a clone of the US, and no such attempt will be made with the Arabs.

IV. SHORT TERM STRATEGY IN RESPONSE TO THE 9/11 ATTACKS

- A. al Qaeda had to be eliminated, or at least drastically crippled.
- B. In order to reduce the immediate hazard, we had to change the perception that we were cowards who could be attacked with impunity. In the short term, it was not possible for us to make the "Arab Street" love us, but we could convert its contempt into fear. Though not ideal, that had the dual merit of being feasible and effective. (Respect and friendship ideally would come later, as it did with Japan.)
- C. The international web of finance which supported the terrorist groups was vulnerable; their resources needed to be trimmed as much as possible to reduce their ability to operate against us.
- D. The purpose of all of this was to give us breathing room, to stabilize the situation for a few years so that we could carry out longer-term and more effective strategies. It was not, however, [sufficient on its own](#).

V. STAGE 1: AFGHANISTAN

- A. al Qaeda was based in Afghanistan, politically protected by the Taliban. It had operated there with impunity for years. The majority of its membership was organized into relatively normal military formations which had been fighting on behalf of the Taliban in the ongoing Afghan civil war. It also had training bases for terrorists, and most of the leadership of al Qaeda was located there, beyond the reach of international law enforcement.
- B. Even after the 9/11 attack, the Taliban refused to cooperate, and continued to protect al Qaeda. We now know that this is because al Qaeda controlled the Taliban. Omar was the nominal head of government but bin Laden pulled the strings.
- C. Thus the Afghan war, fought by us mainly with air strikes, special forces and bribery.
- D. The goal was to drastically reduce al Qaeda's ability to use Afghanistan as a base of operations and eliminate the government that had been protecting it.
- E. Elimination of the Taliban would be an object lesson for other governments who had been protecting terrorist organizations.

- F. “Nation building” in Afghanistan was not an essential part of the operation there, except to the extent needed to make sure that Afghanistan did not again become a large al Qaeda stronghold in the short run (3-5 years). Any “nation building” beyond that was inspired by humanitarian impulses, but did not further any strategic goals.

VI. STAGE 2: IRAQ

- A. Goal of Stage 2: we had to conquer one of the big antagonistic Arab nations and take control of it.
 - 1. To directly reduce support for terrorist groups by eliminating one government which had been providing such support.
 - 2. To place us in a physical and logistical position to be able to apply substantial pressure on the rest of the major governments of the region.
 - a. To force them to stop protecting and supporting terrorist groups
 - b. To force them to begin implementing political and social reforms
 - 3. To convince the governments and other leaders of the region that it was no longer fashionable to blame us for their failure, so that they would stop using us as scapegoats.
 - 4. To make clear to everyone in the world that reform is coming, whether they like it or not, and that the old policy of [stability-for-the-sake-of-stability](#) is dead. To make clear to local leaders that they may only choose between reforming voluntarily or having reform forced on them.
 - 5. To make a significant long term change in the psychology of the “Arab Street”
 - a. To prove to the “Arab Street” that we were willing to fight, and that our reputation for cowardice was undeserved.
 - b. To prove that we are extraordinarily dangerous when we do fight, and that it is extremely unwise to provoke us.
 - c. To defeat the spirit of the “Arab Street.” To force them to face their own failure, so that they would become willing to consider the idea that reform could lead them to success. No one can solve a problem until they acknowledge that they have a problem, and until now the “Arab Street” has been hiding from theirs, in part aided by government propaganda eager to blame others elsewhere (especially the Jews).
 - 6. To “nation build.” After making the “Arab Street” truly face its own failure, to show the “Arab Street” a better way by creating a secularized, liberated, cosmopolitan society in a core Arab nation. To create a place where Arabs were free, safe, unafraid, happy *and successful*. To show that this could be done without dictators or monarchs. (I’ve been referring to this as being the pilot project for “Arab Civilization 2.0.”)
 - 7. Not confirmed: It may have been hoped that the conquered nation would serve as a honey-pot to attract militants from the region, causing them to fight against our troops instead of planning attacks against civilians. (This was described by David Warren as [the flypaper strategy](#).) It seems to have worked out that way, but it’s not known if this was a deliberate part of the plan. Many of the defenders who died in the war were not actually Iraqis.

B. Neither Afghanistan nor Iran would serve the political goals. The conquered nation had to be one generally thought of as being Arab.

1. The human and cultural material we needed for reform did not exist in Afghanistan.
2. The “Arab Street” would not have been impressed by successful reform in Afghanistan or in Persian Iran.

C. Why Iraq?

1. Already a problem

- a. The existing sanctions process against Iraq (including patrols over the “no fly” zones) was a failure and was unsustainable. One way or another the status quo was going to end soon. Lifting the sanctions and ceasing to enforce the “no fly” zones without removing Saddam from power was too risky.
- b. Saddam represented a substantial long-term threat. He had demonstrated utter ruthlessness and viciousness in two external wars and uncountable internal repressions. He showed no sign of abandoning his ambition to develop nuclear weapons irrespective of how long it might take or how much it might cost or what political sacrifice might be required.
- c. Saddam had been providing immense support for terrorist groups, both monetarily and in other ways. There were known terrorist training bases in Iraq and he had been providing money and arms. It appears that little of that support went to al Qaeda. Most of it went to various Palestinian groups such as Hizbollah.
- d. Saddam had placed a bounty on Israelis by stating that he’d pay a lot of money to the families of any successful suicide bomber, no matter what group the bomber came from.
- e. Saddam had developed and used chemical weapons against Iranian troops and on Iraqi civilians. Left to himself there was a non-trivial chance of his giving such weapons to terrorists. After the war in 1991 and 12 years of Anglo-American enforcement of sanctions, Saddam had a grudge against the US, and the chance of him surreptitiously aiding terrorist attacks against us out of spite was too great to ignore. It’s a matter of record that he attempted to have the senior George Bush assassinated. (George Bush Sr. had been President during the 1991 Gulf War.)

2. Military feasibility

- a. The leaders of Kuwait feared Saddam and owed us a big favor from 1991, so Kuwait could be used as a base from which to launch an invasion of Iraq.
- b. NATO ally Turkey shared a northern border with Iraq and it was expected that a second invasion force could be massed there. (As it turned out, this didn’t happen.)
- c. Iraqi terrain between Baghdad and the Kuwaiti border was well suited for mass armored assault.
- d. Because of ongoing low-level combat in enforcement of the southern “no fly” zone, it was possible to do most of the essential air preparation slowly over a period of months before combat began.

- e. Though the Iraqi military was large and had a reputation with the “Arab Street”, in fact it was deeply crippled and likely to be much less formidable than many expected.

3. Political feasibility

- a. A *casus belli* existed that could be leveraged to justify conquest in certain international fora.
 - i. This related to Saddam’s failure to abide by the truce terms signed in the aftermath of the war in 1991, particularly in cooperating with international inspections to eliminate Iraqi chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and development programs.
 - ii. Saddam’s possession or intent to acquire such weapons represented an indirect and long term threat, but was not in actuality the primary justification for the war.
- b. There had been substantial support by American voters since 1991 for military operations to remove Saddam from power. There was far less support for invasion of Iran and no support at all for conquest of any other nation in the region.

4. Strategic suitability

- a. Iraq is centrally located with borders on Syria, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. It has major ports through which supplies and troops can move. Thus if we occupied Iraq, it would be ideal as a potential base of military operations against any of those other nations later, should that become necessary.
- b. The governments in the region know it. Having American troops on their borders, or even the threat to move troops there, was guaranteed to get their attention.
- c. If the military victory over Iraqi forces was overwhelming, that would make the threat even more impressive. The military forces of the other nations in the region were even less formidable than that of Saddam’s Iraq.
- d. This would make diplomatic threats against them far more effective and inspire much more cooperation from them than had been forthcoming to that point.

5. Potential for Reform

- a. Among the major nations of the region, Iraq before Saddam had been relatively mercantile, relatively secular, and had originally had a relatively well-educated and cosmopolitan population.
- b. Iraq had a history of democratic government, albeit not very successfully.
- c. The Kurds had already established a government similar to what we needed to create.
- d. Iraq’s oil wealth could be used to offset much of the cost of rebuilding after the war, as well as making the nation economically viable and prosperous and helping to finance diversification of its economy.

6. Symbolism and propaganda value

- a. Saddam had become a hero to the “Arab Street.” He was thought of as a strong Arab leader who was standing up to the West. Though Iraq’s military had been decisively defeated in 1991, Saddam survived politically and this actually enhanced his reputation. He hadn’t won against us, but at least he’d tried, which was better than anyone else seemed to be doing. The “Arab Street” was proud of him for making the attempt. (This involved a lot of revisionism, such as ignoring Saddam’s earlier invasion of Kuwait, or the participation of large Arab military forces in the coalition army which fought against Iraq.)
- b. Iraq’s military had the reputation of being the largest, best armed and most dangerous of any in the region. If it could be decisively crushed it would be psychologically devastating.
- c. Baghdad historically was one of the great capitals of classic Arab civilization. Having it fall to outsiders would be symbolically important.

7. Other factors

- a. We owed the southern Shiites a moral debt for not supporting their attempted revolution in 1991, and for our failure to make any attempt to prevent the retaliatory slaughter inflicted on them by Saddam afterwards. (I consider this the most important and most shameful lapse by the US since the end of the Cold War.)
- b. The Kurds had prospered under the umbrella of the northern “no fly” zone. If the sanctions against Iraq had ended and we had stopped enforcing the northern “no fly” zone, the Kurds would then have been crushed, in a repeat of the 1991 slaughter inflicted on the southern Shiites.
- c. Without invasion, reform in Iraq was impossible. The sanctions had failed, and after the debacle of the 1991 Shiite uprising, there was no further possibility of revolution. Removal of Saddam and beginnings of reform in Iraq could only be imposed from outside by military force. Thus invasion of Iraq would have been necessary eventually even if it wasn’t the first target.

8. Potential problems

- a. Saddam might use nerve gas or biological agents against the invading force, or the buildup in Kuwait. The possibility existed that the cost of the war in casualties could be extremely high.
- b. Iraq isn’t really a single nation; it is at least three, depending on how you count. (It had been three provinces under the Ottomans.) Creating a unified nation out of it involved problems due to ethnic divisions.
- c. It also included both Sunnis and Shiites, who generally felt about each other the way that the Catholics and Protestants feel in Northern Ireland.
- d. It could be expected that neighboring nations would try to support factions inside Iraq to work to prevent creation of a democracy there. Iran, in particular, was certain to try to inspire the majority Shiites to establish Iraq as another Khomeinite Islamic Republic.

D. Preparing for war

1. Development of a “coalition of the willing.”

- a. NATO was a hopeless waste of time, especially since some NATO members sided with Saddam and tried to use the mechanisms of NATO to prevent our attack.
 - b. The British and Australians openly sided with us. The British in particular could offer substantial military and diplomatic assistance. Australian assistance was smaller but no less welcome.
 - c. Canadian opposition was a major unpleasant surprise.
 - d. Other nations were willing to help, though in some cases they didn't want to admit it publicly until the last minute.
2. It was necessary for Congress to pass an authorization for war.
 - a. The one passed in September of 2001 (under which we had fought in Afghanistan) could not plausibly be interpreted as authorizing war in Iraq unless the Bush administration claimed that Saddam's government was directly implicated in the 9/11 attack, and no such evidence existed. There's no reason to believe that Saddam was directly involved.
 - b. An attempt to try to use the one passed in 1991, or to go into combat without one using the 60-day clause in the 'War Powers Act', would have caused a constitutional crisis.
 - c. It would have been wrong to try to bypass Congress, violating both the spirit and letter of the Constitution.
 - d. It was vital that the Congressional authorization for war in Iraq not include any provision that would give hostile foreign nations (e.g. France) the ability to veto the war. Thus it was vital that it not require UNSC authorization or NATO approval or participation.
 3. We had to attempt to deal with the UN.
 - . Tony Blair required UN approval (or an "unreasonable veto") for domestic political reasons. In the British system, a decision to declare war is made by the cabinet and doesn't directly require approval from Parliament, but Parliament has the indirect ability to veto it through a vote of no confidence, causing the government to fall. If Blair's cabinet had decided to go to war without any attempt to gain UN approval it would have led to a party revolt and a vote of no confidence.
 - a. It was clear that the UNSC would never actually grant permission for armed invasion. By going to the UN in September, it had become abundantly clear by October that the UN wasn't going to cooperate, so Congress defeated all attempts to include a requirement for UNSC approval in its authorization. (In the Democrat-controlled Senate, those attempts were defeated by a filibuster-proof majority.)
 - b. Wrangling with the UN ended up covering the primary period of troop deployment in Kuwait, restraining Saddam from a preemptive attack against us before we were ready. He believed right up to the last minute that his friends and supporters in Europe could prevent the attack, and knew that any military action by him would have scuttled that political effort by France, Germany and Russia. (Not yet known if this was a deliberate part of the Anglo-American strategy or fortunate side effect.)

4. Dealing with the UN required arguing the case on the basis of Iraqi failure to comply with previous UNSC resolutions, and to concentrate on the issue of inspections and WMD disarmament. This was not the real issue for anyone involved.
 5. All negotiations at the UN happened on two levels. Speeches and announcements all talked about Iraq. The real issue was the fact that the French feared the US more than Iraq. It was a keystone of French foreign policy to use all possible means to restrain US military power and diplomatic influence.
 6. After Congress passed an authorization for war without requiring UNSC approval, and after the Republicans won the November election and gained a majority in the Senate while keeping control of the House, European opponents of war were chastened and permitted Res 1441 to pass. It started one “last chance” opportunity for Saddam to cooperate with inspections, and was ambiguous as to whether war would automatically be authorized if the inspections failed. The US claimed it did; the French that it did not.
 7. To no one’s surprise, the new inspections were a joke.
 8. After Saddam yet again failed to really cooperate with inspections, the US and UK introduced one final resolution in the UNSC that effectively would have authorized war. Those opposing the US, in particular the French, continued to oppose this. The debate became surreal because the true French position was to oppose the US irrespective of the merits of the situation.
 9. Chirac ultimately overplayed his hand and gave the US and UK the diplomatic opportunity [to walk away](#). Tony Blair had as a practical matter gotten his “unreasonable veto.”
- E. Despite the setback of Turkish non-cooperation (due to another French political maneuver) logistical buildup was complete and CENTCOM told Bush that it had sufficient force in place and was ready to go. The attack was launched, and we won.

VII. RESULTS

No battle or war is ever 100% effective in accomplishing the goals set for it, but this one was very good. To review:

- A. The military operation was rapid, efficient and overwhelming.
 1. Coalition losses were very light.
 2. Iraqi civilian losses were also very light, confounding predictions before the war.
 3. As a result of a very successful psyops campaign before the war, large parts of the Iraqi military deserted. Many of those who remained refused outright to fight. Most of the paper strength of the Iraqi military never had to be engaged, and the remnants of the Iraqi air force didn’t make a single sortie.
 4. Iraq’s military was not seen by other Arabs as having put up a good fight. Most found the performance of the Iraqi military embarrassing and humiliating.

- B. We now control the territory of Iraq, and have been applying substantial pressure to Syria, Saudi Arabia and indirectly to Iran. Syria and Saudi Arabia appear to grudgingly accept the new situation. The situation in Iran is very fluid and difficult to predict.
- C. Headlines notwithstanding, in most of Iraq the rebuilding process is actually going moderately well. There have been mistakes and progress has not been as fast as many would like, but most of the resistance has been in a small region of Iraq which is dominated by those groups and tribes who were the top-dogs under Saddam. The armed resistance remains a concern and will continue to be a problem for months, but in the nation as a whole progress has been satisfactory. Most of the people of the nation are glad we're there, and their main fear is that we'll leave too soon, or that the Baathists will somehow regain power and reinstitute their reign of terror.
- D. After the war, the true degree of brutality and barbarism of the Baathist regime began to be revealed. This helped shift the political discussion internationally, since it became increasingly difficult for anyone to argue retroactively in favor of any policy which would have left Saddam in power and thus let the horror continue.
- E. When Baghdad fell in just a couple of days, with very few American casualties, Arabs elsewhere were [totally disillusioned and deflated](#).
 1. The news reports fed to them during the war had been lies, and had told them that the Americans were being badly hurt and that the Iraqi army was fighting well.
 2. As a result, the rapid fall of Baghdad was like a bucket of ice water in the face; totally unexpected and an even more massive shock.
 3. They are now asking themselves what *other* lies they've been fed by their governments.
 4. And some are asking themselves "why we Arabs always seem to fail? What is wrong with us?"
 5. Some Arabs are now openly debating the merits of reform.
- F. Anti-American rhetoric is rapidly going out of style in the region. It's no longer fashionable to advocate picking a fight with us.
- G. Irrespective of whether Saddam actually had physical possession of any kind of WMD, it remains the case that he had not abandoned his ambitions to develop such things. Now that he has been deposed, that is no longer really possible, even if he is still alive. He may still have that ambition but he no longer has the means. It would be nice if he were captured or killed, but removing him from power was the primary goal. (Qusay and Uday were [found and killed](#); Saddam may also die very soon.)
- H. With Saddam's defeat, substantial support for Palestinian terrorist groups has been cut off, and it's already beginning to have effects on them.

VIII. STAGE 3 AND BEYOND: THE FUTURE

- A. Pacification and nation building in Iraq must continue. This is a gradual process which will go on for at least the next year and probably for several years at a reduced level. I expect us to have at least some military presence in Iraq for the next 30 years. (It is essential that [we maintain such a presence](#).)

- B. A new Iraqi army, modest in size but far higher quality compared to the old one, will be trained over the next year and will eventually take responsibility for most internal security.
- C. The process of creating Iraqi self-government got off to the wrong start with the wrong concept (top-down) but is now moving in the right direction (bottom up). Most of the cities and towns in Iraq now have ruling councils, and local elections will become the norm. A national council is in place but has little real power, but in perhaps a year there will be the beginnings of a process to write a new constitution and to hold real elections, after which most power will be turned over to the new government. Then, for a period of a few years, there will be “democracy on training wheels” where some of our troops remain but largely don’t interfere *unless* there is a threat of the government being taken over by radicals.
- D. Iraqi liberal democracy will represent a threat to the autocratic regimes in the region merely by existing, and the US will have to militarily guarantee Iraqi security against threats in particular from Syria and Iran, and to a lesser extent from Saudi Arabia. We’ll also have to guarantee Kurdish security against threats from Turkey. This is another reason why there will need to be a significant American military presence in Iraq for years.
- E. There’s going to be low level armed resistance in Iraq for a very long time, and that means a ongoing trickle of casualties. This isn’t a problem which can be solved in weeks.
- F. Diplomatic pressure will continue on other nations in the region to cut support for terrorist groups and to implement domestic reforms, and that will be far more effective. Also, as Iraq gets back on its feet, the new-found freedom there will serve as both a challenge and an inspiration for others in the region. The “Arab Street” will begin asking their governments why they can’t have the same thing.
- G. There is no way to predict whether any more significant military operations will be needed in this multi-decade war to bring about fundamental reform in the Arab/Muslim region. We will plan no new major military campaigns there in the immediate future (the next three years), but invasions of Iran or Syria or even Saudi Arabia are conceivable sometime in the next 20 years if their leaders refuse to cooperate in reforming, or if hostile and activist regimes take power.
- H. Punitive or preventive bombing, especially of Iran’s nuclear facilities, is entirely possible. There will probably be varying degrees of American involvement in low-level or non-traditional armed conflict in various places in the region. The Marines and Army Special Forces [will continue to operate](#) in Yemen and Somalia.
- I. The shadow war against terrorist group finances and against the cells of those groups will continue, occasionally popping into the public view when there’s a high-profile success – or a high-profile failure.
- J. The chance of new and devastating attacks against the US and UK now appears to be substantially reduced. The risk of attacks against us is not zero; there will be more attempts and some may succeed. However, the terrorists now seem primarily to be operating inside the Arab world itself (except for ongoing Palestinian operations against Israel). That’s doubly good, because it’s motivating the governments there to help us more than they have been.

IX. WE CAN STILL LOSE THIS WAR

- A. If nation building in Iraq fails, we won’t succeed in demonstrating that reform can work for Arabs and make them happier and more successful. We will fail to show them that reform is a better choice *for them* than jihad.

- B. If we permit low level resistance in Iraq to drive us out, the Arab street will once again conclude that we are ultimately cowardly, and will again feel contempt for us. And no nation or group in the region will ever again take the risk of helping us in any future operation there.
- C. If other nations in the region don't implement reforms, their people will continue to be angry and will continue to support terrorism and extremism.
- D. If the other nations in the region don't cut off support for terrorist groups, those groups will continue to have the wherewithal to operate, and may eventually target us.
- E. If we do not bring about general reform before one or another nation in the region successfully develops nuclear weapons, the political situation will become vastly more complicated and we will be in extreme peril. It will become extremely difficult for us to continue to foster reform in the region, and there will be an unacceptably high likelihood that one of our cities will eventually be nuked.
- F. It is therefore critical that we continue to be engaged in the region and continue to work for reform there, doing whatever we must to prevent development of nukes by hostile nations in the region and continuing to work to weaken existing terrorist organizations. We are winning the war but we have not won it. It will take decades to win, just as the Cold War took decades to win. The greatest danger facing us now is that we'll lose heart and give up before we finish the job.