

Iraq situation about more than oil

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Whatever the reason for our involvements in Iraq, it is quite clear that oil is a major factor. Given that what is at stake is not this nation or any nations oil other than that of the people of Iraq, the arrogance of those nations seeking to help rebuild that country to get a tap at the spigot of flowing black gold smacks of conflicts of interest.

In the rubble of destruction in Iraq the need for water, consistent electricity and other basic human services seemed evident before the bombs fell. The chance to help a nation rebuild and serve its citizens will stem terrorist activities so get on with the rebuilding. To give

preeminence to a Halliburton with significant oil industry ties or any other company in Iraq's rebuilding without open competitive bids squeezes out those small companies such as Richfield, N.C.'s Oakwood International which has a concrete house in a box which can be shipped, up and functioning in 16 days and adapted to that culture while employing its people in their rebuilding process as well as stimulating the economy of this country.

To allow saturation of government control by private energy officials or those with substantial previous ties is to develop energy policies, which may not best protect the nation's security or energy resources. To denigrate Islam, one of the world's fastest growing religions and deny its members equal religious protections is to misunderstand the U.S.

Constitution.

Whatever the reason for our involvement in Iraq the fact is we are there and it was not a move that should have been discounted. In all the talk of Weapons of Mass Destruction and the fact that 20 percent of the world's oil supplies as we know it presently is there, lost is a more fundamental reason why Saddam Hussein should have been removed — genocide on his own people! For too long the nations of the world stood by while Hitler tried to wipe out the Jews in Germany. For too long good men and women stood silently as Rwanda also saw thousands upon thousands of its people wiped out in tribal conflicts whose darkened skin may have blinded nations from the reality that the wholesale extermination of people by repressive governments cannot continually be

ignored. So what's a super power to do?

What justifies a nations invasion of another sovereign nation? Should it be a preemptive first strike by a super power in its quest for terrorist, the seeking of humanitarian relief for those oppressed, the elimination of genocide, or the search for the right? Should we wait until another Hitler shows himself before we tread where few willingly go without an ulterior motive? Do we constantly expand our search for oil without willingly seriously examine behavior necessitating this gluttony based on larger cars and houses with less fuel efficiency for smaller families? Are we willing to look at alternative fuels in solar, water, wind and hydrogen fuel cells which create new jobs, energy self sufficiency and a potentially large manufacturing base while

bemoaning NAFTA and other agreements which have contributed to a net national loss of jobs.

Is not the protection of the life of those already here a fundamental Pro-life position? "I do not know what course others may chose, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death" (Patrick Henry). I personally do not know what course others may chose, but if it is up to me, we should consider intervening to eliminate genocide no matter who the perpetrator or where the location.

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Gore, Dean and blacks

Al Gore's recent endorsement of Howard Dean for the Democratic presidential nomination underscores a titanic struggle within the Democratic Party that places considerable pressure on the black community.

What is now forming is a "two-camp" struggle with the Bill Clinton operatives rallying around retired Army Gen. Wesley Clark and the Gore faction supporting Howard Dean. The pressure of two opposite camps takes much of the emphasis away from the other candidates and begins to make this appear to be a two-person race.

The fact that Al Gore announced his support for Dean in Harlem was also important. Not only is it the backyard of Congressman Charles Rangel and now includes the turf of Bill and Hillary Clinton. Gore was sending a clear message: the Democratic Party must change direction. Gore came aboard Dean's train because the former Vermont governor had the courage to directly oppose George Bush on America's invasion of Iraq. Dean criticizes Bush for continuing to pursue a war that is wasting billions of American tax dollars, making many more enemies and thus, heightening American insecurity in the process.

Most important, it also signals a change from the Clinton strategy of talking like a Republican while walking like a Democrat. For my money, I would rather stand for something rather than to be following either Richard Gephardt or Joe Lieberman into the fog of supporting Bush on the war and then criticizing his tax policies. If they support the war, how would they pay for it? Seems to me they would have to run the same budget deficits that Bush is running and dry up funding for social programs.

So, the Gore endorsement was very big because it moved the ball toward the goal post for Dean and caused the entire Democratic team to consider more seriously his emergence as the clear leader of the pack. Congressional Black Caucus Chair Elijah Cummings is said to be supporting Dean. If that's true, the black community will be split. The black split, however, will not be between Clark and Dean, but between Al Sharpton and Dean. Each say they want to change the direction of the Democratic party, which seems to be where the black vote wants to go in this election cycle.

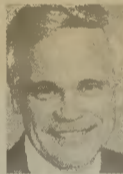
Should Sharpton pull out? Absolutely not. Although Dean looks very left to many people, actually he is not far left and it is possible that he could adopt a far more compromising stance on issues important to blacks. Candidates tend to play to their core constituencies in the primaries and then to the rest of the country in the general election. The betting by his detractors is that Dean will look too liberal to the rest of the country in the general election. Dean is no dummy — he is just smart enough to give them what they want in the general election and that raises the question of how far will he go in backing away from blacks and the rest of his core constituency.

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Santa Claus and my brand new basketball

D.G. MARTIN



It was the first Christmas that I had begun to figure out the role of Santa Claus.

My parents knew that I wanted Santa to bring me two things—a new basketball and a small ventriloquist's dummy.

(The dummy was really just a doll that looked like Charlie McCarthy. But when you pulled the string in the back of his head, his mouth would move. I thought I could learn to talk for the dummy without moving my mouth and become the next Edgar Bergen.)

My parents told me that Santa couldn't be expected to bring me two "big" presents and that I would have to choose which one I wanted the most.

Of course, I wanted both. But I also wanted to please Santa Claus. So I began to try to decide which one of those presents I could do without—if I had to.

I needed the new basketball. I was one of the youngest kids trying to play

the game in my neighborhood—and the older kids wouldn't always let me play. The new ball would be my ticket. The big kids would want to use it, and to use it they would have to let me play.

As for the ventriloquist's dummy, I was sure I could use it to amaze and entertain—and get the attention that I craved.

So it was a hard choice—and Christmas was coming in the next few days. I couldn't make up my mind.

Just before my parents' deadline for deciding, I was playing up in our attic. Guess what I found. It was an unwrapped square package that I hadn't seen before.

So I checked it out and saw that inside the package was a brand new basketball—just like the one I wanted Santa to bring me.

This was a puzzle. What was the basketball doing here in the attic? I was pretty sure I knew the answer, but I didn't like it.

My friends and I had been talking about the question of whether or not Santa was real or not. Some asserted with all certainty that they knew that their parents were responsible for the mysterious gifts that were supposed to come from

Santa. One boy promised "for sure" that he had stayed up and seen his parents putting out Santa's presents.

Another group held firmly to the belief in Santa Claus. I was a part of this group. We appreciated the difficulties of our position. We were beginning to understand how many children, houses and towns there were in this world—and how far apart they were. We struggled to explain how all of Santa's work could be accomplished in so short a time.

We thought these things through, making ourselves believe. Whatever our doubts, we could not conceive of living in a world without Santa.

There was a practical side to all this as well. As one of the boys put it, "What if there isn't a Santa Claus? What if our parents are really the ones who give us those presents? If that should be true, what do you think will happen when we tell our parents we know that they are Santa Claus? They might just stop what they are doing."

He made good sense. I kept trying to put my doubts aside.

But this basketball in the package made it hard for me—hard not to believe that

my parents had bought it and put it up there until Christmas when they would put it out as a gift from Santa. Yes, it was all coming together. And I didn't like the conclusion I was reaching.

But I sure did like knowing that I was going to get a new basketball from Santa—or whomever.

So, there I was—crushed under the grim reality of been having to deal with a world without a real Santa Claus. With all this on my shoulders, what do you think I did next?

You are going to find this next part hard to believe.

But here is what I did. I marched down the stairs, found my mom in the kitchen, looked her in the eye, and said, "Mom, I have decided what I want Santa to bring me. I want him to bring me the ventriloquist's dummy."

At the very moment I was painfully giving up my belief in Santa Claus, I was ready to exploit the system—knowing that I already had the basketball.

The story is not over. Christmas morning I came down the stairs looking for my dummy and my new basketball. Sure enough, there was the ventriloquist's dummy beside the fireplace.

But there was no basketball.

No basketball. "I thought I was getting a basketball," I said to my parents.

"But don't you remember. You said you wanted Santa to bring you the ventriloquist's dummy, and that is just what he did."

"Yes," I thought, "but ... but ... but ... I saw the basketball."

It was all a puzzle. All so confusing. I liked the ventriloquist's dummy, but I sure wanted the basketball, too. And I had seen it in the attic.

Later that morning, when we were opening the family presents, my dad reached under the tree and handed me a wrapped-up, square package. "From Mom and Dad" the card said. When I opened it — well, you know what was inside.

I had my basketball — from my parents.

"Of course," I thought. "That is why it had been in our attic."

I had my ventriloquist's dummy from ...from Santa. Yes, from Santa. Who else?

And I had another gift. It was, I think, the best gift of all.

One more year of believing, there beside my memories and empty places.

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