

## Political economy of victory in Iraq

The concept of "victory" that George Bush is pursuing in Iraq is fallacious for a number of reasons that I could spell out, but I want to concentrate here on just one, the economic cost.

The rate spending for the Iraq War has now exceeded that of Vietnam, which is \$8 billion per month and it is growing exponentially. For example, the successive addition to the budget brought the total cost to \$436 billion, and last October another supplemental in the budget added \$70 billion, bringing the current total to \$506 billion.

But it doesn't stop there, another increase of \$130-\$160 billion is being considered to ramp up sending American personnel over to do training. That will bring the total up to \$700 billion if it passes in 2007, but out in the distance, there is the possibility of a decision by Bush to beef up American forces by another 30,000 troops that will cost even more.

Where do the Democrats stand on this scenario? To begin with, Nancy Pelosi made a monumental mistake by declaring that Democrats would not withhold funding for "the troops" — in other words, they would support the increases that are on the table and perhaps more. This commitment merely follows the Bush administration concept of equating support for funding the troops to funding for the war itself. Let us be clear, the troops are merely the instrument for a policy and should not take precedence over the policy itself. The Bush people have artfully used the troops as a shield to protect them, while they pursued a corrupt, immoral and badly flawed policy in Iraq.

One major reason why Democrats should have communicated to the American people their lack of support for further funding for the war is that they have been placed in a box by the departing Republicans. The Republicans have completed only 2 of 11 spending bills and because of that, passed a law funding the government at the current level until February of 2007.

But because it is reported that Democrats will extend funding at the same levels to cover the rest of the year, it is an act that will amount to cutting many domestic programs. This budget scenario would appear to run contrary to the so-called 1100 hour agenda, some of which will have financial implications, like cutting college costs by restoring the funding for Pell Grants, passing the Minimum Wage, fixing the prescription drug benefit program and the like.

If the Democratic leadership very little can be expected in the way of new or significant initiatives that cost money, as long as they are wedded to funding the increasing cost of the war in Iraq. Live said that despite the fact that Democrats won control of the both houses of Congress, there will probably be very little done, because of the cautious political and issue environment they also inherit. To make a mistake over the mandate given Democrats by the American people could cost them control of not only the Congress, but the White House as well, so they want to appear to be cautious with the biggest issue in the country.

Here, it is notable that Richard Nixon did not stop the war in Vietnam, he was busy following his own concept of victory for six years when he was impeached in 1974 over Watergate, even though Lyndon Johnson had announced a policy of "Vietnamization" in 1968. It took the Congress to stop the war by passing Foreign Assistance Act of 1974 cutting off funding to the South Vietnam government which started the wheels rolling toward closure. Absent control of the White House, Congress becomes the only tool that Democrats have in 2007 for being accountable to the overwhelming vote of Americans to close down this fiasco in Iraq. But they must have the courage to act.

But by agreeing to continue to fund the troops, Democrats buy into the proxy for funding the war and now become part of the problem. By pursuing this course, they could not only weaken the position of their party in future elections, they could also place the constituencies of the party who need policy changes for health, education, income and other things in an unnecessary limbo as well.

I see no recourse to bold action that will break Bush's frantic search for a illusive "victory" and "success" while Democrats only criticize but essentially follow. The only question with this failed war is by what agency will it be brought to a close and how long Americans continue to buy the hollow promises of victory and success that stretch out our commitment until substantial lives and material resources are lost.

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## A black economic symphony redux

After 13 years of writing hundreds of articles, which started yet another journey on what sometimes appears to be a quixotic trapeze across a barren landscape in search of economic empowerment for black people, if I had to select five of my favorite articles, "Economic Symphony" would definitely be one of them. Slightly modified for this occasion, the "Economic Symphony" still sounds great.

Imagine black people writing and playing our own brand of economic music. We would call it our economic symphony orchestra.

Imagine the beautiful harmonious sounds of black people working together in support of one another? Wouldn't it be great to compose our own collective economic music for a change? Wouldn't it be wonderful for a million black people, all playing from the same sheet music, moving in unison toward a common goal, and giving a command performance on the world's stage?

I can see it now. The Maestro (or Maestros) raises his or her baton to begin the performance. All of the players are prepared and well rehearsed. We all know our individual parts. The audience waits with pitched anticipation for the show to begin. The first sound we hear is a booming resonance similar to the beginning of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The concert has begun.

The director motions for the violins, the lead group, to do the opening — to explain our economic strategy. These are our "authentic" black leaders and our dedicated "black" economic empowerment organizations. The Maestro then brings in the French horns, the community organizers, to sound the alarm among the masses. They continuously encourage us to create wealth by developing new businesses and supporting those we already have. They promote responsibility and integrity among our business owners toward their consumers.

The cellos, our elders, play a back-up role to the violins, reiterating the message at a slow gentle pace. The reed section, our teachers and professors, make a smooth transition up to the next octave and pass the economic message on to the trumpets: our youth.

Loudly and boisterously, our young people play their parts with verve, and it becomes just as important to them as rap music. As a matter of fact, they begin to compose their own brand of economic empowerment rap music!

By this time everybody is playing. The string bass and the drums, our "true" ministers, are strumming and pounding out the timing pattern, maintaining our focus on the mission at hand. Oboes and bassoons, our unsung heroes and ishe-reest that work hard but get little attention, are steadily doing their thing. The audience has to really concentrate to hear them or even see them but they are there, just as Harriet Tubman was there in the darkness doing her thing.

The trombones and tubas, our strong black fathers, are belting out directions, taking their proper places in leading their families. The harps, our mothers, provide the beautiful melodies, soothing to our ears yet strong, supporting, encouraging, and urging us to go on to play our music louder and to move to higher octaves. The flutes and piccolos, our beautiful children, merrily play their parts, dashing in and out but gaining more knowledge of their roles with each note they play.

Our economic symphony has indeed begun, and is a rousing success. We get a standing ovation and set out on a world tour that will run for the next 100 years. We play our music without malice toward one another, we play without being jealous of who is getting a lead solo; we play without envy and without emphasis on our own individual accomplishments. We play with the understanding that if each of us plays our part well, we will all be successful.

The Bring Back Black Economic Symphony is coming to your city. Make plans to take up your instrument and play your part. You may not think you can play well enough to be in the orchestra, but understand that the larger the orchestra the more accommodating it can be toward the less talented. Those who have more talent will cover for those of us who are less talented. (Remember: "Whoever gathers much will not have too much, and whoever gathers little will not have too little." Exodus 16:18)

Take your seat in our economic orchestra and plan to play for as long as you are physically able to do so. When the going gets tough you might move from one of the heavier more difficult instruments to an easier one, but keep on playing, please. I started out with a tuba, but I have moved on to the piano. Whatever instrument you're playing, don't stop until you hear the sound of the mighty cymbals.

We must cooperate or we are lost. Heed to the words of two old Maestros: Jews support Jews; Germans support Germans; Italians support Italians. Negroes should now support Negroes. Instead of constantly appealing to Whites, Negroes should create their own opportunities. What a mighty power we will be when we begin this, and we shall never be a mighty power until we begin. Fred Moore, National Negro Business League Organizer, 1900.

"We must demonstrate our capacity to cooperate among ourselves. Somehow we must learn this very fundamental lesson. It will be costly; there will be some loss in the process, but we must keep it up until we have developed people of definite capacity and unquestioned integrity, who can lead the way to larger achievements for the whole race." R.R. Moton, President, National Negro Business League, 1928.

If we play our parts in this Economic Symphony, I know we will be a big hit. It will be the talk of the town. It will lead us to true economic empowerment. And that's music to my ears.

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## Ethiopia and Eritrea: Stay out of Somalia's business

The Horn of Africa is once again on the edge. After years of chaos and warlordism, an ultra-conservative Islamist movement known as the Union of Islamic Courts has begun to unify Somalia.

This unification via the whip, reminiscent of the approach of the Taliban in Afghanistan in the early 1990s, is linked to a mythical view of fundamentalist Islam counterposed to the terror that the Somali people have experienced since the 1991 overthrow of long-time dictator Mohamed Siad Barre.

The ironies in Somalia are many. Most of the rest of the world was prepared to rest content while Somalia degenerated into clan and warlord chaos for most of the last fifteen years. As long as any business could be conducted, the West particularly turned a blind eye to the misery of the Somali people. Only with the rise of the right-wing Islamist movement known as the Union of Islamic Courts, and allegations of never proven ties with Al Qaeda, did a buzz of concern begin to spread about what could unfold.

Since the overthrow of Barre there have been countless attempts to resolve the turmoil and create a new national government. Each effort failed. A transitional government, established through lengthy negotiations, held out the hope of peace, but its base within Somalia was always weak, so weak in fact that for quite some time they did not locate themselves within Somalia.

Thus, it should have been no surprise that a movement would rise, promising stability and order. The fact that this movement is highly repressive and seeks to criminalize much of the behavior that has been part of Somali society such as films and certain music should also not surprise anyone since desperate conditions often lead to desperate and irrational decisions. What is clear is that the Somali people have been looking for a cessation of the clan warfare and many of them were and are willing to accept anything that will stop this. Whether we in the outside world agree or disagree is secondary. This is a matter that must be settled, ultimately, by the Somali people.

Into this mix have stepped both Ethiopia and Eritrea. Since the degeneration of their relationship and the insane war that the two countries fought between 1998-2000 over their border, tensions have remained high. Somalia has now become a site for a proxy fight between the two sides, with the Ethiopians supporting the Somali transitional government and the Eritreans allegedly supporting the Union of Islamic Courts. There is profound danger in this game of regional politics.

The Ethiopians risk continental ostracism for getting involved in the internal affairs of Somalia. They are not there on behalf of the African Union or as a result of an agreed upon peacekeeping settlement. The Eritreans, by the same token, are playing with dynamite much like the U.S. did when it supported the mujahideen in Afghanistan in their war against the Soviet Union in the 1980s in that they may strengthen a very reactionary force that could influence the politics of the Horn of Africa, including within Eritrea itself.

Standing behind this entire mess appears to be the U.S.A. No surprise there. The Bush administration is concerned about the rise of the Union of Islamic Courts and, having branded them as Al Qaeda-lite, wishes to see this movement blocked, if not destroyed. It appears that the Ethiopian government, led by a regime that at one point claimed to be anti-imperialist, has chosen to serve the interests of the USA in this case. Thus, not only does Ethiopia face the prospect of a deadly, long-term conflict to its South, but the USA faces the prospect of potential involvement should the conflict evolve either into another Ethiopian/Eritrean War, or should the Union of Islamic Courts gain public sympathy because they are seen as victims of the one global superpower.

One can disagree with and, indeed, fear the Union of Islamic Courts, while at the same time recognizing that the Somali people will need to resolve this situation. The involvement of other nations does nothing to advance a desperately needed peace process, but instead pushes the situation toward a dramatic escalation. Not only must the USA stay out of Somalia, but all friends of Africa must insist that Ethiopia and Eritrea step back from the precipice. The flames of hell are already scorching their feet.

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## A scaffold's dark portrait of Iraq after Saddam's execution

By Eugene Robinson  
THE WASHINGTON POST

Since history is written by those who rule, the annals of the U.S.-supported Iraqi government record that the deposed dictator Saddam Hussein was given a fair trial, sentenced to death for the mass murder of innocent Shiite civilians and duly executed by hanging on Dec. 30, 2006, in accordance with Iraqi law.

A tragic era was brought to an end, according to the official history, opening the way

for a brighter tomorrow.

But the dark, remorseless, unflinching cellphone video of the execution that quickly surfaced on the Internet tells an alternate history, one that is neither tidy nor hopeful — and that demonstrates, not just by its content but by its very existence, that forces other than the current beleaguered government intend to be the final authors of Iraqi history. That's because they intend to be the ones in charge.

The grainy footage was

apparently captured surreptitiously by someone whose vantage point was near the foot of the gallows. Anyone thinking of watching it should be warned that the camera does not shrink from the inevitable "money shot" — the grotesque moment when the trap door opens and Saddam Hussein's life is terminated. It's history as snuff film.

The most revelatory moment comes when the condemned tyrant — unhooded, unbowed, still acting as if he

expects the deference owed to a legitimate head of state, especially one who rules by terror — gives a religious exhortation. A voice responds by speaking a name that is also a taunt: "Mogtada, Mogtada, Mogtada."

The reference is to the Shiite cleric Mogtada al-Sadr, who leads what is generally described as the biggest, best-equipped and most powerful of Iraq's many sectarian militias — and whose father, a widely revered cleric, was ordered killed by Hussein.

The message is clear: Hear this, Sunni dog. Iraq is a Shiite country now, and payback is sweet.

Hussein can't believe the impertinence. "Mogtada?" he asks, as if he's trying to catch the thread of a narrative that no longer makes sense.

In the dictator's curses against "the Americans" and "the Persians," it is impossible not to hear echoes of the time when Hussein was the one who wrote Iraq's history. For years, the Reagan administration gave him military

and intelligence support to keep the hated Persians from defeating his outnumbered forces in the Iran-Iraq War. In 1983, Donald Rumsfeld was dispatched to visit Baghdad as a special envoy; he smiled broadly as he shook the tyrant's hand.

Naturally, that's not an episode from Iraq's recent history that the current government will care to highlight.

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