

There's no surge protection in Iraq for U.S. troops

The administration's latest decision to add at least 21,000 troops to the fighting in Iraq is the wrong step because it extends the original folly of waging a military conflict in Iraq in a fruitless search to find "victory" in the quagmire that the invasion has created.



RON WALTERS

It is strongly rejected by many citizens who voted to stop the war and by U.S. military commanders because it has been tried twice and is largely viewed as the force that has increased U.S. casualties in Iraq.

The most crucial aspects of the surge is that it puts more American troops in jeopardy of their lives in an ultimately unwinnable war. America lost what turned into a guerrilla war in Korea in 1954; it lost a guerrilla war in Vietnam in 1974 and it has lost this guerrilla war as well. What kept these operations alive—and grew the casualty rate and the expenditure of precious funds, is the fiction of American military supremacy in the pursuit of equally fictitious theories.

Remember the "domino theory" that is America lost in Southeast Asia, all of Asia would fall to Communism? The only question is when will the various theoretical fallacies (if we don't fight them there, we will have to fight them in the streets of America) be recognized as bankrupt and the war be drawn officially to a close by American officials recognizing that they cannot win it.

In real terms, the out-going commander of the Iraq War, General Abizaid has already expressed his doubts that additional troops could change the reality on the ground faced by American troops and his view was backed up by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as well as by the Iraq Commission Report.

George Bush uses the troops fighting in Iraq in the most political of ways: on one hand, he praises the generals and their troops at every opportunity for doing a thankless job; then, he discards the advice of the generals when it is convenient and when they have advised him that a troop surge will not bring "victory" in his terms.

Okay, let's say that Baghdad is "stabilized" and that the new strategy of "clear and hold" is adopted by the military. Then what? How long will American troops be able to hold their positions and will they become sitting ducks as they hold these positions for more attacks and more casualties as a result? So, it appears that Bush is ready to sacrifice the troops—and I use that word purposefully—in the service of a questionable gamble that the infusion of more troops might help to "stabilize" at least Baghdad. This is a recipe for the continuation for failure.

The bottom line here is that U.S. troops—the troops of any country—are the instruments of a policy, but Bush has used them to front his policy by inferring that if you don't support the policy, you don't support the troops. This is flawed logic that would not fly in any banana republic. So why does it fly in the most affluent, the most intellectually perspicacious, the most militarily-oriented nation in the world?

The answer is that Americans do not want to face up to the fact that this war can't be won and as such, they permit Bush to hide behind the vague goals of "victory" extending a destructive enterprise that should have been closed down long ago. The "new" to surge 21,000 more troops is accompanied by a proposal to put \$5 billion more into a rat hole called the Iraq War, an amount that compares to that in the annual U.S. budget for the Community Block Grant program that funds many worthwhile projects in American cities; the Bush administration has cut back in the appropriations each year.

So, Democrats have to revise their vow not to cut off funding for the military campaign in Iraq, because they are not the ones to put the troops in jeopardy—the president did that.

And don't have the temerity to cut off funding, at minimum they should re-evaluate their conduct of this war and begin to withdraw the troops. This is the strategy that closed down other wars and may well have to be used in this case, too.

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New breed of American leaders for a new year

"For these children, our children, and for all of America's children, the House will come to order!"



MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

With these words Rep. Nancy Pelosi, surrounded by her six grandchildren, made history the first week of January as she accepted her election as the first female speaker of the House in American history. Women across the country cheered as she was handed

the speaker's gavel, making her the second person in line for the presidency after Vice President Cheney and the most powerful woman ever in American politics.

As Speaker Pelosi said, "It's an historic moment for Congress. It's an historic moment for the women of America. It is a moment for which we have waited over 200 years. Never losing faith, we waited through the many years of struggle to achieve our rights. But women weren't just waiting; women were working. Never losing faith, we worked to redeem the promise of America, that

Can N.C. Democrats learn from Virginia's senator?

A few days ago, when the Democrats took charge of the Congress, some of us forgot that control of the U.S. Senate would not have shifted except that an unusual Democrat won an election in a nearby state. New Senator James Webb is anything but a typical Democrat.



D.G. MARTIN

He was a long time Republican and even served as President Reagan's secretary of the Navy. He defends the Vietnam War in which he served as a decorated Marine Corps officer. He is "pro-gun." He takes a hard line on illegal immigration. Democrats may not like his positions on the issues, but they surely liked his come-from-behind victory over incumbent Republican Senator George Allen.

Webb's victory raises interesting questions for North Carolinians.

First, assume North Carolina Democrats could find a "Webb-like" candidate who could beat Elizabeth Dole in 2008. Then ask, could a former Republican war hero with hard line conservative views on important issues win the Democratic primary?

It is a tough question. Talk to some Democrats and they will tell you they will do anything to win. Other Democrats would rather lose than have their candidate compromise on key issues.

Another question about Webb is whether or not he is too confrontational and hard-headed to be an effective team player. Shortly after his election, he had an unfriendly exchange with President Bush. Some people wonder if he has the diplomatic attitude legislators need to succeed.

Webb is a successful writer. One of his books may give us clues about who Jim Webb really is, about the origins of this confrontational nature, and how he was able to appeal to enough rural and conservative voters in Virginia. Webb's book, "Born Fighting," is a history of the Scotch-Irish peoples. He follows them from the time of the Roman occupation of Britain until today's America. Their history, he argues, made them tenacious fighters whenever it came to defending or asserting their rights.

Webb describes the struggles of the Scots with the English over the centuries. He details the immigration to Northern Ireland in the 17th century and the fighting against

both Irish and English to secure their families. Then these "Ulster Scots" began migrating to the colonies, where they fought Indians on the frontier and stood up to the English colonists who ran the colonial governments. When the American Revolution broke out, the Scotch-Irish provided more than 40 percent of the troops that fought the British.

These fighting traits made the Scotch-Irish the backbone of American fighting forces, in the Revolution, Civil War, both World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam, where Webb himself fought bravely.

Webb believes that the fighting qualities of the Scotch-Irish are basically positive values in themselves, and he proudly claims to be a part of that culture.

A number of commentators have severely criticized Webb's version of history. Among the most severe of them is Chapel Hill-based Celtic scholar Michael Newton, who condemns Webb for numerous factual errors and questionable methodology.

"Unfortunately," writes Newton, "Webb makes the error of taking history personally, and trying to make the personal historical. He too often 'proves' his hypotheses by repeating anecdotes about his family or people he has met on his travels. While these may be amusing sketches, they are not the data of the historical method."

However you feel about Webb's book (and I confess that I enjoyed it), Newton's point about the book making the "personal historical" is just the reason that it can help us understand who Webb is or, at least, who he thinks he is.

In addition, I think, Webb describes the people whose votes he won in the recent election—the "little people" who have been oppressed by big government, big business, and both political parties. These are people who mostly voted Republican in recent elections. They are people who, like the Scotch-Irish that Webb describes, are ready to choose leaders who will speak for them and fight for them.

And they showed last fall that they would vote for candidates like Jim Webb, even if the candidates were Democrats, which is why North Carolina Democrats should be thinking about Webb as they plan for 2008.

D.G. MARTIN is host of UNC-TV's North Carolina Bookwatch, which airs Sundays at 5 p.m.

Check his blog and view prior programs

A final salute to Godfather of Soul

In 1988, I was the straight-laced newsmen on that hilarious, WPEF-FM morning radio show that featured the very popular and brilliant Skip Murphy and his cast of Crazies with the zany, multi-talented Chaz who never heard a voice he couldn't duplicate... except that a late-James Brown, "Godfather of Soul," (That duo eventually moved on to Dallas where Murphy replaced the departing "Fly Jock" Tom Joyner. Joyner terminated his daily flights from Dallas after his morning show to Chicago for afternoon air and ultimately to establish the nationally-syndicated "Tom Joyner Morning Show.")



KEN KOONTZ

In a meeting after one of our shows, Skip, Chaz and I laughingly recounted the difficulty in understanding the lyrics of one of James' popular hits. And from that grew the very popular "James Brown Word-of-the-Day," wherein The Godfather (actually Skip) would call into the studio "live" to chat with Ernest T. Bass (Chaz) and "that news boy who thank he knew evathing." (That was me.) James would provide us with a word from his broad vocabulary and taken from some particular unusual, unfortunate, funny or otherwise interesting circumstance or moment in his routine daily life. I would astutely provide the Webster's Dictionary definition. And, of course, James would declare in bold indignation that I, Skip, Ernest T., Webster nor anybody else had a clue of the meaning. And he would then go on to use it in a sentence, which, of course, was the punch line.

I join the millions of Godfather fans who mourn his untimely death. And in so doing, I submit a couple of vocabulary offerings that could be taken from fictional depictions of the Godfather's reaction to debate surrounding the delay of his burial and financial settlement of his estate.

Godfather's word: "recipe" Webster's definition: statement of ingredients for a mixture

Godfather's usage: "Ya'll need to burr me now so I can re-ci-pe (rest in peace)!"

Godfather's word: "burial" Webster's definition: put into a grave; to hide

Godfather's usage: "I used to be rich. Bu-ri-al (But real money) money gone now!"

KEN KOONTZ is founder of All-Stars Communications in Charlotte.

Congress should adjust the minimum wage for inflation

Back in November, the African-American community, which mobilized and turned out in record numbers to vote, played a major role in achieving the transformation that has taken place on Capitol Hill. With the 110th Congress in full swing and its first female House Speaker in U.S. history in command and blacks in prominent leadership posts, it's time for lawmakers to make good on their election-year rhetoric. So far so good.



MARC MORIAL

Under the tutelage of Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., the U.S. House recently passed by an impressive 315-116 margin legislation raising the minimum wage to \$7.25 an hour over the next two years. I must commend Speaker Pelosi and her cohorts for rallying the ranks to follow through on their election-year promises. I also must applaud them for producing a clean bill free of concessions to the business community in the form of tax breaks.

As I said at the National Urban League's annual conference in Atlanta, increasing the minimum wage is a small but necessary step toward narrowing the economic divide between minorities and Whites in the United States. The current federal wage of \$5.15 an hour has been in place since 1997. When adjusted for inflation, it is at its lowest level

since 1955. Under the bill that won House approval, Americans now working full time at minimum wage can expect to see their earnings rise nearly 47 percent to \$15,070 a year, nearly \$5,500 above the poverty line for individuals.

Overall, 13 million workers (10 percent of the U.S. workforce) are expected to benefit from the wage hike, 16 percent of them African Americans. More than half of states already require employers to pay workers an hourly wage above the federal minimum level. And according to a recent Associated Press-AOL News poll, 80 percent of Americans surveyed support a hike.

Our federal lawmakers need to bring our nation's lowest-wage earners out of the 1950s and into the 21st Century. These workers can barely support themselves let alone their children. Ten years of inaction by Congress has thrown more and more Americans off the road to economic prosperity and into the trenches of poverty. If we fail to acknowledge their hard work, we risk exhausting their hopes of achieving the American dream.

For far too long, our federal lawmakers have ignored the plight of our nation's lowest-paid employees. In recent years, they've spent more time cutting breaks to the bosses of the working poor than the working poor.

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just some—children in 2007. They need leaders who will commit to ending child poverty in America by 2015, half by 2010, and to make concrete down payments each year in targeted investments.

I hope all of our elected leaders are ready to roll up their sleeves and work together to put America's house in order for our children. And I hope every voter—you—is ready to hold them accountable for results that back up rhetoric.

MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN is president and founder of the Children's Defense Fund.



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