

Every now and then, you have to take a lesson or two from history. In the case of George Bush's Iraq, here's one: No matter what the President announces in his "new way forward" speech on Iraq next week -- including belated calls for "[sacrifice](#)" from [the man](#) whose answer to 9/11 was to urge Americans to surge into [Disney World](#) -- it won't work. Nothing our President suggests in relation to Iraq, in fact, will have a ghost of a chance of success. Worse than that, whatever it turns out to be, it is essentially guaranteed to [make matters worse](#).

Repetition, after all, is most of what knowledge adds up to, and the Bush administration has been repetitively consistent in its Iraqi -- and larger Middle Eastern -- policies. Whatever it touches (or perhaps the better word would be "smashes") turns to dross. Iraq is now dross -- and Saddam Hussein was such a remarkably hard act to follow badly that this is no small accomplishment.

A striking but largely unexplored aspect of [Saddam Hussein's execution](#) is illustrative. His trial was basically [run](#) out of the U.S. embassy in Baghdad; Saddam was held at Camp Cropper, the U.S. prison near Baghdad International Airport. He was delivered to the Iraqi government for hanging in a U.S. helicopter (as his body would be flown back to his home village in a U.S. helicopter).

Now, let's add a few more facts into the mix. Among Iraqi Shiites, no individual has been viewed as more of an enemy by the Bush administration than the radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. American troops fought bloody battles with his Mahdi Army in 2004, destroying significant parts of the old city of Najaf in the process. American forces make periodic, destructive raids into the vast Baghdad slum and Sadrist stronghold of Sadr City to take out his followers and recently [killed](#) one of his top aides in a raid in Najaf. The upcoming Presidential "surge" into Baghdad is, reputedly, in part to be aimed at [suppressing](#) his militia, which a recent Pentagon report [described](#) as "the main threat to stability in Iraq."

Nonetheless at the crucial moment in the execution what did some of the Interior Ministry guards do? They chanted: "Muqtada! Muqtada! Muqtada!" In all press reports, this has been described as a "taunting" of Saddam (and assumedly of [Iraqi Sunnis](#) more generally). But it could as easily be described as the purest mockery of George W. Bush and everything he's done in the country. If, in such a relatively controlled setting, the Americans couldn't stop Saddam's execution from being ["infiltrated"](#) by al-Sadr's followers -- who are also, of course, part of Prime Minister Maliki's government -- what can they possibly do in the chaos of Baghdad? How can a few more thousands of U.S. troops be expected to keep them, or Badr Brigade militiamen out of the streets, no less the police, the military, and various ministries?

Consider the "new way forward," then, just another part of the Bush administration's endless bubbleworld. And check out exactly what madness to look forward to in next week's presidential address via Robert Dreyfuss, a shrewd reporter and the author of the indispensable [Devil's Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam](#). -- *Tomdispatch.com* editor Tom Engelhardt

The Surge to Nowhere

Traveling the Planet Neocon Road to Baghdad (Again)

By Robert Dreyfuss

Like some neocon Wizard of Oz, in building expectations for the 2007 version of his "Strategy for Victory" in Iraq, President Bush is promising far more than he can deliver. It is now nearly two months since he fired Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, installing Robert Gates in his place, and the White House revealed that a full-scale review of America's failed policy in Iraq was underway. Last week, having spent months -- if, in fact, the *New York Times* is [correct](#) that the review began late in the summer -- consulting with generals, politicians, State Department and CIA bureaucrats, and Pentagon planners, Bush emerged from yet another powwow to [tell](#) waiting reporters: "We've got more consultation to do until I talk to the country about the plan."

As John Lennon sang in *Revolution*: "We'd all love to see the plan."

Unfortunately for Bush, most of the American public may have already checked out. By and large, Americans have given up on the war in Iraq. The November election, largely a referendum on the war, was a repudiation of the entire effort, and the vote itself was a marker along a continuing path of [rapidly declining approval ratings](#) both for President Bush personally and for his handling of the war. It's entirely possible that when Bush does present us with "the plan" next week, few will be listening. Until he makes it clear that he has returned from Planet Neocon by announcing concrete steps to end the war in Iraq, it's unlikely that American voters will tune in. As of January 1, every American could find at least [3,000 reasons](#) not to believe that President Bush has suddenly found a way to put Humpty Dumpty back together again.

What's astonishing about the debate over Iraq is that the President -- or anyone else, for that matter, including the media -- is paying the slightest attention to the neoconservative strategists who got us into this mess in the first place. Having been egregiously wrong about every single Iraqi thing for five consecutive years, by all rights the neocons ought to be consigned to some dusty basement exhibit hall in the American Museum of Natural History, where, like so many triceratops, their reassembled bones would stand mutely by to send a chill of fear through touring schoolchildren. Indeed, the neocons are the dodos of Washington, simply too dumb to know when they are extinct.

Yet here is Tom Donnelly, an American Enterprise Institute neocon, a co-chairman of the [Project for a New American Century](#), telling a reporter sagely that the surge is in. "I think the debate is really coming down to: Surge large. Surge small. Surge short. Surge longer. I think the smart money would say that the range of options is fairly narrow." (Donnelly, of course, forgot: Surge out.) His colleague, Frederick Kagan of AEI, the chief architect of the Surge Theory for Iraq, has made it clear that the only kind of surge that would work is a big, fat one.

Nearly pornographic in his fondling of the surge, Kagan, another of the neocon crew of armchair strategists and militarists, makes it clear that size does matter. "Of all the 'surge' options out there, short ones are the most dangerous," he wrote [in the Washington Post](#) last week, adding lasciviously, "The size of the surge matters as much as the length. ... The only 'surge' option that makes sense is both long and large."

Ooh -- that is, indeed, a manly surge. For Kagan, a man-sized surge must involve at least 30,000 more troops funneled into the killing grounds of Baghdad and al-Anbar Province for at least 18 months.

President Bush, perhaps dizzy from the oedipal frenzy created by the emergence of Daddy's best friend James Baker and his Iraq Study Group, seems all too willing to prove his manhood by the size of the surge. According to a stunning [front-page piece](#) in the *Times* last Tuesday, Bush has all but dismissed the advice of his generals, including Centcom Commander John Abizaid, and George Casey, the top U.S. general in Iraq, because they are "more fixated on withdrawal than victory." At a recent Pentagon session, according to General James T. Conway, the commandant of the U.S. Marines, Bush told the assembled brass: "What I want to hear from you now is how we are going to win, not how we are going to leave." As a result, Abizaid and Casey are, it appears, getting the same hurry-up-and-rotate treatment that swept away other generals who questioned the wisdom on Iraq transmitted from Planet Neocon.

That's scary, if it means that Bush -- presumably on the advice of the Neocon-in-Chief, Vice President Dick Cheney -- has decided to launch a major push, Kagan-style, for victory in Iraq. Not that such an escalation has a chance of working, but there's no question that, in addition to bankrupting the United States, breaking the army and the Marines, and unleashing all-out political warfare at home, it would kill perhaps tens of thousands more Iraqis.

Personally, I'm not convinced that Bush could get away with it politically. Not only is the public dead-set against escalating the war, but there are hints that Congress might not stand for it, and the leadership of the U.S. Armed Forces is opposed.

Over the past few days, a swarm of Republican senators has come out against the surge, including at least three Republican senators up for reelection in 2008 in states that make them vulnerable: Gordon Smith of Oregon, whose remarkable speech [calling the war](#) "criminal" went far beyond the normal bland rhetoric of discourse in the U.S. capital, along with John Sununu of

New Hampshire and Norm Coleman of Minnesota. In addition, Saxby Chambliss of Georgia, less vulnerable but still facing voters in 2008, has questioned the surge idea. And a host of Republican moderates -- Chuck Hagel (NE), Dick Lugar (IN), Susan Collins (ME) -- have lambasted it. (Hagel told [Robert Novak](#): "It's Alice in Wonderland. I'm absolutely opposed to the idea of sending any more troops to Iraq. It is folly.") Even Sam Brownback, one of the Senate godfathers of the neocon-backed Iraqi National Congress, has expressed skepticism, saying: "We can't impose a military solution." According to Novak, only 12 of the 49 Republican senators are now willing to back Sen. John McCain's blood-curdling cries for sending in more troops.

Meanwhile, says Novak, the Democrats would not only criticize the idea of a surge but, led by Senator Joe Biden, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, might use their crucial power over the purse. "Biden," writes Novak, "will lead the rest of the Democrats not only to oppose a surge but to block it." Reports the *Financial Times* of London: "Democrats have hinted that they could use their control over the budget process to make life difficult for the Bush administration if it chooses to step up the military presence in Iraq." A Kagan-style surge would require a vast new commitment of funds, and with their ability to scrutinize, put conditions on, and even strike out entire line items in the military budget and the Pentagon's supplemental requests, the Democrats could find ways to stall or halt the "surge," if not the war itself.

Indeed, if President Bush opts to Kaganize the war, he will throw down the gauntlet to the Democrats. Unwilling until now to say that they would even consider blocking appropriations for the Iraq War, the Democrats would have little choice but to up the ante if Bush flouts the electoral mandate in such a full-frontal manner. By escalating the war in the face of near-universal opposition from the public, the military, and the political class, the president would force the Democrats to escalate their own -- until now fairly mild-mannered -- opposition to the war.

However, it's possible -- just possible -- that what the President is planning to announce will be something a bit more Machiavellian than the straightforwardly manly thrust Kagan wants. Perhaps, just perhaps, he will order an increase of something like 20,000 American troops, but put a tight time limit on this surge -- say, four months. Perhaps he will announce that he is giving Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki that much time to square the circle in Iraq: crack down on militias and death squads, purge the army and police, develop a plan to fight the Sunni insurgency, find a formula to deal with the Kurds and the explosive, oil-rich city of Kirkuk which they claim as their own, un-de-Baathify Iraq, and create a workable formula for sharing the fracturing country's oil wealth.

By surging those 20,000 troops into a hopeless military nowhere-land, Bush will say that he is giving Maliki room to accomplish all that -- knowing full well that none of it can, in fact, be accomplished by the weak, sectarian, Shiite-run regime inside Baghdad's fortified Green Zone. So, sometime in the late spring, the United States could begin to un-surge its troops and start the sort of orderly, phased withdrawal that Jim Baker and the Carl Levin Democrats have called for.

Levin [suggested](#) as much as 2006 ended. "A surge which is not part of an overall program of troop reduction that begins in the next four to six months would be a mistake," said Levin, who will chair the Armed Services Committee. "Even if the president is going to propose to temporarily add troops, he should make that conditional on the Iraqis reaching a political settlement that effectively ends the sectarian violence."

That may be too much to ask for a Christian-crusader President, still lodged inside a bubble universe and determined to crush all evil-doers. And it may be too clever by half for an administration that has been as utterly inept as this one.

At the same time, it may also be too much to expect that the Democrats will really go to the mat to fight Bush if, Kagan-style, he orders a surge that is "long and large." Maybe they will merely posture and fulminate and threaten to... well, hold hearings.

If so, it will be the Iraqis who end the war. It will be the Iraqis who eventually kill enough Americans to break the U.S. political will, and it will be the Iraqis who sweep away the ruins of the Maliki government to replace it with an anti-American, anti-U.S.-occupation government in Iraq. That is basically how the war in Vietnam ended, and it wasn't pretty.

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The Bushies have such a talent for making things worse in all sectors that it is downright scary. Surge is the worst thing they could do so of course it is the thing they are pushing. Withdrawal is the best thing they could do so of course they will fight tooth and nail and American deaths piled on top of Iraqi deaths against withdrawal. It is a classic case of criminal minds making criminal mistakes. The best thing for America and for Iraq that Bush/Cheney could do would be to resign so of course that is the last thing they would ever think of doing. Mess of potamia it is and will remain because the Bushies are stuck in an idiot rut.

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