



Fires Chapter Lawton-Fort Sill

Superpower for the Soldier

Quarterly Newsletter

AUSA Chapter 43601 Oct. - Dec. '11

Finding “Success” in the Iraq War

As our final troops depart Iraq and the war comes to a close, there has been much discussion about whether or not we achieved success (let alone victory) in the effort. As has been described by many, our reasons for entering the war have been abridged across the conflict. Invading initially to stop Saddam’s use of weapons of mass destruction, we later embraced the notion that we would throw down a cruel dictator and spread democracy in the region. The thinking was that a vibrant democratic Iraq would serve as a seminal example of needed reform across the Arab world. Current conditions in Iraq indicate that the neophyte democracy is very fragile. Sectarian differences and a centuries-old bent toward totalitarianism make democratic reform difficult. However, if we have learned anything about our cultural differences, the Middle East moves slowly and does not forget its past.

Success in Iraq or the Middle East will not follow the formats of linear wars or provide the immediacy that the western world would like. The truth is that the jury on our success or failure in Iraq is still out. The insertion of a sibling democracy in the Middle East did have an impact. How important this event was to the subsequent Arab Spring, we will have to see. Expectations that Iraq would explode into a vibrant democracy were unrealistic. Likewise, notions that the Arab Spring would result in functional democracies were also roseate.

The ultimate outcome in Iraq and the Middle East will play out

over time. As much as we may not like it, we will need to remain engaged and be patient. The question remains: How do we stay on azimuth to shape success in Iraq and positively influence the region?

The State Department’s efforts to remain engaged and coach the developing democracy are crucial to achieving success. As well as teaching the Iraqis how to govern, they must serve as a moral compass for the fledgling democracy. Al-Maliki’s government must not be allowed to become comfortable with human rights abuse. The civilized world must shed light on primitive behavior. This task will be very difficult and will challenge the State Department’s resources, but it must be accomplished to provide the direction that is needed for Iraq’s democracy to mature.

Likewise, our departure from Iraq could increase our influence across the Arab Spring. Again, statecraft will be needed. Patient, consistent engagement will be required. We should not be surprised that Islamism is winning the initial elections in the recently liberated countries. The lack of education, democratic experience, and needed resources make the population of the Middle East vulnerable to fundamentalism. They will be inclined to listen to their Imams. However, the revolts in the Middle East are about better conditions, better treatment, and a prosperous future. The fundamentalists, rooted in a poverty of consciousness, cannot provide these things. Over time, there will be opportunities to assist the region

as it aspires to rise from its ashes.

For the United States to take advantage of these opportunities, we must capture and hold the moral high ground. We must agree upon who we are and what we intend to accomplish in the region. Our resulting strategic communication, policy, and actions must match if we are to appear trustworthy and capable of being an honest broker. We must not lose sight of the moral implications of “success” in this war effort.

How we handle our commitments to the Iraqi people will be a litmus test of our moral commitment to success in Iraq. Many of our Iraqi allies across this long war will not be able to mend fences with the new Shia government. Their lives will fall into despair—we must not forget them. Efforts to alleviate abuse and to expatriate our allies must not be forgotten. Our treatment of these allies will define us to much of the world.

Lastly, and most importantly, we cannot claim success in Iraq if we fail to take care of our own war veterans. As our troops prepare to come home, our country is in a serious debate over reducing our deficit. Veterans’ benefits are on the table. Is it possible that our country could forget their sacrifices so quickly? The war will not end for these veterans because a ceremony was held in Baghdad and an announcement was made that the conflict has concluded. They will carry the scars of their service for many years. In a combat zone, life experience moves at hyper speed. The circumstances necessitate that

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the emotional processing of so many potentially life-changing experiences waits until a quiet moment. This waiting becomes a spiritual and emotional bill. For many, this bill is about to come due.

Our experience from the Vietnam War indicates that emotional issues, economic issues, and homelessness will rise for our veterans following their homecoming. A large reduction in force will only exacerbate matters. We must not forget them. Our Nation must be prepared to assist them in transition. Focusing upon how we can reduce their benefits to save money is not the appropriate use of our energy. As a Nation, we should be assessing how we can best assimilate them back into their families and our Nation.

These momentous issues are not just matters for our government. As citizens of this great Nation, we must

join together to prepare for our combat vets' homecoming. Organizations like the Association of the United States Army (AUSA) must prepare for a positive role. In our community, we must leverage our Soldier/Family Council to assist the wounded and the military families in crisis. We must prepare to get the homeless off the streets as soon as they become homeless, before the emotional damage is too great.

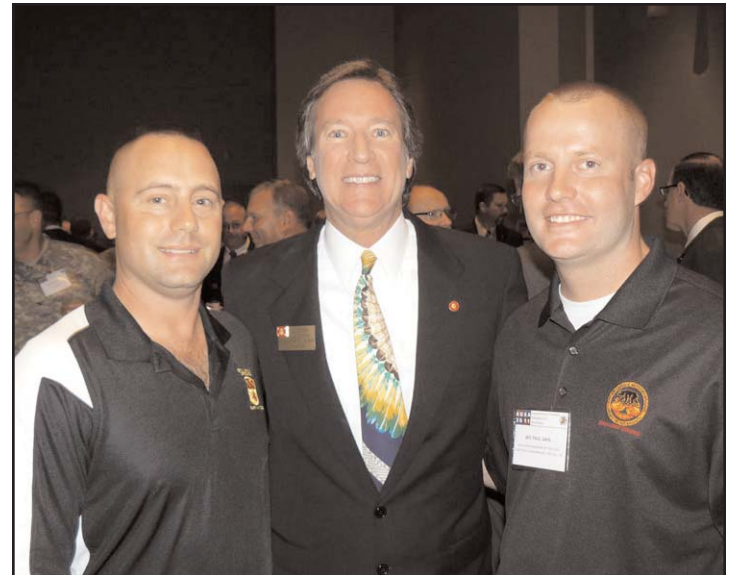
As much as we might like to say so, the conflict in Iraq is not over. Whether or not our effort and our sacrifice enabled "success" has not yet been determined. I suggest that we not retreat from the long war. Moral imperative indicates we must stay the course. Success may yet be achieved.

Nate Slate, President
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Lawton-Fort Sill



428th FA Brigade Soldiers and NCOs of the 3rd and 4th Quarters, FY 11, display their AUSA Fires Chapter tee-shirts with big smiles. L to R: PFC Jacob Spangler, A/1-30 FA, Soldier of the 3rd Quarter; SPC Timothy Tarbutton, A/2-2 FA, Soldier of the 4th Quarter; SGT Nicolas C. Voci, B/2-2 FA, NCO of the 3rd Quarter; and SGT Brandon L. Wallace, B/2-2 FA, NCO of the 4th Quarter. The tee-shirts are part of the chapter's recognition of their excellent performance along with \$50 cash, a one-year membership in AUSA, and a congratulatory letter from the Fires Chapter President for each. The awards were presented by CSM (R) Dennis Meyer.

AUSA Fires Chapter reception for the Fires Center of Excellence at the AUSA National Convention in Washington, DC, 11 October



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