

STI COMMENTS ON PUBLIC AFFAIRS

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

by

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If the presidential campaign of 2004 made any one thing clear it was that neither President Bush or Senator Kerry were willing to explicitly state the condition(s) under which our military forces would be withdrawn from Iraq.

When victory is achieved. (Bush and Kerry) Victory being left undefined. When Iraqi forces can insure a stable and democratic Iraq. (Bush, more or less) Stable, in particular, left undefined. Democratic as in the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea? Within a specified number of years all troops will be withdrawn. (Kerry) The specific number of years, however, subject to change. And many variations on the theme of fighting and winning the global war on terror in Iraq rather than in the United States but without an end date. (Bush and Kerry) It would seem fair to say that waffling on a particular topic in a political campaign reached new heights.

As the time for Iraqi elections nears, now scheduled for January 30, 2005, and the retaking of Fallujah by American and Iraqi forces, it is probable that the strategy of terrorist groups will change from holding territory, as in the case of Fallujah, to concentrating on keeping large numbers of voters away from the polls, particularly in Sunni Moslem areas. Two outcomes are possible.

The best scenario is the one predicted by Interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi in which he forecasts less than 10 percent of the population will boycott the election. The worst case is that the terrorists are successful. Supporting this scenario is (a) the reluctance of Iraqis to confront terrorists in their neighborhoods. (b) the withdrawal of a major Sunni political party from the Interim Government following the attack on Fallujah, (c) calls by Sunni clerics to boycott the election, and (d) the fact that a majority of Iraqis of every religious persuasion view coalition forces as occupiers rather than liberators.

Should the boycott succeed, anti-coalition (terrorist) factions will contend that the election is invalid. Given the UN's track record in such matters it likely that their position will be upheld, which in turn will further legitimize and encourage their insurgency.

Where then stands the United States and its coalition partners on the day or days after the election should a worst case scenario be confirmed? What is their obligation and to who? Argued here is that obligation is not to the Iraqi people as is so often implied but to those men and women who fought and died in a far off place that few Americans could pick out on a world map five years ago. That obligation is to bring them home, but not only home, home with honor. In this regard, to plainly state that they accomplished their mission. A mission that they, their families and all Americans can accept and support with pride.

Should at sometime in the future a memorial be dedicated to those who served in Iraq with fitting words inscribed, a single line will say it all. Something like this—"To those who fought and died to give the Iraqi people a chance to be free." Nothing more. Our mission was not to guarantee freedom but to provide a *chance* for freedom.

Post Script. Our intelligence failures in the run up to the Iraq War will be debated for a long time. One bit of intelligence that should have been ascertained prior to committing our troops, but wasn't, is whether a majority of Iraq's people, if given the chance, would fight and sacrifice to be free.