

INTERNATIONAL  
**Herald Tribune**

A New Mission for Iraq

Peter Charles Choharis

Thursday, March 1, 2007

**WASHINGTON, D.C.:** Senate Democrats plan to introduce a new Iraq war resolution limiting the role of American troops. But confining the U.S. mission to training Iraqis, fighting Al Qaeda and perhaps patrolling borders as the Democrats propose will not prevent the humanitarian disaster that will occur if Iraq continues toward collapse.

For all their references to Vietnam, Democrats rarely mention its brutal aftermath. I once worked in and traveled to refugee camps crowded with Cambodians who had survived the Khmer Rouge killing fields, Vietnamese boat people who had relatives raped and murdered at sea and Hmong who had been hunted by Laotian troops.

Wars are brutal, and the losing population often suffers. But had U.S. military and political leaders admitted earlier that the Vietnam War was doomed and planned accordingly, they might have saved countless more lives.

Iraq too is headed toward collapse, yet neither Democrats nor Republicans are taking the steps necessary to respond to the humanitarian catastrophe that would accompany collapse.

The recently issued National Intelligence Estimate predicts that in the next 12 to 18 months, the security situation in Iraq will continue to deteriorate at rates comparable to last year, when tens of thousands of Iraqis were killed monthly and many more fled. According to the report, "sustained mass sectarian killings," assassinations of key religious or political leaders or "a complete Sunni defection from the government" could trigger a total collapse.

No one in the Bush administration or among the Democrats disputes the forecast. They are ignoring it.

President George W. Bush is sending tens of thousands of additional U.S. troops into Iraq. Most Democrats want to withdraw troops (some immediately) and let the Iraqi army and police secure the country, even though the National Intelligence Estimate says Iraqi security forces are not likely to be capable of that in the next 12- 18 months.

Both President Bush and the Democrats demand that Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki's government make tough political choices, even though the Parliament has regularly lacked a quorum because members are too frightened to attend.

Neither the administration nor the Democrats are planning for a worst-case scenario.

If Iraq collapses, the United States must have in place detailed plans and budgets to secure safe havens for Iraqi noncombatants; to configure a troop deployment capable of responding to mass migrations; to stockpile food, shelters and medicine for masses of internally displaced civilians, and to vastly expand the paltry \$35 million spent last year on Iraqi refugee assistance.

Beyond legal and moral reasons, America has strong strategic interests in preventing a humanitarian disaster. Abandoning Iraq could create failed states that fund and protect terrorists. Regional wars could erupt as Saudi Arabia and others intervene to protect Sunnis while Iran does the same for Shiites, or as Turkey moves against Iraq's Kurds, and the entire region scrambles for Iraq's oil. Millions of Iraqis would try to flee to America, Europe and elsewhere in the Middle East.

The Bush administration contends that "failure is not an option" in Iraq. If humanitarian relief becomes part of our mission, then no matter what happens in Iraq, the United States can still achieve victory.

*Peter Charles Choharis, a visiting fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, practices international law in Washington.*

---

---

**IHT**

Copyright © 2007 The International Herald Tribune | [www.iht.com](http://www.iht.com)