

it suggested that America and the world faced an imminent threat from Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. When these two justifications for the U.S.-led invasion turned out to be without foundation, the administration fell back on the goal of spreading democracy in Iraq and the broader Middle East as the basis for ongoing U.S. engagement.

From an American perspective, the case for extending the reach of democracy abroad always has a ring of validity, although many have concluded that imposing democracy from the outside is not a proven or necessarily compelling art form. Intriguingly, however, it would appear that today in Iraq democracy building provides a credible rationale for American disengagement even though it was a secondary and possibly flawed basis for original intervention.

In the aftermath of elections held 3 months ago, the Iraqis have finally formed a government which will have under its jurisdiction, although perhaps not complete control, a newly formed Army and a fledgling police apparatus. Based on three elements, credible national elections, a new government and a new infrastructure of security, the U.S. is positioned to begin and, almost as consequently, to announce a steady process of disengagement.

In the middle of the Vietnam War, Senator Aiken proposed that we simply declare victory and get out. This may have been good politics then, but there is no basis for suggesting victory was at hand. Ironically, the formation of a new government today may provide the most promising claim of some success in Iraq. Not to take advantage of the circumstance could be a lost opportunity. This may indeed be the last timely movement for decisive decision-making.

Lyndon Johnson knew his Vietnam policy was failing, but he chose to pass it on to a successor who proceeded to escalate an already escalated conflict. To the degree there is relevance to Presidential precedent, it would seem far wiser for this administration to set the conditions and proceed with withdrawal rather than leave such a decision to a future President.

The reason a democracy-based framework for disengagement needs to be articulated is that it allows the United States to set forth a basis for ending the occupation that is on our terms and on our timetable. If we don't develop and announce a plan and a rationale for disengagement, we could at some point find ourselves withdrawing with the other side claiming it forced us out through destructive anarchy, i.e., insurgent attacks and suicide bombings, or through the insistence of the elected government in Baghdad.

Democracy implies consent of the governed and when a large percentage of the Iraqi people want us to leave, as opinion polls indicate is the case today, the U.S. should be hard-pressed to follow the original neo-con strategy

of establishing and maintaining a semi-permanent military base in the country.

Here a note about the Crusades is relevant. While Americans use the word loosely and conjure up quaint cartoon images King Arthur and his knights, citizens of the Muslim world consider the Crusades living history, and it is no accident that Osama bin Laden refers to us as crusaders. For al Qaeda, the pushing out of U.S. forces would be an extension of the Crusades, an act of multi-century consequences. That is why it is so important to apply reason and public reasoning to the disengagement process.

This war has precipitated a great loss of confidence in and respect for the United States around the world. Quite possibly Iraq will be a better country because of America's intervention. But if we hang around too long, the Iraqi government and our government may suffer consequences even more negative than has so far been evidenced. Indeed, with each passing day of occupation, it appears our presence is increasingly inspiring more instability than stability.

It is true that precipitous withdrawal might be counterproductive and that precise timetables have disadvantages. But it is difficult for me to believe anything other than the declaration of a credible plan and reason for disengagement, coupled with a steady drawdown policy, is the wisest course of action today.

In a novel development, Congress has required the establishment of an "Iraq Study Group," under the aegis of the U.S. Institute for Peace, to be chaired by former Secretary of State James Baker and former Representative Lee Hamilton. At the risk of presumption, I would hope the perspective outlined above will be one of the approaches it and the Administration review. There are risks in too abrupt a departure; but a prolonged occupation leads too easily to the kind of retributive civilization clash that misrepresents America as well as peoples of the region.

20TH ANNIVERSARY OF CHERNOBYL DISASTER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, April 26, the world will commemorate the 20th anniversary of the world's worst nuclear disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in the Ukraine when it was under Soviet control.

The explosion released into the air radiation equivalent to 90 Hiroshima-size bombs in the heavily populated areas of northern Ukraine, southern Belarus and southwestern Russia.

□ 2000

Millions of people throughout the world were affected by this disaster, and millions more continue to live with its consequences on a daily basis. Some have written about the North European countries being affected by what has been termed "white winds," the white winds that came from

Chernobyl. Radioactive contamination continues to harm the health of men, women and children throughout our world. It is critical that we do not allow ourselves to forget the looming consequences of Chernobyl, which are with us still today, lest the tragedy repeat itself. We must remind our fellow Americans and the world that those problems continue to exist, and the countries that were affected by Chernobyl require assistance in resolving them. In order to achieve this goal, the Congressional Ukrainian Caucus, in cooperation with the Chernobyl Challenge '06 Coalition, is organizing a series of events at the end of this month to commemorate this solemn anniversary. I am very pleased to cooperate with our co-chairs of the Congressional Ukrainian Caucus, CURT WELDON of Pennsylvania, Congressman SANDER LEVIN of Michigan, Congressman ROSCOE BARTLETT of Maryland, along with myself. Tomorrow, April 26, at 10 a.m. here in the Rayburn House Office Building foyer will be a 1-day photo exhibit entitled "Chernobyl 20." The exhibit will include photographs by some prominent artists illuminating the human stories behind the Chernobyl catastrophe and highlighting the dignity and hope of its survivors. We welcome the public to come tomorrow and view this photo exhibit in the Rayburn House Office Building foyer. It begins at 10 a.m. and will remain there the entire day.

On April 27, the following day, Thursday, from 2 in the afternoon until 6, in HC-6 here in the Capitol, a congressional briefing will feature expert testimony on Chernobyl issues including radiation and health, agriculture and food, environment, economics and U.S. assistance and the containment of the fourth unit reactor. The ambassadors of Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia will provide brief remarks to inform about the current situation with respect to Chernobyl and their countries. If citizens are interested, they can contact our office at our Web site, rep.kaptur@mail.house.gov for information.

On Thursday, April 27 as well, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. in the evening, in B369 Rayburn House Office Building, the Chernobyl Challenge '06 Coalition, in cooperation with our Congressional Ukrainian Caucus, will hold a congressional reception and Members of Congress will have an opportunity to speak. Again, if citizens are interested they can contact our Web site at rep.kaptur@mail.house.gov.

The Congressional Ukrainian Caucus is very grateful that for the briefing that will be held on Thursday, from 2 to 6 in Room HC-6, the Capitol Building, that some of the following speakers will appear, from the Chernobyl Children's Project International and the Children of Chernobyl Relief and

Development Fund, their executive directors, several pre-eminent scientists from major organizations, public and private sector universities, talking about the illnesses that plague people today as a result of this huge catastrophe. And then, finally, those who have served as ambassadors to our country and ambassadors from the affected nations will address what we can do in the way of additional international response to meet today's challenges still arising from the Chernobyl catastrophe.

I have never seen birth defects as I have witnessed among the children affected by this continuing tragedy in Chernobyl. The thyroid cancers, the conditions to the heart, the distortions of the human form related to radiation resulting from Chernobyl are horrendous.

The southern part of Belarus is largely depopulated, though some people who are refugees from Afghanistan are moving into the area, incredibly, and eating and planting seeds in the ground and eating contaminated food and infecting themselves even until this day. There is so much for the American people to understand. Though it was 20 years ago, Chernobyl lives as it will for thousands of years to come.

USING HISTORY AS A GUIDE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DENT). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, one of the things that bothers me is how some of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle come down here and paint a picture using history as a guide that is totally inconsistent with what I, as a Member of Congress for 24 years, have seen and believe.

The President of the United States and the Congress's number one responsibility is to protect this country from enemies, both domestic and foreign. After the attack on 9/11, the President of the United States went after the bad guys, the terrorists. And Saddam Hussein, we were told, was building weapons of mass destruction. In the early 1980s the Israelis attacked a nuclear production site in Iraq because he was trying to build a nuclear weapon. In the Iran/Iraq war he used chemical weapons to kill Iranians during that war. He killed thousands and thousands of innocent women and children, Kurds, using chemical weapons. And in just the last couple of days, some of our expert military personnel in Iraq have found 800 canisters, 800 canisters of chemical weapons, the type that were used to kill Kurds and kill people in the Iran/Iraq war. That is a weapon of mass destruction. We just found it. And so people that say that there are no weapons of mass destruction, or were none, we are starting to find those. And we believe that many of those weapons were carted out of the country before we invaded.

And when I hear my colleagues say there was no connection between al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein, and we had no reason to go in there, the fact of the matter is we know that Uday, Saddam Hussein's son, had leaders of the al Qaeda movement in Baghdad in the hospital and at other get-togethers many, many times. There was a loose-knit association between the Taliban, al Qaeda, Saddam Hussein and others who want to do the Free World ill. That is a fact. And how we see people trying to distort history to say, oh, my gosh, America's made a terrible mistake by going into Iraq really bothers me. The President is doing his dead level best to defeat the terrorists and protect this Nation and the world. There have been attacks in Spain, in France, in England, the United States and other places, in Bali, the terrorists in Egypt just recently. And we cannot back down to the terrorists. We cannot appease them. The President is doing the right things.

Now, regarding Iraq, we are turning the war over to the Iraqis. Eleven million people went to the polls and voted for freedom, democracy and a government; and that government will be formed. It is being formed as we speak.

But we are reducing our troop forces. I understand we have gone from 161,000 just recently to a troop reduction of 30,000 down to 131,000. So we are reducing our forces, and we are turning it over to the Iraqis as they are able to take care of the problems themselves.

The terrorists are going to continue to try to tear up jack over there. They are going to try to drive everybody out and destroy democracy. But it is in our interest and the Free World's to stay the course. And if we don't, we will rue the day that we didn't.

And I want to end up one more time by saying to my colleagues who were talking about Iran early today, the gentleman from Washington, Iran is a terrorist state. We cannot allow them to develop a nuclear capability. And if we do that, we will be dead sorry we did.

IRAQ DEMOCRACY PROMOTION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, the notion that the Iraq war is all about building freedom and democracy across the broader Middle East has been a staple of White House talking points for nearly as long as we have had our troops in harm's way.

But a few weeks ago, courtesy of a front-page story in The Washington Post, we learned something interesting about the President's actual nuts and bolts commitment to democracy. He doesn't have one. That April 5 story by Peter Baker reveals that when it comes to promoting democracy, the bottom line reality doesn't match all the fancy rhetoric.

The administration, in fact, is dramatically reducing funding for programs and organizations that do the nitty-gritty work of helping nations train their people to build and sustain a democratic infrastructure, political parties, unions, a free press and other institutions.

The National Democratic Institute of International Affairs and the International Republican Institute will, according to The Post, be running out of USAID grant dollars in a matter of days. Only a special earmark is keeping them open for business.

The U.S. Institute of Peace has seen funding for its democracy programs in Iraq slashed by nearly two-thirds. The National Endowment for Democracy recently received its last \$3 million to spend in Iraq. As one vice-president at the U.S. Institute of Peace pointed out to The Post, the combined cost of all the programs dedicated to encouraging Iraqi democracy amounts to less than what we spend on the military occupation in Iraq in a single day.

Of course, in addition to being expensive in treasure, this military campaign has carried a devastating human cost, namely, 2,390 American men and women killed, all in the name of democracy that is in danger of never taking hold. It is not surprising, I guess, that this administration would short-change democracy promotion. After all, these are the folks who thought there was no hard work involved in creating a free society. They thought all you had to do was drop a few bombs, kick out a brutal dictator, and democracy would miraculously and spontaneously spring from the oil wells or something. That is one of the reasons their post-war planning was so tragically inadequate.

But this war was never really about building democracy in any real sense. If that had been the justification presented to the American people in 2002, this body and our colleagues on the other side of the Capitol would never have authorized the President to use military force.

No, it was only after the whole weapons of mass destruction thing turned out to be a fraud that the administration started casting about for another rationale. And they came up with this fanciful notion that the war would give rise to democracy, not just in Iraq, but among its neighbors and across the region.

Mr. Speaker, we can encourage democratic elements in Iraq without a military campaign that is killing Americans, killing Iraqis, and fomenting a civil war. It is time to bring our troops home and start investing in true democracy building efforts.

I have offered a new approach to national security called SMART. This stands for Sensible Multilateral American Response to Terrorism. And its core is the notion of investing in nations' democratic potential without resorting to military force.