

Address to Seton Hall University

By Robert E. Andrews

We probably all remember the images in the days after Saddam Hussein's government fell. They were dramatic images of Iraqis going to the street and pulling down a huge statue of Saddam Hussein in the last days of his regime. It was a compelling image of Iraqis taking rope and pulling over this statue of Saddam and watching, both literally and symbolically, his government fall to the ground.

At that very same spot where that statue tumbled to the ground, something different happened on October 24, 2005. A convoy of cars and trucks reached the security gate that is around that area. That area is a turnabout, as they call it over there—we call it a traffic circle in New Jersey. And near it are two of the most prominent hotels for visiting journalists, diplomats, and other people coming to Baghdad. One is called the Palestine Hotel, which is probably the most significant hotel in Baghdad. There was a security perimeter that existed around that circle. On October 24, a car breached that security perimeter, engaged some of the guards, and shot some of them. Several minutes later, a cement truck breached the same perimeter and detonated in front of the Palestine Hotel, killing, at last count, at least a dozen people—probably killing many more—and certainly injuring many others. Several minutes later another vehicle came through, apparently laden with explosives, and engaged some private security guards and US military personnel.

This vignette dramatically illustrates what I believe, sadly, is a failing US policy in Iraq. At the very spot where we were supposed to have our greatest triumph, where the statue of Saddam literally crumbled to the ground, there was violence and mayhem that was beyond belief in its human suffering, but all too believable in its frequency. There is not a day that goes by that we don't pick up the newspaper and read about similar attacks in virtually all parts of that country.

Another juxtaposition was the welcome, and good news, on October 25, that the votes have been counted, and it appears that the Iraqis have approved their new constitution. It was accompanied by the very welcome news that nearly two-thirds of eligible Iraqi voters went to the polls, under threat and fear of death, and participated in that referendum. That is a significant achievement that is not to be minimized.

The other news the same week was that the two thousandth US soldier gave his or her life. Through it all, whether it was the transfer of sovereignty, the foolish

Congressman Robert E. Andrews, (D-NJ) spoke at Seton Hall University on October 25, 2005.

declaration of “mission accomplished” on the deck of that aircraft carrier, the first elections on January 30th of 2005, or the constitutional referendum of ten days ago, one thing has remained consistent. Day in and day out, week in and week out, month in and month out, you can count on the fact that, on the average, every day two Americans lose their lives. You can count that, on the average, every day, week in and week out, month in and month out, dozens of innocent Iraqis lose their lives.

There are three views about the Iraq situation that are prevalent in American politics. Two of them are dysfunctional, and I think are doing the country a great disservice. The first is held by people who are adherents of our president—who voted for him, who support him, and in some cases who revere him. And it is their view (and I am to some extent oversimplifying) that what he is doing is right; that criticism of what is happening is informed by unfair partisanship, that things are getting better on a regular basis, and that somehow it is the US media that are the cause of the problem, because they are reporting all this bad news. I wish that our biggest problem in Iraq was that the US media was exaggerating our problem there. But the fact of the matter is, the most important fact is the number of folded American flags being handed to wives and mothers, brothers and sisters, and sons and daughters over the coffin of their loved ones. It is indisputable, it is painful, and it is real.

There is another view held by many people who do not support the president, who did not vote for him, do not support his agenda, and believe that very little he does makes any sense. Many of these people, in good faith, opposed the war in the first place, out of patriotic belief that it was the wrong thing for the country to do. And their view (and again I am oversimplifying) is that since the president caused this mess, let him figure out how to get out of it.

The lesson that we should learn from September 11th is if you permit a nation to become a sanctuary for terrorist activity, you can expect to be attacked.

We need more people who hold a third view, which is that it is everyone’s problem to figure out what success means in this situation; Republicans and Democrats. It is everyone’s problem to figure out how to solve this problem. That, of course, first acknowledges that there is a problem. I have been discouraged, as time has gone on, in hearing from the secretary of state, the secretary of defense and the president himself, a near blind refusal to acknowledge that there is a problem in the first place. You cannot solve a problem that you do not acknowledge that you have, and I think we need to start this discussion with that acknowledgment.

What I would like to talk about this afternoon is:

What is at risk in Iraq if we fail;

Why I think we are failing at present;

And most importantly, what I believe we must do to succeed.

What is at risk in Iraq is best understood by thinking about what happened on

September 11th. There is not a shred of evidence that Saddam Hussein's government had anything to do with September 11th. Not a shred. And I think that anyone who implies or suggests differently is manipulating the facts in a disingenuous way. But the lesson we should have learned from September 11th is that if you give a terrorist organization the time, the tools, the money, and the opportunity to attack a civilized people, they will attack. There would have been no 9/11 without the Taliban government in Afghanistan facilitating the operations of al Qaeda in Afghanistan. If the government of Afghanistan had behaved as a normal, law-abiding government behaves, as the government of Egypt behaves, as the government of Kuwait behaves, as the government of Qatar behaves, as the government of Israel behaves, as the governments of many other parts of that region behave, there would never have been a safe harbor and sanctuary for al Qaeda. The lesson that we should learn from September 11th is if you permit a nation to become a sanctuary for terrorist activity, you can expect to be attacked.

The most important fact is the number of folded American flags being handed to wives and mothers, brothers and sisters, and sons and daughters over the coffin of their loved ones. It is indisputable, it is painful, and it is real.

And despite all of the administration's changing reasoning on the justifications for the war, and for all of its changing factual explanations, the one fact that I think you cannot look beyond is that with Saddam Hussein leading Iraq, Iraq was potentially such a sanctuary. A Stalinist leader, with access to \$30 billion a year of petro-dollars, with the capacity to build, use, and deploy chemical and biological weapons, and possibly acquire nuclear weapons was a risk that I believe the US could not take and could not afford. The central risk of the regime of Saddam Hussein is that it could have become a staging area for an attack against the United States, or its allies, using such weapons.

It's important to understand what such weapons look like. Americans have an image of weaponry that is based upon the Cuban missile crisis—something that happened long before most people in this room were born. But if you have seen the news clips of it, there was footage of missile silos being built down in Cuba. If you have seen the movie about President Kennedy during that period time, he had to make some difficult decisions about what to do to persuade what was then the Soviet Union and Fidel Castro with the Cubans to stop building missile launch facilities that could attack the United States. That is our image of weaponry.

In the stark terror of the 21st century, weapons look very different. A quantity of sarin gas that could fit into a fire extinguisher could kill thousands of people in the New York City subways. A quantity of smallpox that could fit into an orange juice glass, if deployed through the heating and air conditioning system of a

shopping mall or office building, could lead to a man-made pandemic that could kill hundreds of thousands of people. A nuclear bomb in a suitcase could kill thousands. This is what weapons of mass destruction look like. This is how portable they are. This is how relatively easy it is to get such weapons into a country like ours. So permitting an area of the world to exist where there is the money, the opportunity, and the sanctuary for jihadist forces to get their hands on such a weapon would be a serious mistake. That was what was at risk in Saddam Hussein's Iraq. The cruel and terrible irony of this Administration's failure however, is that I believe if we do not change our policies, we will be on the verge of re-creating that very same risk or worse.

A stable government must take hold in Iraq. I define a stable government as one that is able to preserve lawfulness on its own streets; where acts of terrorist violence against people are the exception and not the rule, where it would be almost unheard of for people to drive a cement truck and several cars up to a major hotel and detonate a bomb. An orderly and stable society is a place where someone who would be synthesizing or manufacturing sarin gas or smallpox would be taken in by the authorities of that country and would be stopped before they could do so. Iraq is far from being such a place today. The only thing that stands between Iraq and anarchy is 160,000 American troops. That's it. And anyone who has studied this situation, who has been there, as I have, would fairly draw the conclusion that if the American troop presence were not in Iraq today, one of two results would occur, neither of which is compatible with this country's security or the security of civilized people around the world.

The idea of a nuclear Iran, further enriched by \$30 billion a year funded by Iraqi oil, is an unacceptably dangerous proposition. It would be far worse than having Saddam Hussein sitting in Baghdad.

What happens if we leave? What's at risk? One result would be a religious civil war between the Shiites and Sunnis with the Kurds unfortunately caught in the middle. In all likelihood, the Shiite factions would win that war because they represent 61% of the population; because their area of the country has not been as badly damaged and has more of a thriving economy; and because their Persian Shiite cousins to the east in Iran would almost certainly side with them. What would the result of such a civil war be? An emboldened, richer, stronger, and empowered Iran. I cannot think of a more dangerous result than that. The Iranian government was, in September, cited by the International Atomic Energy Agency, in a vote opposed only by Venezuela, as having maintained a secret nuclear weapons program for the last twenty-five years. This is not an allegation by the US CIA. This is not another political statement from the White House. This is a fact that has been acknowledged by the global community. And, as you no doubt know from your studies of world affairs, there is now an intense debate pending as to what the UN Security Council

should do about this, if anything. The idea of a nuclear Iran, further enriched by \$30 billion a year funded by Iraqi oil, and further enriched by their de facto annexation of their neighbor, is an unacceptably dangerous proposition. It would be far worse than having Saddam Hussein sitting in Baghdad.

I think security has to come first before there is wider sharing of intelligence and wider investment in that government.

The second possible result is that no real government would rule all of Iraq. The government would dissolve into anarchy, as Afghanistan essentially was prior to 9/11. You understand that the Taliban was the strongest of any group, or clan, or tribal leaders, none of which had effective control over the whole country. The difference of course would be that Iraq would be Afghanistan on steroids. Because, unlike Afghanistan, whose principal exports were heroin and terror, Iraq would be in a position to export \$30 billion a year of oil, in a world starved for oil. So you would have tribes and clans that would govern and rule parts of that country. Mr. Zarqawi is a current example of this kind of ruler. Such choices would create the possibility of sanctuary for jihadist forces that might want to attack civilized people in that region as they have in Riyadh, as they have in Madrid, as they have in London, or as they have here.

Either of these outcomes would be a horrific result. I believe that unless we change our policy and correct our mistakes, that is where we are headed.

What mistakes have we made? What have we done wrong? I have sat through hours and hours of briefings from the administration on this. I have traveled to Iraq. I have heard from Secretary Rumsfeld. In September, I sat in the White House situation room with the deputy national security advisor and our ambassador to Iraq, who is doing a terrific job, by the way, in his early tenure. I have heard the administration's plan and here it is.

To evaluate the administration's plan, you have to understand what happened on October 24 at the Palestine Hotel. Iraq is a country of 24 million people, with insurgents that number, according to the public record, no more than 25,000 people. Let me say that again. It is generally understood that the number of insurgents who have taken to arms in Iraq are 25,000 people in a country of 24 million people. And those insurgents are matched up against, when you add up US troops and allied troops and battle-ready Iraqi security forces, 300,000 security forces. So in a country where there are 300,000 security forces and 25,000 resistance fighters, how is it that someone can drive a cement truck up to the front door of one of the most protected places in the country and detonate it? The answer is that the attackers can succeed because the quality of our intelligence is so bad. We don't have the ability to send some of those 300,000 troops out to stop the resistance fighters before they attack. Why is this?

It's in part because they are guerilla warriors. These are not people who march

down the street in uniforms with a flag. These are classic guerilla warriors who execute their attack and when the attack is over, if they are still alive, they fade back into the woodwork of society. Why don't we know who they are and where they are? The first reason is that we have botched, horrendously, our on-the-ground intelligence operations in Iraq. Now there is an understandable reason for this, but there is an inexcusable reason for it as well. The understandable reason is, the way you breach into a cell of Sunni resistance, or a cell of insurgent resistance, is you have someone penetrate that cell that can pass as being part of it. They are called spies or operatives. Given the culture, given the ethnicity, given the history of the area, American soldiers and CIA operatives are not going to be able to do that. So what you need to do is have people who have dealt with this problem on a daily basis, in their daily lives, help you. This is not a problem unknown to the Egyptians. It is not a problem unknown to the Pakistanis. It is not a problem unknown to the Kuwaitis. Not unknown to those who run Turkey. It is not a problem unknown to many, many nations in that part of the world.

We literally said to friends in the Arab League, in NATO, to the United Nations, “we don’t want you here.”

What did we say to these potential allies in the waning days of Saddam's departure? We said “get out and stay out...we don't want you...we don't need you...this is our operation.” We literally said to friends in the Arab League, in NATO, to the United Nations, “we don't want you here.” So we do not have the intelligence resources and capabilities to find out for ourselves where the next cement truck is going to go. That's the pure and simple problem. And that's an inexcusable failure.

There's a second way you can find out where the next cement truck is going to go. You can hope that one of the 23.975 million people who live in Iraq, who are not part of this resistance, will tell you. Think about this for a minute. How many people had to know about this operation? It took three to four vehicles including a cement truck loaded with explosives and a timed arrival at the Palestine hotel in such a way that they would be effective? At a very minimum, 25-30 people had to be involved in planning that operation. And if you know from your experiences in life, if 30 people know about something, then it is likely that 300 people know about something. Because no matter how secretive people are, they talk to each other. Why didn't one of those 300 people step forward, call the security forces, and say I've heard that this horrific attack is about to take place at the Palestine Hotel? It's because they don't want to die, that's why. Because they are more afraid, justifiably so, of retaliation against them then they are invested in sharing intelligence with the American forces and Iraqi security forces. So it makes it so easy for the attackers to fade back into the woodwork.

With that backdrop, what is the administration's strategy? The administration believes that as political progress is made toward a functioning sovereign Iraqi government, that this progress will make fear dissipate, that more Iraqis will share

more intelligence with the security forces, and we will be able to find out that someone's going to drive a cement truck to the Palestine Hotel, and stop them before they do.

I hope, with every ounce of hope that I can summon, that I am wrong about my assessment of this proposition, but I think that proposition is wrong. I don't think human nature works that way, and I think the fact that two-thirds of the people went to the polls and voted in a referendum does not trump the fact that I am afraid that my daughter might get murdered if I turn in the person down the street who's going to drive that truck. That's what this is about.

The administration is right in stating that progress has occurred. The elections last January were a wonderful thing and the referendum this October was a wonderful thing. There is political progress. The administration believes that as political institutions evolve, confidence will rise, and as confidence rises, intelligence will improve, and as intelligence improves, security will improve. I think they have it backwards. I think people will start to identify the person down the street who's going to drive that cement truck when they believe that if they do, the attacker will be arrested and stopped and the informant will be protected. I think security has to come first before there is wider sharing of intelligence and wider investment in that government.

I wish the facts proved me wrong, but I think they prove me right. The transfer of sovereignty was promoted as the first time when the Iraqis would feel they were truly invested in their own future; the death toll did not go down. The elections of January 30th were counted as a further expression of Iraqi confidence in their future; the death toll did not go down. And most recently, the adoption of the referendum has been touted as one more step in building confidence among the Iraqi people so that they will take charge of their future and provide the intelligence necessary to stop these attacks. I hope I am wrong and that the death toll does go down, but I really doubt it will.

It is the supreme irony that an administration too quick to use force is relying on a political process—and not intelligence-guided lethal force—to try and solve this problem. I don't believe the administration's approach will solve the problem.

What do I think will solve the problem? I think there are four things that we need to do, sooner rather than later.

It is the supreme irony that an administration too quick to use force is relying on a political process—and not intelligence-guided lethal force—to try and solve this problem.

The first is that we need to approach our allies in that part of the world and ask for their help in dealing with the daily intelligence problem that we have. What does that mean? It does not mean that we host a summit conference. It does not mean that we introduce a resolution at the Security Council. It means that we ask our allies

if they would be willing to work with us with their intelligence officers, and their intelligence methods, in getting on the ground, isolating parts of the resistance that are particularly effective, and stopping them before they can kill more people.

It will require what heretofore this administration has been incapable of demonstrating—humility.

It will not be easy to convince our allies to do so. One reason why they will not do it is Abu Ghraib. You cannot understand the damage that was done by the mismanagement of that prison until you evaluate how hard it will be to convince our allies to help us. When I was in that region in 2004, I met with King Abdullah from Jordan and Queen Rania. They are very much in tune with the United States. You would feel welcome and comfortable with them as neighbors and leaders. I thought they were both great. And they want to help us. But you need to understand that within their country the desecration of the culture and their religion that took place in that prison makes it almost impossible for them to do so without inciting huge discord and violence within their own country. Americans, and I include myself in this category, do not understand the depth of the insult that occurred in that prison. If you are Jewish, it was the equivalent of seeing a swastika painted on a synagogue. If you are Christian, it was like seeing the desecration of a crucifix. The combination of nudity and abuse of prisoners, women abusers of male prisoners in particular, was a horrific insult to the people of those countries. It is too late to undo that, but it is not too late to go to our friends in the Arab League, in that part of the world and ask for their help on this intelligence problem. This will require diplomacy. I hope some of the graduates of this school will be involved in that effort. It will require what heretofore this administration has been incapable of demonstrating—humility. The greatest sin the United States has committed in Iraq is the sin of hubris. Hubris is believing that because we think something is, it is. Believing that because we have done some things well, we do everything well. Believing that because we have the best and bravest military in the world—which I believe we do—that everything they do is right. If we do not engage our allies in this intelligence venture we will fail.

The second step we must take is to put an international face on the political process, rather than an American face. Most people were disturbed by the images of Abu Ghraib. Who would not be? I sat in a conference room and saw the slides and photos that were taken there and was appalled. What a few people did disparaged the huge majority of military people in this country, who would never consider doing such a thing. And what they did to their reputation. And what they did to our country's reputation.

But I will tell you what is also troublesome to me. In the press reports about the negotiations leading up to the adoption of the draft constitution that the Iraqis just approved, there was a snag, as you would expect, between the Sunni and the Shiite about certain issues of minority representation. The Kurds were very much in it as

well. The president of the United States got on the phone with several Sunni leaders and asked them to make concessions; the same way he is going to try to get on the phone and ask Republican senators to go along with his Supreme Court nominee; the same way he gets on the phone and asks House members to cast that one more vote to get his budget over the top. He should be making those calls as part of his job, as president of the US, to members of our Congress. But, if we are trying to make the argument that this is a sovereign independent political process, the president of the US should not be making those calls; Secretary-General Annan should be making those calls. His diplomats should be making those calls. Will the Iraqis do everything we want them to do? I hope not. Because if they are, then their sovereignty becomes artificial, the argument that we are overseeing a sovereign process becomes hollow, and the process becomes less likely to succeed.

I agree with the administration that rising confidence in Iraqi political institutions will lead to an improvement in security, because it will make some people more invested in the future of their country and therefore more likely to share intelligence about where the next cement truck is coming from. I agree that some people will do that. I do not think nearly enough will do that. But I do not think we will achieve nearly enough legitimacy in those political institutions until they have a truly international face with respect to the way they are being worked out. Does that mean we need to back out of the process? No. But the missed opportunity that I made reference to earlier is just that: a missed opportunity to promote credibility in the new Iraqi government through UN involvement. This is a continuing missed opportunity. We should not let our disagreements with some things the UN does stand in the way of the good sense of involving the UN in solving this very difficult problem.

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The third step I think we need to take is to dramatically step up the training of Iraqi security forces. And when they are ready, for every Iraqi soldier that steps into the breach, an American soldier should come home. This is important for both our country and the Iraqis. I asked the commanding general of our forces in Iraq, General Casey, at a congressional hearing in early October, how large he thought the security force needed to be in order to maintain order. His best guess was 325,000 people under arms. But presently only about 60,000 or 70,000 Iraqis are capable of caring out that mission. As quickly as we can, with the aid and assistance of the Arab League, of NATO, of other international institutions, we need to train, recruit, equip, and prepare, as many Iraqis to take on that role as possible. And as they do, on a gradual basis, Americans should come home. In part because it is what our people expect, and in part because it is what is necessary for us to succeed.

In order to do these three things we have to do a fourth thing, which will be very

hard for this president. If we are going to go to our friends in the Arab and Muslim world, if we are going to go to our friends in Europe and say “we have disagreements—and we still have disagreements about how we got here and what we ought to do next—as we have helped you in the past, we are asking you to help us now with this intelligence problem that we have.” And in order for us to go to the international community and say “we want you to play a more active role in brokering the evolution of political institutions in Iraq;” in order for us to go to the Iraqis and to others who train the Iraqis, and say “we want your more active participation in training Iraqi security forces, so they can take over this important job of keeping peace and order;” in order for us to ask those questions, we need new people asking those questions.

I will say something that will sound unusual for a Democrat. If I were the president, I would ask George Herbert Walker Bush, the 41st president, to help.

The president needs to change his team on this issue. Now I will permit you a partisan comment, there are many of us who felt that the leader of the team needed to be changed last November. I am certainly one who felt that way. But the president was reelected. It is his purview, his right, and his obligation to run the country for the next three years. And I do not mean what I am about to say as being critical of these people as individuals or their careers, but Secretary Rumsfeld in particular, is not capable of accomplishing the objectives that I just laid out. Not because he is not smart, because he is. Not because he does not care about the problem, because he does. But because he will not be listened to in the parts of the world that we need to persuade. I think starting with Secretary Rumsfeld, and all of the policymakers in the Defense Department, the president needs to make a change.

I will say something that will sound unusual for a Democrat. If I were the president, I would ask George Herbert Walker Bush, the 41st president, to help. If there is a person in American history over the last twenty years who has been uniquely successful in communicating with Arab and Muslim states at a time of crisis, it was the first President Bush, who back in 1991, built a coalition that included everyone, even Syria, in a coalition against Saddam Hussein after he invaded Kuwait. The stakes were different. They were lower. The problem was less difficult than this, and the world was a different place, but we need people who can speak with credibility and authority to people in that part of the world, or we will not succeed.

Now I will stop where I started. I am hopeful that what is about to unfold in Iraq will be the first in the chapter of improvements in the human condition in that region and around the world. I reject the proposition that people of different faiths cannot live together, in harmony and peace, and achieve prosperity with their children. I reject the proposition that any one faith doesn't want that as an objective. I reject the proposition that I have the right to impose those propositions on anyone. I do not, as an American. But I refuse to believe that any area of the world must be

and should be an incubator for the kind of attacks against innocent people that we have seen in London, Riyadh, Madrid, and in New York City. We have the obligation and opportunity to stop those attacks by denying terrorists the sanctuary they require.

The saddest irony of this administration's policy is that if they do not change, if they do not move away from the argument that the evolution of political institutions alone will provide security, and security will wipe out the possibility of that sanctuary, if they do not divorce themselves from this argument and move on to a real solution, I fear that they are going to create a problem at least as bad, if not worse, than the one they went to Iraq to solve.

I have attended the funerals of five young men from my district who have died in Iraq. Not one of their family members has said to me, "I regret that my son, my husband, my brother, served his country in this way." Not one of those grieving loved ones has ever said, "because I lost my son, my husband, my brother, we should stop trying to do what we are doing." But, in their own way, each one has asked me what exactly is it that we are trying to do. Whether it is because of the crisis of confidence that stems from the White House, or whether it is from other factors, I don't think they have ever gotten an answer. My answer is, and has been, your family suffered this sad sacrifice because we want to eliminate or minimize the possibility that someone who wants to fly an airplane into a building, or spray sarin gas on the subway, or spread smallpox through the heating and air conditioning system of a building, will have the money and chance to do so. That is how we intended to protect our country by removing Saddam Hussein.

How can we say, to those who have suffered loss, if we fail on this objective, that their sacrifice has been worth it? If we continue to follow a policy that I believe is likely to lead to a horrific civil war—which Iran will win—or the evolution of what I call an Afghanistan on steroids—a place where terror could be exported with much greater horror—then I think we failed the sacrifice of every one of those young Americans who have given their life, as well as the innocent Iraqis and members of other coalition groups.

The time has come to move beyond a political debate on whether or not we like the president; or whether we think he has been forthright or not; or whether there have been mistakes made in Iraq or not. We have debated these points. People have reached their conclusions. The time has come for those of us in both parties to decide what to do next. The plan I have outlined today is what I think we need to do next. If we do not, I am quite concerned that history will record this effort as a failed attempt to make us safer.

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