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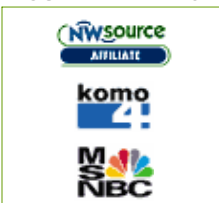
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OPINION

Friday, June 24, 2005

Iraq Occupation: This war can't be won

SEATTLE POST-INTELLIGENCER EDITORIAL BOARD

The questions about U.S. presence in Iraq aren't about winning or losing. The driving factor must be improving, protecting and respecting the lives of the Iraqi people.

Those are people such as Hassan Juma Awad and Faleh Abood Umara, two oil worker union leaders from the southern Iraqi city of Basra. Visiting Seattle with the King County Labor Council yesterday, the two men had no doubt about what the United States can do next to help their country recover from the reign of Saddam Hussein, whom Awad refers to as "a criminal, in capital letters."

The occupation, they believe, must end. And withdrawal must be followed by a massive rebuilding of Iraq's infrastructure, with U.S. support.

Iraq poses thorny questions not just for the family men from Iraq but also for policy-makers worldwide. An international conference in Brussels this week produced more good words about cooperation in rebuilding but no new plans for genuinely internationalizing the occupation, setting a timetable for U.S. withdrawal or considering a rapid pullout.

The Bush administration is revving up its media manipulation machinery with a new push on "winning" in Iraq. In the latest sales pitch for why we are there, President Bush says, in effect, that Americans are fortunate to have drawn terrorists into a fight on somebody else's soil.

His neocon policy advisers have been wrong about almost everything else in Iraq. They foisted this war on the United States and the world with patently false assertions not just about weapons of mass destruction. The increasingly famous Downing Street memo only hints at the scope of mass deception. The neocons also spread absolute fantasies about how we would be greeted in Iraq, how many troops would be needed to establish security and how much time, money and blood would be spent in an occupation.

Whatever elements of truth may exist in the latest PR pitch about foreign fighters in Iraq, U.S. convenience alone can't justify our presence there. As is hard to remember when watching pictures of destruction from Iraq, that land is the home of real people like Awad, Umara, their wives and their children.

Awad and Umara, who had a cousin executed by the deposed dictator, have no doubt that their country can do better at governing and reuniting itself if the United States were to leave immediately. They could be naïve or wrong. But they think that it is the United States that is being misled,

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again, with the talk of fighting jihadists on their soil. If the United States has good intentions toward Iraq, we must ask ourselves -- and Iraqis -- what the overall effect of occupation is on the Iraqi people.

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How do you view the American presence in Iraq?

- It's not an occupation. We are heroically helping Iraq's government and people
- U.S. troops necessary, but a timetable for withdrawal is essential
- Not sure or don't care
- U.S. troops are necessary, for as long as needed
- Saddam Hussein is gone, and it's time to withdraw

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