

KeyOpinion



An Uncivil Civil War

Richard L. Hershatter
Contributing Columnist

The situation in Iraq is starting to sound like one of those old Japanese movies, where the director just didn't know quite how to end it, so it goes on and on and on.

After three and a half years — nearly as long as it took the United States and its allies in World War II to force an unconditional surrender on three powerful modern countries — the conflict seems no closer to solution.

As this is being written, over 2,600 American servicemen and women have been killed and nearly 20,000 grievously maimed. The Iraqi civilian population has suffered casualties in excess of 100,000, and the country is continuing to lose men, women and children at the rate of 3,000 per week — most from internecine warfare between rival Muslim religious groups.

The centuries-old animosity and deadly rivalry between the Shiite and Sunni branches of Islam, which were held in tight check by the murderous Sunni dictator Saddam Hussein, were unleashed when he was toppled. The blood being shed as a result is far in excess of anything caused by actions of our military.

It is not the intent of this column to raise the question of whether or not it was a mistake to invade Iraq — we are there, and history will determine the wisdom, or lack thereof, of the pre-emptive “shock and awe” actions of the Bush administration.

We do need, however, to study the mistakes that have been made and try to derive some lessons that might help prevent future errors and perhaps point out a way to resolve this mess.

If there is one thing that the technological advances of the part century have shown, it is that modern warfare is as much a science as it is an art. It demands professional, not amateur, leadership.

It follows that if the leaders of a country decide to go to war, the nation must have leaders with some military experience, not armchair politicians playing warrior. Failing that, it is imperative that the advice of trained soldiers be sought and followed.

So when the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff insists that the planned invasion is seriously understaffed, it behooves civilian leadership to take heed, instead of summarily firing the officer.

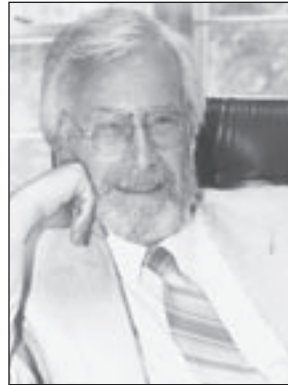
Secondly, you don't “go to war with what equipment happens to be on hand,” as claimed by Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld. When the United States was attacked at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, it was woefully unprepared, but it took its time to build up its military and its equipment and launched carefully prepared counterattacks when it was finally ready.

Third, when a nation goes to war, it needs to do so with all the facilities at its command. A war cannot be successfully waged on the cheap, with insufficient manpower, inadequate equipment, and most of the population sitting back in their living rooms watching it on television.

Again: World War II was a perfect example, with the entire population involved, either serving in the armed forces or making sacrifices on the home front.

History also teaches us that definite goals and carefully thought-out plans are essential to ultimate victory.

In the case of Iraq, the originally stated goal was the elimination of weapons of mass destruction. After defeating Hussein's armies and determining that there were



no such weapons, the “mission was accomplished,” and our involvement could have been logically terminated at that time.

The next opportunity to declare victory and leave occurred with the capture of Saddam Hussein, but we stayed on, only to become objects of hatred as an army of occupation.

The new goal was to establish a “stable democracy” in the Middle East, as an example for all the other Moslem nations to emulate.

The problem is that in deciding to engage in nation-building, it is first necessary to have a nation. Iraq is not a nation and never has been.

The country was stitched together in the 1920s by the British out of three provinces left over from the old Ottoman Empire. Ethnically, the Kurds, Shiites and Sunnis have little to do with each other and are bitter enemies.

Having toppled the Sunni despot holding the place together, the United States is left with a vacuum which is most likely to be filled, after a nasty civil war, by Shiite factions, backed, armed and financed by Iran.

If Iran succeeds and ultimately becomes a nuclear power, the entire oil-rich Middle East will fall to elements hostile to the West.

It is time to stand back and reassess the situation and determine what our ultimate goals should be. Hopefully, Washington's leaders will be up to the task.

Richard L. Hershatter is a retired lawyer and novelist who writes a syndicated column of interest to Floridians. He can be reached at Banyan502@aol.com.

Longboat Key News

5370 Gulf of Mexico Drive, Suite 210
Longboat Key, FL 34228
Phone: 941-387-2200
Fax: 941-387-8288
www.lbknews.com

Steve Reid, Editor and Publisher
sreid@lbknews.com

Melissa Reid, Associate Publisher
Associate Editor
Lia Martin

Vice President Sales/Marketing
Christopher Berloni

Production/Distribution Manager
Caron Cooper

Office Manager
Mary Cohen

Advertising Executives
Linda Browning • Nan Kirk

Staff Writers
Melissa Reid • Melissa Donley

Contributing Columnists
Dick Hershatter • Tom Burgum
Rusty Chinnis • Christine Killeen
Peter Holliday • Al Green
Karen O'Dowd • The Chaser
Glenn & Carole Swope

Graphic Design
Caron Cooper • Jerry Maguire

Newsroom
news@lbknews.com

Letters to the Editor
letters@lbknews.com

Advertising Department
ads@lbknews.com
941-749-0400

For stop deliveries and distribution requests,
please email circulation@lbknews.com
or call 941-749-0400.

Katrina's Pictures Lie

Tom Burgum
Contributing Columnist

Time magazine led the parade of “let's all remember Katrina” with the lead, “It's still so easy to be angry. Last August, a single storm swamped and choked and nearly killed a major American city, as the government seemed to abandon its residents.” Time's take on hurricane Katrina's assault on the Gulf Coast is simply a continuation of the almost hysterical reaction of the press in 2005. Newsweek's cover the week after Katrina was titled, “America's Shame.”

Bob Herbert of the New York Times opined that, “Mr. Bush's performance last week will rank as one of the worst ever during a dire national emergency.”

This week, TV news featured replays of Katrina, highlighting the 36 hours where thousands were stranded at the Super Dome and the New Orleans Convention Center. The television pictures beamed throughout the world became the whole story of Katrina for many. It is a sad fact that these same pictures did not tell the story. The problem is a television picture can tell a very limited story, such as a woman standing before a destroyed house or even a large group of people milling about while asking why the government isn't helping them. Television cannot even begin to tell the story of a hurricane that ravaged 80,000 square miles. But it was the television coverage of the New Orleans scenes that determined what America, indeed the world, thought of the Katrina response.

In reality Katrina was a monster of nature that defied man's efforts to prepare adequately. It cut a swath of destruction though an area roughly the size of Great Britain, flooded a major city, reduced scores of counties in a tri-state area to splinters, choked thousands of miles of roads with debris, destroyed or damaged hundreds of bridges, destroyed communications infrastructure for both land lines and cellular phones, shattered electrical service and closed airports. And, it all happened with



brutal, numbing swiftness. The scope of the Katrina disaster was so broad and so complete as to defy adequate description. The media answer was to concentrate on New Orleans and the problems at the Convention Center and the Super Dome.

The result is the news coverage has led the American people to accept two truths. The first is the federal government, in particular, and the state and local governments, in general, let down the people of New Orleans. Note: the people of Mississippi and Alabama don't even get honorable mention in the polls. The second is that it is all the fault of the federal government. Bush took some pains while in New Orleans on Tuesday to validate the inaccurate picture painted by the narrow TV pictures. He said, “All levels of government let you down.”

Someone should tell the people of New Orleans that the government of the city let you down when they failed to even have minimal evacuation plans. The city let you down when they told people to go to the Super Dome and the Convention Center but made no provisions to actually evacuate anyone. The city let you down when they failed to provide for evacuation of the handicapped. Nursing homes let you down when they abandoned the sick and the elderly to drown in the rising floodwaters. You let yourselves down when you failed to evacuate or, if you didn't have means to do this, to at least have 72 hours of food and water while waiting for rescue. None of the above is the responsibility of the state or the federal government and you simply are reacting to the common misconception of what happened and who was at fault. Many would agree that the Bush administration has much to apologize for, but he need not accept blame better put elsewhere. Bush should be criticized for appointing someone to head FEMA simply because the man was a substantial contributor to his campaign. There is no excuse for a President to take his responsibility to appoint qualified officials so lightly.

The President does have a responsibility to set the record straight about a federal and state response that was truly remarkable — no matter what is said by NBC, CBS and FOX. Even with the overwhelming nature of the disaster, the relief effort throughout Louisiana and Mississippi was underway within two days. At the

Burgum, Page 8A