

sacked. Fourth, massive amounts of money have been wasted in the reconstruction effort, and companies like Halliburton have received noncompetitive contracts and made vast amounts of money off the war. Fifth, America is not paying for this war as we go. We have gone into debt to pay for it, and taxes have been cut. The cost continues to grow, and there is no end in sight.

Given the systematic untrustworthiness and incompetence of the Bush administration, how can an ordinary citizen like myself support the war? How can one's natural response to the whole initiative be anything but skepticism? Of course, I would like to see something like the surge strategy work, but this administration is so incompetent, so unrealistic, and so untrustworthy that it is surely foolish for me to go on believing.

PATRICIA SMITH
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*University of California,
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Iraq

TO THE EDITOR:

Arthur Herman makes an interesting case for staying in Iraq in order to "win," but I remain skeptical for a number of reasons ["How to Win in Iraq—and How to Lose," April]. First, Mr. Herman says that we are there to create a free, open, and liberal society, but that is not how the war was sold to the American people. Second, there has been regular lying on the part of the administration concerning the success of our efforts and the financial and human costs (for example by restricting media coverage of coffins returning home).

Third, insufficient numbers of troops were sent, they were poorly supplied, and generals who dissented from the Pentagon's pre-conceived notions were

TO THE EDITOR:

Arthur Herman writes that the French in Algeria in the 1950's won the fight on the battlefield against the Islamic insurrection but lost the war because of perfidy at home by the likes of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Similarly, the United States military had the North Vietnamese against the wall in 1972, but we had to withdraw in defeat and humiliation thanks to the antiwar Left at home. Finally, he argues, just as we are poised for military victory in Iraq with the surge and the new leadership of General David Petraeus, the toothless Democrats are

ready to throw in the towel. Such a radically revisionist history of wars that the French and American militaries actually lost in the field lays the ground for a myth of grievance that will have serious political consequences. And such mythic narratives have their own history.

For decades after the Civil War, the South nourished the idea of the “lost cause,” which asserted that victory had been certain but for bad political leadership under Jefferson Davis and the escape of slaves who had the audacity to fight for the North. In World War I, so it was claimed, Germany won great victories in the east and made huge territorial gains at the 1917 treaty of Brest-Litovsk that would have led to hegemony over Europe were it not for the “stab in the back” by Jews at home and the resulting humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles. One should remember such history well before blithely dismissing legitimate opinion at home that the Iraq war was badly conceived, sold to Americans based on lies, and is now lost in the field.

CHARLES B. STROZIER
Center on Terrorism
City University of New York
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

While recounting supposed successes in Iraq—operations in Najaf “presaging” a better future, Moqtada al-Sadr lying low, and the manual-writing General Petraeus being in charge—Arthur Herman devotes even more of his article to criticizing nefarious defeatism on the home front. One can see why: if the war had been handled competently from the start, per-

haps it would have made a difference for the better. But now, as the mismanaged mess is completely unraveling, a *Dolchstoßlegende* (that is, a “stab in the back” myth) is needed to give cover to the hapless originators of the disaster and deflect blame onto the skeptics.

OLE J. THIENHAUS
Las Vegas, Nevada

TO THE EDITOR:

Arthur Herman invokes the Vietnam war in arguing for the U.S. to stay and win in Iraq, but does he draw the right lesson from that earlier conflict? The Pentagon Papers tell us that we remained in Vietnam for the better part of ten years not to win but merely to avoid admitting defeat. More than any military repercussion, we feared the damage to our global reputation as the most powerful nation in the world. Unfortunately, the current surge in Iraq is little more than a smoke-screen to hide the truth that after spinning our wheels for several years we do not know what else to do, and cannot face the folly of our past actions.

PETER RUSSERT
Los Altos, California

TO THE EDITOR:

Arthur Herman’s article, “How to Win in Iraq—and How to Lose,” should have been titled “How to Fight More Effectively in Iraq—and Whom to Blame When It’s Time to Go Home.” Our real problem in Iraq, however, has nothing to do with how well we fight. The problem is that “winning” has no meaning. Whether our troops leave in two years or in a decade, Iraq will have to go through its own process of reconciliation. We can depose Iraqi

leaders, we can contain the territorial ambitions of different factions, but we cannot use our military to shortcut Iraq’s transition to a modern democratic society. Fifty years from now, whatever Iraq has become, it will have had little to do with our occupation. There are better ways to help the country go forward.

Mr. Herman bemoans our “loss” of Vietnam decades ago. I was there as a diplomat, and can assure him that everything the U.S. was fighting for there has been achieved beyond our wildest dreams. Within a few years of our leaving, warring Vietnamese factions unified. Then there began an amazing process of political and economic development. The Chinese army was confronted and beaten in border engagements. Soviet influence in Hanoi was degraded. And now, a mere 40 years later, Vietnam is an important friend to America. Perhaps Mr. Herman can explain how things would look better today if we had “won.”

DAVID SMITH
San Francisco, California

TO THE EDITOR:

Arthur Herman’s excellent analysis of the insurgency in Iraq would have been better without the references to “fourth-generation warfare” (4GW) theory. The term 4GW has become a popular rhetorical device for describing the so-called “war on terror” or “long war,” but it has a questionable historical basis, and carries ideological baggage Mr. Herman seems unaware of. It is notable that the Army’s new counterinsurgency manual FM 3-24 (which he himself mentions) does not adopt the 4GW paradigm.

The theory itself has evolved over nearly two decades, from postulating future 4GW as a fight among elite, elusive soldiers using high-technology weaponry to ideas that easily incorporate “non-trinitarian” (non-statist) war, including Islamist terrorists armed with box-cutters. The Spengler-like theorizing of 4GW makes irregular warfare, which is as old as man, the culmination of four centuries of modern military history. Its godfather, military theorist William Lind, is a vociferous opponent of the Iraq war who undoubtedly regards Mr. Herman’s ideas as pure folly.

Guerrillas have always used asymmetric tactics, deception, and propaganda to advance their aims. Alexander the Great battled insurgents, as did the leaders of Rome. What is different today is less the nature of insurgencies than the post-industrial Western societies against which they are directed. Modern insurgents benefit from an almost default acceptance of their legitimacy in the West, especially among Left-leaning elites in academia and the media. These elites almost reflexively believe that insurgents’ goals and tactics are at a minimum understandable due to various grievances, and at the upper limit justifiable and worthy of support.

This is not a new type of warfare, but rather an atavistic kind of war being waged against morally tired societies. To refer to Spengler again, modern insurgencies are like a disease afflicting Western civilization, now apparently entering its winter years.

JONATHAN F. KEILER
Bowie, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR:

I would take slight exception to the suggestion in Arthur Herman's wonderful article that the military only recently started thinking about counterinsurgency and the lessons of the French experience in Algeria. Algeria was a primary case study at the Marine Command and Staff College at least as early as 1985 when I attended. We studied the successes of the French General David Galula, if not his own account of them in his book.

On the other hand, there are good reasons for leaders to be cautious about counterinsurgency operations. Five years seem to be about the most that Americans will tolerate for hostilities, and counterinsurgencies almost always take a great deal longer. They also provide limited incremental dividends that are often not nearly enough for a fickle populace at home. Counterinsurgency is just not the "American way of war."

ARTHUR A. ADKINS
Pensacola, Florida

TO THE EDITOR:

Arthur Herman's trenchant analysis of progress and problems in the Iraq war should be a cautionary tale for the U.S. Congress. As in Algeria and Vietnam, we could "snatch defeat from the jaws of victory" if Congress cuts off funding for our efforts there. It is ironic that the same Senate that overwhelmingly approved the appointment of General Petraeus as commander in Iraq is now considering whether to hogtie his strategy by limiting the forces and funds necessary to execute it. If we "lose" in such a way at home, and the implications for Iraq and for us

are likely to be devastating.

THOMAS B. VAUGHN
McMinnville, Tennessee

TO THE EDITOR:

In his excellent article, Arthur Herman refers to humanitarian efforts on the part of American troops in the "northern district of Kabylia," Iraq. I believe he means the "northern governorate of Ninawa." Kabylia is located in Algeria, as Mr. Herman himself notes in another context.

ALLAN R. SWEGLE
Seattle, Washington

ARTHUR HERMAN WRITES:

Like many opponents of the Iraq war, Patricia Smith Churchland, Charles B. Strozier, Ole J. Theinhaus, Peter Russert, and David Smith extrapolate its unwinnability from the Bush administration's alleged failings in waging it. They rehearse liberal boilerplate about how the President "lied" about weapons of mass destruction (ignoring the fact that President Clinton described the threat from Saddam in 1998 in similar terms), about administration incompetence (although this same administration toppled Saddam's entire regime in less than six weeks and with only 183 casualties), about how Haliburton has made "vast amounts of money" in war profiteering, and so on.

But these familiar complaints, even when not laced with intimations of conspiracy on the part of American government and industry, are immaterial to the central issue. That issue is how to avoid past military mistakes, of which there have been many in Iraq (just as there were in World War II, which we eventually won), and how to find the right

strategy for the future. The fact that the Left and the media continue to assert, prematurely, that the war is lost is very much relevant to whether we succeed or not, as I emphasized in my article. The strategy of General David Petraeus represents a different approach to fighting the insurgency in Iraq from that of his predecessors—an approach that holds out much promise, if it is given a chance.

To suggest, as Messrs. Strozier and Thienhaus do, that I am merely concocting a "stab in the back" myth in order to blame the Left for losing the war is absurd. (And it is disgraceful for Mr. Strozier to equate my position with the *Dolchstoßlegende* that, as we know, led to the rise of the Nazis.) Unlike the Civil War in 1865 or World War I in 1918, the Iraq war is not over. We have not surrendered to the terrorists and insurgents trying to thwart Iraq's development into a stable country with a stable government.

In fact, the successes of the Petraeus surge since my article went to press suggest that the war is not nearly over. Sectarian violence in Baghdad is down markedly. Another hopeful sign was the news in late May that local American commanders will be able to negotiate ceasefires in their districts—a huge step in empowering local Iraqi elites to defuse the insurgency. A year ago, the situation in Anbar province seemed hopelessly out of control, but now the Sunni leadership there is turning against the insurgents. If such developments were to spread, the prognosis for Iraq's future would look far more hopeful.

Reversals for the better are not uncommon in the

history of warfare, as I pointed out in my article. The French experienced such a turn in 1956-69 in Algeria, as did the Americans in Vietnam in 1970-72 (under very different circumstances), though both went on to withdraw without achieving victory. I am sorry if these incontrovertible facts seem revisionist to Charles Strozier and David Smith. But the decisive factor in both wars was a public that had lost confidence in the military's leadership, despite its superior position on the battlefield. We are in danger of ending up in the same place today, though with much less reason.

AS ARTHUR A. ADKINS points out, the key to winning a counterinsurgency campaign like the one in Iraq is time—probably another five to seven years at this point (although at much reduced troop levels as the Iraqi army comes on-line). This may be more than the American public can stomach, but its tolerance for what will result if we lose may be even lower.

The growing consensus, even among opponents of the war like Brent Scowcroft and Anthony Zinni, is that getting out of Iraq is no longer an option. Mr. Smith's notion that abandoning Iraq will lead to some kind of "national reconciliation" on the model of Vietnam is wrong at both ends of the analogy. In Vietnam, tens of thousands of boat people had to flee for their lives or spend years in Communist reeducation camps. The sectarian violence in Iraq is at a high level even with all our efforts to contain it. If we withdraw, a bloodbath will likely ensue.

Mr. Adkins is of course

correct that the idea of counterinsurgency was not discovered yesterday by American military commanders. I did not mean to imply that the French campaign in Algeria was unknown to counterinsurgency theorists before Petraeus—or, pace Jonathan F. Keiler, that fourth-generation warfare is the only way to characterize such low-intensity conflicts. But the Pentagon under Donald Rumsfeld was so focused on substituting high technology for large numbers of American troops in Iraq, and on not bogging them down in nation-building, that it discounted counterinsurgency theories that seemed to require both. It has taken the failure of a “transformed” American military to keep the peace in Iraq to give Petraeus’s ideas a chance to work—just as it took the failure of successive British generals in World War II to find one, Bernard Montgomery, who could defeat Erwin Rommel in the Western Desert.

In the end, the aim of my article was not to explain away defeat or to assign blame—although, as several of my correspondents confirm, this is a compulsive habit in debates about the Iraq war. My aim was to suggest how defeat might be avoided. If we fail to establish and secure democracy in Iraq, it will not be a tragedy for the United States—despite the sad expenditure of lives and treasure. It will be a tragedy for the entire Middle East. What is equally sad is that so many in this country seem gleeful at that prospect.

My thanks to Thomas B. Vaughn for his kind remarks, and to Allan R. Swegle for correcting the slip of my pen.