

Terrorists in New Jersey?

Help me out here. Arguments about the war often are based on the notion that "if we don't fight the terrorists in Iraq, we'll be fighting them on the shores of New Jersey." Let's be wildly optimistic. Say that we fight in Iraq for 10 years and the result is that Sunnis and Shiites stop killing each other and live in peace, they unite to drive out the foreign jihadists and they establish democracy. (Not even Dick Cheney would be this delusional, but let's say it happens.) Do we then expect the jihadists will drag themselves home and give up their ways? That Osama bin Laden (or whoever is leading al-Qaida at that time) will say, "Well, we lost in Iraq -- I guess we should just stop all this terrorism and go do something else"? Do we think terrorists all over the world will stop plotting against the United States? Dozens and dozens of terrorist groups exist in scores of countries, including Egypt, Indonesia and Turkey. These groups are not going to stop if we "win" in Iraq. They still will be looking for ways to harm our nation. We've killed or captured the majority of the top leadership of al-Qaida, but they seem to be able to find a new generation of leaders. Suicide bombers blow themselves up daily, but there always seem to be more recruited.

This is not to say we should give up on fighting terrorists. We should be focused and intense in helping eliminate them. But the war in Iraq will have very little effect on that struggle, except that it drives our friends away and reduces the cooperation we need in addressing terrorism. It also helps the terrorists recruit, and it gives their members great fighting experience. But it depletes our energy and our resources.

What can a "victory" in Iraq possibly look like? The overwhelming number of fighters there are local Iraqis, not terrorists. There are many wiser things we should be doing to fight terrorism.

If you want to wage war in Iraq because you want the country's oil, or you want to contain Iran, or you want to show the world who's boss, then make the argument on those points. But the people living on the New Jersey shore won't be any safer for it.

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