

## Evil Iran, the new Al-Qaeda

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“Iraq and its costs”, the op-ed published this Monday by the Wall Street Journal and authored by Senators Joe Lieberman (Independent, Connecticut) and Lindsey Graham (Republican, South Carolina)[1] is nothing short of alarming. Even more alarming than counterinsurgency ace General David Petraeus’ show to the US Senate.

Coming from the two top surrogates to Republican presidential candidate Senator John McCain, the Lieberman-Graham piece – a preemptive strike proclaiming the success of the “surge” – should be taken as the very essence of McCain’s foreign policy, a presidential candidate that still can’t tell the difference between a Sunni and a Shi’ite. As it happens, it is also a formidable piece of fiction. The overall martial theme remains unmistakable: we need war, war, war.

Mr Surge goes to Washington

Lieberman-Graham hail Petraeus as “having led one of the most remarkably successful military operations in American history” while deriding “antiwar critics” as essentially a bunch of losers. What they don’t say is that the “surge” is in fact not over – it has been reconverted into a “pause”, according to Petraeus himself, before things start surging again. Lies. Lies. Pause. More lies.

Lieberman-Graham rebrand the “surge” as a “noble cause” – insisting on the drop of American casualties (“down by 70%”). But they don’t tell how. They insist on magical surge “liberation” of former al-Qaeda strongholds – but they don’t say that “empowered Iraqi Muslims” – actually Sunni Arab guerrillas – decided, wisely, to rake in US cash (\$300 a month in a 70% unemployment economy) instead of fighting three enemies at once (al-Qaeda, the Baghdad government and the Americans themselves).

They also don’t mention that any “success” of the “surge” is also directly conditioned by Muqtada al-Sadr’s truce, imposed last autumn; and by decreased ethnic cleansing in Baghdad (which had in fact been turned from a Sunni-majority to a Shi’ite-majority city even before the “surge” began).

Lieberman-Graham talk of “Muslims taking up arms against Osama bin Laden”. Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Two Rivers – although extremely violent – is a negligible militia among the jaw-dropping 28 militias in Iraq, no more than 3,000 fighters compared, for instance, to around 100,000 Kurdish Peshmergas.

Lieberman-Graham hail the deer-caught-in-headlights [Nuri al-]Maliki government in Baghdad, “encouraged” (“under heavy pressure”, rather) by US ambassador Ryan Crocker,

to pass US-designated benchmarks. Even Sunnis rejected the new de-Ba'athification law. Not many are "encouraged" to vote in the next elections (Lieberman-Graham are certain they will, "by the millions"); their collective feeling is that the government remains a Shi'ite-Kurdish private affair.

Not surprisingly, there's not even a passing mention by Lieberman-Graham of the holy of holies: oil. In fact, the only benchmark that Washington really cares about is the new Iraqi oil law - which no serious Iraqi nationalist member of parliament would dare to approve. On the other hand, Lieberman-Graham exult that "the Iraqi economy is growing at a brisk 7%". Good for dodgy car smugglers from the Gulf, not for a 70% unemployment economy.

Lieberman-Graham laud Maliki's "political will" to "take on the Shi'ite militias and criminal gangs, which he recently condemned as "worse than al-Qaeda". Here pops up for the first time the dizzying amalgam now relentlessly established by the Bush administration and McCain himself of Wahhabi, al-Qaeda and Shi'ite Iran - the Islamic Republic branded guilty, with no evidence, of supporting these militias and gangs.

Lieberman-Graham seem to believe the Iraqi security forces have "shown significant improvement". Whatever rhetoric they employ cannot modify the end result of the battle of Basra, where these "Iraqi security forces" deserted en masse and were routinely humiliated by the Mahdi Army and/or rogue Mahdi Army units. Not to mention the supreme humiliation: the ceasefire was broken by the commander of the Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), in Qom, the religious capital of Iran, and behind Maliki's back. The IRGC, branded by Washington as terrorists, were actually the peacemakers.

Unstoppable, Lieberman-Graham go on to say that al-Qaeda "still retains a significant foothold in the northern city of Mosul" where "Iraqi and coalition forces are involved in a campaign to destroy it". The true story, reported by Asia Times Online ([The other Iraqi civil war](#), April 3) is rather that Americans are helping Kurds in their slow-motion ethnic cleansing of Sunni Arabs in Mosul and the surrounding region.

Blame, blame Iran

The full demonization of Iran - and the heart of Bush and McCain's foreign policy - is on show when Lieberman-Graham accuse Iran, with no evidence whatsoever, of continuing "to wage a vicious and escalating proxy war against the Iraqi government and the US military". The Iranians have American blood on their hands" and are responsible, through ghostly, undetermined "extremist agents", for "the deaths of hundreds of our men and women in uniform".

There's no evidence these American-christened "special groups" even exist - or are just a counterinsurgency fabrication. It doesn't matter. The whole project - Bush's and McCain's - is spelled out quite frankly: "Our fight in Iraq cannot be separated from our larger struggle to prevent the emergence of an Iranian-dominated Middle East." This is code for regime change - a newer, "softer" surge of the old neo-con maxim "Real men go to Tehran".

The amalgam is duly reinforced when Lieberman-Graham stress "continuing threats from Iran and al-Qaeda" - underscoring once again that McCain's gaffe of two weeks ago (Iran is training al-Qaeda) was not a gaffe at all. Lieberman - who recently went out of his way to

elevate McCain to JFK status – even manages to blame “antiwar politicians” for turning “John F Kennedy’s inaugural address on its head, urging Americans to refuse to pay any price, or bear any burden, to assure the survival of liberty.” Then it’s amalgam redux – the specter of a fictional world “in which al-Qaeda and Iran can claim that they have defeated us in Iraq and are ascendant”.

As for the bread-and-butter daily horror in Iraq, nothing will change. No significant “troop withdrawals in the months ahead”, and no “political timeline”. But then Lieberman-Graham soar to unparalleled brotherhood heights when they write that “thanks to the surge, Iraq today is looking increasingly like Osama bin Laden’s worst nightmare: an Arab country, in the heart of the Middle East, in which hundreds of thousands of Muslims – both Sunni and Shi’ite – are rising up and fighting, shoulder to shoulder with American soldiers, against al-Qaeda and its hateful ideology”.

Bin Laden is patient – he knows the occupation itself will continue to be a magnet to thousands of aspiring jihadis. Sunni Arab guerrillas have learned to be patient; they’d rather breathe now, paid by US cash, and then relaunch their offensive, at the right time, to recapture Baghdad. As for those “hundreds of thousands of Muslims” – in fact millions – their main battle cry is not al-Qaeda, but rather “Occupation out”, as in the Million Man March called by Muqtada al-Sadr for this Wednesday in Baghdad and then canceled.

Why the abrupt cancelation? Because the immense Sadr City slum, as well as other Sadrist bases, have been totally encircled by Maliki’s and Petraeus’ “surge” troops. In a press conference at Firdous Square – where exactly five years ago today the marines staged the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein, with the help of a few Baghdad locals – Sadrist spokesman Salah al-Obaidi said Muqtada would not risk the safety of his millions of supporters.

Asia Times Online sources confirm Iraqi “security” – in fact Badr Organization commandos – have been detaining every single young Shi’ite male from 15 to 35 and preventing them from entering the city center. This is also what the “surge” is about – massive popular repression, although no one will hear it from Lieberman-Graham.

The war on Iraq ended five years ago today. No: the war on Iraq actually started five years ago today. For those who still live under the spell of a Bush “we create our own reality” administration, the Lieberman-Graham piece is soothing. For McCain supporters, it’s confirmation of the road map ahead – The Hundred Year War plus “bomb, bomb, Iran”. As for the majority of the American public, which has had enough of an endless war that has torn the country apart, it’s nothing but an insult to their collective intelligence.

Note

1. [Iraq and Its Costs](#), The Wall Street Journal, April 7, 2008.

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