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Five Flaws in the President's Plan
by Zbigniew Brzezinski

The president's speech gives rise to five broad observations:

- It provided a more realistic analysis of the situation in Iraq than any previous presidential statement. It acknowledged failure, though it dodged accountability for that failure by the standard device of assuming personal responsibility. Its language was less Islamophobic than has been customary with President Bush's rhetoric since Sept. 11, though the president still could not resist the temptation to engage in a demagogic oversimplification of the challenge the United States faces in Iraq, calling it a struggle to safeguard "a young democracy" against extremists and an effort to protect American society from terrorists. Both propositions are more than dubious.
- The commitment of 21,500 more troops is a political gimmick of limited tactical significance and of no strategic benefit. It is insufficient to win the war militarily. It will engage U.S. forces in bloody street fighting that will not resolve with finality the ongoing turmoil and the sectarian and ethnic strife, not to mention the anti-American insurgency.
- The decision to escalate the level of the U.S. military involvement while imposing "benchmarks" on the "sovereign" Iraqi regime, and to emphasize the external threat posed by Syria and Iran, leaves the administration with two options once it becomes clear -- as it almost certainly will -- that the benchmarks are not being met. One option is to adopt the policy of "blame and run": i.e., to withdraw because the Iraqi government failed to deliver. That would not provide a remedy for the dubious "falling dominoes" scenario, which the president so often has outlined as the inevitable, horrific consequence of U.S. withdrawal. The other alternative, perhaps already lurking in the back of Bush's mind, is to widen the conflict by taking military action against Syria or Iran. It is a safe bet that some of the neocons around the president and outside the White House will be pushing for that. Others, such as Sen. Joseph Lieberman, may also favor it.
- The speech did not explore even the possibility of developing a framework for an eventual political solution. The search for a political solution would require a serious dialogue about a joint American-Iraqi decision regarding the eventual date of a U.S. withdrawal with all genuine Iraqi political leaders who command respect and wield physical power. The majority of

the Iraqi people, opinion polls show, favor such a withdrawal within a relatively short period. A jointly set date would facilitate an effort to engage all of Iraq's neighbors in a serious discussion about regional security and stability. The U.S. refusal to explore the possibility of talks with Iran and Syria is a policy of self-ostracism that fits well into the administration's diplomatic style of relying on sloganeering as a substitute for strategizing.

- The speech reflects a profound misunderstanding of our era. America is acting like a colonial power in Iraq. But the age of colonialism is over. Waging a colonial war in the post-colonial age is self-defeating. That is the fatal flaw of Bush's policy.

The writer, who was national security adviser to President Jimmy Carter, is the author of the forthcoming book "Second Chance: Three Presidents and the Crisis of American Superpower."