

Blame Iraqis for the Ghastly Mess the War Has Created

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As the people who talked the United States into the Iraq war try to talk their way out of the blame for the mess they made, one dominant theme has emerged: Blame the Iraqis. Our intentions were good; we did our best to help; but the Iraqis are vicious, incompetent ingrates who would prefer to kill one another than seize the freedom we brought them. It's not our fault that it turned out so badly.

It has turned out rather badly, hasn't it? President George W. Bush will go no further than to say that he is "disappointed by the pace of success." But practically everybody else in the US and Britain knows that the invasion of Iraq was a huge disaster.

Somebody must be to blame, and it cannot be us, so it must be those brutal, stupid Iraqis. This comforting myth started on the right, among those who had been eager supporters of "a war of choice to instill some democracy in the heart of the Middle East," as New York Times columnist Tom Friedman put it in his column four years ago. It has now even infected that icon of liberal irony, the "Doonesbury" comic strip.

There was no surprise last November when arch neoconservative Richard Perle, ex-chairman of the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board Advisory Committee, said that he had "underestimated the depravity" in Iraq. He has a lot of blame to shift, so he would say that, wouldn't he?

It was no surprise, either, when right-wing columnist Charles Krauthammer, once an eager supporter of the war, elaborated on the same theme less than a month ago: "Thousands of brave American soldiers have died trying to counter, put down and prevent civil strife. But when Arabs kill Arabs and Shiites kill Shiites and Sunnis kill all in a spasm of violence that is blind and furious and has roots in hatreds born long before America was even a republic, to place the blame on (America) is simply perverse....Iraq is their country. We midwived their freedom. They chose civil war."

Brazen, self-serving distortions of the truth by people who have a lot of explaining to do, and not in the least surprising, because if the ghastly mess in Iraq wasn't the fault of Iraqis, then it would have to be the fault of Americans. Perle and Krauthammer would figure quite prominently among the Americans in question.

But what is one to make of Gary Trudeau peddling the same line in his comic strip "Doonesbury"? The strip runs daily in 1,400 newspapers around the world, and often serves as the vehicle for political or social commentary from a liberal perspective. It never supported the invasion of Iraq, but last month strip was a classic exercise in stereotyping and blame-shifting.

An American colonel, planning the day's operation in the streets of Baghdad, notices that his Iraq Army opposite number has not shown up yet, and sends a soldier to find him. Cut to the Iraqi Army officer: Still behind his desk, coffee cup in hand, ashtray full of cigarettes. He says

to the young American soldier: "It's not in my book. Are you sure it's today?" US soldier wearily replies "Yes, sir. You'll recall we fight every day." Unraveling the message doesn't take a Marshall McLuhan: US troops are carrying the burden of the war while lazy, cowardly Iraqis shun their duty. They don't deserve us.

There was an earlier strip even more blatant in blaming the failure on the Iraqis. An American soldier gets behind the wheel of a Humvee and says "Ready to do this, partner?" to the same Iraqi officer, sitting beside him in the front seat. But the Iraqi officer is asleep.

As they approach the target house, the Iraqi officer, now awake, says "I know this house. The owner is Sunni scum." "Well, intel wants us to capture the guy alive," says the American. "That will not be possible. I am sworn to revenge," replies the Iraqi. "Why," asks the American. "What'd he ever do to you.?"

"A member of his family killed a member of mine," replies the Iraqi officer, cigarette dangling from his lips. "What? When did this happen?" asks the shocked American. "1387," replies the Iraqi officer. "What is the matter with you people?" screams the American.

Get the message? These Ay-rabs are not only lazy, they are so savage that they harbor murderous grudges over six centuries. Even Americans cannot bring these people to their senses. Let's get the hell out of here. It isn't our fault that it all went wrong.

Getting out of Iraq is the least bad thing the United States can do now, and the sooner the better. If Americans must manufacture racist fantasies about the victims in order to salvage their pride on the way out, then so be it. *But it is a shameful, childish lie!*