



## An Interview with Thomas Donnelly, Author of *Operation Iraqi Freedom: A Strategic Assessment*

Q: *Why is it that the U.S. military—which won so quickly and decisively in Iraq last spring—has run into so much trouble since then?*

A: The Pentagon's desire to fight a quick war ultimately undercut its ability to win a decisive war. It put so much emphasis on getting to Baghdad quickly that, by the time U.S. troops arrived there, they were worn out and ready to go home. This gave the resistance the breathing room to regroup and launch the guerrilla war we've been fighting since last summer. Part of the problem was that our war plan saw Baghdad as the strategic lynchpin for the campaign, not the Sunni Triangle that surrounded it. But in fairness, the kind of counterinsurgency we're fighting has always been a strategic blind spot for the U.S. military. This isn't the kind of war we like to fight, and our enemy has taken advantage of that.

Q: *With escalating casualties in Iraq, are we stuck in a quagmire? Is this another Vietnam?*

A: The Vietnam comparison has less to do with facts on the ground in Iraq than with our own fears here at home. The fact is, tens of thousands of American soldiers died in Vietnam; in Iraq, one thousand soldiers have been lost. In Vietnam there was an organized, popular resistance. The resistance in Iraq can hardly be called popular; it is a ragtag bunch of terrorists who are murdering innocent Iraqi civilians and international aid workers.

Q: *With the 9/11 Commission and Senate Intelligence report dismissing the Bush administration's claims of ties between al Qaeda and Saddam, how can Iraq still be part of the war on terrorism?*

A: Everyone agrees that there were operational ties between Saddam's regime and al Qaeda. Both the 9/11 commission and the Senate Intelligence Committee report offer considerable evidence of

these contacts. But in addition to his support for terrorists, Saddam Hussein was a part of the broader problem of Middle Eastern terrorism. His regime, more than any other, epitomized the kind of dysfunctional, corrupt, and repressive rule that is responsible for churning out terrorists. The replacement of his dictatorship by a democracy will be a strategic blow against al Qaeda a hundred times more powerful than capturing Osama bin Laden. And the terrorists know this. That is why they are doing everything in their power to sabotage Iraq's democracy, attacking anyone and everyone—Americans, Iraqis, Europeans, *anyone*—associated with it.

Q: *How will Iraqi democracy make Americans safer from terrorism?*

A: A free Iraq will not be a haven for terrorists. It won't threaten its neighbors or develop weapons of mass destruction like Saddam did. That's first. Second, and more importantly, a democratic Iraq will empower its own people to begin to address some of the political and economic problems that have afflicted the Middle East for so long. That, ultimately, is the only thing that is going to make America safer from the threat of terrorism. We can improve airline security all we like; we can go hunt down al Qaeda in the mountains of Afghanistan. But in the end, until the Middle East stops being a place of anger, resentment, and repression, it will continue to produce terrorists.

Q: *Some have argued that the Bush administration came to office determined to go to war with Iraq—to settle old scores. Is there any truth to this?*

A: The war in Iraq has been going on since long before George W. Bush came to office. For more than a decade, most of it under President

Clinton, the United States has been fighting a war against Saddam Hussein. U.S. jets flew over the skies of Iraq and were shot at. So the notion that President Bush ever faced a choice between war and peace is just plain false. The choice we faced was between continuing a war to contain Saddam Hussein or launching a war to end his regime.

Q: *What are the most important lessons for the military to learn from its experiences in Iraq?*

A: First and foremost, the United States military needs to get better at doing counterinsurgency. The fact is, from Afghanistan to Iraq to the Horn of Africa, the U.S. military is engaged in a host of low-level, open-ended counterinsurgency missions. These are “small wars,” and they require a different mentality, different training, and different equipment from the kind of fast, decisive, “big” war that we as Americans like to fight. These are also manpower-intensive wars;

they require a lot of troops, and that means we need a bigger army.

Q: *You've argued that part of the reason the United States military has stumbled in Iraq is that we don't have enough troops. Do you think that the Bush administration should send more? Is it time to reinstate the draft?*

A: More troops could have made a big difference in the tumultuous months following the fall of Baghdad. But at this point, it is the Iraqis themselves who are coming forward to take responsibility for their own security. It's their war as much as it is ours. Now, do we need a bigger army? Unquestionably yes. But a draft is not the best way to do this. An all-volunteer, professional army has consistently proven the best way to get the most committed and capable soldiers onto the battlefield. Resurrecting the draft would be a big step backwards.