



Free Press Viewpoint

Iraq pullout: it's not over yet

It was a huge headline Thursday morning: Last combat unit leaves Iraq.

Papers, cable news and Internet news sites all had photos of humvees, tanks and armored personnel carriers headed down the roads into neighboring Kuwait.

It should have been the moment that many Americans – not to mention Iraqis – have waited for for seven years. The U.S. is finally out of a desert quagmire that has cost the lives of thousands of our troops.

Not so fast. The last combat unit may have left, but there are still 50,000 U.S. troops on the ground and thousands more private contractors. What are they doing? Advising and assisting is the official line, which means they are training Iraqi security forces and providing security but handing over more and more of the day-to-day missions to the Iraqis.

Luckily it seems our leaders aren't acting as if this is the end of the road. Nowhere are big speeches announcing the complete and utter end of the occupation. Republican and Democrat leaders alike smartly noted that a lot of work is left. Everyone is hedging because we're still there.

We cannot yet ask ourselves if we succeeded in Iraq, because it isn't over. What we have to ask ourselves is: what are our goals, what is needed to accomplish them and have we been successful so far?

One of the main questions we need to ask now is, what effect will the withdrawal of front-line troops have on Iraq. If the 2007 surge is to be credited with the current stability of the country, will removing troops lead to instability? Or have our troops rooted out all of the insurgents?

The weekly reports of suicide bombers, assassinations and other attacks seem to indicate that they are not gone. Less maybe, but not gone. Can Iraqi forces handle the vacuum we're leaving behind? And will the U.S. troops who are "advising and assisting" continue to sustain casualties? Only time will tell.

The orderly withdrawal of our combat troops is good news, no doubt about it, but it should not be looked on as the end of U.S. involvement in Iraq. —Kevin Bottrell

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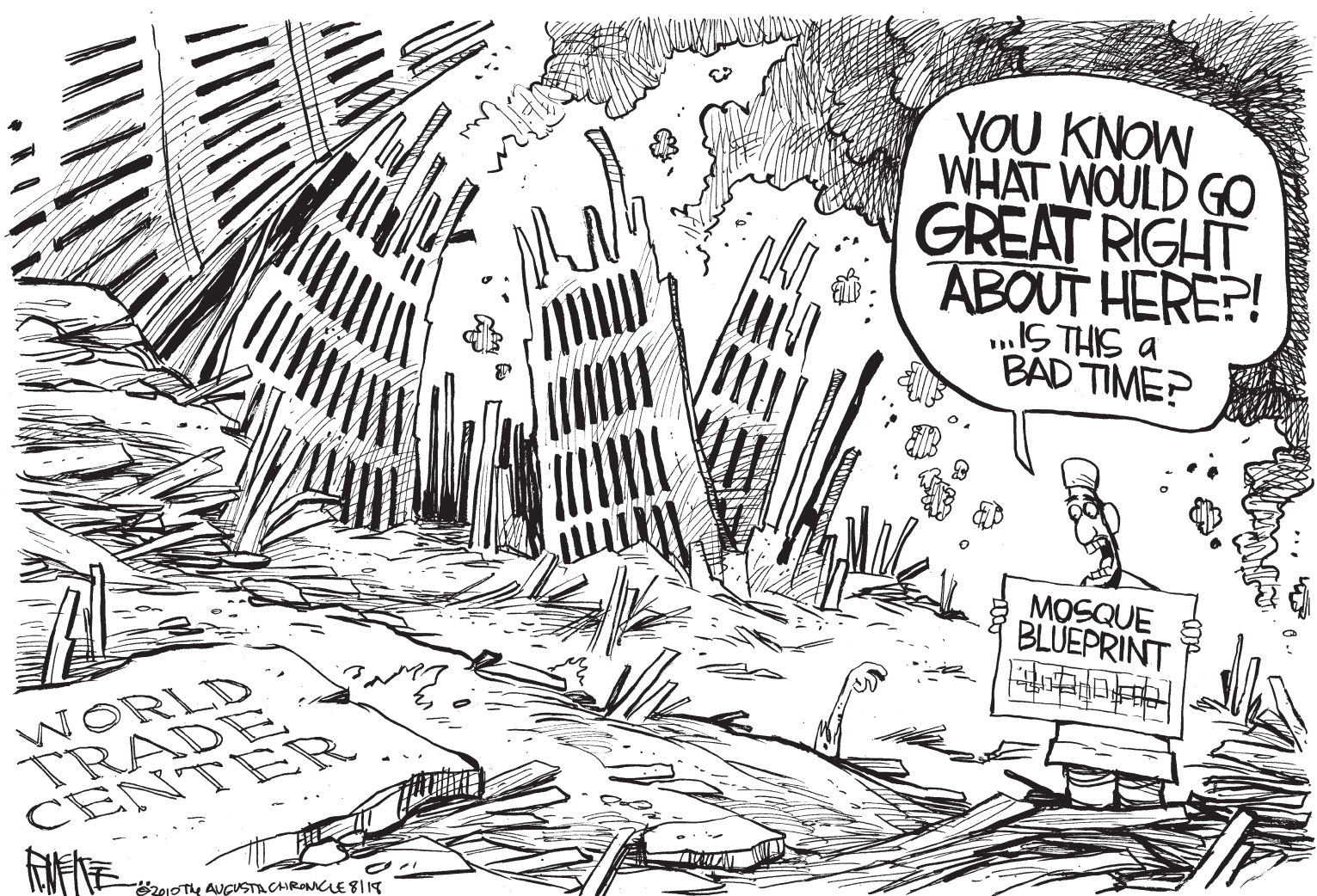
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Hotheads ignore parts of mosque issue

I have been following the controversy over a Muslim group seeking to build an Islamic Center and mosque two blocks north of "ground zero" in lower Manhattan.

The idea of a mosque just blocks from where Muslim fanatics attacked the World Trade Center in New York has enraged many Americans. Many so-called conservatives criticized President Barack Obama for defending the idea.

At a White House dinner celebrating the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, the president said, "Muslims have the same right to practice their religion as everyone else in this country."

Peter Krisanow, who worked at the National Labor Relations Board under George W. Bush, ripped Obama for supporting the group's right to build the center in the name of religious freedom.

In a column for the *National Review*, a conservative magazine, Krisanow wrote:

"But unlike the president, when his fellow Americans think of the construction of a mosque on Ground Zero, their view doesn't begin and end with the First Amendment and local zoning ordinances."

Krisanow went on to say that Obama's support for the mosque offered further evidence how out of touch he is with the American people.

Andrew C. McCarthy, another writer for *National Review*, was even more outspoken in a column:

"If his resolve to defend religious freedom were truly unshakable, the last thing he would endorse is the construction of a gigantic monument to intolerance in a place where bigots



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

devastated the city they had repeatedly targeted because of the pluralism and freedom it symbolized."

Unfortunately, the president backtracked on his remarks the next day, telling reporters that he wasn't speaking about "the wisdom of the decision to put the mosque there."

"I was commenting very specifically on the rights people have that date back to our founding," he said.

If Obama thinks these comments will appease his critics, he's naïve.

The whole controversy over the mosque has revolved around whether its location would be seen as insulting and insensitive to those who lost loved ones on Sept. 11. But the critics of the project seem to have never considered the feelings of the Muslims who also lost loved ones working in the World Trade Center that horrible day.

People opposed to the mosque have also neglected the fact that we have Muslims serving in the U.S. Army, fighting and dying with their fellow soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. And last but not least is the fact that the mosque is not being built on ground zero. It is more than two blocks from the former World Trade center, around a corner on Park Place. The mosque

is just one part of a center that also features an auditorium, spa, a basketball court, swimming pool, classrooms, exhibition space, community meeting rooms and a 9/11 memorial.

Defenders of the mosque project should be willing to concede that some comments by Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, the principle figure behind the project, would alarm many Americans. Rauf has called American policy "an accessory to the crime" of 9-11 and he has refused to call Hamas a terrorist organization.

But these comments may give a distorted view of Rauf's personality. The imam has also openly condemned al-Qaida and its ruthless mentality. He is a Sufi mosque, which is almost the polar opposite of the violent Wahabism followed by jihadists. Sufism is said to be Islam's most accommodating and tolerant denomination.

We are sending a terrible signal to Muslims when we lump moderate Muslims with radical Islamists. This will only lend legitimacy to terrorists who claim America is at war with Islam.

There is a real need for interfaith discussions between Christians and Muslims so people can become aware of the divisions within Islam. Hopefully, Islamic centers such as the one being proposed will help people discover the tolerant side of the world's second largest faith.

This country has always had pride in its tolerance of all religions. Let's live up to our principles and support the Islamic Center.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

Cheap Medicaid future lacks substance

It's always easier for governments to justify spending money when the funding is provided by someone else, such as the federal government. It's still taxpayer money, of course, but state and local governments sometimes treat federal money as "free money."

A recent study showcasing the potential impact of federal health reform on Kansas, authored by Schramm-Raleigh Health Strategy and commissioned by the Kansas Health Policy Authority, displays the tendency all too well.

One of the major findings in the study is that by 2020 the uninsured in Kansas will drop by 191,000. According to the data, there will be an increase of 96,000 people in the large employer insurance market, a decrease of 108,000 in the small group market, an additional 73,000 in individual health insurance market (purchased through the subsidized exchanges to be created in each state by 2014), and an increase of 130,000 into public insurance (Medicaid, SCHIP, or other programs). The study looked at those Kansas under age 65 so did not include Medicare estimates.

Even with the increase in the numbers of Medicaid recipients, the study concludes that the state of Kansas budget commitment in 2020 will only be an additional \$2 million, a "rounding error," as Health Police Authority Director Andy Allison said a number of times.

Assuming the study's estimates to be accurate, the state's portion of increased cost is "only" \$2 million because the federal government is assuming responsibility for new Medicaid recipients under the health reform plan. From 2014-2017 the federal government will

Other Opinions

• Gregory L. Schneider
Kansas Police Institute

pay 100 percent of the costs of new Medicaid enrollees; after that it will pay 95 percent until 2020 when it settles on a 90/10 match. The federal government is also increasing its share of the Children's Health Insurance Program, which lowers the net cost to the state of extending government coverage to 130,000 more Kansans.

The study makes no allowance for other increases in health care costs or for any administrative cost increases. The \$2 million increase would therefore only hold true if the federal government can afford to keep its promises, health care costs remain static over the next ten years and the state can handle the workload associated with 130,000 new Medicaid enrollees without increasing administrative costs. Who wants to take that bet?

Let's set aside the philosophical discussion of whether moving people from private insurance to Medicaid is a good thing, or whether expanding Medicaid is fiscally responsible. The costs to the public treasury, whether paid as a state tax or as a federal tax, will be immense under health reform proposals. Someone in Kansas is going to pay the added tax burden to pay for the expansion of Medicaid.

Allison recognized this and said so, to his credit.

Whether the increased cost of care is borne by the state of Kansas or by the federal government, it is ultimately borne by taxpayers and taxes will have to be increased to pay for it. It is not wise to keep borrowing to do so (think Greece). And it should be clear to everyone that the accounting gimmicks employed to pass health care reform and the claim made by the Congressional Budget Office in March that the reform would be deficit neutral, have subsequently been changed. Any health reform bill that markedly increases the federal government's role in health care will be an expensive proposition. Even if the state budget isn't impacted much, you can count on your family budget being negatively impacted.

The budget model presented seems to be the rosier of rosy scenarios. Remember that term? It was first employed in 1981 when Reagan Budget Director David Stockman discussed a rosy scenario in the administration's budget projections and urged an increase in taxes to pay for the proposed budget deficits.

Good Old Rosy Scenario is back with a vengeance. Regardless of whether the numbers in the study are correct, taxpayers are still on the hook for the higher costs. Whether that results in a federal tax increase or a state tax increase, a tax is still a tax – and that is not a rosy scenario.

Gregory L. Schneider heads the Kansas Policy Institute's Consumer-Driven Health Care Project and is an associate professor of history at Emporia State University.

Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley

