

UNO

The UN can end Iraq and Afgh

By Helena Cobban

The United Nations alone has enough clout to bring about peace in Iraq and Afghanistan

AFTER long and costly wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, how can the United States plan to win in either country? What would an achievable victory look like?

This question has new urgency, given the recent upswing in violence in Afghanistan and the sense emerging among many US leaders - from both parties - that military resources need to be speedily diverted there from Iraq.

One thing is clear. Neither of these victories will look like your grandfather's victory in the Pacific in 1945. Back then, Japan's army chief and top-hatted foreign minister traveled to the USS Missouri to sign a surrender document and hand it with full pomp to Gen Douglas MacArthur.

But victory in Iraq and

Afghanistan will not depend, as in Japan, on defeating a standing national army. Instead, in each country, it will depend on defeating or defanging anti-government insurgencies and helping midwife a governing system that:

- Enjoys domestic political "legitimacy", that is, it has the support of the vast majority of the country's citizens.
- Is sustainably able to deliver public security and other basic services to citizens throughout the whole country.
- Has the tools to resolve in non-violent ways the still-unresolved and yet-to-emerge conflicts among its citizens.

What we don't want is a replay of what happened in Vietnam, where the US declared "victory" but then withdrew humiliatedly, under fire, leaving the victors free to enact brutal retribution against our former allies.

Only one body can provide the leadership that's needed to defeat

the insurgencies in both Iraq and - over a longer time frame - Afghanistan. That is the United Nations. Though it's far from a perfect institution, only the UN has the vital quality of worldwide legit-

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Regarding Iraq, we need to ask the UN to urgently convene two negotiating forums. One would sort out the thorny political dilemmas that remain inside the country. The other would bring together Iraq, all its neighbours, the US and the Arab League to agree on a plan for total withdrawal of US forces

imacy that allows it to mobilise global resources and expertise and make the tough decisions required in these two countries.

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League to agree on a plan for the drawdown - or total withdrawal - of US forces in a way that will not result in Iraq's neighbours moving in to exploit the resulting vacuum.

Americans have a similar need for a greatly increased UN leadership in Afghanistan. Given the current state of world politics, it is quite improbable that the US and its NATO allies can ever achieve

one of those now warning the US against being drawn into the same trap that confounded the Soviets in Afghanistan. Other non-NATO governments need to be brought into the decision-making. (The

Remember, too, that NATO - unlike the UN - has always been, and remains, a military alliance. Only the UN can amass the broad range of tools needed to carry out the tasks of long-term peace-building in Afghanistan, as it has successfully done in Mozambique, Cambodia, and elsewhere

the "pacification" of a country so far distant from NATO in geography, culture, and politics.

Former national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski is just

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Afghanistan, as it has successfully
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ly include military-style units for
peacekeeping or peace enforcement.

But many non-military tools
will be required as well. The goal is
to have Afghanistan become a func-
tioning, independent country whose
people have no incentive to provide
safe harbor to terrorists or drug lords.

Again, only the UN has the
worldwide legitimacy and the tech-
nical and cultural capacities needed
to spearhead this effort.

These tasks will require, cer-
tainly, a strong new compact
between our country and the UN,
whose capacities have been badly
hobbled by Washington's deep
estrangement from it in recent
years. We should recall that the UN
was created by an earlier, much

wiser generation of American lead-
ers, and it still stands as one of our
country's finest achievements.

So yes, there is a way for
everyone, including our country, to
win in Iraq and Afghanistan. It
means stepping back from the urge
to have Washington "control" all
the big decisions in both countries.
It also means understanding that in
this century, the world's peoples
are all dependent for our security
upon each other. Security is no
longer a function mainly of mili-
tary might, but of helping people
everywhere build flourishing and
hope-filled communities.

The UN embodies those
ideals of human security and glob-
al interdependence. In the 21st
century, we and the peoples of
Iraq and Afghanistan need it more
than ever before. COURTESY THE
CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

*The writer's latest book is
"Re-engage: America and the
World After Bush"*