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# The Iraq Story You Haven't Heard

By Steve Muscatello

Dec 2, 2005

The fallout from Congressman John Murtha's call for immediate withdrawal from Iraq continued this week with House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi on Wednesday [endorsing](#) Murtha's plan, saying it had "changed the debate" about the war.

But another Democrat also "changed the debate" on the war this week. And while Senator Joe Lieberman's (D-CT) statements have been grossly—and deliberately—underreported, they are vital for the future of Iraq.

In public statements and in an op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal*, Lieberman argued forcefully for a continued American presence in Iraq. He [writes](#),

"I have just returned from my fourth trip to Iraq in the past 17 months and can report real progress there. More work needs to be done, of course, but the Iraqi people are in reach of a watershed transformation from the primitive, killing tyranny of Saddam to modern, self-governing, self-securing nationhood—unless the great American military that has given them and us this unexpected opportunity is prematurely withdrawn."

Now, if Murtha's call for withdrawal garnered top-story coverage in every newsroom in America, one might assume that encouraging news from Iraq—delivered by an elected official of the same party—would receive similarly extensive coverage.

Quite the contrary.

As the ever valuable [Media Research Center](#) reports, both the ABC and CBS evening news failed to “utter a syllable” about Lieberman’s Iraq assessment while NBC simply ran a brief Lieberman clip. This after all three networks made the news of Murtha’s call for withdrawal a leading story only some two weeks ago.

As for the print media, here’s a run down:

- The *Washington Post* did not acknowledge Lieberman’s comments in its Nov. 29 and Nov. 30 editions. This despite running a front-page story on Nov. 30 headlined, “U.S. Debate on Pullout Resonates As Troops Engage Sunnis in Talks.”
- The *New York Times* had no space for Lieberman, either. They did find room, however, to run a Nov. 30 story headlined, “Senator Clinton Calls for Withdrawal from Iraq to Begin in 2006.” This “call” took place in a letter Clinton wrote to constituents.
- The *Boston Globe* carried a 479-word Associated Press story on Nov. 28 that perverted Lieberman’s comments, focusing on the potential of a “significant” withdrawal in ’06 rather than the progress in Iraq that Lieberman hoped to report.

Here’s the rub: the media manufactured the shock and novelty of the Murtha story. As [Instapundit](#) and others have reported, Murtha has expressed reservations about Iraq since 2003. For example, in May of 2004, Murtha told *Roll Call*, a Capitol Hill newspaper, that the war in Iraq was “unwinnable.” Similar statements dot Murtha’s record since the beginning of the war, and yet, the media portrayed his call for withdrawal as a knee-jerk reaction to deteriorating conditions in Iraq.

Meantime, Lieberman returns from Iraq with an eyewitness progress report—particularly noteworthy in light of an intensifying war debate and an increasing public wariness of any information delivered by the Bush administration—and is ignored by the mainstream media. Like magic wizards, the media can just as easily create something out of nothing as they can make nothing out of something.

All this makes it that much more important that President Bush mentioned Lieberman’s comments in his address to the U.S. Naval Academy this week. “Pulling our troops out before they’ve achieved their purpose is not a plan for victory,” the president said. “As Democratic Senator Joe Lieberman said recently, setting an artificial timetable would discourage our troops because it seems to be heading for the door. It will encourage the terrorists. It will confuse the Iraqi people.”

Another golden nugget from the president’s speech was this: “America will not run in the face of car bombers and assassins so long as I am your commander-in-chief.” Lieberman went deeper, providing context for this supported endeavor by noting the number of Iraqis who desire civil government (27 million) compared to the “roughly 10,000” terrorists or other rejectionists in Iraq.

After America began paying attention in 2001, it had three possible responses to Islamic extremism: fight now; fight later; and fight never. Lieberman’s contrast proves that fighting the Islamic radicals now is superior to fighting them later. With greater resources, greater firepower and the support of millions of Iraqis, America can outlast the terrorists. And American armed forces have already done much of the heavy lifting. As Lieberman notes, “about two-thirds” of the country is in “pretty good

shape.”

Is Lieberman carrying water for the Bush administration? Doubtful. Why, then, were comments like these largely ignored?

“[I’m] disappointed by Democrats who are more focused on how President Bush took America into the war in Iraq almost three years ago, and by Republicans who are more worried about whether the war will bring them down in next November’s elections, than they are concerned about how we continue the progress in Iraq in the months and years ahead.”

Lieberman rightly criticizes Democrats for their misguided, erroneous and irrational criticism of the reasons for going to war. ([Norman Podhoretz](#), among others, has done an excellent job debunking Democratic revisionist history.) Still, it's not surprising that the media didn't feel like relaying the message.

But it was even more encouraging to see Lieberman call out Republicans for their politically motivated ambivalence about Iraq. If nothing else, the media could have gone with this angle: “Lieberman: GOP Too Focused on Partisan Bickering, Must Focus on War on Terror”

Members of both parties are ultimately acting like little kids in the backseat of a mini-van yelling, ‘Are we there yet? Are we there yet?’ Their search for instant gratification in a long war, coupled with their refusal to acknowledge progress in Iraq, is maddening.

It brings to mind the words of Winston Churchill during World War II: “[The people drift] to and fro, according to the changing minds of public opinion and the desire of public men of medium stature to gain majorities and office at party elections.”

Men and women of medium stature dominated the debate over Iraq in November. The events of this week and the Iraqi elections now just 13 days away should change that—even if it doesn't make the headlines.

*Steve Muscatello is a Townhall.com columnist.*

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