



**Pell Center**  
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# **Ambassador Peter W. Galbraith**

## **The End of Iraq, The Rise of Iran**

**Remarks to the Pell Center**

**for International Relations and Public Policy**

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It is a great pleasure to be back here at Salve Regina University and especially a pleasure to be in the presence of Senator and Mrs. Pell, who are two dear friends. And of course, Senator Pell was not only my boss for fourteen years, but was very much my mentor. More importantly, without his support and willingness to put up with, as perhaps you could tell from Peter Liotta's introduction, a not always entirely conventional staff member, the story in my book which is partly a personal story, would not have occurred and therefore would not have not have been told. More importantly the situation of the Kurdish people in Iraq might have been quite different if it weren't for Senator Pell's willingness in 1988 to raise the issue of Saddam Hussein's genocide against the Kurds. Senator Pell was able to get the Senate to unanimously pass sanction legislations that, although did not ultimately become law, largely because of the opposition of the Reagan Administration, many of whom are the same people who are the architect of the 2003 war. But at the time they were very much opposed to economic sanctions on Iraq, which at the time was gassing its own people. Although the legislation, the Prevention of Genocide Act of 1988, was not successful, it did lead Iraq to stop using poisoned gas against the Kurds, showing in that even in the face of the most repressive regimes, a willingness to act and international pressure can make a difference.

So it's true that thousands more Kurds were killed, but there's no doubt that the efforts to do *something*, to put principle above economic interests made a difference and there are people alive today because of Senator Pell's legislation and he also highlighted the situation of the Kurds and gave them a profile that helped play into the decision to create a safe haven which has in turn led to the emergence of a virtually independent Kurdistan. I say this, of course as the staff person working on this issue and I did have a lot to do with it. But without Senator Pell, who was the elected official, and his willingness to do

something that his 99 other colleagues weren't, something very significant would not have happened.

My lecture today is the "End of Iraq, The Rise of Iran. I've just come from Iraq so it's truly first-hand information. I got back to Boston last night [October 1, 2006] having left Erbil and Iraqi Kurdistan on Saturday [September 30, 2006]. Every time I go and, I've been about twenty times since April 2003, generally to the North, but I've also gone to Baghdad each year, the situation is worse.

You didn't need to come here this evening to get that analysis. That's painfully obvious if you've been reading the newspaper or watching the television news. And of course, it's worse now than it was at the end of September 2006, worse than it was in June. And worse in June than it was last year and so it goes.

But there were some striking points about my visit. I should say that I was in Kurdistan, a safe and secure part of Iraq. There are virtually no coalition troops there, which might be one reason why it's safe and secure. But the other reason is that Kurdistan is governed very independently from Iraq. The Kurds have their own army, the Peshmurga, who don't allow the Iraqi Army to come there.

Being in Kurdistan is a terrific window into what is going on in Iraq and it is much better than traveling, as a Westerner, in any other part of the country. Because the kind of visit that one can make are very, very constrained by the security situation in Baghdad. It is almost impossible to move around in Baghdad so one is stuck in the green zone, which is its own little bubble, and it's increasingly hard to travel to the south. But in Kurdistan, there are Arabs who come there and you can talk to them and you can talk to the Kurdish leaders who, not surprisingly, are keen followers of the situation.

The first point I would make is that their unanimous belief is that the Americans have failed in Iraq, that basically this is over and we've lost. They don't believe that the government of national unity in Baghdad can possibly succeed. They make a point, and I make it in my book, that that government has no authority. I argue that to speak of a government of national unity is not very wise because there is no nation. The country is very fragmented. There's no unity. It took six months to form this government and it doesn't govern anything. It doesn't govern the south, which is today a group of theocratic fiefdoms that are governed by Shia religious parties that are closely aligned to Iran. The largest and the most important of the Iraqi Shia religious parties was founded in Tehran in 1982. Incidentally, its name, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), does give you a clue as to its political agenda. That is much more helpful than the names of the political parties in the United States in terms of understanding their program.

The other main parties also have very close ties to Iran. They seek to create a religious state and they have militias that now enforce an Islamic rule in Southern Iraq, a rule that is based on the Iranian model, but is generally more severe. In short, the democracy that we promised to bring to Iraq does not exist in the southern half of the country, and this coalition government of national unity of Shiites and Sunnis, Arabs and Kurds doesn't have any authority there. There is some convergence here because the same Shia parties that dominate the South also dominate the central government in Baghdad, so some of the individual ministers in the government in Baghdad do have some authority. But that authority is not because they are government ministers, but rather because they are political leaders of the parties that run the south.

The Sunni center of the country is the locus of the insurgency and it is a battleground. So the government doesn't exercise much power there, either. And recently

there was a leaked intelligence report from the Marines Intelligence Office in Anbar province, which is the most Sunni of Iraq's eighteen provinces, saying "We've lost control of the province. It's in the hands of the insurgents."

Kurdistan in the north, as I've previously described, is virtually independent. It has its own army. The Iraqi Army isn't allowed to go there. The Iraqi flag doesn't fly there; it, in fact, is banned. Kurdistan controls its own oil resources. It has its own immigration system. For instance, if one flies to Iraq, one needs a visa, but I've never had an Iraqi visa in my twenty trips because I was going through Kurdistan where one doesn't need a visa. It has hard to think of anything Iraqi about Kurdistan and, more importantly, the people there unanimously don't want to be part of Iraq. In January 2005, the population voted in a referendum on independence. Ninety-eight percent of the population voted for independence and almost everybody voted, a two million people turnout

Baghdad is the front line of the civil war between the Sunnis and the Shiites. The eastern part of the city is controlled by the most radical Shiite cleric, Moqtada Al-Sadr, and his Mahdi Army. The western part of the city is controlled by Al-Qaeda and its Iraqi offshoots and imitators and by former Baathists so the government's writ doesn't extend there, either.

The Kurds see no way that this can be put back together, and neither do I. But they also had one other observation that I was really struck by. They say that the Americans on the ground also recognize that basically this is over. And they say the Americans now rarely venture out of their fortified bases and diplomats and large civilian establishments rarely leave the Green Zone. Their real focus is on protecting themselves. This is actually normal in circumstances when you can't accomplish the mission, you don't want to take risks. You

don't want to take risks in a losing cause. And that in some way was the most striking observation that I came away with from this trip.

How should we look at Iraq? How should we look at what has happened? I think it is above everything else an enormous strategic failure. And the reason that it is a strategic failure is that we operated there from the beginning without having a strategy. We substituted wishful-thinking for an understanding of the realities of the region. And that is a luxury many that people thought the United States had, but it turns out that even if you're a superpower dealing with a much smaller, much weaker set of powers you don't actually have the luxury of operating without a strategy.

What do I mean by that? The ambitions for the Iraq war were huge. Yes, there was a belief that Iraq was a potential threat, but clearly if you were focused on the issue of states that were seeking to acquire weapons of mass destruction that might share them with terrorists or might be opponents of the United States, Iraq would not be number one on the axis of evil of Iraq, North Korea, and Iran. It would be a very low number three. Even before you had the inspectors go in, we were 100 percent confident that Iraq did not have nuclear weapons and did not have a meaningful nuclear weapons program. And once the inspectors were there, it was a 100 percent sure that they didn't have a nuclear weapons program. Because this requires large facilities that one simply cannot hide. It's true that many people thought, including me, that Iraq still had chemical weapons. After all, Iraq had used chemical weapons extensively against the Iranians as well as against the Kurds, so it was logical to think that they were still there. And also if they didn't have them, why didn't they allow inspections? But it turns out that there was an explanation, which was quite different, which was that Saddam Hussein did not want to reveal to his own military that he'd given up his weapons for fear that if he announced that he didn't have the weapons, his own people,

particularly the Shiites, might seek to have another rebellion. That was his main concern. But it was reasonable to think that Iraq did have chemical weapons. But in terms of the strategic interests of the United States, chemical weapons were a much less serious threat than nuclear weapons we knew Iraq did not have. Chemical weapons are run of the mill World War I technology. They are terrifically effective against defenseless villagers, but they aren't so threatening against the United States. On the other hand, a nuclear weapon is totally devastating both in the explosion and the aftermath. So from a strategic perspective, if you're concerned about nuclear weapons, it never made sense to go after Iraq, which did not have a nuclear weapons program when you had Iran and North Korea moving ahead with a nuclear weapons program.

But the architects of this war, frankly, had something else in mind. They believed that if they toppled the dictatorship in Iraq, that the Iraqi people whom they viewed as an undifferentiated quantity—they believed that there was such a thing as an Iraqi people—would successfully make the transition to democracy and that a *democratic Iraq* would be a subversive force to Iran and Syria, would help topple both of those regimes, and later we would get democratic reform throughout the Middle East. In short, Iraq would play the kind of role, in the Middle East, that Poland with Solidarity played in 1989, triggering a democratic revolution that brought down the Berlin Wall, the end of communism and the break up of the Soviet Union. This was the hope.

The result, however, is not only a quagmire for the United States, an absence of democracy in Iraq, but more importantly, with regard to Iran, the Iranian regime has not been toppled but instead has been greatly empowered. President Bush spoke in 2002, in the State of the Union Address, about an axis of evil between Iran and Iraq. At that time, Iran and Iraq were the bitterest enemies in the world. The reference was to the WWII axis

between Germany and Italy. But in 2002, Iran and Iraq were not allies. They were bitter enemies. Iran had, after all, for eight years during the Iran-Iraq war tried to topple Saddam Hussein and had failed.

The United States came in, toppled Saddam Hussein, a result Iran very much wanted *and* brought to power Iraq's Shiite majority, which came to power through democratic elections, and brought to power political parties which were all Iran's allies. And so without having lost a single soldier, without having spent any significant sum of money, Iran's closest ally in the world today is Iraq. Iran's proxies are in power in Baghdad. As we speak, the oil minister Hussein Shahrastani, is in the process of negotiating agreements where Iran and Iraq would jointly develop oil resources in the southern part of Iraq and all the fields that straddle the international border. Iraqi oil would be exported through Iran. Already today, about 100,000 barrels of Iraqi oil are being smuggled from between the last metering point in Basra and the point where they load on the ships in the Persian Gulf. About 100,000 barrels out of Iraq's two million barrel a day production are being diverted to Iran or are going to Iranian smugglers.

The Iranians have a program to train the Iraqi military we are also training. They also have terrific access to the dual-use materials that Iraq had before the war. Let me explain. While Iraq did not have any weapons of mass destruction, it did have a lot of materials, many of them from the nuclear program and chemical weapons program that *had* existed before the first Gulf War, which they abandoned. The materials were still there because they were so-called dual-use items. Yes, explosives could be used to detonate nuclear bombs, but they can also be used for construction purposes. And so under the terms of the cease-fire that ended the first Gulf War, the armistice, these materials were put

under U.N. inspections but they weren't removed or destroyed because they had other purposes.

Well, when the United States went into Iraq, we had no plan to safeguard the stockpiles of these materials and so they have basically disappeared. And it's a good bet that some of them, particularly the nuclear-related materials, have probably ended up in Iran. And beyond its triumph in Iraq, Iran has been emboldened in terms of its nuclear program. When we went into Iraq, Iran had suspended the enrichment of uranium, a central step in making a nuclear weapons program. While we've been busy in Iraq, the Iranians have ended that suspension; they're moving forward with the enrichment of uranium.

We've had a lot of tough rhetoric from the Bush administration, but the administration knows what the Iranians know. First, that with half our army tied up in Iraq, we have no military possibility of taking on the Iranians. Second, that the United States is more isolated than it has been in the world at any time during my lifetime. Perhaps the only greater isolation that we had in the last one hundred years was in the 1920s when we *chose* to isolate ourselves from the rest of the world. Now we are isolated because of the enormous opposition around the world to American policies, and the very low opinion people have of the current American president, which has rubbed off into enormous unpopularity of the United States, which in turn makes it much more difficult for us to act in our own national security interests.

The Iranians understand that there were some reluctant allies in the invasion of Iraq, and that there would be *no* allies for the United States to take on Iran. There is of course little stomach in the American population to take on Iran. And finally the Iranians know that if we moved against them, if we, for example, initiated an air strike against their nuclear facilities, they could retaliate against the United States in the south of Iraq where *their* allies,

these militias which may number as many as 100,000, run the show. So Iran feels that, at this time, it has all the cards vis-à-vis the United States.

Feeling so emboldened, Iran supported its ally Hezbollah in Lebanon in a war that I think was carried out atrociously by the Israelis. The war was carried out in a way that damaged Israel's standing in the world, and by extension the United States' standing as well. Nonetheless, that war was caused by Hezbollah crossing the Lebanese-Israeli border, killing Israelis soldiers, and kidnapping several of them. It was an unprovoked attack by Iran's ally. It demonstrated the limits of what the Israelis, or indeed any state, can do against non-state actors who have missiles. Hezbollah has 100,000 missiles supplied by Iran which they were able to launch into Israel. Israel couldn't find them from the air because they are hidden in homes, mosques, and schools. You can launch them and leave before anybody else can respond.

When the Israelis entered Lebanon with the kind of military coverage that they have, they looked like they were being very brutal as the televised images showed around the world. So while a lot of Hezbollah fighters might have been killed, the net result was that there were more recruits for Hezbollah and that it definitely won the war of public relations. The strategic outcome of this war is an example of a resurgent Iran.

But there are other shoes that will drop. In Bahrain, a Shia majority island nation in the Persian Gulf, ruled by Sunnis, the Sunnis are trying to rig the elections so that the Shiites don't prevail "electorally." That is a highly explosive situation very much subject to Iranian influence. Bahrain is strategically important to the United States because it is where the U.S. Navy is based in the Persian Gulf. And if Bahrain falls, the United States will suffer a major military setback in that region.

In the eastern province of Saudi Arabia, there might be a Shiite majority. The Saudis don't actually ever conduct a census because they don't want to know what the results will reveal. But the eastern province is important because that's where the oil is in Saudi Arabia and the Saudis are so alarmed by the developments in Iraq that they are planning to build, at a cost of maybe 10 billion dollars, a *750-mile wall* along the Iraq-Saudi border. I think they ought to study a little Chinese history as to whether wall-building solves your problems. But in any event, that's what the Saudis are doing.

So one can say that for a military campaign or effort that was intended to make the United States more secure, eliminate non-existent Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, and trigger democratic revolutions in Iran and the greater Middle East, we've pretty much had the opposite effect. It is *Iran* that is resurgent. Incidentally, of course, Syria which was a basket-case regime, has also been very much strengthened by the events in Lebanon and to some degree by America's failure in Iraq.

Now this leads us then to wonder what, at this point in time, can reasonably be hoped to be accomplished in Iraq, and what our strategic interest are. In my book, I discuss the reasons for the strategic failure. They include failing to understand Iraq, failing to prepare for the post-war, and sending too few troops, but even more importantly that the troops that we sent did not have a plan to secure any of the sites that has weapons of mass destruction-related materials or to secure any of the government ministries. It isn't that we didn't secure *all* of the ministries in Baghdad; it's that we secured *none of them* except for the oil ministry. The failure includes the fact that the president never decided about a political program, never decided whether we were going to run Iraq for four or five years in a Germany-style occupation, the kind of occupation that we did at the end of the World War

II, or whether we would form an Iraqi interim government right away. As a result, we basically did both of these things at the same time, which never made sense.

The administration never decided whether we were going to disband the Iraqi army or recall it. The result is that in April 2003 we were in the process of recalling the Iraqi army when in came Paul “Jerry” Bremer, the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority who then disbanded it. Well, again, you can have an argument as to whether it was a good idea to recall it or disband it, but you cannot say it makes sense to do both things. A further reason for he failure, described in my book and in an excellent new book by Rajiv Chandrasekaran of the *Washington Post*, was the decision not to send in professionals to administer Iraq, not to send people who had experience in the Middle East, knew Arabic, knew about electricity or transitional justice, but instead to staff the occupation with Republican political operatives and conservatives who were chosen not on the basis of any professional skills they had, but based on their belief in the mission and in the administration’s goals. All these are contributing factors to the failure.

But what we face now is, what are our issues, and what do we do about them? Basically, I believe that the country has broken up. It is in the midst of a civil war. So the issue is should we try to put Iraq together again? Should we have as a goal a unified and democratic Iraq, which is that the president says is our mission.

If that is our mission, let’s see what would be required to accomplish it. If our goal is a unified and democratic Iraq, what would be required to so make it? Well, it would require two military missions that we are now not undertaking.

The first would be to dismantle the Shia theocracies in the south and, related to that, to dismantle and disarm the Shia militias. Remember, our current battle is primarily with Sunni insurgents. This would involve taking on a whole new enemy. And in the case of the

Shiite militias, an enemy closely linked to a very powerful neighboring state, Iran. To do that we would need three or four times as many troops as we now have and of course we would have to accept many more casualties. Nobody in this administration is serious about doing that.

The second thing we would have to do, if we wanted a unified, democratic Iraq, would be to end the civil war in Baghdad between Sunnis and Shiites. Now, this cannot be done by Iraqi forces. Why? Because Iraqi forces are either Sunni or Shiites. Mostly, they are Shias. They are *partisan* in the civil war and indeed it is the Shia-dominated police that is responsible for some of the worst atrocities, committed by the death squads, that are going on today. So if the United States wants to end the civil war in Iraq, it has to become the police of Baghdad and of other mixed cities. And to do that would again require many more troops than we now have. Troops that are policemen are much more exposed to attacks than troops who are in tanks, highly protected. In order to be a policeman you have to be on the streets. I can assure you that the president has no intention of using U.S. troops that way or in increasing the numbers.

The final element of this, I suppose, is that we would have to persuade the Kurds who are our friends and allies to give up the independence that they now have. I can assure you again that there is no chance we can persuade them to do that, especially since it was the U.S. ambassador who brokered the Iraqi constitution which legalized their de-facto independence. So if we cannot accomplish the mission of a unified and democratic Iraq, what strategic purpose of the United States is served by our continued presence in the country?

The president has defined it politically as “We can’t cut and run, which is what the other party wants to do.” But that’s a little vague for me. I think that we have one

remaining interest in Iraq that we *can* accomplish and that is very important. And that is that we do not want Al-Qaeda and the other Salafi jihadis, groups that wish to use violence to spread Islam and target both the West and the Shiites who are considered apostates, to have bases in Iraq from which they might attack the United States or the West. In short, we do not want the Sunni part of Iraq to become what Afghanistan was under the Taliban prior to September 11, 2001.

Now if that's our remaining interest, how can we accomplish that? First, if we're not going to dismantle the theocracies of the south or disband the militias, why are we there? Yes, if we withdraw from the south, it will be pro-Iranian, it will be theocratic and not democratic. That's exactly what it is today. I would say we ought to withdraw from the southern part of Iraq *tomorrow*.

If we withdraw from Baghdad, there will be horrendous sectarian killings and extremists will control different parts of the city. That is already the situation in Baghdad today and we have no intention of changing it. Well, if we have no intention of changing it, I say we should get out of Baghdad.

With regard to the Sunni areas, our current strategy involves, and you've heard this from the president, having Iraqi forces take on the Sunni insurgency. As the president puts it, "As Iraqis stand up, we'll stand down." But what the administration describes as "Iraqi," the Sunnis understand as "Shia army." That is to say, an army of troops of people they oppressed for eighty years who are loyal to a government in Baghdad dominated by religious parties that were *themselves* sponsored by the national enemy of the Sunni Arabs, namely Iran. The more that Shia troops are used to get Sunni insurgents, the more support the insurgency wins. And that's why we have made *zero* progress against the insurgency. Not only do they oppose us, but they understand that we're going to be gone. And more than hating us, they

hate the Iraqi army more because they don't think of it as *their* army at all. So the strategy to "Iraqize" the war further is clearly not going to defeat the insurgency. We need a different strategy.

Iraq's constitution permits the creation of very strong regions. Under the constitution, a region can have its own army and control most of its own oil. The central government has so few powers that it doesn't even have the power to tax. And that, incidentally, was no accident. That is what the 80 percent of Iraqi who are Shiites and Kurds wanted. But this also offers a way out.

The Kurds have their own region, Kurdistan. The Shiites are in the process of creating their own region in the non-southern governance. The Sunni Arabs now need to be encouraged to form a Sunni Arab region with its own army and to provide for their own security. And they might be helped in that regard. This strategy of creating a Sunni region and hoping that it will have enough interest to defeat Al-Qaeda, admittedly is a strategy based on hope, but the alternative is the current strategy which *cannot* and *will not* work.

The final element is keeping the focus on this one remaining strategic objective important in Iraq, namely stopping Al-Qaeda from having bases there. Again, forget about democracy. We're not doing that. Bush certainly isn't going to do that. Forget about ending the civil war. Bush isn't going to do that. Forget about countering Iran's influence. Bush isn't going to do that, either. Let's keep our eye on the ball that is the Al-Qaeda threat. Under this plan, the Sunnis have now their region. We can hope that more moderate elements, and that "moderate" is a very relative term here, might be able to police their own area. But suppose they don't.

Well we need an insurance policy and what I argue is the insurance policy would come from a redeployment of American troops to Kurdistan. It's very pro-American part of

the country. Of course, the Kurds are very grateful that we protected them from 1991 to 2003. It's probably the one place in the world today where George Bush could win an election. He's popular there. And the Kurds would welcome an American presence because it would help protect them from both Arab Iraqis, but deter other neighbors, notably Iran and Turkey.

From our point of view, a force in Kurdistan, a much smaller force, would be one still within what is nominally the territory of Iraq from which we could then strike at Al-Qaeda if we had to. That kind of redeployment would very much serve U.S. interests. It would also discharge a moral debt to the Kurds, who were on our side.

Let me assure you that what I'm outlining, namely an immediate withdrawal from the south, a rapid withdrawal from Baghdad and a reshaping of the political dynamic in the Sunni areas, and then withdrawing from there, and a small "on the rise" force in Kurdistan is not going to leave a happy outcome in Iraq. Civil war *will* continue. Iran will continue to be dominant. But it will still protect us from the threat of terrorism, at least a certain kind of terrorism, relatively. And it will free up forces that are needed for more urgent national security missions. I am not here advocating military strikes on Iran, but it is very hard to have meaningful negotiations with that country about its nuclear programs if they believe there is no military option at all. So it will strengthen our diplomatic position and frankly getting out of Iraq is essential to undoing the damage it has done to the United States reputation around the world.

This is an election year and while I do not wish to be partisan, I do want to offer this comment. Of course voters are very much in the mood, it appears, to punish the Republicans for Iraq and frankly that seems to make sense because the administration seems

almost oblivious to the disaster that has overtaken that country and that has overtaken the United States.

The Democrats have come up with what may very well be a very good electoral strategy, which is to *say nothing*. After all, if someone is in the process of committing suicide, as the Republicans seem to be, there's not point in pushing them. Let them do that damage themselves. It may be a good electoral strategy, but frankly it doesn't serve the national interest.

I think there is an obligation to come up with an alternative strategy. Senator Biden has done so, but he's almost alone. There have been many critics of the approach I've outlined, because it has received a lot of attention. The basic criticism is that if we break up Iraq into these strong regions, there will be a lot of fighting because there are no neat lines in Iraq and, of course, Iran will be dominant.

There's no doubt that these points are correct. Although I don't advocate the breakup of Iraq, I'm very careful to say it has already taken place. The Iraqis have done that, but one needs then to press on as to the alternative. Does somebody have a strategy that they think will work? And that is of course a question that the administration can't answer, but I think it's a fair question to ask the Democrats as well in this election period.

Thank you.