
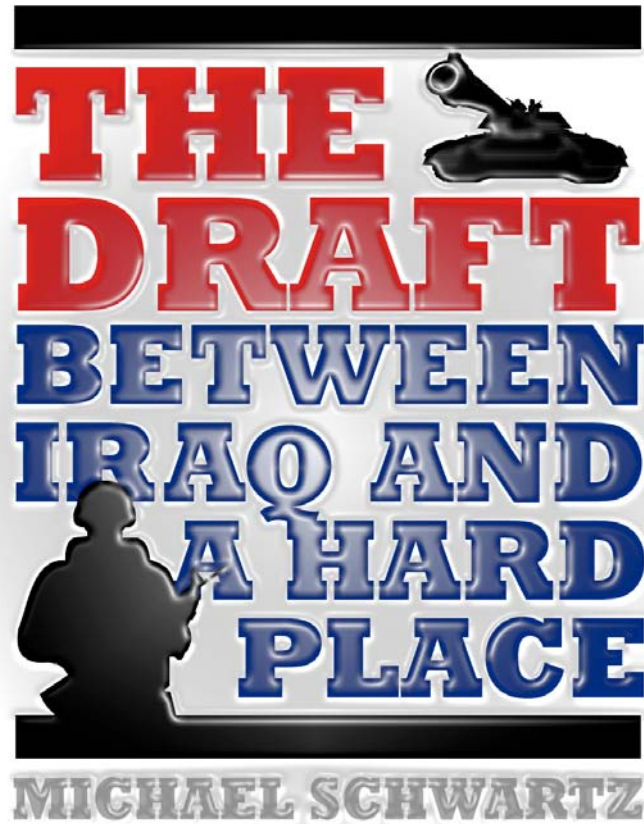


**THE**   
**DRAFT**  
**BETWEEN**  
**IRAQ AND**  
**A HARD**  
**PLACE**

**MICHAEL SCHWARTZ**



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MICHAEL SCHWARTZ

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## **AFTER**

two years of intensive fighting in Iraq, the Pentagon is feeling the strain in every military muscle and has been looking for relief in just about every direction but one – the draft. All across the United States today, young people are wondering whether, sooner or later, in its increasingly airless military universe, the Bush administration will open the window a crack and let the draft in.

A key reason for the ever-more-evident strain on military resources is that more than 40% of the 150,000 soldiers in Iraq are Army Reserves and National Guards. As Army Historian Renee Hylton told Salon reporter Jeff Horowitz, use of these forces creates pressure to “win and get out...there’s a definite limit to people’s service.” When they are called to active duty, these troops risk their jobs as well as their lives; so, when their mandatory two-year terms expire, a significant proportion of them, under the best of circumstances, are likely to refuse further service. And service in Iraq has already proved something less than the best of circumstances. Little wonder then that, just past the two year anniversary of our invasion, the military is under increasing pressure to replenish this crucial element in the recruitment mix – without much of an idea of how to do so.

In addition, in order to maintain troop strength in Iraq at anything like present levels, large numbers of active-duty soldiers must return there for more than one nine-month tour of duty, and this redeployment too generates distrust and distaste. Sooner or later, sizeable numbers of these angry soldiers must nevertheless be convinced to re-enlist, or else the pressure for new enlistees will escalate out of control and beyond the bounds of the present system to satisfy.

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Add to this a constantly increasing casualty toll, now well beyond 30,000, which, in a variety of ways, places yet more pressure on recruitment. Finally, as embittered double-deployment veterans and angry Reserves, along with wounded and mentally stressed discharges, return home, they only stiffen the resistance to enlistment among the young in their neighborhoods.

None of this was anticipated at the start of the Iraq war by Bush administration officials; they were confident that the American military could topple Saddam Hussein's government and pacify any left-over "dead end" loyalists of the old regime in about three months. Defense Department figures, reported by the Washington Post on March 19, projected reductions in American troop strength in Iraq and Afghanistan from just over 200,000 at the time of the invasion to about 125,000 by September 2003; to 50,000 six months later; and – not counting troops left to garrison the permanent bases – to zero by the end of 2004.

They were wrong, of course. Troop levels, after declining according to plan during the summer of 2003, began climbing again as the resistance grew – in response to a deepening economic and infrastructural disaster, and to the brutal nature of the American military occupation. With some fluctuations, since the beginning of 2004 the numbers of boots on the ground in Iraq have remained at about the 150,000 level (not counting expensive private "security contractors" hired by the Pentagon and private firms) – almost double the number that the U.S. could hope to sustain in the long run, given the force levels of the present volunteer military.

Several recent reports have documented the depth of the impending crisis, including a detailed analysis of troop strengths by Ann Tyson in the Washington Post. So far, over one million U.S. military personnel have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, with some 341,000 already doing the dreaded double-deployments (and many now entering triple-deployment territory). The military has moved troops into Iraq from all over the world, including previously untouchable Cold War detachments in Korea, Germany, and Alaska, and it's still "scrambling" to keep 17 battalions regularly in Iraq, many severely undermanned. These shortages have led to an increasing dependence on expensive private security contractors, who themselves add to the Pentagon's recruitment problems by hiring away otherwise re-usable military personnel for four times the wages paid in the Army.

To make matters worse, the Defense Department (to protect against a crisis else-

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where) has decided, with Congressional authorization, to increase the overall size of active-duty forces by 30,000, which can only amplify the retention/recruitment crunch.

### **Recruitment: Entering Freefall**

Last fall the military embarked on a Herculean set of efforts to meet these daunting demands. It manufactured a 40% increase in the pool of candidates available for the Guard and Reserve by relaxing entry standards and raising the enlistment age to 40 years. It added thousands of new recruiters (1,400 for the National Guard alone) and equipped them with an array of new inducements, including signing bonuses as high as \$20,000 (for those with previous experience) and up to \$70,000 in college credits for new enlistees. Re-enlistment bonuses, depending on specialty, can now reach \$100,000. The Defense Department also launched a new \$180 million recruitment campaign that includes “sponsorship of a rodeo cowboy, ads on ESPN, and a 24 hour Web site that allows users to chat with recruiters...24 hours a day.” In a special effort to help the most stressed service, the military is offering six million dollars of recruitment money in exchange for the right to name the home of the new Washington Nationals baseball team National Guard Stadium.

The most dramatic of the new measures were aimed at inducing (or coercing) personnel to remain in the military beyond their enlistment contracts. Tom Reeves, author of *The End of the Draft* and longtime observer of draft policy, reports that 40,000 soldiers have already been retained by using the notorious “stop-loss” system, which allows the Army unilaterally to keep soldiers for up to 18 months beyond the date their enlistment is scheduled to terminate. This is essentially a more bureaucratic and politer form of the old British method of “impressment,” also known as Shanghaiing. There is now a Congressional investigation into persistent reports that short-timers – those with less than a year or so left on their enlistment contracts – are being told that re-enlistment will guarantee a non-combat assignment, while refusal to re-enlist will lead to an Iraqi deployment during the remainder of their service. While the Defense Department denies that such blackmail-style practices are taking place, they do admit that station “stabilization” – a pre-agreed upon duty station away from Iraq – has become a major incentive for re-enlistment.

Such military efforts were augmented by what may be the



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ultimate sign of military desperation: the call-up of 5,500 members of the “Individual Ready Reserves.” As Reeves notes, these are “older men and women whose regular reserve duty has ended – including grand\_mothers and grandfathers edging toward retirement... who have no idea they would be recalled to duty.” It is hardly surprising that nearly one-third of these superannuated reserves have refused to report. Nor is it surprising that modest signs of rebellion are appearing inside what was, until recently, a volunteer military. The Los Angeles Times, for instance, has documented cases of National Guard soldiers protesting inadequate equipment and 60 Minutes, among other places, has reported at least 5,500 desertions among the troops, largely to avoid deployment or redeployment to Iraq.

Worse yet, from the Pentagon’s point of view, even its most far-reaching and draconian efforts seem to be failing. Re-enlistment levels in both the Army and the Guard have now slipped below quota, and Reuters reports that this shortfall can be expected to get dramatically worse once larger numbers of soldiers reach that 18-month stop-loss limit. New recruitment appears to be entering freefall, with the most drastic declines among African Americans, who traditionally make up 25% of the volunteer army. January and February recorded the first Marine recruitment shortfalls in a decade; while the army is running 6% below targets for the year. Hardest hit have been the Reserves, with a 10% decline, and the Army National Guard at 26%. These units are in full crisis, with the Guard already announcing it will not reach full strength in 2005, and Reserve Commander General James Helmly stating that “overuse” is making his units into “a broken force.” Reeves reports that even the military academies have suffered 15% to 25% declines in applications for admission. To make matters worse, as USA Today has reported, the anti-war movement has begun (with at least some success) targeting the recruitment process. (A meticulous account by activist Peter Charaek of one successful protest in Oregon can be found on the Jeff Rense website – <http://www.rense.com/general63/home.htm>

Major General Michael D. Rochelle, the man in charge of army recruiting, told New York Times reporter Damien Cave that the recruitment crisis constituted the “toughest challenge to the all-volunteer army” since its inception in 1973.

### **The Iraqi Armed Forces: Replacement Killers?**

Optimistic reports that our local military allies will soon begin to replace American

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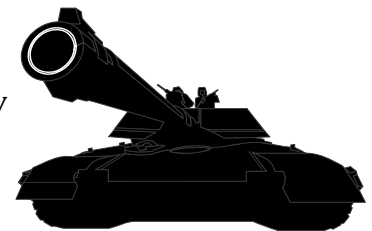
troops follow a familiar pattern of miraculous overstatement (first established in Vietnam decades ago), as reporter Timothy Phelps documented in a March 21 article in *Newsday* that reviewed the history of American attempts to build Iraqi military forces. In the spring of 2004, official (and unofficial) Bush administration reports claimed the existence of 206,000 fully trained Iraqi troops. To the surprise of those who had accepted these claims, none of them fought successfully in the major battles that April (in Falluja, Najaf, or Sadr City). Most deserted beforehand, refused to fight, or fled under fire. A measurable minority, however, did fight ferociously – for the resistance, using American-supplied weapons and equipment.

By fall 2004, though the U.S. was publicly claiming 135,000 “combat ready” Iraqi troops, one military official told *New York Times* reporter John Burns that as few as 1,500 Iraqi troops were actually fully trained. This was vividly demonstrated in the second battle of Falluja, when only Kurdish militia units imported from the north fought successfully alongside the Americans. The official Iraqi Army units resisted, either through mutiny or desertion, or by defecting to the other side. Kalev Sepp, a counterinsurgency expert at the Naval Postgraduate School told *Newsday*’s Phelps that the second battle of Falluja was largely fought against Iraqis who had been “trained and equipped by Americans.”

Then came Rear Admiral William Sullivan’s report to Congress in Spring 2005 which spoke of 145,000 “combat capable,” “new” Iraqi armed forces. This claim was disputed – by of all people – Sabah Hadhum, a spokesman for the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior. He told the *London Telegraph* reporter Anton La Guardia, “We are paying about 135,000 (members of the security services) but that does not necessarily mean that 135,000 are actually working.” As many as 50,000 of these may actually be what he termed “ghost soldiers”-- men not on duty but whose paychecks were being pocketed either by their officers or themselves.

*Newsday*’s investigative report confirms Hadhum’s negative assertion. Just under 40,000 of the reported 145,000 armed forces turn out to be holdovers from the old Iraqi National Guard. According to Army experts, they had received the same “haphazard training,” as their predecessors (who refused to fight) and could be relied upon to do nothing except receive their paychecks.

Another 55,000 were Iraqi police whose unwillingness to confront the guerrillas has become legendary. The Deputy Governor of Nineveh province – where the Iraqi “northern



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capital,” Mosul, is located – accused the 14,000 police there of being “in league” with the resistance. He assured reporter Patrick Cockburn of the London Independent that his bodyguards “don’t tell them our movements,” since he suspects them of trying to assassinate him. Military expert Kalev Sepp told Newsday the U.S. military had concluded that “70 percent of the police in Anwar province are insurgents or sympathizers,” with substantial infiltration elsewhere as well. (According to Sepp, even “one infiltrator with access to intelligence” could give the enemy “forewarning,” so imagine what a 20%-70% infiltration rate might do.)

According to Rear Admiral Sullivan, only a meager 14,000 troops were fully trained units in the “new Iraqi army,” the first beneficiaries of what Burns of the Times called a “\$5 billion American-financed effort.” These troops had not, however, yet endured a major battle, and some of the American troops who worked with them evidently considered them worthless. As one trooper told London Times reporter Anthony Loyd, “I’m more scared of going out with these guys than clashing with the insurgents.” According to Los Angeles Times reporter David Zuccino, even the 205th Iraqi Army Brigade, “considered the country’s best unit by many U.S. trainers,” had been infiltrated by insurgents. And Army Staff Sergeant Craig Patrick, one of the advisers in charge of training the Iraqis told Washington Post reporter Steve Fainaru, “It’s all about perception, to convince the American public that everything is going as planned and we’re right on schedule to be out of here. I mean, they can [mislead] the American people, but they can’t [mislead] us. These guys are not ready.”

Nevertheless, in mid-February, Burns reported that two brigades of this new force “became the first home grown unit to take operational responsibility for any combat zone in Iraq,” the restive Haifa neighborhood in Baghdad.

The remaining 30,000 troops in Sullivan’s count were vaguely defined military personnel commanded by the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior. In the long run, U.S. military leadership hopes that these will become the Iraqi equivalent of the U.S. Special Forces, and will constitute a new secret police or other sinister entities. In the meantime, they are, it seems, largely incapable of confronting the resistance. In their first solo effort, reported in the New York Times, between 500 and 700 members of the First Police Commando Battalion, with air support from the American military, could not capture a training camp containing under 100 guerrillas. Eventually, U.S. ground forces were needed, and even then, the guerrillas might have escaped.



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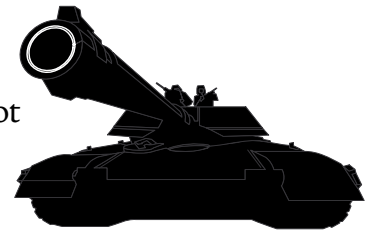
In a recent report to the Carnegie Endowment, military expert Jeffrey Miller concluded that the “gap” between the forces needed to handle the security situation in Iraq and the actual strength of the Iraqi military had doubled in the past year, raising “grave doubts about the...hope for success” of the strategy of transferring responsibility to the Iraqi military. Certainly, no such transfer can succeed in time to allow for a comfortable transition before the onset of the recruitment crisis now facing the American military.

### **Does Anyone Feel a Draft Coming In?**

As the strain on the U.S. military continues to build, so does the pressure on policy. The only option that does not imply the sacrifice of many more American lives and magnitudes more Iraqi lives may be the withdrawal of American troops, but this option is “unthinkable” to the Bush administration – and to its loyal Democratic opposition, not to speak of the bulk of the mainstream media. Only the American people (according to the most recent Marist Poll) – and the rest of the world – consider it “thinkable.”

According to former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, avoiding this unthinkable option would require “500,000 troops, \$500 billion and the resumption of the military draft.” The need for a draft has been seconded by a wide range of military experts, including then-presidential candidate General Wesley Clark, who, in 2004, said the U.S. needed to start “thinking about the draft”; frequent Pentagon advisor Colonel David Hackworth, who called the draft a “no-brainer in ‘05 and ‘06”; and Charles Moskos, adviser to four presidents on military manpower, who declared that “we cannot achieve the number of troops we need in Iraq without a draft.” Washington Monthly editor Paul Glastri and national security analyst Philip Carter articulated what might be the most comprehensive argument, calling for what a “21st Century draft,” that would “create a cascading series of benefits,” including turning the tide in Iraq.

Despite this crescendo of advocacy by friends and foes of administration policy, government insiders continue to tread very lightly on the issue. The Project for a New American Century, the policy planning group that developed significant aspects of current foreign policy, has called for several years of 25,000 troop increments to the military, but they have not indicated how this could be done. Secretary of the Army, Francis



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J. Harvey, after “bursting into laughter” when asked about the draft, stated, “The D-word is the farthest thing from my thoughts.” And President Bush has repeatedly re-asserted his commitment to keeping the volunteer army.

The deal-breaker for the administration may be exactly what they have repeatedly said since talk of the draft burst onto the scene during the 2004 election campaign – the experience of Vietnam gave a conscripted army a bad name. The current volunteer army (even if its recruitment involves large elements of coercion and manipulation) is better suited for the sorts of wars the U.S. is fighting, they believe, and any move toward the draft would severely undermine commitment to such wars, both inside and outside the army. Even such partisan advocates as Glastris and Carter concede this problem, though they offer what they feel are viable ways of getting around it.

But if the draft advocates eventually persuade the administration that a conscripted army is viable, I believe they would still have to overcome a second layer of reluctance among decision-makers in charge of military policy: a fear that the draft will specifically alienate those who currently endorse the war in Iraq. Pro-war partisans rest much of their support of administration foreign policy on the expectation that the January 30 election was a turning point, that the battle of Falluja disabled the resistance, that Iraqi troops will be ready to handle the guerrillas in the not-too-distant future – and that American troops will soon be brought home at least reasonably victorious. The reinstatement of a draft would constitute an admission that these beliefs are so many illusions. In all likelihood, therefore, any relaxation of the unequivocal opposition to the draft in the administration would indeed precipitate a sharp erosion of the war’s already eroding base. Opposition might then reach the critical mass needed to make withdrawal “thinkable.”

But this reluctance to embrace the draft leaves the Bush Administration in a knot of a dilemma. Without rejuvenating the armed forces, the situation in Iraq is likely to remain at best undecided, and even a stalemated situation would constitute a mighty blow against the administration’s larger foreign policy goals. The goal of unilateral American dominance in global politics and in global markets depends on the image and reality of American military invincibility, so that – with each passing day – the lack of victory in Iraq undermines the credibility of Washington’s threats to

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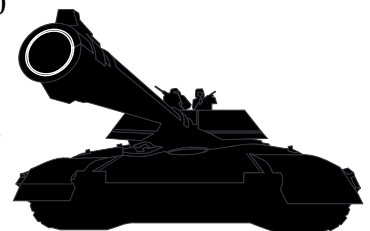
force regime change wherever “rogue states” resist its diplomatic will. As Carter and Glasris wrote in their Washington Monthly article, “America has a choice. It can be the world’s superpower, or it can maintain the current all-volunteer military, but it probably can’t do both.”

For many Americans, the de-escalation of American imperial ambition is an attractive alternative to further war and a conscripted army. But for the Bush Administration, this alternative is just as unthinkable as the draft. They are stuck, therefore, between Iraq and a hard place.

The solution thus far has involved a contradictory and unstable set of pronouncements and policies. Rhetorically, the administration has continued to reaffirm its commitment to a no-draft military and its promise to pursue “preventive wars” of all sorts. At the same time, its officials have taken specific steps meant to give them added flexibility. As Reeves has documented, they have been quietly erecting the Selective Service System (SSS) needed for a future draft. In March, the SSS issued a report assuring the president that “it would be ready to implement a draft within 75 days” after Congressional authorization. Richard Flahavan, a spokesman for the Selective Service System, told reporter Eric Rosenberg of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer that the SSS already has in place “a special system to register and draft health care personnel” and that they were undertaking active planning for “a special skills draft” aimed at computer programmers and language specialists. These programs would be ready for implementation any time the need arose.

News of this high level of preparedness has added to already widespread rumors of a renewed draft, and has fed speculation that the government was perhaps waiting for a dramatic event which would justify the draft without jeopardizing support for the war – perhaps an internal terrorist attack, or an authentic (or U.S. precipitated) crisis elsewhere.

Fitted together with this posture of waiting is a shift in military tactics in Iraq. General Richard Cody, the Army’s second ranking general, told New York Times reporter Eric Schmitt that “a shift from combat operations” to American “leadership” over Iraqi troops has been underway since the January 30 election. Babakr Badarkhan Ziabri, the Iraqi commanding general, told the Arabic language paper Al-Zaman that American troops would withdraw into bases within six months, emerging



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only when Iraqi troops needed support, but avoiding offensive operations.

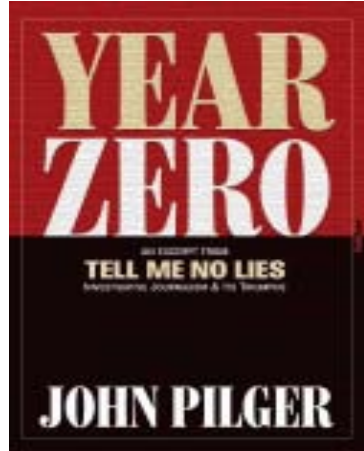
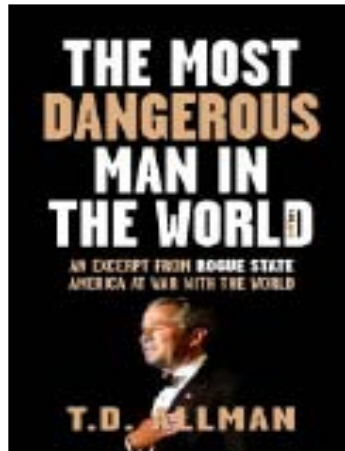
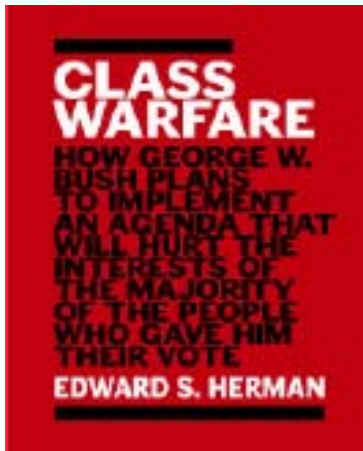
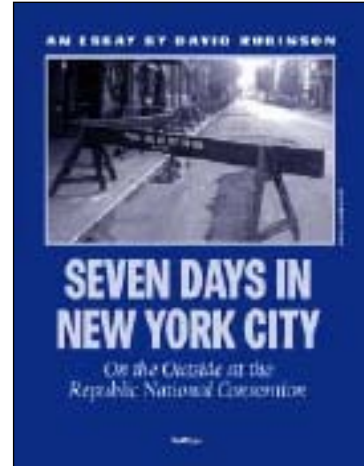
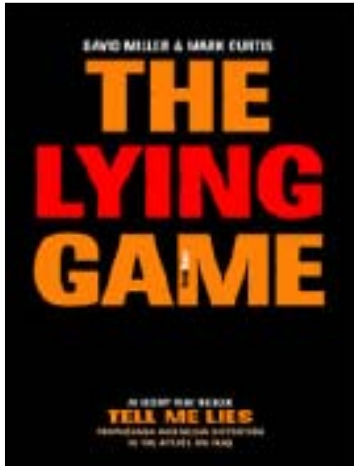
While this military strategy could slow or halt the disintegration of the forces stationed there (and lessen the wear and tear on their dangerously fraying equipment), it has already proven quite detrimental for the “pacification” effort. In early April, for example, the Washington Post quoted U.S. officials conceding that “many attacks have gone unchallenged by Iraqi forces in large areas of the country dominated by insurgents.” At the same time, the Shia resistance, led by young cleric Muqtada al-Sadr’s forces, has re-emerged as a major force in many cities of the South.

These new strategies, therefore, are likely in the long run to further erode the U.S. military position and strengthen the resistance, and so may lead – as Nixon’s Vietnamization program did decades ago – to the increased use of American air power against resistance strongholds. Such a strategy would promise an intolerable rate of civilian casualties, as well as the devastation of homes and neighborhoods wherever the resistance is strong. This, in turn, would, of course, only heighten support for the guerrillas and increase pressure on American forces.

The Bush administration is likely to find itself increasingly trapped between Iraq and a hard place, wound in an ever-tightening knot of failing policy and falling support, at the heart of which lies a decision about reconstituting a draft. How this will resolve itself will be one of the complex dramas of our time.



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