

## Key to success is solving the political issues in Iraq

By SEAN FOLEY



FOLEY

Published: Tuesday, 12/18/07

In recent months there has been considerable press coverage of the "good news" out of Iraq. In particular, journalists have focused on the effects of the surge in U.S. military forces announced by President George Bush in January 2007 and the subsequent decline in al-Qaida attacks, sectarian violence, and insecurity throughout the country.

In an audiotape released in late October, Osama bin Laden seemingly confirmed the success of the U.S. military effort when he harshly criticized his followers in Iraq for their arrogance, mistakes and inability to overcome division.

Lost in the commentaries on the surge and the understandable excitement over the improved situation in Iraq is a simple question: Has the surge met the goals it was designed to achieve?

The chief goal of the U.S. surge in Iraq was not to reduce the violence per se but to create the conditions in which political factions in Iraq could resolve their differences and build a unified, stable central government. Once this government was in place, it was argued, U.S. forces could begin to withdraw from the country.

However, months after the surge began, Iraqis and their politicians still disagree about the future of their country. Basic issues such as the distribution of oil revenues, the composition of the army and the division of powers between the central and provincial governments remain unresolved. Nor is there much hope that the government and parliament, both of which are weak and hopelessly divided, will make much progress soon. It is likely that at least 100,000 U.S. troops will still be in Iraq when Bush's successor takes office on Jan. 20, 2009.

When one looks at recent events in Iraq from this vantage point, it becomes clear that the surge has yet to meet its core objectives and that "good news" from Iraq should be treated with considerable skepticism.

Even Ray Odierno, the commander of the multinational corps in Baghdad and a proponent of the surge, has repeatedly warned of the dire consequences for Iraqis if they cannot make political progress soon.

Odierno's comments reflect a lesson the U.S. military has learned in previous conflicts: Military success — no matter how impressive — is of little value if it is not accompanied by equally significant political progress.

Few Americans better understood this lesson than the men and women who led the country through World War II. President Roosevelt and his advisers were able to make full use of victory through the Marshall Plan and a host of other political actions. We would be wise to learn from their example.

Published: Tuesday, 12/18/07