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## Expanding Iraq War into Syria is lunacy

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AS I suspected six months ago, and U.S. military and Bush Administration civilian officials confirmed, U.S. forces have invaded Syria and engaged in combat with Syrian forces.



Simpson

An unknown number of Syrians are acknowledged to have been killed; the number of Americans - if any - who have died so far has not yet been revealed by the U.S. sources, who, by the way, insist on remaining faceless and nameless.

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The parallel with the Vietnam War, where a Nixon administration deeply involved in a losing war expanded the conflict - fruitlessly - to neighboring Cambodia, is obvious. The result was not changed in Vietnam; Cambodia itself was plunged into dangerous chaos which climaxed in the killing fields, where an estimated 1 million Cambodians died as a result of internal conflict.

On the U.S. side, no declaration of war preceded the invasion of Syria, in spite of the requirements of the War Powers Act of 1973. There is no indication that Congress was involved in the decision to go in. If members were briefed, none of them has chosen to share that important information with the American people.

Presumably, the Bush Administration's intention is simply to add any casualties of the Syrian conflict to those of the war in Iraq, which now stand at 1,970. The financial cost of expanding the war to Syria would also presumably be added to the cost of the Iraq war, now estimated at \$201 billion.

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The Bush Administration would claim that it is expanding the war in Iraq into Syria to try to bring it to an end, the kind of screwy non-logic that kept us in Vietnam for a decade and cost 58,193 American lives.

Others would see the attacks in Syria as a desperate political move on the part of an administration with its back against the wall, with an economy plagued by inflation, the weak response to Hurricane Katrina, investigations of senior executive and legislative officials, and the bird flu flapping its wings on the horizon. The idea, I suppose, is to distract us by an attack on Syria, now specifically targeted by U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad.

And then there is the tired old United Nations. An invasion by one sovereign member, the United States, of the territory of another sovereign member (Syria), requires U.N. Security Council action.

Some observers have argued that destabilizing Syria, creating chaos there, even bringing about regime change from President Bashar Assad, would somehow improve Israel's security posture in the region. The argument runs that Saddam Hussein's Iraq was the biggest regional threat to Israel; Mr. Assad's Syria is second. The United States got rid of Saddam; now it should get rid of the Assad regime in Damascus.

The trouble with that argument, whether it is made by Americans or Israelis, is that, in practice, it depends on the validity of the premise that chaos and civil war - the disintegration of the state - in Iraq and Syria are better for Israel in terms of long-term security than the perpetuation of stable, albeit nominally hostile, regimes.

The evidence of what has happened in Iraq since the U.S. invasion in early 2003 is to the contrary. Could anyone argue that Israel is made safer by a burning conflict in Iraq that has now attracted Islamic extremist fighters from across the Middle East, Europe, and Asia? Saddam's regime was bad, but this is a good deal worse, and looks endless.

Is there any advantage at all to the United States, or to Israel, in replicating Iraq in Syria?

For that is what is at stake. Syria in its political, ethnic, and religious structure is very similar to Iraq. Iraq, prior to the U.S. bust-up, was ruled by a Sunni minority, with a Shiite majority and Kurdish and Christian minorities. Syria is ruled by an Alawite minority, with a Sunni majority and Kurdish and Christian minorities. That is the structure, not unlike many states in the Middle East, that the Bush Administration is in the process of hacking away at.

It seems utterly crazy to me.

One could say, "Interesting theory; let's play it out," if it weren't for the American men and women, not to mention the Iraqis and now Syrians, dying in pursuit of that policy.

What needs to be done now is for the Congress, and through them, the American people, the United Nations, and America's allies, the ones who are left, to have the opportunity to express their thoughts on America's expanding the Iraq war to Syria.

A decision to invade Syria is not a decision for Mr. Bush, heading a beleaguered administration, to make for us on his own.

**Dan Simpson, a retired diplomat, is a member of the editorial boards of The Blade and Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.**

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