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REVIEW & OUTLOOK | AUGUST 31, 2010

The President on Iraq

Some free advice for his speech.

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No doubt when he speaks to the nation about Iraq tonight, President Obama will extol the courage and tenacity of our soldiers. They deserve every bit of praise for the enormous sacrifice they've made, and the favorable outcome they have achieved. The President could further honor that sacrifice, and also do himself a political favor, if he includes a couple of other points that some of his White House advisers may not like.

The first is to give his predecessor credit for deciding on and sticking with the 2007 troop surge that turned the tide against the insurgency. George W. Bush made that decision in the face of ferocious bipartisan opposition, not least from a certain Illinois Senator. If Mr. Obama wants to win some bipartisan goodwill, he'll admit he was wrong at the time and say he has learned from the surge's success in Iraq as he has planned his own surge in Afghanistan.

We also hope Mr. Obama is candid in admitting to the American public that a substantial number of U.S. troops will need to remain in Iraq for many years. Many Democrats want to pack up every last armored Humvee today, but Americans need to understand that our troops are needed to assist the Iraqis on security matters and to consolidate the strategic benefits of having a democratic ally in the volatile region.

The U.S. kept hundreds of thousands of troops in Germany for decades after World War II, and it still has tens of thousands in South Korea and Japan. It would be a tragedy if after seven years of sacrifice, the U.S. now failed to assist Iraqis as they try to build a federal, democratic state in an often hostile neighborhood.

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