The Disintegration of Strength
An Epitaph of America's Military Power

The article that follows was written by Oliver North. It reflects how the tide in America's war in Iraq has begun to shift and how that change is beginning to make this conflict look strikingly familiar to one fought in Southeast Asia some 40 years ago. As you read it consider what God said would happen to the young nation of Israel as it prepared to enter into the land of Canaan if it refused to obey Him.

> "And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass:" (Lev. 26:19)

Is it possible that these words are playing out today before our very eyes? Has America's strength been rendered impotent by its timidity? And if yes, how will this once great nation be viewed by the world if it is made to flee from a collection of nomadic psychopaths with nothing but an unrelenting drive to destroy the infidels?

How to Lose a War? The Sequel
By Oliver North

Since October of 2001, our FOX News "War Stories" unit has been documenting the remarkable young Americans fighting the global war on terror. We have covered thousands of them on the decks of ships in the Persian Gulf, on combat patrols in the shadow of the Hindu Kush, in gunfights along the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates and gone to hospitals in Iraq, Germany and the U.S. with the wounded. Throughout, there has been a common bond among these "warriors of 9/11" — a steadfast resolve that they could win the war. Now, for the first time since I accompanied the initial U.S. combat units heading into Kandahar, Afghanistan, I'm hearing something different — a loss of confidence in the final outcome.

Over the course of the last 10 days, I've met with scores of those I'd previously covered overseas. These soldiers, sailors, airmen, Guardsmen and Marines are now in "stateside" assignments at Camp Lejeune and Fort Bragg, North Carolina, at Miramar Air Station in California, at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio and here in Hawaii. Many of them expect to be back in the fight — some of them soon. But recent reversals, not on the battlefield, but in Washington, have caused nearly all of those I talked to on this trip to question whether we are suddenly in danger of losing the war they have been fighting.

This sudden loss of assurance in our fighting forces has nothing to do with casualty figures, troop levels, the leaders prosecuting the war in the field or new acts of terror by a ruthless enemy. Rather, the anxieties I'm now hearing from those I have covered in combat come in questions like: "Do you think that they are going to pull us out before we've finished the mission?" and "Will we abandon Iraq like we

abandoned Vietnam?" Interestingly, not one of the thousands of young Americans I have covered in Iraq or Afghanistan has ever asked about or commented upon pre-war intelligence.

For more than two years the so-called mainstream media, the far left and some in Congress have been making trite comparisons between Vietnam and Iraq. Having spent a significant amount of time in both conflicts, about the only parallels I have seen in the two wars have been that bullets still wound and kill, and spilled blood is still red. But another common thread now ties the two hostilities together — political cowardice in Washington, D.C.

On Tuesday this week, with the Commander in Chief traveling in Asia, the Democrat leadership in the U.S. Senate introduced a proposal that would have set a fixed date for withdrawing American troops from Iraq. The measure was defeated 58 to 40, but an amended version, setting 2006 as a "period of significant transition creating conditions for the phased redeployment of United States forces from Iraq," passed by an overwhelming 79-19 margin.

Though the White House and some Republican lawmakers sounded the trumpets of victory for defeating the Democrats' hard-and-fast timetable, the message to the troops is clear: no matter where we stand in the war on terror - if the Senate has its way, we're "pulling out" in 2006. Abu Musab al Zarqawi's "al Qaeda in Iraq" terrorist organization immediately claimed victory and exhorted his followers to "hold on." Officials in Iraq's interim government, intent on providing a secure election on December 15th, were publicly muted in response to the votes, expressing hopes in an official statement that "Iraqi security forces are becoming increasingly effective." Americans in uniform — both in-theatre and at home — were stunned.

Major General William Webster, commanding the U.S. Army's 3rd Infantry Division in Iraq said that "setting a date would mean that the 221 soldiers I've lost this year, that their lives will have been lost in vain." A U.S. Marine colonel, recently returned from Iraq called it "a formula for disaster." And universally, those I have met with here in Hawaii, from the U.S. Army's 25th Infantry Division to the 1st Marine Brigade, to the sailors of the fleet, to the wounded at Tripler Army Hospital — all expressed anger and frustration with statements like: "We've fought well." "We're helping to create a democracy." "Don't they want us to win?"

That's a valid question. Even Senate Republicans don't seem to know what they want. As the "World's Greatest Deliberative Body" was exploring how to set a "date certain" for withdrawing troops without setting a certain date, Senator John Cornyn, (R-TX) said, "Americans do not cut and run, Americans do not abandon their commitments, and Americans do not abandon their friends." But he voted for the measure anyway.

About the only ones in Washington who seem to know what they want are the leaders of the Democrat party. Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV), who voted for war in 2002, waited until President Bush was overseas meeting with the Prime Minister of Japan to proclaim that, "Democrats and Republicans acknowledged that staying the course is not the way to go." He then summed it all up by adding, "This is a vote of no confidence on the Bush administration policy in Iraq."

William Jefferson Blythe Clinton knows what this is all about. Though the Clinton administration had advocated the overthrow of Saddam in 1998, he told a university audience in Dubai this week that the Iraq war was "a big mistake." Like former President Jimmy Carter, Mr. Clinton apparently no longer feels bound by the affront to our troops or the traditional protocols that once governed political discourse while overseas.

In the House, Pennsylvania's John Murtha, an influential Democrat who voted in favor of the Iraq war in 2002, called for the immediate withdrawal of U.S. troops saying, "it is evident that continued military action in Iraq is not in the best interests of the United States of America, the Iraqi people or the Persian Gulf region."

The GOP leadership, senior administration officials and the President need to dramatically alter the debate. They need to go to Iraq, talk to the troops, and reassure them that we will stay there long enough to get the job done and not one second longer. Notwithstanding the "peace in our time" appeasement sentiment sweeping through our capital, it's not too late. Republicans need to realize that wining the war in Iraq is the only issue that really matters right now. It is more important than Medicare, the next Supreme Court justice, foreign trade deals or tax reform. If we lose the war — and we could — none of these things will matter.

Oliver North is a nationally syndicated columnist and the founder and honorary chairman of Freedom Alliance. He also hosts "War Stories" on FNC, which airs Sundays at 8pm ET.