

# Doubling Down in Iraq

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I have repeatedly heard the term “double down” used when referring to President Bush’s escalation or surge in Iraq. Double down is a gambling term and refers to the ability to double your bet after receiving your first two cards in the game of Black Jack. Typically you would only double down when you were dealt a ten or eleven and the house didn’t have a ten card showing. After doubling down you are only given one card and you obviously hope for a ten or a face card, giving you twenty or twenty one. With twenty one the worst you can do is break even, but the odds of winning are very much in your favor. Another gambling term that comes to mind is the concept of “double or nothing.”

The problem with using these gambling terms when referring to the war in Iraq is twofold. First, when I play Black Jack, poker, roulette, or participate in any other form of gambling, I know two things: First, I know the rules of the game I am playing and the conditions needed to “win” before I ever sit down at the table; Second, I also understand the odds of my winning. In Iraq, nobody can really tell you what the rules are, nor can they articulate what “winning” really means. Finally, it is impossible to even determine the odds of winning.

The second problem with using gambling as an analogy for Iraq revolves around the presumed payoff. If I bet you that some unlikely event will come to pass (like double zero coming up on the roulette wheel) and lose, I lose my money. If I bet you again - double or nothing, I know the exact conditions that define “winning” and I also know the odds of my winning (37 to 1 against). I can continue to lose and then bet again, double or nothing, as long as someone is willing to take my bet. But here is the sick part of the false Iraq-gambling analogy: If double zero eventually shows up on the roulette wheel and I win the bet with the 37 to 1 odds, I get my original bet back as well as the doubled or quadrupled value of the original bet!

In Iraq, even if we could figure out what winning meant and what the odds of winning were, and even if we did eventually “win,” would we get our original bet back? Would all of our dead soldiers come back to life? Would we get all of the billions of dollars we originally “bet” back? Would our national prestige be restored? Nope. Not on your life.

The very best we can now hope for in Iraq is the least worst scenario.

There is no winning in any rational sense of the word. Even the term “pyrrhic victory” implies far too rosy an outcome.

That’s my two cents worth.