

What kind of "victory" have we won in Iraq?

Jim Fetzer (READER WEEKLY, 8 May 2003, pp. 18-19)

As Americans continue to celebrate our military victory in Iraq--including parades and speeches by generals and politicians--we should ask what kind of "victory" we have won for America. No one seriously doubted that the mightiest military in the history of the world could take out a third-rate power, weakened by a savage war, a decade of sanctions, and pressured by the UN to disarm as our army was massing at its borders. The very idea Iraq could triumph militarily over the US was absurd.

So now we have, if not quite a cessation of hostilities, political events that are meant to create the impression of a triumph attained. The President of the United States flies onto the *U.S.S. Abraham Lincoln* in one of the greatest public-relations displays since Michael Deaver positioned Ronald Reagan at the foot of Mt. Rushmore, and no one remarks the irony of the role being played by a man who went AWOL from his service in the National Guard! If he were a Democrat, he would have been pilloried.

The constantly changing rationale for going to war in Iraq caused concerns among our most open-minded citizens. It was alleged that Iraq had ties to terrorists, yet none have been shown to exist to this day. It was alleged that Iraq contributed to 9/11, yet no evidence has ever supported such a claim. It was alleged that Saddam was in cahoots with Osama bin Laden, yet Osama's network stands opposed to secular governments of the kind represented by Saddam. They are mortal political enemies.

The failure to substantiate any of these claims led to further allegations, including that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. UN inspectors were dedicated to finding them, but were having no success. Even to this day, we have yet to find them. So the rationale became the removal of Saddam himself¹ and, subsequently, to bring about a change of regime in Iraq. When that did not resonate, the ultimate rationale became to bring Iraqis freedom and democracy, a siren song most Americans could not resist.

No one who spoke out against going to war in Iraq suggested that the US was going to suffer a military defeat, that Saddam Hussein was a good guy, or that the people of Iraq did not deserve freedom and democracy. The reasons for opposing the war were rooted in the principles of due process and the rule of law, which might have led to a military intervention under the auspices of the UN, if the US had allowed it to go work its will. We could not control the outcome, so we subverted the process.

It may be well to ask whether the reasons that were offered in opposition to war in Iraq were good reasons that still remain valid today. Some argued, for example, that this war was unjust on the ground that it was an unnecessary intervention, that it was unlikely to make things better, and that it violated principles of proportionality and of compassion. The war was unnecessary if there were alternatives that could have been adopted to bring about the resolution of legitimate differences between states.

Hans Blix, for example, observed that we confronted the choice between maintaining a force of 250+ inspectors at a cost of \$80,000,000 versus deploying a military force of 250,000 at a cost of \$100,000,000,000. Moreover, there were intermediate options, such as selective engagement. Proving the existence of weapons of mass destruction would require locating them. Once located, it would have been possible to use "smart" weapons to take them out. It would have been unnecessary to invade and occupy Iraq.

Another argument against was that an attack upon Iraq would violate the UN Charter, international law, and the US Constitution. UN Resolution 1441 affirmed that "serious consequences" would attend Iraqi failure to comply with its demands for ridding itself of weapons of mass destruction, but did not authorize war. *Serious consequences*, after all, could have entailed increased inspections, tighter sanctions, or selective engagement falling short of war. That it did *not* authorize war ²was a principal reason that it passed.

Moreover, since Iraq did not pose an imminent threat to the US and the UN Charter only authorizes one member nation to attack another without Security Council approval when

that is the case, the US attack on Iraq violated the UN Charter. And, since the US signed the UN Charter as a collective security agreement to which it is bound by a treaty, while the US Constitution, Article 6, Clause 2, specifies that treaties have the same status as the Constitution of the US itself, in attacking Iraq, the President violate the US Constitution.

The campaign of "shock and awe" was originally envisioned as raining many thousand of bombs and 700-800 cruise missiles upon Baghdad in 24-48 hours. Donald Rumsfeld, our Secretary of Defense, announced it would be the greatest display of military power the world had ever seen, which brought the bombings of Dresden, Guernica, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki to mind. Those we have seen. The idea was to produce the conventional equivalent of a nuclear attack, as if that would make their moral standing any different.

Attacking Iraq was not only a violation of international law but was morally wrong. The US has now set the precedent of declaring its willingness to attack other nations, even without UN approval, to promote its own national interest. This was not a pre-emptive war, bear in mind, but a preventative war. Even the UN Charter sanctions pre-emptive wars allowing a nation to defend itself when subject to imminent attack. This was, like the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, 7 December 1941, a date that will live in infamy.

Veteran intelligence officers have written to the President expressing their dismay over the abuse of intelligence information to justify the war in Iraq, observing that, "you have been backed into the untenable position of assuming the role of Saddam Hussein in refusing to cooperate with UN inspectors" (*CommonDreams.org*, 1 May 2003) which is a fascinating point. The US will not allow UN inspectors to return to Iraq but is keeping control, leading to suspicion that we are going to plant what we cannot find.

The very use of the phrase, "weapons of mass destruction", appears to have been for propagandistic purposes, meant to incite the ³American people to support a war they might otherwise have opposed. Even Tony Blair's most fervent supporters are now beginning to sense a scam, while the Prime Minister insists that WMDs are going to be

found. But the "WMD" concept, which replaced using "ABC" (for atomic, biological, and chemical), which already conflated weapons of different kinds, was always rather odd.

As Geoffrey Wheatcroft (*The Guardian*, 2 May 2003) has observed, nuclear weapons have a capacity for mass destruction that dramatically exceeds those of biological or of chemical weapons. What makes them distinctive is their power to wreak massive destruction virtually instantaneously. But the war and its aftermath are confirming what Hans Blix had already told us, namely: that Saddam lacked the material to build them and, even if he had possessed them, the missiles to deliver them as warheads.

As for freedom and democracy, that is a campaign slogan, not our national policy.

When our Secretary of State says we are going to be watching what the Syrians do as opposed to what they say, that standard has to be applied to the US. We have subverted freedom and democracy around the world, including, most recently, in Venezuela (where we supported a military coup over its popularly elected leader). We will not allow an Islamic republic to emerge in Iraq, even if the Iraqis want it.

The real reasons for going to war appear to have had nothing to do with any of the above but were rooted in a geopolitical strategy known as the "Project for the New American Century" (<http://www.newamericancentury.org>). The administration has a plan for projecting US military power world-wide in pursuit of a new 21st Century empire. Saddam was a convenient target, because his military was weak, his country oil-rich and centrally situated, and he could be readily demonized using propaganda.

As John Cochran has reported (*ABC News*, 25 April 2003), White House officials have admitted that the existence of weapons of mass destruction was not the real reason for going to war with Iraq. Elements of the government had decided that the Middle East would continue to be a breeding ground for ⁴terrorist; that young Arab men with lives of poverty and despair, would continue to regard the United States and Israel responsible; and that the US needed to flex its might to show it would fight terrorism.

An adviser to British Prime Minister Tony Blair has been even more candid, stating that the prospect of gaining access to Iraqi oil was "a very large factor" in the decision to attack Iraq. "I don't think the war would have happened if Iraq didn't have the second largest oil reserves in the world", said Sir Jonathan Porritt, who is the head of the Sustainable Development Commission (*Bloomberg*, 1 May 2003). Which is hardly the first time that foreign sources have been more honest than our own government.

One of the most astute students of the Middle East, Thomas Friedman (*News Tribune*, 5 May 2003), has observed that conservatives want to treat the war as a "done-deal" and translate the President's political standing into a ram-rod pushing through its own right-wing political agenda, including further massive tax cuts for the rich. Liberals, as he sees it, are quietly rooting for Bush to fail. Friedman thinks there are hazards on both sides--complacency about a war not yet won and the prospect for its unraveling.

And there are signs that things might still unravel. In the aftermath of the massacre at Fallujah, nearly a week after troops of the 82nd Airborne opened fire on a crowd of demonstrators, the US has yet to ask the doctors who treated them for a body count, an obvious first-step in an investigation the military has promised but appears unwilling to conduct. Phil Reeves (*Independent UK*, 4 May 2003) in Fallujah reports this lack of response has compounded an event in which 13 people died and dozens were wounded.

According to the US, American troops opened fire after having been fired upon and thus were acting in self-defense. Witnesses at the scene, however, contradicted that report, emphasizing the key points that there was no fire-fight and that the crowd had no guns. The father of a 13-year old boy who was killed remarked bitterly, "The Americans are just lying!" And this comes in the wake of a series of similar events, including shootings of women and children at check-points and the failure to remove unexploded ordinance.

One British military source remarked, "Don't talk to me about the US Army. Let's just say that they face a very steep learning curve", implying that the soldiers overreacted

when the crowd descended upon them. In Reeves view, this event exemplifies some of the worst elements of the occupation: "panicky troops firing at Iraqis instead of seeking to engage with them or understand their circumstances, then insisting that local people have no cause for anger", rather than taking responsibility for our own serious mistakes.

And, indeed, this is not the first indication the US is not shouldering its responsibilities toward Iraq under international conventions. The bombing of the Iraqi infrastructure was a grave violation and the failure to protect the Iraqi National Museum and Iraq's National Library, even while protecting the oil fields and the Ministry of the Interior, where no ancient antiquities but business records are stored, speaks volumes about our real reasons for invading Iraq. And the rest of the world has surely taken notice.

Friedman believe that we stand at a precarious juncture, because if we fail to do the right things in Iraq, it can have devastating effects. Doing the right things in Iraq, however, is going to be incredibly expensive. David Hackworth, the youngest captain in Korea and the youngest colonel in Vietnam, has estimated that we will be there for 50-60 years, which sounds fantastic until you realized that we are still in Japan and Germany 60 years after World War II and in Korea 50 years after the Korean War.

Hackworth estimates that rebuilding Iraq by providing them with a national health care plan, public education, and freedom and democracy may be expected to cost \$2-3 trillion dollars. As Jay Leno has remarked, "Hey, we can't get those things in Florida!", much less in Iraq. Apparently, this is part of the Bush plan for American's future, a scenario that involves investing trillions of dollars to maintain an empire abroad while the United States, its infrastructure, health, and welfare, continue to gradually decline.

Personally, I have found this ironic for an allegedly ⁶ Republican administration. During my lifetime, the G.O.P. has stood for balanced budgets, constitutional government, and a non-interventionist foreign policy. The Bush administration has stood these traditional Republican values on their head by massive budget deficits, undermining constitutional

government (by passing Patriot I and now promoting Patriot II), and nation-building abroad--especially striking since Bush campaigned against a US role as a nation-builder!

George Will (*News Tribune*, 13 April 2003), a fervent ideological proponent of the war, now says our most pressing task is not rebuilding relations with Germany and France but reconstructing Iraq. He, like other reactionary columnists and commentators, heaps scorn upon the UN as an ineffectual organization that we should not bother to salvage. Presumably, the US can still walk and chew gum at the same time. Surely we ought to be doing all the above. We ought to appreciate their efforts to save us from ourselves.

Germany, France, and the UN were trying to keep us from violating international law, the UN Charter, and our own Constitution. We do not praise subordinates who carry out illegal acts on behalf of their superiors ("the good Germans"), yet Will would punish those who would have kept us from making matters worse. Recent events, including our failure to assume our responsibilities for policing the nation, hint that things may get worse. As one Iraqi has remarked, "We will give them a year and then kill them."

The UN has not proven to be an unsuitable instrument of collective security; rather, the US has proven itself to be an unworthy member nation. How could the UN cope when the most powerful nation in the world discards policies that have maintained more than fifty years of peace without a world war for the sake of projecting power abroad in what the world perceives as a new form of imperialism and colonialism?

Only extremists like Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Bush, and Will would seriously contemplate the deliberate defiance of the greatest hope for world peace by the most powerful country in the world. And now these childish minds would punish other nations and world organizations for their valiant efforts to keep us from doing wrong. We have lost our way with leadership that is unworthy of this great nation. If this spells "victory", we may want to consider the price that we are going to pay.

Jim Fetzer, a professor of philosophy at UMD, recommends that everyone who wants to keep abreast of current developments, many of which are never reported by the US media, should check out <http://www.truthout.org>, which collates articles from around the world and makes them available over the internet.