

"What Has the U.S. Achieved in Iraq?"

Most of the world think that the U.S. policy in Iraq has been a political failure. Even a majority of the U.S. electorate seems to think so, according to the latest polls. This does not seem to faze the Bush regime, which argues (and may even really believe) that its policy has been a great success. So, let us review the situation.

First, let us look at what the present U.S. government most loudly claims as a success. Saddam Hussein has been overthrown and he himself is a prisoner, destined at some point to be put on trial. This is unquestionably true. I have however tried to figure out what else can be put in the success column, and I'm having a hard time coming up with anything. I have compiled a list of eight other possible or asserted U.S. objectives, and find the score on each of them either in doubt or quite negative.

(1) The first is the destruction of the Baath party and its political influence in the future in Iraq. Well, the party is formally dismantled. And initially the U.S. occupying authorities sought to eliminate the Baathists from any role in Iraqi institutions (the army which was dismantled, the police which was reorganized, the universities, and the government ministries). But when the U.S. was faced by insurrectionary forces in Fallujah which they found they couldn't dislodge, they found that the only solution was to turn to ex-Baathist leaders in order to bring about a truce and to restore order locally after the U.S. forces withdrew.

Now, we learn from the N.Y. Times that these former Baathists were subsequently tagged by the local population as U.S. agents, and have been forced to resign or to shift their allegiance to an Islamic fundamentalist group that now controls not only Fallujah but a good deal of the Sunni areas of western Iraq. So, the U.S. is in the extraordinary position of regretting the downfall of the ex-Baathist group in Fallujah and its environs. In Afghanistan, the U.S. succeeded in the 1980s in ousting a secular Communist regime only to install thereby the Taliban, whom they discovered eventually to be far worse. The U.S. seems to be doing something similar in the Sunni areas of Iraq.

(2) The second is control over the world oil supply. It is hard to see that the U.S. is in a better position today than it was three years ago. Iraqi oil exports are erratic because of continual guerilla attacks on the pipelines. Whether, once the political situation settles down (and this may take quite some time), the U.S. will end up with a greater de facto influence on how Iraq plays its oil cards than say France or Russia remains to be seen.

(3) The third is reducing the ability of Islamic "terrorists" to attack the U.S. or otherwise to achieve hostile objectives. Despite all the nonsense that is sometimes said, it is clear that, before 2003, the regime of Saddam Hussein did not really allow these groups to operate from an Iraqi base. Now, these "terrorist" groups are free to roam in Iraq, seize hostages, and recruit new participants. Whatever the degree of achievement of U.S. objectives in this regard elsewhere (cutting off funds to al-Qaeda and destroying its bases in Afghanistan and Pakistan), invading Iraq cannot be said to have advanced significantly U.S. objectives in this regard.

(4) The fourth is creating a stable, pro-American government in Iraq. Well, the U.S. is certainly not there yet. The present Allawi interim regime is weak in every way - in military

and police power, in political control of Iraq, and in legitimation by the population. The recent standoff in Najaf of the offensive of Allawi and the U.S. military against Moqtada al-Sadr and his Mahdi militia hardly enhanced Allawi's status. For the moment, the interim regime is still utterly dependent on the support of the U.S. military. If it wants to achieve legitimacy, it has to either increase radically its military strength (which seems remote) or increase its legitimacy (which means distancing itself from the U.S.). Allawi may aspire to be the next Saddam Hussein, but he has a long way to go. And if he gets there, is it sure the kind of stable government he might thereby create would really remain "pro-American"?

(5) The fifth is to end the threat of weapons of mass destruction. It is not only that the Bush regime found no such weapons in Iraq. It is also that the invasion of Iraq may well pull down the last shreds of the nuclear non-proliferation program. Iran and North Korea have obviously speeded up, not slowed down, their efforts. It is now announced that *South* Korea may be following in their footsteps. And if so, can Japan and Taiwan be far behind? What can the U.S. do? What can the United Nations do? The bluff may well have been called.

(6) The sixth is to spread "democracy" throughout the Middle East. Whatever this may be taken to mean, I can't see that much has been accomplished. If democracy means multi-party elections with no constraints, it seems likely at this moment that such elections would result - in Iraq, in Egypt, in Jordan, in Saudi Arabia, in Afghanistan, and in many other countries - in regimes far less to the taste of the United States than the current ones. It is for this reason that the Bush regime has been dragging its feet on such elections in Iraq, not pushing them forward at full speed. "Democracy" seems to be favored by the Bush people only if it gives the right results. The people, unfortunately, are perverse.

(7) The seventh is to make friends and influence people, throughout the region and the world. Even the strongest supporters of the Bush administration in the United States have noticed that its policies have had the opposite effect. They have "unmade" friends and influenced people negatively. The Bush people are reduced to saying that this is not important, and that the U.S. should not allow its policies to be dictated by so-called friends.

(8) The eighth is to establish the credibility of U.S. military power, as a deterrent to all potential enemies of the U.S. and all potential troublemakers everywhere. But using military power, especially overwhelming military power, only works if it results, in the inimitable words of the Bush administration, in "shock and awe." We have seen the shock but not the awe. It is hard to be awesome when the great U.S. armed forces are held in check by a popular resistance in Iraq that is growing daily. It is hard to be awesome when it is clear that the U.S. armed forces are at present stretched to their utter limits, in terms of personnel, with few means of expanding their number in the near future. It is hard to be awesome when we have military and intelligence personnel in the U.S. urging prudence on their civilian superiors.

The problem with demonstrating credibility is that, if success builds on success, lack of success makes the situation worse. The Bush regime seems to have achieved this undesirable goal. If this were a school exercise, I fear the grade would not be "excellent" or even "very good" but at most "barely passing" and at worst, an outright failure.

by Immanuel Wallerstein