

No Aftermath in Iraq Yet

Joseph Coates from chapter 4 of *Defeating Terrorism Developing Dreams: Beyond 9/11 and the IRAQ WAR • Volume 5: Turning Point: The Rocky Road to Peace and Reconstruction*

It was November 1st, 2003, when I began this essay. The original plan was to pull together—some six months after the end of the Iraq conflict—the military, social, political, economic and other developments in Iraq concerning liberation, rehabilitation, reform, and reconstruction.

That is not practical now, because the conflict is far from ended. Some presumably small groups of Iraqis, close adherents to Saddam Hussein aided by an indeterminate number of outsiders, are engaged in destructive and deadly actions against U.S. armed forces and civilian personnel; representatives of international agencies in Iraq; and local people, including police, cooperating with the US and allied forces.

Iraq is politically divided along ethnic, religious and ideological lines. Some religious groups, as well as others, are vociferously opposed to the continued presence of American troops. They feel, in a strongly nationalistic way, that the Americans should get out and let them settle their own affairs. Other small groups use events in which Iraqis are killed, injured, or dislocated by American troops as a rallying cry.

To pursue all the details in the last six months of development and their origins, consequences and reactions, is premature. It's a job for historians and a story which is not likely to be accurately told in the next ten years. The

assignment of responsibility, and hence of blame, is premature and too politically charged now to be useful.

Rather than to pursue those lines, I've chosen to present a dozen widely if not universally accepted beliefs about human behavior and then will fit the events in Iraq into violations of, ignorance of, or underuse of those general precepts.

1. Look Before You Leap

Aesop's Fables, which are widely seen in the Western world as sensible guides to human behavior, include the tale of the fox who finds himself in a well. He hails a goat passing by, tells him how great the water is and convinces the goat that he should jump in. The fox then points out that they are stuck. There is no obvious way to get out. He then comes up with a bright idea. He has the goat stand on his hind legs and lean against the wall. The fox promises to run up his back to reach the rim and then help the goat to get out. What we all expect happens: the fox gets out, and offers no help to the goat. The goat complains, but the Fox dismisses him as "you foolish old fellow." The lesson is "look before you leap."

The point of the tale is to carefully consider the consequences of your actions.

The U.S. was obviously unprepared for the limited enthusiasm of the Iraqi people for liberation and the questionable behavior of those who vandalized and looted buildings and offices,

behaving in a very destructive way, and those who attacked even the most important assets of the country—the oil wells and pipelines—which could provide it with international income.

2. Always Have an Exit Strategy

Positively linked to Aesop's fable is the military's core belief that every action should be associated with a preplanned exit strategy; when planning to get into a situation, one should know how to get out and have a specific strategy for getting out.

It is worth noting the difference between tactics and strategies. Tactics are the moment-to-moment, day-to-day plans and operations of the military. Strategy is the overall grand plan which allows them to deal tactically with expected, as well as unexpected, events.

There appears to be no exit strategy from Iraq. There is no publicly presented definition of when it will be time for the U.S. to move out, or the conditions for moving out, or for that matter what moving out would mean. Would it mean all aid and help stopped, or only military aid?

In the absence of an exit strategy, it is difficult to have a perspective on how long the continuing hostilities will last and at what point we would be able to remove ourselves. Whether that is months, years or decades is at the moment an open and befuddling question which makes many people unhappy, anxious or alarmed about the total future

cost in material and lives.

Remember: Aesop's goat had no exit strategy.

3. Wield Occam's Razor

William of Occam, who lived in the late 13th and early 14th Century, was an English philosopher who is most famous for what is now known as "Occam's Razor." It was a point in his argument, logic and rhetoric that the more things which you mention as a cause of some situation, the less credible your argument. William's principle was, put in those now quaint terms, "do not multiply entities beyond necessity." The more complex your story, the more difficult it is for you to sustain it and for others to believe it.

We see that now that the numerous reasons for entering Iraq, presented one after another before we moved in are unsustainable by post invasion evidence.

First, Iraq was loosely linked to the terrorists responsible for the events of 9/11 and there were accusations that Al Qaeda fighters were finding refuge and succor in Iraq. The facts after the invasion do not support either claim.

Then there was the point that Iraq was engaged in producing nuclear weapons. At the time of writing this essay, after six months of on the ground searching, the unequivocal outcome is that there was no nuclear weapons program in Iraq in the past decade.

And there was the claim of both chemical and biological warfare capabilities and that these weapons could be launched very, very quickly. No tangible evidence has been found of any significant capability with regard

to either of these classes of weapons of mass destruction. The best testimony from the Iraqis, who ostensibly would know about such weapons, is that those programs were dropped years ago.

The consequence of having multiple reasons for invading Iraq rapidly loses all credibility as each of the cornerstones of that invasion one by one prove to have been a chimera, that is, a non-existent fantasy.

4. The Ideologue Has the Answer Even Before Understanding the Question

The Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary gives four closely linked definitions of ideology: visionary theorizing; a systematic body of concepts especially about human life or culture; a manner or the content of thinking characteristic of an individual, group, or culture; and the integrated assertions, series and aims that constitute a sociopolitical program.

The key characteristic of an ideologue, that is, an adherent to an ideology whether it be Marxism, communism, socialism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism or vegetarianism, is that he or she knows the answer even before even understanding the question. The ideologue's vision is rigid and inflexible. Fixed explanations for situations one does not like coupled to formula solutions, hardly can provide a basis for fresh understanding of new situations or solutions tailored to a special conditions.

The U.S. has seriously stumbled over its ideological preconceptions in Iraq from beginning to end. For one thing, we have repeatedly been told that we are bringing free markets and democracy, the inevitable linkage

to free markets, to the people of Iraq. By no means is there universal or even consensus agreement among scholars that the free market is a necessary correlate or accompaniment to democracy, or vice versa. It rather represents one ideological point of view, which is now to a substantial degree dominant in the U.S. government and widely celebrated in business.

The reality in Islamic countries is that democracy and the way it is developed in Western Europe, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon countries, is alien to the hundreds of years of Islamic life. Islamic political life is characterized in two ways. One is that governance must be intimately tied to religious beliefs, in sharp contrast to our American belief in the absolute separation of church and state.

Second, religious beliefs must play a crucial role in that government. In much of Islam there are religious courts which perform many of the duties that we in the West have assigned to strictly secular courts. The religious court's framework is traditions hundreds of years old. They often mete out punishments grossly offensive to Western values and in violation of United Nation's statements of human rights.

The notion that free markets and democracy are inextricably linked is an historic error further compounded by the confusion as to what exactly a free market is. Does it mean no holds barred, all out conflict between and among buyers and sellers? Does it mean inevitable growth of global corporations? Does it mean universal access at fair prices to goods everywhere? Is it anti-monopolistic or pro-monopolistic? The ideology

underlying one of our objectives in Iraq is founded on political misunderstanding and dubious economic precepts.

The incongruity if not outright contradictions between American ideology and local customs and universal beliefs may create a too wide chasm to be spanned by the council set up to lay the basis for democratic voting, and a new Western--Islamic hybrid constitution. An imposed American ideology of one man, one vote is antithetical to Iraqi thinking in which a clan, the tribe, and the religious group to which one belongs are one's primary affiliations.

In a society organized around tribes the concept of one man-one vote leaves open the terrible possibility that once the majority gets into power it becomes their opportunity to "get even."

The flexibility and the regard for the rightful and fair treatment of every citizen in a democracy may be terribly thwarted when the Iraqi electorate goes into the voting booth.

Inversion of an old expression "I'll believe it when I see it" finds its own value among ideologues: "I'll see it when I believe it." This shows up in different ways in the Iraq situation. First was the incorrect overemphasis on Iraq as a refuge or base for terrorists. The terrorist's Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan were primarily motivated by a need to reform Islam and reestablish traditional values. Iraq as a secular state would hardly be the place where one would expect them to find assistance. As it turns out they were not in Iraq. Whether, more recently, former and would-be terrorists are finding an opportunity to get back at the United States by assisting dissident groups in Iraq is an

open question.

Ideology can even effect well established organizational behavior. Before we went into Iraq the Secretary of Defense had a legitimate objective of moving the three armed services, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force, into high tech based services and to relying more on the use of special forces in future combat. He has been quite successful with the Navy and the Air Force, but has met consistent resistance from the Army brass.

For example, before we invaded Iraq the Army argued that at least a quarter million men and maybe several hundred thousand would be necessary not just for victory, but to hold the terrain until we accomplished what was needed in the post-conflict period. The secretary pooh-poohed the Army's position because he knew he knew better.

By providing fewer troops than the Army knew it needed we see now some of the consequences; early on the looting of national treasures in museums and destruction of infrastructure and, more recently the discovery of hundreds of weapons caches and perhaps a million tons of armaments, so much and so numerous that American forces cannot adequately guard them. That makes them attractive sites for virtually anyone in Iraq to steal weapons for later use, in many cases for later use against Americans or for export to insurgent groups.

The Secretary's anticipation that the new military orientation would be able to defeat of the enemy, forced the Army to rely on high tech and special forces. The Secretary's view seems to be borne out in the formal military encounters in Iraq taking only 23 days to victory. but his single

minded Ideology overlooked the needs while occupying the country to establish a new era of reform. The special forces were untrained and unprepared to deal with civilians in a civilian context. As a result we see a continual round of incidents reported since the occupation of culture clashes between local people and the foreign troops who haven't the foggiest idea of the cultural differences between them that they encounter and have to deal with daily.

Other consequences of the ideological approach and of Americans' self-righteousness, discussed below, were to fail to anticipate the gross shift in world opinion resulting from this country's unilateral invasion, contrary to the expressed wishes of the United Nations. Favorable visions of the U.S. in public opinion polls in a dozen or more large and small countries have dropped anywhere from 10% to 50%. Countries that would never have dreamt of being at risk of a U.S. invasion or an occupation are now fearful. The objective validity of those fears is not the point. Our actions created an image and that image shifts public opinion.

Almost surely another unanticipated effect of the unilateral movement into Iraq was to mobilize a Pan-Islamic view against the United States and make already existing doubts and hostility about the United States more certain. Iraq is an Islamic country. Our unilateral move with incidental support from the U.K. and small levels of support from other countries focuses attention throughout Islam on a U.S. versus Islam conflict.

5. The Fish is the Last to Discover the Water

The head of the Chinese Communist Government during its most strenuous period of communization was named Mao. One of the icons of his chairmanship was his Little Red Book, widely reprinted in English. It is a very small book, meant to fit in a Chinese pocket, of quotations epitomizing Mao's wisdom. One of his universal truths is that, "The fish is the last to discover the water." What that means is that whatever the social milieu in which we grow up, we tend to universalize it and think that is the way everything is or must be.

Heading the revolutionary government, it was important that Mao get the point across to the population that their views of the government, its role and its function, reflect the situation in which they grew up, which is radically different from the new world for China that he was vigorously and violently propagating. The point is not in any way unique to Chinese communism. We tend to generalize as universal whatever is most common and familiar to us.

We see in Iraq this having the terrible consequences of our soldiers and administrators not understanding what our anticipated liberation of the people would incur; violence, vandalism, theft, destruction, the settlement of private grievances and accounts, fear of the liberator and seeing the self-proclaimed liberator as conqueror. The failure to appreciate linguistic difficulties and the cultural differences that American officers and troops would have to cope with in order to be effective undercuts our best intentions.

6. Americans are Self-Righteous

Scholars of American culture and society are in broad but not universal agreement that we are a self-righteous society. That is, we tend to see ourselves as morally superior to other nations and the international actions that we take as above reproach.

While frequently tested and proven incorrect, that self-righteousness does persist.

As we approached Iraq in the attempt to liberate it, which we in our self-righteousness saw as the best thing to do. We also assumed that our system, our rules, our economy, and our polity is the only way in which a nation as socially backward as Iraq can be brought up to desirable international standards and values. How wrong can we be?

When our attitudes and claims toward Iraq were put before the global community, that is the United Nations, and our proposed intervention was rejected, in our self-righteousness we went ahead almost alone, unilaterally. Until recently that word was unfamiliar. It means doing it our way and not caring about the views, interests, or proposals of other nations.

In the international arena, the theme for the last 50 years has been promoting multilateralism, that is, many sides coming together to decide what needs to be done with regard to a situation, and what needs to be done to satisfy as far as possible the fullest range of global interests. Our new unilateralism undermines 50 years of U.S. support for the United Nations. It reveals that strong self-righteous attitude that too often pervades American society and the actions of our elected officials.

Self-righteousness is often

linked to ideology and usually reveals failure to recognize Chairman Mao's wise observation. Self-righteousness has its price. Now, many countries of the world are teaching us a lesson by giving relatively little or no military or economic aid in the reconstruction of Iraq. We made our bed and they are eager to let us lie in it. Recall Aesop's fable.

7. Let the People Decide

Thomas Jefferson and the other Founding Fathers held to some principles that informed the writing of the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. One of those core principles is that an informed electorate, an informed citizenry, will make the right decisions. No one believes that those decisions always will be, without exception, the best. But, the fundamental Jeffersonian principle is that no system is better than or more effective in the long run, than one in which the decisions are based on the will of an informed electorate.

What we see in the story of Iraq before, during and after the invasion is that the electorate, our people, were kept in the dark, misinformed, given exaggerated information, promised that there was concurrence both internally within the government and with a well-informed ally, the United Kingdom. All of that seems to melt away in the examination of the events leading into and in the six months following announced victory in Iraq. These systematic violations of the Jeffersonian principle tie very closely to the next point.

8. Secrecy is a Principle of Bureaucracy

Going back to the early 19th Century, the great German Sociologist Max Weber observed that one of the most enduring and strongest characteristics of bureaucracy is secrecy. Bureaucracy tends to hold back, to not come forth with information, to avoid unnecessary revelation and, insofar as possible, to operate behind closed doors. All of which is fully understandable since the less the people know about what goes on inside a bureaucracy, the less trouble they will create for the well ordered administration of government.

That is not the American way. While we do have to have agencies that are secret because of their military, intelligence or police functions, even they have to be ventilated -- ventilated before the U.S. Congress, ventilated before the state legislators, ventilated by the White House, and ventilated in discussion with each other. It appears that too little ventilation occurred in the preparations for Iraq and too much secrecy among and between agencies.

It is now unclear as to who gave what advice, and with what degree of authority and concurrence, to the President with regard to many of the conditions mentioned above. As stated: weapons of mass destruction, the extent to which Al Qaeda was operating out of Iraq, the extent to which Iraq was funding foreign (non Iraqi) terrorist activities, the degree of readiness of Iraqis to welcome liberation, the extent to which tribalism and religious differences would stand in the way or promote the movement toward a new society.

Even at this writing the White house is dragging its feet in turning over to the Congress pre-invasion information, illustrating how strong the passion for secrecy is throughout government.

9. All Politics is Local

The great former leader of the House of Representatives, Tip O'Neil, observed after his decades of experience in American politics, both local and in the Congress, that things that counts most for the electorate are overwhelmingly local. International issues, global issues, issues outside one's city, town, community, region or even state count for far less than the things that are most immediate and direct in their effects.

The failure to attend to that principle led to a widespread dissatisfaction with the recruitment of Army Reserves and National Guard -- local actions to deal with an international situation based upon a national decision.

A few days before this writing, there was a march on Washington to protest any budget for further military activity in and our immediate removal from Iraq. One newspaper said that some 150 cities were represented. There, the local interests speak against the national interests because for them every dollar for Iraq is a dollar not available to deal with local issues.

The local implications of the alleged military and terrorist threats and the consequences of our involvement domestically and especially locally have been ignored or at least overlooked and downplayed in government planning. The now daily drumbeat announcing the deaths

of American soldiers and civilians in Iraq is enormously powerful local news vicariously felt everywhere.

10. Your Place in Some Hierarchy Determines Your Values and Goals

The great social psychologist Abraham Maslow studied the values which motivate people and help determine their actions. He concluded that all of us fall somewhere on a multi-layered hierarchy of attitudes and behaviors. For the bulk of people who are at the lowest level of socioeconomic development -- the poor, the uneducated, those who are largely left out of the larger society -- there is no sense of the future. They rather live from day to day, work from day to day, struggle from day to day.

As people move up in prosperity, if they are fortunate and hold fairly routine ordinary low level jobs, their focus broadens somewhat and they begin to concentrate on the things that will keep them employed. They still have a narrow, short-term and fearful view of their position in the world. They want to hold on as tightly as they can to what they have and are deeply fearful of possible losses.

Only after one has moved up several notches does one come to attitudes and behaviors that are characteristic of the broad middle class and the much narrower upper class in the United States.

What we see now is that the people in Iraq are, to a large extent, people who fall in the lower echelons of the Maslovian hierarchy; they want certitude, they want organization, they want continuity, they want security. Having destroyed much of their personal assets and wiped out much of the job base, we are

promising them the discord of the free market, the uncertainty of democratic processes, and giving them the presence, for an indeterminate period, of an uncertain army that does not understand the people, their customs and their needs.

11. If You Don't Know Where You are Going, Any Road Will Get You There

Since most of the advertised reasons for invading Iraq no longer hold water, the questions to consider are where have we gotten, why are we there, what must we do, and when will it end?

Obviously, we can not suddenly remove ourselves from Iraq. That would create a situation likely to be far worse than the one which brought us in. It would create a policy void in which highly aggressive Islamic fundamentalists would move in, doing on a grander scale what had happened in Afghanistan when the Taliban cooperated with Al Qaeda.

We have put ourselves into a situation in which we have no sensible paths to follow but to rehabilitate and restore the country, to undo the damage that we have done and to work to build an alternative to a Sunni regime of Saddam Hussein acolytes or a fundamentalist takeover.

How long will that take? How much will it cost, and what must we bring to bear? These are new questions that we apparently were totally unprepared to consider after a successful military action against the dictator and his cowardly army. What we have gotten into has certainly complexified the point above regarding an exit strategy.

12. Who's to Blame?

Our self-righteousness makes us too ready to assign blame for anything that we don't like. Blame is a stultifying, negative and crippling category because it forces us to search out who is, in a very narrow sense, responsible and nail that person to whatever one nails such people to. As blame means guilt, guilt implies punishment.

The situation is far too complex to merely search to assign blame. One has to recognize that the system of events, organizations and interactions which misled us into Iraq, which are keeping us there in unexpected circumstances, and are leading us into goals and objectives which may be unrealistic, are not the results of the actions of a single person or even a small cluster of people.

Rather, the mess reflects that the total complex of the political system, the legislative system, and the administrative system have together failed to establish rational goals, rational actions, rational behavior, and clear unequivocal plans and their implementation. We just seem to be doing it all on the fly, albeit an extremely expensive fly, while ad-hocking the operation.

It would be ideal, as many would want, to blame all of this trouble and discord on President Bush as our leader, heap the blame on his shoulders and expel him from office at the next election. Short, sweet, to the point punishment but destructive and inappropriate. The President is technically responsible for everything that happens on his watch, everything done by subordinates, but the reality is that a much larger range of people and institutions that feed into and feed on the White House

are collectively and diffusely responsible and at fault.

However, two characteristics of the man now in the White House may help to clarify why some of the situations described above could come about. It is been well established by those who watched him as Governor, and wrote about him as a presidential candidate, and even write about him as our President, that he has two characteristics which inform his political actions.

One of them is that he has high regard for experts and he has many experts around him. The extent to which those experts are balanced against each other—even-handed in what they present—and aware of some of the above principles is open to argument. But relying on expertise is an important part of the President's behavior.

Second, ever since he was a governor, he has had a policy of looking at a situation calling for action, taking an action which seems appropriate, and then waiting to see what occurs. Based on what occurs as a result of the previous action, he takes a second action to improve the situation, etc.

That incrementalist approach may or may not be good or the best form of political planning in a continental economy within a global world. It may tend to reinforce the short term and the ideological rather than push us to the strategic, long-term and comprehensive way of thinking.

An example of this may be the move into Iraq as a preemptive strike. While the international lawyers are busy arguing whether a preemptive strike is good or bad, legitimate or illegitimate, legal or illegal, in various national and international regions, the clear point is that it was an action

running counter to the global community, as reflected in the United Nations.

Now we see the consequence of that pre-emptive strike in our inability to recruit the ready support of other wealthy nations in dealing with the Iraq situation. It is almost as if the French, Germans, Russians and Chinese are spanking us for our misbehavior, teaching us a lesson about what globalism really involves. Back to Aesop's fable.

All of this remains in a state of intrinsic uncertainty until historians have had an opportunity, five, ten, or more years from now, to get at all the classified documents, all the memoirs, all the memos, and give us something resembling the truth. However that turns out, the lesson should be clear: In the future, we and our government must pay attention to the 12 points made above.