

Two questions on Iraq

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Two questions:

- 1. the extent of the Iraq War's success and*
- 2. what U.S. policy should be in Iraq afterwards.*

On the first question: extent of success. This war is an aggressive war, the supreme crime against international law, a crime against humanity, the same crime for which the Nazis were hanged at Nuremberg and, to paraphrase the Nuremberg tribunal, the crime which contains the evil of all ensuing crimes. So, is it a success if the US “wins”? Yes, as much of a success as, say, in Vichy France, which was far more successful militarily for Germany than the US in Iraq.

That's pretty much the end of the question, as far as I see it, but one could go into all manner of details about the extent of “success”: civilian casualties; mass refugee exodus; nonexistent reconstruction; corruption and missing billions in reconstruction money; mercenaries; death squads, many with US support; the “Salvador” option, led by major US Central American terrorist figure Negroponte; the extreme neoliberal policies implemented by proconsul Bremer, including applying Saddam's notorious anti-union laws; the divide and conquer strategy applied to prevent a unified government; massacres and abuses by US forces and mercenaries; Abu Ghraib; white phosphorus in Fallujah, where some 60% of buildings are bombed out; ethnic and sectarian conflict; massive rise in terrorism; ethnic cleansing (one of the main reason for the “surge”'s drop in violence is that urban neighbourhoods have been “cleansed” and partitioned, and even then it's a drop from astonishing levels to a lower-but-still-massive level); water supplies (often non-existent, water-borne diseases prevalent); health system (virtually no reconstruction, supplies of medical equipment minimal, most reconstruction I know of was in 2003-4 and consisted of painting); food prices; black market; electricity supply (rare to have a full day); gas supply (massive lines for oil); employment rates (I think now worse than under Saddam plus crippling sanctions described as “genocidal” by some in the UN who implemented them).

About the only thing one can truly call “successful” out of the whole tragedy is the downfall of Saddam – something that Iraqis tried to do several times themselves, except for being thwarted, including by the US (recall the revolt after the 1991 invasion and massacres by Saddam while the US stood aside); and note that Saddam would not only be alive, but would surely be in power today, with US support, (and, as a secular ruler and enemy of al Qaeda, no doubt a strong ally in the “war on terror”!), were it not for his decision to disobey orders and invade Kuwait back nearly 20 years ago (or possibly he simply misunderstood orders! There was this very strange meeting between the US ambassador and one of Saddam’s officials just before that invasion. But that’s another story). The true “success”, from the cynical point of view of US geopolitical strategists, will be control over the energy supplies in the region – and that’s why such an extraordinarily large permanent bases are being built. But subverting the sovereign right of Iraqis to control their own resources is something that only the most cynical could call a “success”.

On the second question: what US policy should be in Iraq. A good start would be to obey international law. Under international law occupiers have no rights; they have no right to say what they should do. They have only *responsibilities*. Those responsibilities are enumerated under the Geneva conventions and other international legal documents. Primary amongst them is to respect the wishes of the population: so Americans have no right to decide what to do; Iraqi opinion is paramount. Iraqi public opinion is clear: I think large majorities for a long time now want American withdrawal, see American troops as a threat and adding to violence. The Iraqi “government” (to the extent it governs anything) is not so clear about this – because it is so dependent on the US for its own survival, a virtual puppet state with very little popular support and army and police whose loyalties lie elsewhere, often deserting or working for sectarian death squads. There is very little evidence I am aware of that US troop presence does much beyond inflaming the situation, committing the horrors involved in any occupation, and providing a target for attacks; and despite many internecine conflicts within various Iraqi factions, I understand that the vast majority of attacks are by or against Americans. G. Sharat Lin estimates an 80% drop in violence if Americans were to disappear.

So that much is clear to me. Massive reparations, war crimes trials, and impeachment are also clear. Beyond that, one can only make suggestions, making clear the right of Iraq to control its own destiny. Involve other countries in the region (e.g. Iran, Syria) in discussions on the future of the region, security and stability and governance. Work through the UN. Use diplomacy. Work towards a settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict, which is holding up the course of history in the region and in the world.

In general, help to solve problems rather than cause them. Become a credible force for democracy and human rights stop thwarting them. Stop supporting dictators (e.g. Saudi Arabia, oil monarchies, Egypt, Uzbekistan, other Central Asian nations) and subverting democracy (e.g. Venezuela, eastern Europe, Pakistan) around the world. Stop harbouring terrorists (e.g. Cuban exiles) and training them (e.g. School of the Americas / WHINSEC). Stop building

military bases all over the world. Stop military aggression and expansion (e.g. bombing Somalia, missiles in Poland) and threats (e.g. Iran). Stop supporting human rights abuses (e.g. Israel/Palestine, Colombia, Indonesia, Philippines). Cut off arms supplies and aid to dictators and armed conflicts. Turn the US military budget – which is about half of Earth’s military budget – into a budget for international humanitarian aid, development, health care, renewable energy, and education. Undercut all the correct arguments about US hypocrisy that the bin Ladens of the world can make to recruit followers; undermine support for terrorism instead of provoking and increasing it. Sign on to arms control treaties (recall that in the US vs. Iran dispute, there is only one country clearly in breach of nuclear weapons treaties – and it’s not Iran) and implement them. Restore civil liberties. Make the country one worth defending, make the country one which needs no defence. There is a very real sense in which the US has no enemies but those which it has created itself. Use massive US power and prestige – and the extraordinary level of goodwill in the world towards Americans (but not the American government) – through multilateral institutions in accordance with international law, to make the world one worth living in.

The near future for Iraq seems bleak and chaotic, regardless of what happens; a humanitarian tragedy, chaotic and violent, and one for which the US bears full responsibility, both morally and under international law. The onus is on pro-invasion forces to argue that the American presence can do anything to make things any better. All evidence seems to the contrary. My conclusion would be, to the US military: get out, and take your bases with you, and your mercenaries, and your control over oil, you have no right to prescribe what is good for Iraq.

That would be my general approach, anyway.