



IRAQ INVASION

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Will Iraqis accept American victory?

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Sure, bloody street fighting in Baghdad may lie ahead, even after a couple of days of breathtaking coalition advances. But the United States will win this war. Yet if this isn't Vietnam, neither is it the Afghanistan campaign, where Americans were hailed as liberators. I was in Afghanistan during that war, and the difference is manifest. Afghans were giddy and jubilant, while Iraqis now are typically sullen and distrustful - and thirsty.

And that's America's biggest long-term problem. For all the talk about US forces being short of armoured divisions, or supply lines being stretched so taut that Marines were down to one meal a day, those are tactical issues that will be forgotten six months from now. The fundamental and strategic challenge is that so far many ordinary Iraqis regard Americans, as best I can tell, as conquerors rather than liberators.

Vice President Dick Cheney said on the television program "Meet the Press" on March 16 that "we will, in fact, be greeted as liberators." And Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz said of the Iraqis in a speech to the Veterans of Foreign Wars on March 11: "Like the

people of France in the 1940s, they view us as their hoped-for liberator. They know that America will not come as a conqueror."

It's too early to know definitively what Iraqis think, and for now, the signals are mixed, with jubilation in Najaf and anger in many other areas. Iraq these days is almost as varied, tribal and polarised a society as the United States. All in all, most Iraqis seem watchful and ambivalent, as reflected in this conversation I had near Safwan with a Shiite farmer in his 40s.

"Money was okay under Saddam," he said. "Freedom was not so good. As a people, we were doing okay before the invasion. But the war upsets our lives. It brings destruction."

"Do you think the aftermath of the war will bring improvements?" I asked. He shrugged. "Only God knows."

"So do you think Saddam is a good president or a bad president?"

"Saddam is a good president." Long pause. "Well, maybe not good. So-so."

Fear of Saddam explains some of the reticence (half the Iraqis I've asked have said Saddam will win the war), but you also see nationalism fermenting in Iraqis who proclaim that they will fight US occupation the way Palestinians fight Israeli occupation. The risk is not

that America will lose the war, but that it will never fully establish a peace. Already the coalition-controlled south is, particularly after dusk, a Hobbesian world of banditry and anarchy. One Arab expert dourly suggested to me that Iraq could emerge as "another Lebanon."

Yet even if many Iraqis are suspicious now, there's hope of bringing them around. In Germany and Japan in 1945, initial attitudes toward Americans were ferocious, but sensitivity and diplomacy managed to turn around public opinion.

The Bush administration wages war better than it wages diplomacy, and the Pentagon's apparent plan to make an Iraqi leader out of Ahmad Chalabi, whose support lies along the Potomac rather than the Tigris or Euphrates, is emblematic of the administration's Attila-the-Hun brand of diplomacy, which risks antagonizing the world and alienating the Iraqi people themselves.

So today the paramount question is not whether America will win this war, but whether it can persuade ordinary Iraqis to accept American victory. The Iraqi jury is still out. The danger is not that Iraq will turn into another Vietnam but that after America's victory, it could turn into another Lebanon or Gaza.



Iraqi civilians, some wounded, took shelter after being caught in a fierce firefight between US and Iraqi forces on the eastern outskirts of Baghdad.

Hawkish lawyer to oversee post-war administration

THE GUARDIAN

A Pentagon lawyer who sought to have US citizens imprisoned indefinitely without charge as part of the war on terrorism will supervise civil administration in Iraq once Saddam Hussein is removed. Michael Mobbs, 54, who will take charge of 11 of the 23 Iraqi ministries, is one of several controversial appointments to the Pentagon-controlled government-in-waiting being assembled in a cluster of seaside villas in Kuwait.

Other top-level appointees include James Woolsey, a former CIA director with Israeli connections who has long pursued a theory that President Hussein, rather than Islamic militants,

was behind the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York. Another is Zalmay Khalilzad, who once sympathised with the Taliban but later changed tack.

During the Reagan administration, Mr Mobbs worked at the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, where he became known for his hawkish views on national security and American-Soviet relations. On these issues he was closely aligned with the assistant defence secretary at the time, Richard Perle, who is widely regarded as chief architect of the war. Mr Mobbs later joined a Washington law firm where Douglas Feith - now under secretary for policy at the Pentagon -

was a partner.

In his current role as a legal consultant to the Pentagon, Mr Mobbs has been working behind the scenes to help determine the legal fate of terror suspects and other detainees held by the US military in Cuba and Afghanistan. He was also author of what has become known as the "Mobbs declaration", a document presented to the US courts on behalf of the Pentagon claiming that the US president has wide powers to detain American citizens alleged to be enemy combatants indefinitely.

The former CIA director James Woolsey was initially scheduled to take charge of the Iraqi information ministry, although opposition from the White House has made that unlikely.

Apartheid past of contract bidder

THE OBSERVER

Fluor Corporation, the US building firm tipped to land a massive reconstruction deal in postwar Iraq, is facing a multibillion-dollar lawsuit claiming that it exploited and brutalised black workers in apartheid-era South Africa.

Lawyers acting for thousands of victims of the racist regime are to file a detailed suit in the US this week, which includes the claim that Fluor hired security guards dressed in Ku Klux Klan robes to attack unarmed workers protesting against poor pay and conditions.

The action comes at an awkward time for Fluor, one of five firms controversially invited by the US government to bid for a \$600 million contract to rebuild Iraqi roads and public buildings. John Ngebetsha, a lawyer for former employees, said: "This company has a long history of human rights violations in South Africa. It cares nothing about the societies in which it works and its involvement in Iraq would be disastrous."

Fluor denies all the allegations.

Meanwhile, it has emerged that Jay Garner, the retired US general who will oversee Iraqi reconstruction, is facing legal action over his activities while president of a defence company, SY Technology (now SY Coleman).

Lawyers acting for rival DESE Research claim Garner lent his weight to senior officials at the Space and Missile Defence Command, where he previously worked, to deny DESE a research contract on a system for attacking enemy satellites. DESE's lawyer, Howell Riggs, also claims that Garner received a "payoff" from successors at the defence command in the form of another lucrative contract. That deal was later cancelled.

Riggs said: "We are investigating Garner's role in the denial of a contract to DESE in September 2001 and whether he has engaged in a conspiracy to deny DESE work. We expect to file a suit against him and SY Technology or its successor soon."

No one at SY Coleman was available for comment.

Blitz turns Baghdad into a ghost town

AFP, Baghdad

With explosions pounding the downtown and US forces claiming the sprawling airport on the outskirts, Baghdad was a ghost town Saturday night, huddled up in some areas, alert in others.

Just as the clock struck midnight (2000 GMT), two massive blasts woke up even the deepest sleepers in the heart of the capital, which has been hit night and day by US missiles and bombs since March 20.

But other than the bright flashes, the only thing to light up the dark streets of this city of five million were the neon signs of a few cafes and the dim glow peeping out of apartment windows. A handful of young people wandered about, beating the suffocating heat, while militiamen stationed themselves on benches or at the doors of buildings, smoking cigarettes, laughing or simply staring off into space.

The Tigris river -- into which a missile plunged early in the evening near Saddam Hussein's main palace -- divides the city in two. Power has been restored on the east bank of the river. The other side, home to most official buildings, remains dark.

On Saturday morning, much of Baghdad woke up brutally to the sound of machine-gun fire and light artillery. The battle lasted three hours. A US officer claimed some 1,000 Iraqi troops died in the fighting and that the coalition securely held the airport. Iraq

claimed it had forced the invaders out. In the west of Baghdad, the signs of war are apparent, with tanks and nervous militiamen and hospitals filled with wounded troops. And the rumour persists in the streets, but never witnessed, of American forces penetrating the city.

In the east, the city is as quiet as can be. Nearly all stores have downed their shutters. Even the markets where Baghdadis go to buy food -- the Al-Arab souq, with its tinny goods, and the al-Ghazai souq, renowned for its fowl -- are deserted.

Five money-changers stayed open, but no customers came. Oddly, the Iraqi dinar is trading at 3,300 to a dollar, against 3,800 the day before.

"There's no work to be had here, so I'm going to move my family to Diyala in the east of the country. But then I'll come back. The men should stay here," said the owner of the As-Saah exchange office.

Bus stations and taxi stands were empty. But pick-up trucks can be seen in the capital's battered outskirts filled with beds, mattresses, pots and pans.

In the city's northern Qahiri area, Ali, who has five daughters, packed up his remaining belongings in his van, tying it up with a rope. "A bomb fell last night near our house and so I decided to send my wife and children to the Adhamiyeh neighbourhood downtown. That seems like a less vulnerable place," he said.

'I should not be allowed to say these things in America'

THE UNION ONLINE

As Americans, we have a right to question our government and its actions. However, while there is a time to criticise, there is also a time to follow in complacent silence. And that time is now.

It's one thing to question our leaders in the days leading up to a war. But it is another thing entirely to do it during a war. Once the blood of young men starts to spill, it is our duty as citizens not to challenge those responsible for spilling that blood. We must remove the boxing gloves and put on the kid gloves. That is why, in this moment of crisis, I should not be allowed to say the following things about America:

Why do we purport to be fighting in the name of liberating the Iraqi people when we have no interest in violations of human rights as evidenced by our habit of looking the other way when they occur in China, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Syria, Burma, Libya, and countless other countries? Why, of all the brutal regimes that regularly violate human rights, do we only intervene militarily in Iraq? Because the violation of human rights is not our true interest here. We just say it is as a convenient means of manipulating world opinion and making our cause seem more just.

That is exactly the sort of thing I should not say right now.

This also is not the time to ask whether diplomacy was ever given a

chance. Or why, for the last 10 years, Iraq has been our sworn archenemy, when during the 15 years preceding it we traded freely in armaments and military aircraft with the evil and despotic Saddam Hussein. This is the kind of question that, while utterly valid, should not be posed right now.

And I certainly will not point out our rapid loss of interest in the establishment of democracy in Afghanistan once our fighting in that country was over. We sure got out of that place in a hurry once it became clear that the problems were too complex to solve with cruise missiles.

That sort of remark will simply have to wait until our boys are safely back home.

Here's another question I won't ask right now: Could this entire situation have been avoided in the early 1990s had then-US ambassador to Iraq April Glaspie not been given sub rosa instructions by the Bush Administration to soft-pedal a cruel dictator? Such a question would be tantamount to sedition while our country engages in bloody conflict. Just think how hurtful that would be to our military morale. I know I couldn't fight a war knowing that was the talk back home.

Is this, then, the appropriate time for me to ask if Operation Iraqi Freedom is an elaborate double-blind, sleight-of-hand misdirection ploy to con us out of inconvenient civil rights through Patriot

Acts I and II? Should I wonder whether this war is an elaborate means of distracting the country while its economy bucks and lurches toward the brink of a full-blown depression? No and no.

True patriots know that a price of freedom is periodic submission to the will of our leaders especially when the liberties granted us by the Constitution are at stake. What good is our right to free speech if our soldiers are too demoralised to defend that right, thanks to disparaging remarks made about their commander-in-chief by the Dixie Chicks?

When the Founding Fathers authored the Constitution that sets forth our nation's guiding principles, they made certain to guarantee us individual rights and freedoms. How dare we selfishly lay claim to those liberties at the very moment when our nation is in crisis, when it needs us to be our most selfless? We shame the memory of Thomas Jefferson by daring to mention Bush's outright lies about satellite photos that supposedly prove Iraq is developing nuclear weapons.

At this difficult time, President Bush needs my support. Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld needs my support. General Tommy Franks needs my support. It is not my function as a citizen in a participatory democracy to question our leaders. And to exercise my constitutional right, duty to do so would be un-American.



Arab volunteers carry the deadbodies of their fellow fighters on the back of a pick-up truck following fierce fighting with US troops in south of Baghdad yesterday. Egyptians, Jordanians, Saudis and Syrians are fighting alongside Iraqi troops against US forces moving on Baghdad, using tactics including suicide bombings, US officers have said.

