



IRAQ INVASION

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After Iraq, will US continue to 'go it alone'?

AFP, Washington

Having chosen to topple Saddam Hussein without United Nations backing, the United States now faces a choice between imposing its supremacy or working with the rest of the world.

Should the United States install a "Pax Americana" at the risk of painting Iraq as a US protectorate, or should the UN flag fly over reconstruction efforts, with even France, Russia and Germany -- which vigorously opposed the war -- taking part?

Debate has rarely been so intense between neo-conservatives who favour an unabashed assertion of American pre-eminence, and internationalists who do not want to see the United States isolated from the world community.

"The war in Iraq has become as much a test of the international system as of Saddam Hussein, as much a question of a new world order as of a new, democratic Iraq," said Thomas Donnelly of the American Enterprise

Institute (AEI), a Washington think tank.

"The 'new world order' that will emerge from the war will be a 'unipolar world, marked by an even greater degree of American primacy and leadership than before," Donnelly said in an April 1 essay published by AEI, which is close to administration hawks including Vice President Dick Cheney and Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

"We appear to be moving at last from the post-Cold War era to the time of an enduring Pax Americana," he said, adding that new institutions may be needed "to reflect the new realities."

But other analysts disagree, arguing that the enormity of the task of rebuilding Iraq, coupled with the need to pursue a long-term campaign against international terrorism, will oblige Washington to rein in unilateralist impulses and seek broad cooperation within the United Nations.

"It is in US interests to use the UN," said Rachel Bronson of the New York-based Council on Foreign Relations.

"The UN provides legitimacy that makes the job (of rebuilding Iraq) a lot easier (and) can give the Iraqis themselves time to figure out how they can incorporate the exiles into the political system as well as those who have lived in Iraq."

Even Washington's best friends, beginning with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, are pressing for an international framework for the reconstruction of Iraq.

Following a two-day summit in Belfast, Bush and Blair on Tuesday denied a reported split over the role of the United Nations in supervising an interim Iraqi government.

The controversy has threatened to bring about a repeat of the bitter bickering between Washington and Europe that emerged during the run-up to the Iraq war and jeopardised the future of transatlantic ties.

"The rebuilding of Iraq will require the support and expertise of the international community," Bush said. "We're committed to working with international institutions, including the United

Nations, which will have a vital role to play in this task."

In a joint statement, the two leaders restated their commitment to seeking new UN resolutions to "affirm Iraq's territorial integrity, ensure rapid delivery of humanitarian relief and endorse an appropriate post-conflict administration for Iraq."

Helmut Sonnenfeldt, an international affairs expert at the Brookings Institution, said debate on post-war Iraq at the United Nations in the coming weeks could be decisive in Bush's outlook on the issue.

"If it becomes just a resumption of the disputes and the arguments" that Washington rejected in its decision to lead a military campaign against Saddam, "the US probably will figure out other ways to work in Iraq."

If instead "all of the countries involved ... exercise moderation," the United Nations could have "a continuing role," Sonnenfeldt said.



Pakistani journalists chant anti-war slogans while marching towards the US consulate in Karachi on April 9 to show their resentment over the deaths of three journalists killed by US attacks in Baghdad. About 100 journalists took to the streets to condemn the killings of three journalists in Iraq.



Iraqi civilians walk past an Iraqi cannon in the eastern suburbs of Baghdad on April 9.

PHOTO: AFP

Iraqis do not favour Americans to stay

AP, Amarah

Local leaders were adamant when the US Marines came into this eastern city: They didn't want to see US flags, didn't want Iraqi flags torn down and didn't want soldiers interacting with their women at checkpoints.

"The Americans are not the best at knowing what's good for Iraq. The Iraqis are," a man identified as the leader of freedom fighters who liberated this Shiite town from government control told Brig. Gen. Rich Natonski, commander of Task Force Tarawa, over tea at a local sheik's house.

Iraqis cheered US troops who rolled tanks into Baghdad and knocked over a 40-foot statue of President Saddam Hussein on Wednesday, happy to see their oppressive leader ousted. But they are also reluctant to give up too much control in the rapidly shifting political landscape - and already wondering how soon the Americans

will go.

"Whatever he has done, he is a Muslim, and we are a Muslim nation," Baghdad store owner Ali Al-Obeidi after watching US troops help celebrating Iraqis pull down Saddam's statue. Referring to coalition troops, he said: "We will never allow them to stay." The fight to liberate this southeastern Iraqi city began Sunday, when local Iraqis rose up against Saddam's 10th Armoured Division in a battle supported by heavy US-led airstrikes. When Marines arrived Tuesday, they had no one left to fight, finding abandoned tanks littered across this barren, muddy landscape in freshly dug bunkers.

On the main highway through town, which leads to Baghdad, a government building was still smouldering, documents and file cabinets littering the front yard. Armored vehicles and artillery pieces littered the

street, lined by sandbag bunkers.

Sheik Ali Shalan al-Faisal, hosting a meeting Wednesday at his house in a village about security and a new administration, bragged that residents had killed the division's commanding general.

Al-Faisal, sitting under a picture of himself, said the largest problem the city now faced was a lack of electricity because the power lines from Nasiriyah had been cut and looters had taken all the repair equipment.

Despite that, the local leader said his own men wanted to be in charge of controlling the chaos that has followed the fall of Saddam's regime.

"We don't have to have American security. We can have our own security if the US allows us," he said.

Foreign troops in other conflicts have often worn out an initial welcome. Shiite Muslims showered the Israeli army with rice when it entered

Lebanon in 1982 to root out guerrillas. Many Roman Catholics welcomed British troops into Northern Ireland in 1969.

"But when they began to put up checkpoints, barbed-wire perimeters and limited population movements, attitudes began to change," said Sandra Mitchell, an International Rescue Committee lawyer who has worked missions in Kosovo and Bosnia.

Some Iraqis are already expressing anger at the British troops controlling the southern city of Basra, accusing them of being ill-prepared and failing to halt widespread looting and lawlessness.

"We thought when they entered the city, they would prepare an administration to take control," said Dr. Janan Peter al-Sabah, chief of surgery at a local hospital. "We don't need food or water. What we lack is safety and

protection. Our message to the coalition troops is to take responsibility for the security of the people, of the homes, of the facilities."

In Amarah, it wasn't entirely clear if the situation was as calm as locals insisted. Gunfire could be heard throughout the afternoon and large cloud of black smoke rose into the sky just before sunset.

Natonski said his medics treated a 12-year-old girl shot in the head, and had evacuated her by helicopter.

At a military base the Marines visited near Amarah on Wednesday, the local leader insisted his men could control the site and see that the weapons didn't fall into the wrong hands.

"We want to go home also to our families," Natonski reassured the local leaders.

"Inshallah," they all heartily replied, Arabic for "God willing."

The images they choose to show and ignore

ROBERT JENSEN

It was the picture of the day -- the toppling of a Saddam Hussein statue in Baghdad -- and may end up being the picture of the war, the single image that comes to define the conflict. The message will be clear: The US liberated the Iraqi people; the US invasion of Iraq was just.

On Wednesday morning television networks kept cameras trained on the statue near the Palestine Hotel. Iraqis threw ropes over the head and tried to pull it down before attacking the base with a sledgehammer. Finally a US armoured vehicle pulled it down, to the cheers of the crowd.

It was an inspiring moment of celebration at the apparent end of a brutal dictator's reign. But as Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld has pointed out at other times, no one image tells the whole story. Questions arise

about what is, and isn't, shown.

One obvious question: During live coverage, viewers saw a US soldier drape over the face of Hussein a US flag, which was quickly removed and replaced with an Iraqi flag. Commanders know that the displaying the US flag suggests occupation and domination, not liberation. NBC's Tom Brokaw reported that the Arab network Al Jazeera was "making a big deal" out of the incident with the American flag, implying that US television would -- and should -- downplay that part of the scene. Which choice tells the more complete truth?

Another difference between television in the US and elsewhere has been coverage of Iraqi casualties. Despite constant discussion of "precision bombing," the US invasion has produced so many dead and wounded that Iraqi hospitals stopped trying to count.

Red Cross officials have labelled the level of casualties "incredible," describing "dozens of totally dismembered dead bodies of women and children" delivered by truck to hospitals. Cluster bombs, one of the most indiscriminate weapons in the modern arsenal, have been used by US and British forces, with the British defence minister explaining that mothers of Iraqi children killed would one day thank Britain for their use.

US viewers see little of these consequences of war, which are common on television around the world and widely available to anyone with Internet access. Why does US television have a different standard? CNN's Aaron Brown said the decisions are not based on politics. He acknowledged that such images accurately show the violence of war, but defended decisions to not air them; it's a matter of "taste," he said.

Again, which choice tells the more complete truth?

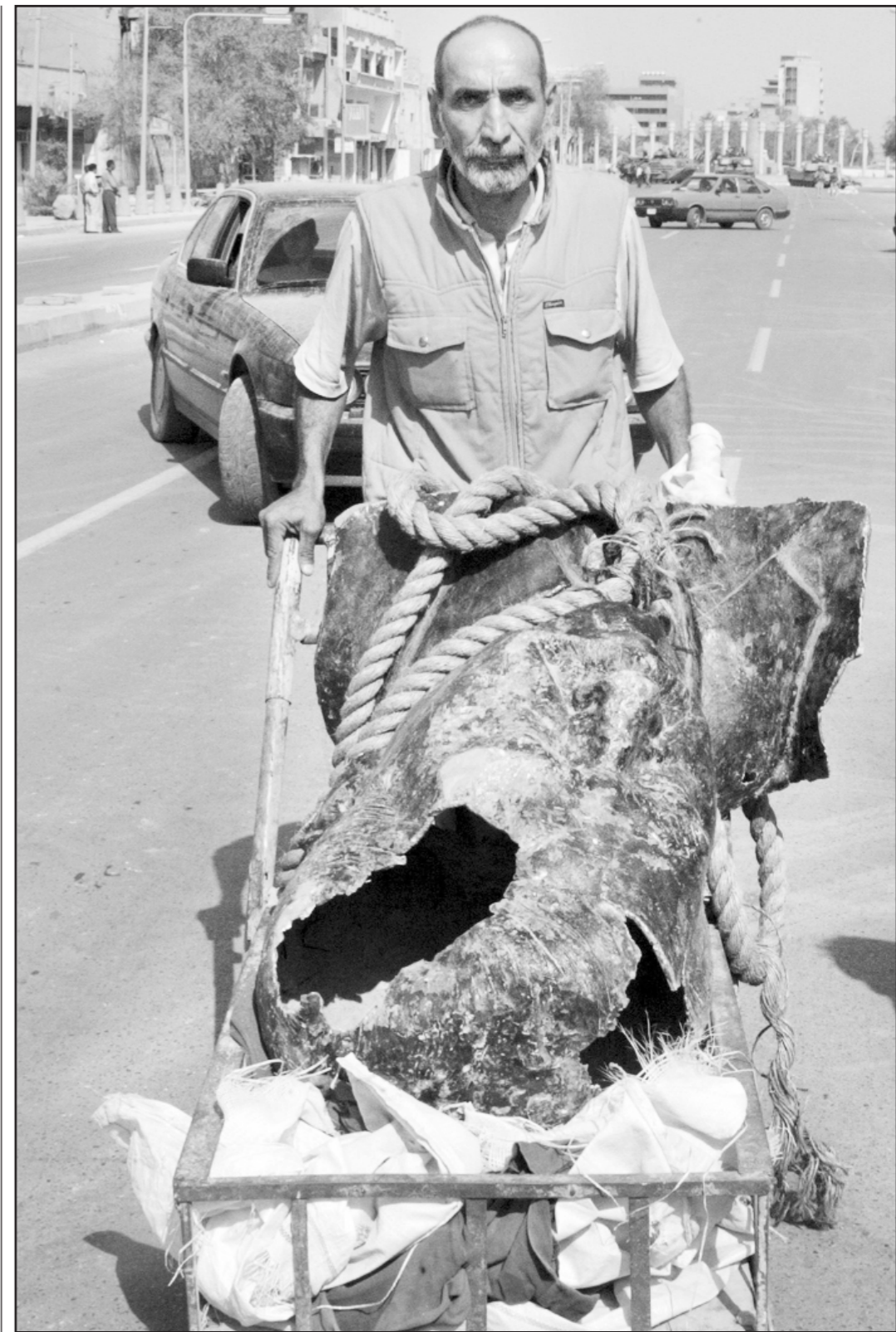
Finally, just as important as decisions about what images to use are questions about what facts and analysis -- for which there may be no dramatic pictures available -- to broadcast to help people understand the pictures. The presence of US troops in the streets of Baghdad means the end of the shooting war is near, for which virtually everyone in Iraq will be grateful. It also means the end of a dozen years of harsh US-led economic sanctions that have impoverished the majority of Iraqis and killed as many as a half million children, according to UN studies, another reason for Iraqi celebration. And no doubt the vast majority of Iraqis are glad to be rid of Hussein, even if they remember that it was US support for Hussein throughout the 1980s that allowed his regime to consolidate power despite a disastrous

invasion of Iran.

But that does not mean all Iraqis will be happy about the ongoing presence of US troops. Perhaps they are aware of how little the US government has cared about democracy or the welfare of Iraqis in the past. Perhaps they watch Afghanistan and see how quickly US policymakers abandoned the commitment to "not walk away" from the suffering of the Afghan people. Perhaps we should be cautious about what we infer from the pictures of celebration that we are seeing; joy over the removal of Hussein does not mean joy over an American occupation.

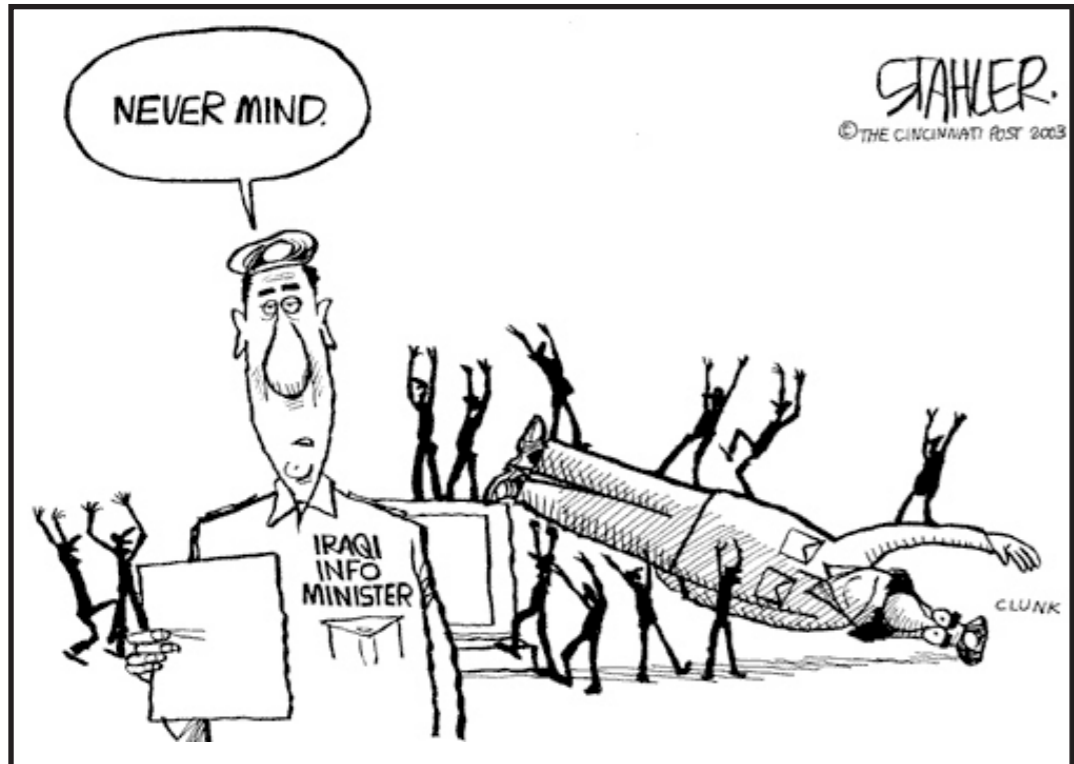
There is no simple way to get dramatic video of these complex political realities. But they remain realities, whether or not US viewers find a full discussion of them on television.

Robert Jensen is a professor of journalism at the University of Texas at Austin.



An Iraqi man pushes a cart loaded with the remains of a sculpted head of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad April 10.

PHOTO: AFP



France, Britain call for humanitarian aid

AFP, Paris

As the regime of Saddam Hussein crumbled in Iraq Wednesday, France and Britain urged quick action to avert a humanitarian crisis, with French President Jacques Chirac calling this an absolute priority.

Chirac telephoned Blair to discuss the situation after President Saddam Hussein's 24-year grip on power in the country drew to an end.

Chirac stressed "that humanitarian aid must be the absolute priority in the current situation," a spokeswoman said. "(He) hopes the necessary security conditions will be established urgently to allow aid to reach the people and the hospitals that need it."

Blair also informed Chirac about his talks with US President George W. Bush in Belfast, spokeswoman Catherine Colonna said.

Asked about Paris' position on the US-led war against Iraq, she said: "France wishes the conflict to end as quickly as possible, as it has consistently said."

The Iraqi regime collapsed on Wednesday as US troops poured into the capital amid jubilant scenes and widespread looting.

Chirac and Blair had also discussed the role of the United Nations, once security had been re-established in the political, administrative and economic reconstruction of Iraq.

Britain and France have been seriously at odds over Iraq, with France, Germany and Russia lined up against the Anglo-American invasion, and Britain Washington's closest ally on the issue.

The exact role of the United Nations in post-war issue threatens to become a new divisive issue.