

### **Imagining the Future in Iraq**

The future of Iraq remains unclear. There are those who have tried to categorize the current conflict as the next Vietnam. Others have dubbed it the next Afghanistan, and others still see a future for Iraq unlike any seen in history. In the midst of all this speculation, one thing is certain: eventually, the US military must withdraw from occupied Iraq. As a matter of history, occupation does not last unless there is a concomitant colonization and/or a significant population influx. Since the latter is absent from the current situation in Iraq, it holds that an eventual American military withdrawal is inevitable.

Interestingly enough, the U.S.'s "divide and conquer" method, i.e. one which attempts to polarize Iraq and hence cause an instability that will require a U.S. presence, seems not to have the intended effect originally postulated by the neo-conservatives who are running the show in Washington. Recent clashes in Fallujah and Najaf have shattered prior claims from the White House that laid blame for Iraqi resistance exclusively on Sunni, pro-Saddam residues within the country. Indeed, the resistance is phenomenon shared by several Iraqis, and Secretary of State Donald Rumsfeld's recent call for ten thousand new troops to enter the country doesn't help the situation. Already, Iraq has 115,000 American troops within its borders (compare that to Afghanistan's 13,500), and clashes between the resistance fighters and American troops are at a high.

Despite claims that the White House publicizes regarding its intention to subvert terrorism, the increasing military presence in Iraq is the strongest catalyst for the sort of anti-American political religiosity that might manifest itself in forms of terrorism. I wrote my piece with the following irony in mind: while those like Rumsfeld have stated "There will be no theocracy in Iraq," the U.S.'s campaign is encouraging religious fervor, activism, and sedition against the occupying powers. Just as in George Orwell's *1984*, where the government was in the business of tampering with public

records to push their agenda, so too is the current administration sugar-coating the truth with falsehood and deceptively harming the American public by keeping them in the dark. Wouldn't it be ironic though if Iraq managed, as in Iran, to take over the American Embassy and declare the independence of its own theocratic state?

The current situation does after all mirror Iran's prior to the Revolution of 1979 in several ways. The United States's presence was one that encouraged the political repression of those against the established power in Iran and does the same today in Iraq. Further, Shias, who constitute sixty percent of the Iraqi population and almost all of Iran's, tend to gather more than Sunnis in large groups during such mourning holidays as Ashura and Arba'een, and so have a ritual means of gathering en masse. Also, just like the thousands of troops the U.S. has stationed around the country, so too did the Shah employ tens of thousands of SAVAK agents, or secret police, to keep a tight grip on any potential insurrection. Ultimately, the instability of the mass protests frightened the Shah and he fled to Egypt shortly afterwards. In Iraq, escalating American deaths and an unstable situation could convince the American public or Congress to call for a withdrawal of troops from the region. Add to all this the religious importance of cities like Karbala and Najaf, sites famous for their mosques and history. In Karbala, Imam Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, was martyred with his family—an event still preserved in the memories of the Iraqi people and the Muslim world in general.

And so, in the midst of daily clashes in cities like Karbala and Najaf, there is no reason why Iraqis won't be eventually "pushed to the edge" to the point of conducting a hostile takeover of an embassy or other important foreign-run building. Unlike the situation in Afghanistan, where the number of foreign troops drastically declined with the advent of an interim administration, the Pentagon has already declared the intention of keeping over a hundred thousand troops in Iraq until at least late 2005, long after the June 30 handing-over of power. So long as they are in Iraq, the foreign troops will be resisted, and broad-based coalitions like the "Mujahideen" (freedom fighters)

that I came up with will likely form to route the occupying powers. Like Guy Montag's government in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, the US has undertaken a strategy that serves its aims for hegemony at the cost of the lives of hundreds. Air raids, cluster bombs, tank fire—all are used if necessary to serve the interests of an oligarchy that is far removed from the public and acting foolishly on our behalf. Toward the end of the novel, Montag manages to escape his city as his country's belligerent policy causes a nuclear war. Perhaps even that would be better than what is going on now; as I see things, oppression is far worse than murder, and the oppression undertaken by the US against innocent Iraqis has violated all codes of justice and reason.

In the wake of such an event as the one my article describes, I imagine that the U.S. would be quick to show its political dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in Iraq. For this reason I had President Kerry ban all imports from and exports to Iraq, echoing the bans Jimmy Carter imposed during the similar Iran hostage crisis. But in Tehran, seventy embassy workers were taken hostage, whereas the American Embassy in Baghdad, the largest in the world, will employ 3,000 people.

And would it be surprising that the call of the masses would be for theocracy? After the rule of Saddam and a mostly (though not entirely) secular interim administration, it seems as though the religious establishment were the only one representing the real concerns of Iraqis. Further, one can imagine a unified front incorporating both religious factions. In Afghanistan, the Pashtun/Tajik issue, though present, was not as significant a deterrent to the stability of the country as the U.S. portrayed it to be. After all the misery the Afghans have experienced, the general feeling was one of being tired of inner conflict and one of resignation to the cooperation between both groups, between which the division wasn't as stark as the U.S. and American media outlets made it seem. In Iraq, especially one united in its collective resentment of and resistance to the occupying powers, I predict the same attitude and willingness to incorporate clergy from both schools of thought into a resultant theocratic power structure. In Ursula Le Guin's *The Word for World is Forest*, the Athsheans come to expel

their occupiers with all their might and main because of their moral understanding of justice. So too, I feel, will Iraqis do the same based on their own moral convictions.

In *The Word for World is Forest*, the occupied Athsheans were driven to the point of harming their occupiers for the sake of their own independence. Like the Athsheans, the Iraqis are being pushed to new levels of animosity against the occupying coalition forces, and the American public must be wary of the potential risks that come with their presence in the region. Aggressive action could spell for us an economic downturn, loss of life, and diplomatic crisis if things are permitted to go out of hand.

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