

**B440. "A Sociologist's Iraqi Exit Strategy" The Christian Science Monitor
(November 18, 2003) p. 9.**

The US's Iraq problem needs to be addressed by fewer generals and more sociologists, whose vocation it is to understand how societies function and the extent to which they can be restructured. I happen to be one, but this isn't an application for a job. Rather, it's a plea for a realistic approach to social engineering.

The neo-Wilsonian plan to turn Iraq into a "shining, prosperous democracy" - "a model that will change the whole Middle East" - and then bring our troops home fails the social-science test. Practically all attempts to do so in countries less prepared than Germany and Japan have failed. Among the dud democracies are countries as different as Haiti and Cambodia, Nicaragua and South Vietnam.

The most relevant attribute of Iraq is that its citizens are very patriotic. During the British mandate of 1920 to 1932, Iraqis caused tens of thousands of casualties before the British quit.

Today, practically all Iraqis, regardless of their background - from religious fundamentalists to abject secularists - tell anyone who asks them that they want the US to get lost.

Aside from such simplistic Madison Avenue PR as TV ads about how great the lives of American Muslims are, the coalition forces are trying to win the hearts and minds of Iraqis by actually "reconstructing" the country. This includes fixing thousands of school buildings, clinics, bridges, power plants, oil facilities, and much else that was allowed to deteriorate during the Hussein regime.

Fixing the polity entails training cops, professionalizing the civil service, educating judges, and ensuring the freedom of the press, among other tasks.

The cost of this hyper-ambitious program is skyrocketing - not only because of its scope but also because of a combination of local graft and profiteering by US corporations. Thus, the US government is picking up the tab for garbage trucks at \$ 50,000 a piece, prisons at \$ 50,000 per bed, and business training for Iraqi entrepreneurs at \$ 10,000 monthly per student.

Most important, far from satisfying Iraqis, the "reconstruction" is jacking up their expectations. They complain bitterly about the lack of jobs, traffic jams, and poor services. SOC 101 tells us that the more they will be given, the more they will demand from Uncle Sam's seemingly bottomless pockets, and the more resentful they'll grow for not getting all they think they are entitled to get.

SOC 102 teaches that the first phase of democracy, which typically lasts decades, brings an explosion of antisocial behavior. Violent crime, white-collar crime, and rape are all on the rise in Iraq, and likely to be followed by the spread of HIV, the breakup of families, child neglect, and an increase in drug and alcohol abuse.

We tend to turn a blind eye toward these human and social costs of democratization, which are particularly high in countries that previously have been tyrannies, such as Russia and East Germany in which communism followed the Nazis. The Iraqis - reminded daily by mullahs that these malaises are Western imports - are scandalized. They can't wait to find their own Vladimir Putin to restore at least a modicum of social order.

In short, to wait to exit until Iraq's economic and political development is advanced is an exercise in futility, especially as there is no reason to believe that the American public is willing to put up with the costs of a long occupation.

The extreme opposite exit strategy, in the neo-Jacksonian mold - to declare victory and go home - is more realistic, but not by much. Officials in Washington debate whether they should first conduct an election and then turn over the keys to the elected government, or whether also to insist that a constitution be drafted and endorsed, and then bail out.

But sociology shows that such political maneuvers won't buy social order. Joseph Nye, dean of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, suggested recently that the Bush administration may call an election next July and bring the troops home, hoping to "just make sure it doesn't collapse before the end of November." It may indeed last that long, but not much longer; civil war among ethnic groups is very likely to follow. Nor will this strategy prevent a new Iraq from restoring a program to build weapons of mass destruction (WMD). And such a retreat - akin to that of the Israelis from southern Lebanon - will merely encourage terrorism in every place US forces are present.

All this favors a minimalist agenda. The US should leave further economic and political development to an elected Iraqi government, which will be awarded some financial and technical aid.

However, before the US turns over the reins to such a government, it ought to demand to be allowed to keep three Guantanamo-like bases in the country; one in the Kurdish parts of the country near Iran and one next to Basra with access to a port; and a major airfield in the largely unsettled parts of northwestern Iraq. These well-fortified bases would be relatively terrorist-proof. They'd allow inspections to be backed up by force if the new government appeared to be trying to develop WMD, and they could be drawn upon to pacify the country if a civil war were to break out. And these bases would help project US power in the area, serving as a standing warning to neighboring terrorist-harboring Iran and Syria.

That is, the US could get out of the futile social-engineering business, but maintain power and credibility as it disengages.

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