

B458. "A 'Sovereign' Iraq? Don't You Believe It" Los Angeles Times (June 23, 2004), p. A15.

Here we go again. The United States is about to fall prey to its own propaganda.

President Bush has repeatedly said we will grant "full and complete sovereignty" to Iraq on June 30. We've said we'll turn over Saddam Hussein for trial and punishment and that the occupation will finally be replaced by Iraqi self-rule. But these grand promises are as unbelievable as they are unattainable.

Already we've begun to qualify some of them: The Iraqis will take "legal" custody of Hussein, it turns out, but the U.S. will continue to hold him physically.

Now imagine what could happen next. Suppose that Iraqi judges and jurors acquit Hussein. Would he be released? Would he be allowed to preside over the re-erection of his statue in Firdos Square? Or to restore his regime?

Of course not, you say, the U.S. will never let that happen. And right you are. Just as we promised that a war in Iraq would result in a secure and democratic Middle East, we are now making a promise of full sovereignty that we are neither willing nor able to make come true.

One reason our words have all the value of a three-dinar bill is that no nation ever had "full" and "complete" sovereignty -- although quite a few have come closer than Iraq will starting June 30. Stanford professor Stephen Krasner (who, by the way, served in the Bush National Security Council until 2002) wrote the definitive book on the subject, "Sovereignty." He refers to the whole notion of "supreme and independent political authority" (in Webster's definition) as "organized hypocrisy." Why? Because nations often interfere in the internal affairs of other nations, belying the notion of absolute control by a ruler within a territory.

For instance, in just the last few years, one power or another, alone or in combination, marched into Afghanistan, Haiti, Liberia, Congo, Somalia, Sierra Leon, Bosnia, Serbia and Lebanon, among many others, to remove regimes, install new ones or otherwise "keep the peace." It's true that many of these interventions were done with the approval of the United Nations, but that only underscores the point: Nations either yielded some of their sovereignty to the U.N., or the U.N. usurped it (in the right-wing view).

The whole idea behind the International Criminal Court, which the U.S. has not ratified, is that people from Country A can be brought to trial by forces of Country B and judged in Country C. The 25 European Union nations, recognizing that sovereignty is not a yes-or-no proposition, have turned over a fair measure of control of their governance to the European Commission, Parliament and Court. The International Monetary Fund has forced Argentina, Russia, Turkey and Indonesia to change the way they do business by threatening to withdraw vital financial support.

Iraq's only distinction in all this is that the U.S. plans to grant it much less sovereignty than even weak nations have. The U.S. will continue to maintain a major military presence in the country, leaving Iraqis just a "say" in the ways these forces are employed. And the U.S. will continue to be in charge of Iraq's security forces. Moreover, the U.S. has ruled that the interim government will be prevented from enacting new laws or changing any of the legal arrangements put into place by the Coalition Provisional Authority.

Americans who have been controlling Iraqi ministries will become advisors. But who can doubt that they will stay in power for the foreseeable future. They will control the

disbursement of the \$18.6 billion that we will continue to pour into the country and that will constitute a major part of its budget. In other words, any independence on the part of the interim government could come at a very hefty price.

If the Bush administration would openly acknowledge that sovereignty only exists in varying degrees and that in Iraq it must be granted gradually, its actions would seem much less nefarious. We must openly admit that we are going to continue to pay for much of what the Iraqi ministries are going to do and that we will therefore have a major say in the way the funds are spent. We should openly admit that U.S. armed forces will be needed to prevent a civil war and pacify the country and that we will not allow a former Baathist general, or any other Iraqi officer, to command them, though we may take Iraqi military "advice."

As important, we should stop scoffing at the U.N., the International Criminal Court and other international institutions and admit that they should have some jurisdiction over the affairs of nations. Then we could send Hussein to The Hague for trial by the ICC, rather than pretend that we are going to turn him over to a wobbly Iraqi judicial system.

What would it mean to Bush's reelection chances if he took back his "full and complete" rhetoric and replaced it with the truth: a frank admission that we are far from truly handing over power to the Iraqis? I don't know, but I am confident it would make for a sounder and more responsible U.S. foreign policy.