

CARNEGIE COUNCIL COVERS AFTERMATH OF THE IRAQ WAR



While major combat operations in Iraq ended over a year ago, hostilities continue. In the parlance of official

U.S. foreign policy, the worldwide war on terrorism goes on. As of this writing, the 2003 Iraq war is in many ways incomplete, as is lingering conflict in Afghanistan and other far corners not in daily news reports. Questions remain about ends and means, targets and tactics. Gray areas have emerged. Moral principles are being tested.

When confronted with hard moral choices, it is important to clarify the criteria involved in reaching decisions—a process that frees us to think harder, further, and more imaginatively about existing policy as well as to come up with options for more effective choices in future. This essay outlines the criteria for three areas of debate that have emerged in the aftermath of the Iraq war. It presents a synthesis of the ideas discussed on the pages of *Council on Foreign Relations* and other Council publications, in our online forums, and at our events and seminars during the 2003–2004 program year. As a supplement to our *Council on Foreign Relations* newsletter, the publication aims to enhance the Council's mission of providing a wide and diverse range of resources to illuminate the moral dimensions of today's most pressing foreign policy questions.

COVER PHOTOS

(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP): PAUL BREMER CONFERRING WITH LOCAL LEADER; MUSEUM GLORIFYING SADDAM HUSSEIN; UN BAGHDAD HEADQUARTERS AFTER THE BOMBING; VOTING AT A PROVINCIAL ELECTION.

SHALL WE CALL IT EMPIRE?

The American willingness to act with such alacrity and self-assurance in Afghanistan and Iraq drives home the point of the nation's unrivaled position in the world. As Carnegie Council President Joel Rosenthal wrote in *Council on Foreign Relations* a year ago, "The projection of American power inspires the great debate of our time. Is the United States a twenty-first century empire, and if so, what kind?"

Theories about America's burgeoning imperial status have been circulating, in one form or another, for the past thirty years. But in Rosenthal's view, the empire question today carries even greater moral urgency than previously. The United States, he pointed out, has gone from effecting quick, lethal regime change in Afghanistan and Iraq to assuming responsibility for nation building. American political and economic muscle has created and main-

tained an integrated world economy and the institutions that support it. America's soft power—its culture and values—continue to radiate outward through its strengths in popular culture, higher education, and technological innovation. Where some see a benevolent hegemon spreading democracy and security, others see a hyperpower in need of constraint.

Empire has also been a frequent theme at the Council's public speakers series of the past year. At a Merrill House Program in late April, historian Niall Ferguson said that the American people were in "imperial denial." Preferring the image of liberator to that of conqueror—"We don't do empire," as Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld famously said—America has yet to face up to being the most powerful country the world has ever seen. In Ferguson's view, it would do well to shoulder its imperial burden in trying to emulate the model developed by Britain 100 years ago, which, among other things, demonstrated the wisdom of remaining in countries for long enough to build civil institutions such as courts and schools.

But while Ferguson would like to see America improve its imperial performance, other, more skeptical critics think it is performing only too well. One such skeptic is political theorist Benjamin Barber, who told a Merrill House audience last October that the more ethical course for the United States would entail curbing its militaristic impulses and working for "global comity within the framework of universal rights and law, conferred by multilateral political, economic, and cultural cooperation."

Likewise, the contributors to a special section on empire in the Fall 2003 *Ethics & International Affairs* maintained that the United States has more than succeeded in harnessing the rest of the world through "network power" and expanding markets. The development economist Robert Wade, for instance, argued that the United States had arranged the world economy in such a way that it can finance a military many times bigger than anyone else's without having to cut consumption; it also has greater freedom to run big deficits than other debtors have. In the view of Wade and other critics, the crucial question then becomes: are there feasible alternatives to American empire that would help to shore up a more just world order?

However one approaches the empire question, there can be little doubt that it needs to be approached. As Jedediah Purdy put it in his book *Being America*, "There is no need to admire or accept this characterization of American power, but there is no escaping the need to understand it. The idea of American empire is part of the world's landscape, as familiar elsewhere as it is alien to Americans."



CAN DEMOCRACY BE EXPORTED?

In a speech given at the end of last year to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy, President Bush asserted, “The establishment of a free Iraq at the heart of the Middle East will be a watershed event in the global democratic revolution.”

In turning the promotion of democracy into a centerpiece of his foreign policy agenda, the president has opened up a critical area of debate: can direct conquest and occupation pave the way for democracy? Iraq’s prospects for a democratic future were hotly contested inside Merrill House during the past program year. While few questioned the worthiness of the president’s policy as an abstract ideal, many saw it as unconscionably risky to attempt to impose democracy on a country as fractious and brutalized as Iraq. As Merrill House speaker Benjamin Barber put it: “How do you create democracy in regimes that have only known tyranny, theocracy, dictatorship, or even totalitarianism? Our record here is not great.”

In a CarnegieCouncil.org forum on Iraq, independent journalist Micah Garen said that the United States had lessened its chances for a successful democratic transition through an unrealistic time frame and lack of preparation. “It is a ‘shock treatment’ approach that is not supported by enough troops or any real plan.”

Democracy specialist Larry Diamond delivered much the same verdict when visiting the Council in late February after having spent time in Iraq consulting for the occupation authorities. While agreeing with President Bush that it is important “to build a world order in which the momentum is for freedom, human rights, the rule of law, open societies, and open borders,” Diamond stressed that it takes time to build the partnerships to help generate this momentum.

In the present circumstances, it is just about possible Iraq could gradually move toward democracy, Diamond said; but “the task is huge and the odds are long against it.” He advised “a frank recognition of the obstacles and dangers, and a sober reflection on the lessons of post-conflict reconstruction.”

Other commentators were even less sanguine than Diamond. As Carnegie Council senior associate Andrew Kuper wrote in *Worldview*, the historical precedents of Germany and Japan suggest that democracy cannot be successfully imposed on another nation

unless enemy forces have been completely defeated, extensive groundwork has been laid, and the occupying power has an assured departure. “None of these conditions is in place in Iraq, which does not bode well for the Bush administration’s dream of democracy,” Kuper said, noting that softer strategies, such as strengthening electoral commissions and voter education, might yield better results.



According to Barber, the Bush administration assumed that democracy in Iraq could begin by developing free markets. However, history has proved that “capitalism needs democracy more than the other way around; thus the notion that the path to democratization lies directly through marketization is a terrible mistake,” Barber said.

Likewise, at a Council panel discussion of multilateral democracy promotion strategies held at the end of last year, participants, who included Joseph Stiglitz and Adam Przeworski, said that market reforms do not encourage democratization in the absence of political reforms. Without an accountable political system, market reforms tend to result in crony capitalism, vast inequalities, and corrupted markets—all of which are bad for democracy.

Perhaps the ongoing difficulties in Iraq attest to what international political economist Francis Fukuyama describes as a dearth of knowledge about the concrete measures that can be taken to assist failed or weak states. “We know less than we think we know about building political institutions, designing constitutions, and bolstering civil society,” he told a Merrill House audience in May, adding that in Iraq’s case, it might make sense to put money into building political parties, which the nation now desperately lacks.

THE FUTURE OF THE PAST: CAN HISTORY PROMOTE PEACE?

Coming to terms with Iraq’s recent difficult past—and taking steps to preserve its ancient past—should be high on the list of tasks for the American-led reconstruction, according to several participants in Council publications and events.

While consensus was quickly reached on the need to identify and arrest senior figures responsible for the political crimes of Saddam’s regime and ban their supporters from post-war governance, there is considerably less agreement on the strategies that should be pursued

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Political science professor Wilson Carey McWilliams served as an associate editor of the Carnegie Council’s Worldview magazine for ten years. The following is from a column he wrote on President Reagan’s democracy promotion strategy:

The fact that the United States is a democratic regime does not qualify the Americans to teach democracy. The argument is at least as old as Plato’s *Apology*: The citizens of a democracy—even its public-spirited citizens—do not necessarily understand what is required to found or maintain a democratic political society. Founders must be bold and creative, new princes in new states; but their inheritors are inclined to take the regime as a given, preferring practice to theory.

To most Americans, democracy means certain institutions, such as the right to vote, “checks and balances,” and the Bill of Rights. Up to a point, such judgments are correct. Democracy needs the strength and force of democratic laws; and over the long haul, institutions can shape the character of a people. Even the best democratic laws, however, depend on opinions and feelings. The first Constitution of the Mexican Republic mirrored that of the United States, but it did not bring democracy to Mexico. Institutions frame a body politic, but they do not give it a soul.

—AUGUST 1984

WORLDVIEW MAGAZINE (1958-1985) IS AVAILABLE AS AN ELECTRONIC ARCHIVE AT WWW.CARNEGIECOUNCIL.ORG/ADVSEARCH.PHP.



in the hopes of achieving reconciliation among the nation's ethnic factions. The \$18.4 billion aid package for Iraqi reconstruction, approved in October of last year, allocated \$1 million for building the Museum of Baathist Crimes—the brainchild of Kanan Makiya, an Iraqi dissident who fled in 1968 and was prominent in calling for the recent American-led invasion. The museum will house a collection of state documents on the tortures and executions ordered during the three decades of the Baathist regime.

Writing in the November/December 2003 <INPPINŪ>, Lili Cole, who directs the Council's program on history and the politics of reconciliation, warned that while Makiya's plans seem commendable, "in a fragmented society like postwar Iraq, deciding on the truth about the old regime will not be easy." She stressed that not everyone in Iraq agrees that all the country's postwar woes are the product of Saddam's tyrannical rule; instead they point to the damage done by thirteen years of economic sanctions. "Nor does it seem likely that Makiya, an exile backed by an occupying power, is the right person to spearhead the nation's truth-seeking effort."

Cole wondered if in the early days of reconstruction, Iraq might in fact be better off focusing on its distant, rather than recent, past. "An effort to restore the looted Iraq National Museum, with its wealth of ancient treasures attesting to the region's glory days, might do more to restore a sense of national pride and belonging than an atrocity museum, with all of its potential to divide rather than unify."

Cole's reference to the glorious past calls to mind the debate that raged in the early days of the American-led invasion, when officials from the museum world and UNESCO, the UN's cultural agency, took the coalition forces to task for failing to protect the treasures housed in the National Museum in Baghdad.

Micah Garen has made several trips to Iraq over the past year and a half to gather evidence for a documentary he is making on the looting of Iraqi antiquities and consequent loss of the nation's cultural heritage. While confirming that fewer items from the

national museum were plundered than initially reported, he told a meeting of the Council's Young Associates that more recently, the shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf has been looted, consisting of "1,000 years of historical documentation and gifts from other countries—everything that's important in Shiite history."

According to Garen, in the "power vacuum created by the war," the area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (sometimes referred to as the "cradle of civilization," with traces of 10,000-year-old human settlements) has attracted large numbers of local and professional looters, who are working "on an unprecedented scale." The result, Garen said, is "complete disaster." For the past sixteen months, there has been nothing but ad hoc protection of the archeological sites in the south (provided mainly by the Italian national police, who are part of the coalition forces).

Yet another lost (and still to be restored) part of the Iraqi legacy is the habitat of the so-called Marsh Arabs. This tragedy occurred as a result of Saddam Hussein's policy of draining and damming the southern marshlands, thereby depriving its residents of their livelihood and traditional way of life. In an article for the Spring 2004 *Human Rights Dialogue*, Sayyed Nadeem Kazmi and Stuart Leiderman reported that those who are charged with rebuilding Iraq had not yet given priority to the restoration of the region, despite the clear importance of such an initiative for reasons both humanitarian (the majority of Marsh Arabs have been displaced) and ecological (the area once constituted the largest wetlands ecosystem in the Middle East).

Not everyone concurs, however, that the marshlands should be re-flooded. According to the Web site of the AMAR [Assisting Marsh Arabs and Refugees] Foundation, the region is the site of some of the country's richest oil deposits. So would the Marsh Arabs (who are among Iraq's poorest inhabitants) be better off were their homeland transformed into an oil economy and they were given some of the financial benefits?

The Carnegie Council recently launched a new event series, "The Ethics of Preserving Cultural and Natural Legacies," which will include a public roundtable on the Marsh Arabs' plight. <INPPINŪ> looks forward to reporting on these events in the coming year. ■

—<INPPINŪ> Editors



The <INPPINŪ> supplement is published by the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, an independent, nonpartisan nonprofit organization that serves as a premier forum on ethics and international policy for expert and general audiences. To find out more about us, to become a member, or to be placed on our mailing list, go to www.carnegiecouncil.org. Or contact us at:

Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs
170 East 64th St.
New York, NY 10021-7496

tel: 212/838-4120; fax: 212/752-2432
email: info@cceia.org

www.carnegiecouncil.org