

B432. "In and Out." National Review Online (October 3, 2002).

A major reason policymakers and the public are told we should not exorcize Saddam is that after we rid the world of him, we will have to stay in Iraq, at huge costs and risks. Phebe Marr, author of *The Modern History of Iraq*, testified before the Senate that if the U.S. embarks on this project, it needs to be prepared to see it through to an acceptable outcome - including, if necessary, a long-term military and political commitment to ensure a stable and more democratic government.

According to projections made by Col. Scott Feil (Ret.) at congressional hearings, to keep the peace in post-Saddam Iraq we may need 75,000 troops, which amounts to three divisions (the military calls for one division on line, one to train, and one to recuperate). Iraq would engage nine divisions. The tenth is mired in Afghanistan and . . . ten active-duty divisions are all we've got. Ergo, an occupation of Iraq would tie up all of our forces! And the cost, estimated to run to scores of billions, some say, would damage our economy, or at least deepen the deficit. At the same hearings, Morton Halperin of the Council on Foreign Affairs, wondered if the administration proposes paying for the operation by running ever-larger deficits, by increasing taxes, or by reducing domestic spending. He added that one of the costs to consider with regard to the operation is that the price of oil is likely to go up and that this may well trigger another recession in the U.S. Given a closer look, it is hard to follow why we should remain in that godforsaken country one day after we rid the world of Saddam and destroy his weapons of mass destruction, the facilities that make them, and his means of delivery.

Ethically, we are liberating the people of Iraq, whose oppression is different in character, but not much less severe, than that of the Afghan people under the Taliban. Saddam's regime is a secular one, but not less tyrannical. People are regularly tortured and executed; the secret police is so omnipresent that whatever opposition there is dares not speak its name. That he unleashed chemical weapons on his own citizens says it all. Removing this maniacal despot and breaking the back of his Republican Guard and the secret police would be a great gift to the people of Iraq, a major collateral gain resulting from our drive to protect Iraq's neighbors and ourselves, but not a source of some kind of new obligation to them.

It is up to the people of Iraq to work out what kind of regime they wish to have after they are freed from Saddam's peculiar brand of tyrannical socialism. For once, Secretary Powell got it right when he called on the Iraqi opposition - not on our troops or aid workers - to help the Iraqi people come up with a representative form of government that will reflect the values of the 21st-century world.

Thomas Friedman, the New York Times foreign-policy guru, recently argued that we should act in line with the signs displayed in pottery stores: If you broke it, you own it - make whole the countries in which we intervene with military force. A caller to NPR pointed out that there are no such signs in pottery stores. Regardless, our military action will set the conditions that will provide the Iraqi people the opportunity to recover from the mess Saddam made out of their country. But we should hardly act as if we own it nor allow anyone to make us feel guilty if we do not act as if we do.

We are warned that what the Iraqi people will next choose as their government may not be quite the one that would meet our standards; that no democracy will follow; even that a new

military dictator may arise. Marr argues that if Iraq were left to its own devices after a military operation, nothing much would change and the result would be highly destabilizing. All this may be true, but even our continuing presence in Iraq would not ensure success. None of the countries with similar cultural, social, and religious backgrounds have developed or maintained democratic governments. (Several of them hold elections, but typically there is one candidate and one party and they get 97 percent of the vote, as President Bashar al-Assad in Syria does. They have very little of what a genuine democracy takes: a free press, competing parties, civic education, and pluralism.)

If the Iraqi people are not ready to take to the streets in defense of their newly won freedoms (as the people of Russia and the Philippines did), and a new Saddam-like ruler dominates them, this still does not mean that we are back at the starting gate. First of all, such a new dictator will have learned that it is not conducive to his health and that of his regime to ignore U.N. (and our) demands not to develop weapons of mass destruction, to oppose meaningful inspections, and to support terrorists (whether or not they are card-carrying members of al Qaeda).

Second, if a future head of Iraq is so dense that he cannot learn from the immediate past and chooses to embark on the same course that led Saddam to his downfall, and our various allies again unwisely sell him what he needs to proceed, it still would take him a decade or longer to reach the same level of armament Iraq now commands. I will even grant that in the worst-case scenario, at some point in the future, the international community, led by us, may need to clean up the mess one more time. Still, it readily beats us becoming mired in Iraq for years to come. President Bush should read up on what Candidate Bush said about nation building. It is a very thankless and dubious task. See Afghanistan, see Haiti. One hopes that when Condoleezza Rice told the Financial Times that the U.S. was completely devoted to the reconstruction of Iraq as a unified, democratic country, she did not mean that these were burdens we had to carry, but was mainly seeking to mollify our critics.

James P. Rubin, an assistant secretary of state in the Clinton administration, really lost it when he argued that: "It remains crucial that the administration convince the Iraqi people and the world that America is prepared to help Iraq prosper far beyond any change in regime. That means identifying the administrative arrangements and principles we would like to see govern the country, promising substantial peacekeeping forces for many years if necessary, furnishing technical assistance to the new government and its security forces, and starting a reconstruction fund to rebuild a country debilitated by war and economic sanctions." He did not bother to explain why we owe all this to an oil-rich country that never hesitated to hold us over a barrel when it could jack up oil prices.

We are told that it worked in Japan and Germany and that what countries like Iraq need is a Marshall Plan. But it doesn't take a degree in sociology to recognize how different these countries were from the likes of Iraq. These were highly industrialized societies before the war, with a highly educated population, including many who had technical expertise; executives trained and experienced in running large-scale industries; a free market; a work and saving ethos; &c. While these countries merely had to be helped onto their own feet (which still took many years and billions of dollars), Iraq would first have to grow such feet.

Others argue that if we do not stay, Iraq may fall apart due to internal conflicts among its various ethnic groups. Former secretary of state Caspar Weinberger argues that the U.S. needs to stay in Iraq because the centrifugal forces there are substantial and that leaving after Saddam is removed might result in a situation which could unravel (the Kurds, for

example, might try to declare independence). I do not see why any of this should lead us to keep one American, or spend one dollar, to keep Iraq together.

If the Shiites, who have long been oppressed in Iraq, want to fight the Sunni over their rights or create a separate state, why should we lose sleep over it? After all, Iraq is an artificial creation imposed on the people of the region by foreign powers. If the people of this area now seek self-determination along different lines than were drawn some generations ago, why should we stand in their way? We have nothing to fear if two or three countries will be formed in the area now called Iraq. If, in the process, there is some fighting among these groups, we surely would not welcome it; we regret bloodshed, but it would hardly be the first war of ethnic liberation in which we did not intervene.

It may seem that the situation is different with regard to the Kurds. We badly need Turkey to support our intervention in Iraq, and they will, on the condition that we not allow the Kurds in the regions of Iraq bordering Turkey to form an independent state after the fall of Saddam. However, one hopes that we can make the Turks see that if the Iraqi Kurds form a state, it is at least as likely to diminish the Turkish Kurds' call for independence as it is to embolden it. After all, we expect the Palestinians and Israelis to settle for half a loaf even though many on both sides of the green line aspire to have it all. In any event, we need to remind Turkey that a Kurdish state on their border poses no military threat to them, a major NATO power, and that they will be able to deal with Kurds on their side of the border as they now do. (Although one hopes they will accord them more regional autonomy.)

Since the president's powerful speech to the U.N., several Democrats have been criticizing him for seeking regime change in Iraq rather than merely insisting, in line with U.N. resolutions, that Saddam allow effective inspections and the elimination of weapons of mass destruction. Well, it's a distinction without a difference. Even if Saddam somehow did truly allow it all, it would be a quite different Saddam and regime - one that could no longer threaten its neighbors, the oil fields, and ultimately us. Anyhow, we shall soon find out if such a changed Saddam is merely a piper's dream or if we have no choice but to go in there and change the regime, defang Iraq, and rush home.

Rep. Ike Skelton (D., Mo.) is one of those who lose sleep over the fact that undoing Saddam will destabilize the region. Having just spent ten days as the guest of the reformers in Iran, I suggest that there is strong reason to believe that both Iran and Syria will be much less belligerent and less supportive of terrorists once they actually see the fate of those who, as the president put it, are against us. The culture of the Middle East is very respectful of those who carry a big stick. The fact that the U.S. is not merely willing to condemn evil but also exorcize it will get their close attention. The same holds for the extremist Palestinian groups; without Saddam's financial and moral support, they are more likely to be willing to settle. And of course Saudi Arabia, whatever it says now, will be more, not less secure.

In short, the post-Saddam era, as far as our presence is concerned, should be limited to removing the weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. Maybe, if the new regime offers us some bases, we may stay there on our way to deal with other evildoers in the region. But that is as far as we need to get involved.