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Iraq Has Lived up to its Arabic Definition:
"Well-Rooted Nation"

Machiavelli might very well have been describing the United States' position following its military victory in Iraq when he said, "There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things." For, as the U.S. soon discovered in 2003, an easily attained military victory does not necessarily usher in a paragon of a peaceful new nation. No matter how admirable the goal, the United States underestimated the difficulty of installing democracy in Iraq. Bent more on destroying the "imminent danger" to the *American* people, the U.S. made the safety of the *Iraqi* people its primary policy only after the war. But under the watchful eye of the rest of the world which expected U.S. greed to over-run humanitarian goals, America declared that its aims were for the benefit of the *world's* people. Many critics had little faith in the American ability to put aside selfish reasons to engage in war in an effort to liberate the Iraqi citizens from a tyrannical Ba'athist regime and eventually replace that regime with a democratic form of government that would be a shining example for other terror-riddled Arabic nations. But the George W. Bush administration and the Tony Blair parliament had begun a campaign in which a successful outcome was vital if their nations cared to be respected in the international arena in the future.

However, even as reform-minded Iraqis pledged their support in transforming Iraq into a democratic polity, the mass population was more apprehensive. Gandhi once said that, "The spirit of democracy cannot be superimposed from the outside. It must come from within." Iraqis, having been oppressed for so many years, hungered for freedoms yet grumbled that these

freedoms came from an American plate. Democracy is a western ideology, and in the years following the U.S. occupation in Iraq the Arab world clung tightly to its eastern culture, afraid that the strong-handed Americans would not only try to reform their political systems, but also attempt to Americanize them in the process (not to mention, steal their oil). The Iraqi Shi'ite population was especially concerned after feeling that they had been abandoned by the U.S. in 1991; though Shi'ites constitute a majority in Iraq, the Arab world is predominantly Sunni – a fact that led Iraqi Shi'ites to worry about their image in the eyes of Arab nations if they cooperated with Americans. Finally, whatever their cultural heritage, Iraqi nationalists hated the idea of an Iraqi government installed by the United States to further America's interests.

Simply having these fears made Iraqis leery of following any plan outlined by the United States. Militant groups were especially fearful and anxious to retain or revamp their religious, tribal, or economic power and influence without U.S. interference. They began to organize in the post-war Iraq resulting in not only sporadic, lethal raids on the American troops but also American worries that democracy would not take root. As long as the U.S. had a strong voice in anything Iraqi, the Iraqis, as well as the surrounding Arab nations, were not eager to listen. The Arabic people are very protective of their cultural and historical backgrounds and have, on the whole, not welcomed Western beliefs. Further alienation of the Arab peoples was certainly not an aim of U.S. and British forces. Luckily, though there have been isolated instances of conflict and many brave troops continued to lose their lives after the official battle ended, no grave terrorist acts have manifested recently.

It would have been premature for the U.S. and British troops to withdraw immediately upon victory and prior to establishing a new Iraqi democracy; however, few were aware of the difficulty of such a task. While troops

attempted to protect the peace in post-war Iraq, the Iraqis increasingly considered them hostile and grew angry at the occupying authority that had promised them so much and, instead, delivered them sporadic power outages, contaminated water, little food, and long lines for gasoline in their oil-soaked nation. It did not matter that these were only the short-term downfalls of military intervention that would give way to long-term solutions in time. The Iraqis yearned for results, some even saying, "Alas for Saddam's days. We had food and security. Now we have nothing but the freedom to express ourselves." The country that had been so joyous at the defeat of Saddam Hussein was not at the same time thrilled at the introduction of the ones who had orchestrated that defeat. Although President Bush said in February, 2003, "America's interests in security, and America's belief in liberty, both lead in the same direction: to a free and peaceful Iraq," the Bush administration also had to confront the idea that actually being a dominant presence in Iraq to activate this free and peaceful outcome might not be the way to achieve ultimate success in both Iraq and the region at large.

At the same time, Americans were growing restless at home. They had elected a president who had been unconcerned with foreign affairs and focused instead on domestic policy but had become embroiled in Middle Eastern nations of which most Americans had no knowledge. In the post-September 11th world, military intervention to protect themselves was understandable and even desirable for many Americans. However, as the budget deficit grew to its largest in history and as President Bush committed himself to helping war-torn and AIDS-suffering African nations while at the same time attempting to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, everyday Americans began to forget about Iraq just as quickly as they forgot about Afghanistan. Continuing to spend money and

committing troops to an area that voters considered already resolved is political suicide – and 2004 was an election year.

It was a paradox that the Bush administration solved by quickly training an Iraqi police force, installing a provisional Iraqi government committed to carrying out democratic policy, granting contracts to American and European corporations to stimulate the Iraqi economy while introducing a new Iraqi currency, and restarting the flow of oil – always with one U.S. eye watching to make sure another Saddam Hussein was not germinating.

Though the immediate aftermath of war was chaotic and violent and obviously not the desirable outcome for a mission promoting democracy and peace, the conflict was ultimately worth it.

The war against the tyrannical regime was a success in that it somewhat easily ousted Saddam and his Ba'athist party cronies from power. A courageous display of American and British military might rescued the Iraqi people from the grip of a monstrous political power that not only readily employed torture and violence whenever it wished, but also, through its greed and mismanagement, ruined the once prosperous country. As Saddam continued to build lavish palaces – at least one of which he never even visited, yet still commanded a chef to cook three meals a day in case he decided to stop by – he consciously let his country fall from having a per-capita GDP of more than \$12,000 in 1979, ahead of Spain and Hong Kong, to one of less than \$3,000 in 2003 with a per-capita income of only \$700, making it one of the poorest nations on earth outside of Africa. But such egregious mismanagement is now mere memory because whomever military missions did not eradicate, the occupational authority did by purging the administrative facilities of all of the Ba'athist criminals. Because many valuable members of Iraqi society – and in fact, millions of Iraqis – had joined the party in order to keep their jobs or even to sustain their lives, it was an uphill

climb for the occupational authority to purge only those Ba'athists that had actually committed atrocities and were still loyal to Hussein. However, under the direction of Paul L. Bremer, the authority succeeded in ousting those who deserved it while letting those who contained indispensable expertise retain their jobs to more easily facilitate the reconstruction.

Saddam Hussein was gone; the Ba'ath Party lost most of its members and all of its credibility; and nothing in the past ten years has come close to inflicting the physical and emotional devastation suffered by the Iraqi people under Saddam's regime. Iraq is truly a freer and more peaceful nation. In this vein, war, though not a desirable weapon to wield, was the correct answer and the U.S.-led invasion, from a retrospective view, was justified.

Taking Saddam out of the Iraqi picture was not the only reason to wage war in 2003. As British Prime Minister Tony Blair told both Houses of Congress in July, 2003, "Finishing the fighting is not finishing the job. We promised Iraq a democratic government. We will deliver it."

For a region that has been inhabited for more than 6,000 years, ten years is hardly a substantial period of time to expect significant change. However with only limited experience with democracy in those 6,000 years, and a full-blown attempt at it for the last ten, some change is evident. To justify embarking on such a costly mission, one underlying motive for bringing democracy to Iraq was to produce an American-friendly nation that would cooperate with the American government and international councils such as the United Nations. However, in the interest of the future of Iraq and the Middle Eastern region as a whole, the fact that Iraq has not simply become a puppet of the U.S. and Great Britain has been the greatest outcome. If a puppet government had been installed instead of the parliamentary system in place, Iraq would not only have lost credibility with its surrounding nations but would also be a major threat to

its own future stability stemming from the Iraqi people's anger at their subjugated position.

Iraqi democracy is not American democracy. Fortunately, this does not matter as it is still democracy and, in fact, is even preferable to an American carbon-copy because it has meant that the Iraqis are happier with their personalized style of democracy – a style that respects Islam whilst at the same time granting the freedoms that define democracy. Being satisfied with their government has meant that Iraqi citizens choose more readily to participate in it while it offers credibility to the surrounding, observant Arab nations. The U.S. and Great Britain ensured that a constitutional democracy developed in Iraq and were practical enough to back away and let the Iraqis follow whichever political directions they chose for themselves. The result has been a government committed to Islam that is neither militant nor violent in its commitment as it has also undertaken to provide freedoms of religion, speech, the press and others that had so long been absent from their ravaged nation.

This is not the first time the U.S. has attempted to rebuild a nation following military involvement, and the occupying authority in Iraq made history its guide. Just as the U.S. had successfully installed democracy in both Grenada and Panama, it followed the same pattern of political transition by quickly transferring power to the legitimately elected Iraqi leaders. Over time, a suitable electoral system has been inaugurated that adds to the credibility of the founding democracy. At the same time, this system has yet to become a fully functional exemplar of voting procedures and widespread incorporation of the population. Yet a slow-building democracy is nonetheless a democracy; and as the future still looks hopeful, success is a more and more appropriate word.

Tyrants are extremely protective of their power, and they regard stepping down as total defeat. Thus, they refuse to consider stepping down and,

unfortunately, toppling one tyrant does not produce a domino effect on nearby tyrannical regimes. Although the U.S., and for that matter the world, had hoped that Iraq's neighbors would follow suit in a hasty renunciation of what the West considered corrupt politics, no giant leap has yet been taken in the region. Opportunely, with President Bush eventually able to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict during his second term in office, the Arab nations were more disposed to make changes. That, along with the U.S.-led victory in Iraq, did induce them to modify some of their policies without complete concessions of power.

Progress toward reform has been especially evident in the Gulf countries – countries with smaller populations and younger leaders – where competitive elections have taken place and certain freedoms have been more liberally granted. Take Kuwait for example. Because Shi'ite radicalism was subdued in Iraq, the moderate Kuwaiti Shi'ites have sustained good relations with the Kuwaiti royal family, allowing the authority of the Kuwaiti parliament to increase. Also, in Bahrain, where the Shi'ite majority is ruled by a Sunni monarchy, the federalist policy in Iraq has helped the Bahraini Shi'ites work with the Sunnis toward liberalization goals.

Such changes are promising, however the larger Arab nations have seen less progress in the ten years since the end of the Iraqi war. President Bashar Al-Asad of Syria has tried to stimulate civil society but has found this difficult to accomplish without private infrastructure and with a state-run economy. Saudi Arabia, a terrorist-infused country, chose to clamp down on reform to guarantee stability instead of eradicating the terrorist groups. Such action is worrisome to say the least. The Wahhabis are still a presence in Saudi Arabia though they have been less vocal in recent years. The United States knew that it could not invade the large and populous Iran though they held weapons of mass destruction and

threatened the safety of the surrounding area. However, the U.S. has used diplomatic maneuvering to try to ensure that Iran's leaders will not use their weapons. At the same time, the U.S. has encouraged the many young Iranian reformists to establish a political base in the country. Still, events have moved slowly in Iran and little has yet been accomplished. Finally, Egypt, fearful of losing its position if the smaller nations began to welcome the West, has instituted economic reform yet simultaneously has asserted the state's control over politics.

The United States must be careful that it does not become too confident in the progress and liberalization of the region, for widespread anti-Americanism is still a staple of the Arab nations and violence has certainly been no stranger to the area. But, with the installation of an Iraqi federalist, democratic, and Islamic government coupled with the settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the surrounding Arab nations have at least taken steps in the right direction.

A stable political environment helps to foster a stable economy and although a decade is not sufficient time to build long-term economic confidence, the results so far have been promising in Iraq. The Iraqi economy has steadily been rebuilding for years. Following the war and coinciding with the absence of tyranny, U.S. corporations began to invest money in the new nation receptive to reconstruction efforts. In order to revitalize Iraq's economy, the United States adeptly realized that rebuilding the middle class would get the ball rolling. An economically stable middle class would help check the power of militant and vocal religious groups dangerous to a sprouting democracy. However, restoring such a middle class proved difficult when the U.S. attempted to put everything in place and further U.S. and European corporations instead of giving the Iraqis the resources to do it themselves. The United States developers were less interested in sustainable developments than capitalizing on the immediate post-

war situation. As E.M. Forster once said, "Spoon feeding in the long run teaches us nothing but the shape of the spoon." Fortunately, within the last few years, companies installed in Iraq have turned toward sustainability; but the loss of time has meant that a strong middle class has not developed as quickly as was hoped upon deposing Saddam. Also key to economic reconstruction has been increasing trade and foreign investment with nations in the world economy. This has been accomplished through free trade agreements between the U.S., Iraq, and other Middle East countries. A Middle East Free Trade Area is even being negotiated.

And then there is the oil money. When the UN passed resolution 1483, it lifted economic sanctions on Iraq and placed its oil revenues under the occupying authority of the U.S. and Great Britain. The plan was to use the revenues from the second largest oil reserves in the world to pay for the war and the reconstruction, to help with Iraq's debts, and finally to help the Iraqis themselves by providing them with equal shares of the revenues modeled after the Alaska Permanent Fund. The result would be to provide the actual Iraqi citizens with the country's wealth, to encourage the middle class and foster investment, and to ultimately allow the country to regain its pre-Saddam economic position. Unfortunately, that goal has yet to be realized. This is not to say that it will not ultimately be realized as the economy recovers well, and the original plan has not deviated significantly. However, when all of the decrepit oil refineries had to undergo a modernization process that took years to bring the oil barrel rate back up, and as the reconstruction costs soared past the naïve projection levels, there has not been enough time or money to start giving the oil revenues back to the Iraqis themselves. Hopefully, in ten more years, that will be a different story.

Iraq is not without violence and poverty; and without a wide electoral base, it is not a perfect example of democracy. But no nation is. And if you compare the Iraq of 2003 with the Iraq of 2013, the positive results (including the absence of Ba'ath party tyranny) and the steady reconstruction have ultimately outweighed the hazards of war. Undeniably, the future of Iraq holds more trouble and conflict as it continues to transform itself; however we can only hope that the troubles of the future in no way compare to the oppression of the past.

As for the invading authority, it is unquestionable that the United States is the most powerful nation in the world; however, such power does not come without certain consequences. One of these consequences is the expectation of the rest of the world – both those countries that desire help and those that make sure that help is not self-serving to American interests. Historically, the U.S. tended to stay away from the business of other nations and instead focused on itself, but when it decided to promote democracy to the Iraqi citizens, oppressed citizens of other countries expected the same. America may be the most powerful, but it did not get that way by investing all of its time and money in liberating foreign people, and after a short stint as a humanitarian promoter during which time the American economy was not recovering and the budget deficit was the greatest it had ever been, the U.S. decided to play things closer to the vest. Perhaps events in the future will swing things another way, but for now, America is paying attention to America and asserting that it has every right to do so.