

I Was Wrong

A repentant warblogger sheaths his sword.

By Jack Strocchi

HAVE YOU EVER made a universal and eternal fool of yourself? The Internet offers wonderful opportunities to immortalize intellectual folly. My recent chastening experience as a pro-war blogger has made me realize that I am not cut out to offer strategic advice to statesmen. The worrying thing is that this advice applies equally to the current folk who hold those positions.

Before I join the orgy of recriminations at the Bush administration for leading us into the Iraqi flytrap, I must first engage in a bit of self-flagellation. I have been well and truly conned, by my dumb self and devious others, about the second Gulf War's economy of means and attainability of ends. The war was built on a series of falsehoods, propagated by neocon-artists and swallowed by Suckers R Us.

The best lies are laced with a tincture of truth, so I must concede that the war did generate some bright spots. Hussein & Sons were run out of power—almost. It appears that Saddam is still pulling the strings somewhere around the Sunni Triangle. The cities of Basra and Baghdad are enjoying municipal democracy—sort of. The U.S. is not happy with the tendency of Iraqis to elect fundamentalist clerics and is instead handpicking administrators. Iraqi oil fields are being developed for Iraqi civic benefit—but not quite yet. A *Washington Post* headline gloomily proclaimed, "Iraq Is Ill-Equipped to Exploit Huge Oil Reserves."

Figuring out a well-intentioned plan is one thing. Making it work is another,

and judged by this standard, the invasion and occupation of Iraq can now be considered a failure. Witness Jack Straw, Britain's foreign secretary whose pull-no-punches report to Tony Blair concluded: we are at risk of strategic failure in Iraq.

This late-breaking wisdom is a good sign, but I fear the Owl of Minerva has already had its wings clipped.

It is now clear that, far from promoting U.S. strategic objectives, the Bush administration has actually gone backwards on stated war aims.

There was no Islamist problem in Iraq before, but there is one now. Rather than deterring fundamentalist terrorism, occupying another Holy Land has effectively launched a U.S.-sponsored recruiting drive for Islamic terrorists. Elements of the terrorist organization Ansar al-Islam have moved into Baghdad, Islamic jihadists were infiltrating

that disarmament leads to a war." America's postwar woes have strengthened North Korea's bargaining position to the extent that we now have to enlist our old adversary, the People's Republic of China, in an attempt to keep the Axis of Evil from spinning off a wheel.

The postwar period has also failed to create a new "dynamic of peace" in the Middle East, although it has added some exciting new forms of civil instability. Palestinians have not been impressed with U.S.-backed regime changes. The attempt to banish Arafat, their long-time leader, has made them quite cross. They have started their suicide bombings again, and the chief navigator for the road map to peace has quit in disgust.

The U.S. also made a few ... process errors in its preamble to the war. It's hard to fight international terrorism when one treats allies with contempt by launching a pre-emptive war, which sets

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Iraq from Syria, and some of these folks were probably behind the various car bombings that have enlivened urban Iraq over the past few months.

There were no WMD found in Iraq, but WMD proliferation continues apace at the other end of the evil axis. Pyongyang's state-run newspaper pointed out the obvious truth, "The Iraqi war proved

a bad military precedent; lying about WMD, which destroys public trust in a democracy; sidestepping the UN Security Council, which mocks international law; and trashing Old European allies, which disables security alliances. All these things may turn around, or somehow magically fix themselves, although I doubt it.

What cannot be denied about this war is its astronomical cost. I should have known better. I have practiced as an economist, and economists like Professors William Nordhaus and John Quiggin raised the cost alarm before the war. Their mid-range estimate was that the Iraq military and civil enterprise would cost about \$100 billion, with a likely duration of five years. But I cheerfully ignored their dire warnings about the recklessness of buying into a dilapidated piece of political real estate with eyes wide shut.

The penny dropped when the bills started to flow in. Iraq has turned from a renovator's dream into a money pit. The *New York Times* reports that the total costs of the war, occupation, and reconstruction are likely to be nearly \$500 billion. This "news" gave me a bad case of sticker-shock and awe, at both the magnitude of the war's expense and my folly for

supporting it. The author, Donald Hepburn, an adviser to the Middle East Policy Council, takes a certain amount of sadistic relish in itemizing the costly entries. First there was the cost of the war, "the cost of preparation, aid to noncombatant allies, and the invasion itself amounted to \$45 billion." Then there is the occupation, "Assuming a five-year occupation, that's some \$300 billion." Then finally, there is the cost of reconstruction, "the total bill is likely to be at least \$200 billion over a decade." A few hundred billion here, a few hundred billion there, and soon we are talking real money.

I can't say I was not warned. My blog-gurus on both the Left and the Right opposed the war and doubted the sums and schemes of the neocon planners. In the future I will be more cautious before attempting to teach them how to suck intellectual eggs.

I would also like to issue a series of formal apologies to all those adversely affected by my ignorant and arrogant blogs, nagging comments, and unsolicited e-mails. They include my social-democratic alter ego, for ignoring his repeated warnings never to trust crypto-Trotskyists; sundry bloggers, for my excruciatingly long-winded and torturous comments; my few remaining political friends, who have tolerated my behavior with saintly patience; the Internet, for wasting valuable cyberspace. Finally, I owe an apology to the Iraqi people for any inconvenience caused by my urging on of the recent hail of precision-guided, high-explosive ordnance targeted at their land.

There remains the mystery: why did I do it? If I am any guide, I would say that the War Party acted from a mixture of motives and reasons. First, hazy personal psychology: my vindictiveness was directed at a convenient scapegoat for 9/11 and assorted unmoved Leftists. Second, lazy professional pathology: a failure to exercise due diligence in the accounting for likely costs. Third, crazy political ideology: the utopian hope that wholesale violence in the Middle East would somehow make Arabic people want to copy our way of life and allow the United States triumphantly to make the world over.

Whatever the cause, it remains the case that this writer has considerable empathy with another punch-drunk pugilist who asked for a fight and got what he deserved:

*I have squandered my resistance,
For a pocketful of mumbles, such are promises.
All lies and jest.
Still a man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest. ■*

Jack Strocchi is a former warblogger who contributes to <http://catallaxyfiles.blogspot.com>.

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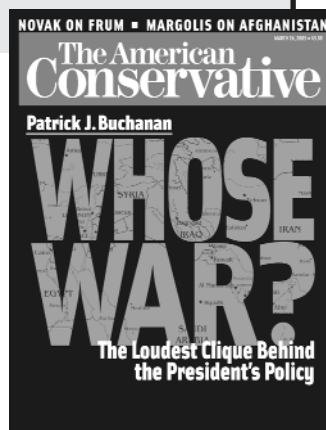
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[taking up the burden]

An Empire—If You Can Keep It

A British academic thinks *Pax Americana* may have universal appeal.

By Dominic Lieven

IT IS SUDDENLY FASHIONABLE to talk about American empire. It was always fashionable to do so in left-wing circles outside the U.S. What is new is that mainstream discussion in university international-relations departments is now accepting the concept, and so are many American newspaper and political pundits.

If calling the U.S. an empire makes any sense, it is in the context of the power that has always been required to sustain great civilizations. It is above all American power that has secured the triumph of democracy and liberal capitalism over its vicious 20th-century rivals, communism and fascism. It will remain American power that will play the biggest part in sustaining this order in the foreseeable future.

The Bush administration's claim that Iraq represented a major threat to U.S. security or the contemporary global order was hugely exaggerated. But the fear that weapons of mass destruction (first biological, then chemical, and possibly even nuclear) will probably be in private hands within a generation or two and will then pose a threat to our civilization is justified. Shifts in military technology have brought down previous empires and civilizations. Ours could follow. The defense of imperial

civilizations can demand ruthlessness. It always requires political skill. The key to combating private bioterror will be the collaboration of the world's intelligence services and therefore of the states that control them. As was the case with every successful empire in history, to survive, the United States needs loyal allies and clients.

Failure to remember this helps to explain the mess in Iraq. The U.S. went in virtually alone, with no meaningful international allies, save Britain. It lacked reliable local clients, partly because few Iraqis believe that America has the staying power to bear the costs of direct imperial rule for any length of time. Meanwhile, the unfortunate British army, having just about escaped from its last post-imperial conflict in Ireland, finds itself trying to preserve order in Iraq, always one of its least easily policed colonies. In addition, the British are a fifth wheel on an American landrover whose driver doesn't appear to have a local map and that is operating in territory where anything America does (however benign in intention) is bound to be deeply suspect.

Thinking in terms of American empire is useful because it helps one to understand the realities of power in the contemporary world. Past empires dif-

fered enormously in the impact they made on the everyday lives of the peoples they governed. In some cases, subject peoples were nearly exterminated. In others, ordinary people barely noted empire's existence. Most Indian peasants never saw an Englishman, though by the standards of many empires the British penetrated quite deeply into Indian society, culture, and economy.

Today, American power pierces foreign cultures much more deeply than most imperial regimes ever did. The integrated global economy and U.S. television reach almost every village, challenging existing values, customs, and vested interests. The challenge may often be a force for progress—for instance, as regards life chances of women—but this will not necessarily make it popular among those who count in political terms. Nor will it necessarily differentiate America from past empires, some of which also brought progress in their wake.

For many foreigners, ever-present, uninvited, and intrusive American power is seen as imperialist. This is bound to bewilder most Americans who have never consciously chosen the path of empire and yet are caught up in its toils. American prosperity is now inexorably linked with integration into the global