

Village Democracy and Presidential Leadership



Joseph C. Wilson IV

Iraq is a country that remembers its history, dating back millennia. They will outlive this occupation. They will make our lives difficult there. At the end of it, I think the chances are really very good that the consequences will be far graver to our national security than they were going in.

—Joseph C. Wilson IV

Some recently have written nostalgically about an era to be resurrected, when Americans will walk across their empire, as the British did in jodhpurs and pith helmets. I call what is happening today the “jodhpur and pith helmet revolution.” It is an image of Jessica Tuchman Mathews’s evocative concerns in chapter 3 about “creating and managing dominance.”

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

Iraq was not a pre-emptive war. There was not an imminent threat to our national security, as we know now. Iraq was a war of choice, and it was not a war for the reasons that were provided by the American government in the run-up to the war, particularly when the White House went to Congress.

This was not a war about weapons of mass destruction. It had nothing to do with whether you believe or don’t believe the intelligence reports. For example, the alleged sale of uranium from Niger to Iraq never happened. The administration knew that from February 2002.

On the eve of sending troops into battle in Iraq, President Bush stated that “intelligence gathered by this and other governments leaves no doubt that the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised.” But

in 2004 David Kay, the Central Intelligence Agency's chief weapons inspector, told Congress shortly before resigning, "I'm personally convinced that there were not large stockpiles of newly produced weapons of mass destruction. . . . We didn't find the people, the documents, or the physical plants that you would expect to find if the production was going on." Similarly, in a report issued in 2004, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace found that the government "systematically misrepresented the threat" from Iraq.

Beyond the false "weapons of mass destruction" argument, a second rationale for Iraq was the alleged link to terrorism. But the United States itself acknowledged the weakness of this argument. The U.N. charter would have permitted the United States to act, had there been links to terrorism. In addition, the Patriot Act gave President Bush full authority to act on behalf of the United States when he thought there was an operational link between a foreign government and al Qaeda. But in fact the U.S. government did not go to war based on the Patriot Act or the U.N. authority.

A third rationale for the war was that Saddam was a brute. But there are many brutes out there. Are we going to take them all down? Saddam may have been a special case because his use of chemical weapons and brutal murder of citizens constituted genocide. But there is a convention in the United Nations accepted by the world—the Genocide Convention. We could have gone to the United Nations and debated Iraq on those terms, and we could have done it decades earlier. But we didn't.

IRAQ: A WAR TO REDRAW THE POLITICAL MAP

In reality, this was a war to redraw the political map of the Middle East. It was a war that was put together by American zealots, the goal of which was to change the dynamics of the Middle East in such a way that a new political order, less hostile to our strategic partner and historic friend Israel, emerges. Such a new political order is desirable but is unlikely as an outcome of military invasion, conquest, and occupation.

The United States has gleefully attacked the international institutions that have served this country well for the past forty-five years. The American government has undone many of the foreign policy successes that we have had and that we have undertaken in the thirty years during which I have been in Washington. For that I am profoundly disturbed. I say this as a person whose proudest moment in his diplomatic career was serving as George H. W. Bush's charge to Baghdad and subsequently as ambassador to Gabon.

As a result of recent foreign policy, a schism could develop between traditional Republicans, the Brent Scowcrofts of the world, and conservative Republicans. I have been approached by any number of people who are George H. W. Bush—traditional Republicans and who are willing to take nonpartisan stands; but nonpartisanship stands directly in conflict with conservative ideology.

THE SKILLFUL USE OF POWER

The issue of power and foreign policy has never really been between hard and soft power, though that is an interesting distinction. Rather the issue always has been the use or abuse of force, confused with the legitimate exercise of power. I define force as the brute imposition of our will without regard to the legitimate concerns of the other party. Power, on the other hand, is the legitimate use of all the tools of statecraft, hard and soft, military when necessary, as well as a panoply of other options when possible. These options include intelligence, economic sanctions, economic assistance, public diplomacy, and strategies that are subversive or seductive.

As we go about exercising leadership and our will in foreign policy, the choice always has been between imposition of force and skillful use of power.

THE THREAT OF TERRORISM AND WEAPONS PROLIFERATION

America faces two threats over the next generation that I think are central to our national security: terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. And we face the nexus between the two threats.

Concern about terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction was out there well before September 11. It was in the Clinton national security statement and in the Nunn-Lugar legislation, passed before September 11, to get the weapons of mass destruction off the streets of the Soviet Union. (See William Hartung's discussion of Nunn-Lugar in chapter 9.) The U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century, chaired by Warren Rudman and Gary Hart, predicted the terrorist attacks on America and laid out a sweeping overhaul of national security structures and policies.

Unfortunately, the potential for these threats being realized in a way that again victimizes the American population in dramatic fashion is increased exponentially by the worldwide resentment to the militaristic actions that we have taken, to our willingness to run roughshod over international institutions and agreements. Remember, for a vast majority of the countries, the United Nations is the only forum in which they can make their complaints known to the world.

AFGHANISTAN, IRAQ, ISRAEL, AND PALESTINE

Many argue that the winds of change are blowing through the Arab world because of the American invasion of Iraq. These arguments are correct. Unfortunately, these are not the winds of liberal Western democracy that we would like to see. These

are the winds of resentment—as yet another humiliation is inflicted upon a population that remembers the Crusades far better than we remember the winner of the Super Bowl.

Where, then, do we stand at present in the places of greatest recent concern to America—Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel, and Palestine?

In Afghanistan, the legitimate war to destroy an enemy who had inflicted grievous harm on a population has become little more than a holding action to protect one man in his palace while allowing warlords to reign in the countryside, with little sustained effort to move the process toward either reconstruction or some political accommodation. Deals were cut to enable the United States to operate militarily against the remnants of al Qaeda without reference to what is necessary for future Afghan stability and representative governance.

In Iraq, we pursued the highest-risk, lowest-possible-reward strategy of invasion, conquest, and occupation. The occupation left us exposed to a growing insurgency and an increasing hatred that runs the risk of spilling over from the rest of the Arab world. I get notes every day from military officers, journalists, and nongovernmental organizations in Iraq. They talk about the problems associated with just living in downtown Baghdad—stories that they can't get into their own newspapers, including the *New York Times*.

People in the Middle East understand when Osama bin Laden talks about the expulsion of Arabs from Granada in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It was the same in Bosnia. Before we could get through to people, we had to patiently listen to history dating back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Yet when you come into any office of the National Security Council in Washington, the fifteen minutes allocated for a meeting doesn't really allow time to discuss anything other than the immediate subject at hand.

In Israel, the United States has been AWOL for many years, while more than 600 Israelis and 2,000 Palestinians have been killed in a vicious and particularly traumatizing cycle of violence. The tentative and fragile cease-fire will hold only if the American government is prepared to remain engaged for a sustained period of time and is ready to assert pressure at the highest level on both sides to make necessary compromises.

The future does not bode well. Seventy-five percent of the Palestinian capacity has been destroyed in recent years. Our former interlocutor, Abu Mazen, had a popularity rating among Palestinians that is below the statistical error rate of the polls. The Hamas, which we are calling upon to be dismantled, is seen by many Palestinians as a viable symbol of resistance in the occupied territories and also is a supplier of goods and services in the absence of other government services being provided.

The dismantling of two towers and the withdrawal from a couple of towns and a couple of roads does not an Israeli concession make. Equally, continued Palestinian

attacks on Israeli civilians only further traumatize Israeli and, by extension, the American Jewish community.

I have argued for years to Arab audiences that there has been nothing worse for Arab and Palestinian interests than this second intifada, that Palestinian suicide bombers are a shame on the Palestinians generally, and that the trauma that they have inflicted upon Israeli society is perfectly understandable. It traumatizes Israeli society when Palestinian kids blow themselves up in restaurants and kill thirty Israelis. A reaction is provoked—not just in Israel but also among Israel's staunchest supporters. The process of finding peace is made much more complicated.

Some say that we can't want peace more than the Israelis and the Palestinians do. The argument probably is accurate, but it is an abrogation of diplomatic responsibility to walk away from the process.

One of the roles that diplomacy fills in a time of conflict is to occupy space and time among belligerents while the facts on the ground change in a way that will lead to a more favorable negotiated solution. But to walk away and allow the cycle of violence to further deepen has been a dereliction on the part of this administration. It has been very difficult to get that point heard over the past several years.

WHAT TO DO?

What to do, realistically speaking? My answers are consistent with the suggestions of Jessica Tuchman Mathews in chapter 2. Let me concentrate on Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, and Palestine.

Iraq and Afghanistan

It is not a bad idea to encourage democracy in the Middle East. But those of us who have done democracy a long time know how difficult it is, in the best of circumstances. It is much more difficult when the democratizing power also is the occupying power, and one that doesn't necessarily have in mind the best for the citizens of the country it's attempting to democratize. Not that we shouldn't try to democratize—but the use of the military ought to be judicious at best and ought not to hinder the tools of democratization.

Of course, you never get a second chance to make a first impression, and the first impression we made was not the first impression that most of us would have wanted us to make. But we can try to make a second impression. Reform in Iraq must be based on multilateralization, provision of security, satisfaction of basic human needs, creation of grassroots democracy at the village level, and reconstruction of the economy.

Multilateralize. We must internationalize as quickly as possible in Iraq.

One trick here is not to forget Afghanistan. We have to stay the course in Afghanistan because there is still work to be done against terrorism there. But we also have to stay the course to ensure that this particular failed state, taken on by America, is not allowed to lapse back into more failure.

We have multilateralized Afghanistan. We need to multilateralize more in Afghanistan. But the progress on multilateralism to date in Afghanistan at least provides a model for the process in Iraq. The imprimatur of the United Nations is needed in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

Multilateralization in Iraq is just like a high-risk oil exploration venture in the old days, before the science of drilling was better. The issue is spreading the risk, not taking all the rewards for yourself. If you succeed, there will be enough rewards for everybody. If you fail, you don't want to be left holding the baby alone.

Authorize Peacekeepers. The United States is asking the population of both Afghanistan and Iraq to take a leap of faith—away from traditional societies where there is protection by clans, tribal warlords, village chiefs, clerics, or dictators.

To move away from their traditional societies, the populations of Afghanistan and Iraq must feel that they are safe in their own homes, can ride their bicycles, can walk to where they have to go, can drive their cars, if they have cars, and can do what they need to do without fear of bodily harm to them or their families.

That has been accomplished in Kabul. It has been accomplished somewhat in some places, like Kurdistan and Northern Iraq. It hasn't been accomplished in the Afghan countryside, and certainly hasn't been accomplished in Baghdad.

We need to flood Iraq with United Nations Chapter 7-authorized peacekeepers if necessary, and flood it with police trainers. The United States does not have a national police force. We have a national investigatory agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, but we don't do policing the same way some of the Europeans do. For example, the Italians and the Spanish, who were allies of ours in the Iraq invasion, have the *carabinieri* and the *guardia civile*. The French have the *gendarmerie*. They train to military doctrine. They do policing activities. We need their help.

We need to reconstruct the defense and security apparatus of Iraq. Iraq has a long border to protect. It has enemies who wanted to impose their views on Iraq long before we got there, and who will be there long after we have departed. Iraq needs a policing operation. It's a difficult country to govern, to say the least.

Satisfy Basic Human Needs. People's human needs must be satisfied. Among other things they need water, food, access to medicine, and access to medical treatment. It was really significant to me when I saw the first trucks arriving in Iraq with humanitarian assistance. We saw one or two trucks. Then the camera panned out into the group of consumers of that humanitarian assistance, and you saw a demand for at least six trucks.

When you have demand that exceeds supply by such a margin, there will be fighting for the limited supplies. So the answer is equally obvious. If you have de-

mand for six truckloads worth of supplies, bring nine trucks in. When you want to change the hearts and minds of people to make them receptive to reform, satisfy their basic human needs.

Create Grassroots Democracy at the Village Level. Political revitalization and democracy building is tough work. The best adage on democracy that I have heard is that it's a bit like an English lawn. You have to seed it, water it, and then roll it every day for 600 years. Then it will look really good.

As we know from the American experience, democracy is something that is built brick by brick. America wants Iraq to be friendly with its neighbors, provide a national system of representative governance, espouse human rights, and provide foreign policy that is consistent with American values—but these priorities are not necessarily the issues with which someone in an Iraqi village is concerned.

People in the village want to see the same sort of things that people wanted to see in my town in California when I was growing up—and the same kinds of things people living in Washington, D.C., would like to see. They want to see the trash picked up, the kids go to a safe school, the education system functioning well, and the police working effectively to ensure their safety.

So democracy building cannot begin top down in Baghdad. We need to begin in the villages and work up. That will mean a huge investment. The investment cannot be just American. As I have said, other western nations and the nongovernmental organizations need to be in Iraq—to serve as trainers, mediators, and sounding boards, as just people there to listen to the gripes that you get at the village level. So it is a matter of positioning yourself at every level in such a way that you're there, occupying space and time, as the people around you deal with the issues most important to them.

Democracy cannot be built without economic reconstruction. Before it can solve the longer run issues of manufacturing, production, and oil exports, economic reconstruction must infuse cash. We need to flood Iraq with \$20 bills. People need to be able to buy goods, to stave off some of the complete desperation that is gripping the population.

Israel and Palestine: Constant Presidential Involvement

The thorn must be pulled from the side of the region. The road to peace in the Middle East still goes through Jerusalem.

Policy on Israel requires constant presidential involvement. As Brent Scowcroft has proposed, the United States needs to apply the same level of energy in reinvigorating the Arab-Israeli peace process as it used in lobbying for war in Iraq. America needs a big on-the-ground presence in the region of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, again to occupy space and time.

Israel never will do anything without America, its guardian. So Americans are needed. But what is the other presence that helps spread the risk to Americans a little

bit more? The one I keep coming up with is an American presence that makes it more difficult for Palestinians, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad to go after Arab soldiers. The Arab presence might be in the form of Egyptian or North African soldiers.

On settlements in the occupied territories, Yitzhak Rabin understood that Israeli policy should not be thickening of the borders but rather an agreement with the Palestinians to police their own territories in a way that was credible and that allowed Israelis to feel secure within their borders. Thickening of the borders is an artificial security anyway, given technology and given the ability to move asymmetrical weaponry in and out of the cities, as we see with suicide bombing. Yet today Israel continues to thicken its borders.

Today a majority of Israelis do not want to continue the settlements. This provides an opportunity for the Israeli government. But for the government to reverse the policy of thickening borders would be an act of great political courage—because it also could be political suicide. Still, it is important to make some movement on settlements.

My own judgment about Hamas is that the key to diminishing its influence is to build from the center out. If you build a moderate center, then you put the fringe back where the fringe belongs—on the fringe and not in the center, where it currently holds too much power.

That really means empowerment of the Palestinian Authority. We need to be prepared to underwrite public social services to the community. We need to develop public-sector capacity in Palestine. The argument is analogous to the need in America to save our public schools with sufficient investment in them and not to abrogate responsibility and accountability through private-school voucher schemes.

The trouble with military counterattacks is that there is a lot of collateral damage. It seems to me that, even though in the short term you are going to probably get a greater level of Israeli casualties, because the attacks aren't going to stop, you must start treating those attacks as criminal acts. What happens within such a criminal justice framework? For one thing, you don't have these horrible roadblocks and lockdowns of these entire cities for all but two or three or four hours per day. In this way, life is made better for the average citizen. So framing the issue in criminal-justice terms can help build moderation from the center out. And by making life better for the average Palestinian, Hamas will become isolated.

Terrorism and Africa

As we look at terrorism and the phenomenon of weapons of mass destruction, we must touch on Africa. The American government has no new original ideas from what was put forward in 1998. It hasn't come to grips with conflict resolution in places like Liberia and Congo. To a certain extent, America has farmed out respon-

sibility for conflict resolution—type activities largely to former colonial powers. In my judgment, this farming-out policy perpetuates hegemony and relationships that have not been terribly healthy. Look at Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone.

We need to get more involved in conflict resolution, and we need to get more involved in the other tools of statecraft, including foreign aid, economic assistance, debt relief, assistance to militaries, and training of police forces. We also need to focus on the phenomenon of failed and failing states as breeding grounds for terrorism and other transnational activities that impact our national security—whether they are health-related matters like the viruses of ebola and HIV/AIDS or narcoterrorism, money laundering, and other international criminal activities.

THE POLITICS OF TRUTH

The United States needs to use power instead of force. We need to finance nation building, work with the United Nations, and build a multilateral strategy.

Disdain for these policies by the government ill serves the American people. Prominent conservatives speak openly of the destruction of the United Nations as one of the benefits in our occupation of Iraq.

But the truth is that we have spent almost fifty years developing international relationships that have served our broader national interests well. We should never forget that since their creation, the United Nations and its companion institutions have far more often served our interests than blocked them.

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