

Global Realignment and the Decline of the Superpower

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The United States has been defeated in Iraq. That doesn't mean that there'll be a troop withdrawal anytime soon, but it does mean that there's no chance of achieving the mission's political objectives. Iraq will not be a democracy, reconstruction will be minimal, and the security situation will continue to deteriorate into the foreseeable future.

The real goals of the invasion are equally unachievable. While the US has established a number of military bases at the heart of the world's energy-center; oil output has dwindled to 1.6 million barrels per day, nearly half of post-war production. More importantly, the administration has no clear strategy for protecting pipelines, oil tankers and major facilities. Oil production will be spotty for years to come even if security improves. This will have grave effects on oil futures; triggering erratic spikes in prices and roiling the world energy markets. If the contagion spreads to the other Gulf States, as many political analysts now expect, many of the world's oil-dependent countries will go through an agonizing cycle of recession/depression.

America's failure in Iraq is not merely a defeat for the Bush administration. It is also a defeat for the "unipolar-model" of world order. Iraq proves that that the superpower model cannot provide the stability, security or guarantee of human rights that are essential for garnering the support of the 6 billion people who now occupy the planet. The mushrooming of armed groups in Iraq, Afghanistan and, now, Somalia foreshadows a broader and more violent confrontation between the over-stretched American legions and their increasingly adaptable and lethal enemies. Resistance to the imperial order is on the rise everywhere.

The United States does not have the resources or the public support to prevail in such a conflict. Nor does it have the moral authority to persuade the world of the merit of its cause. The Bush administration's extra-legal actions have galvanized the majority of people against the United States. America has become a threat to the very human rights and civil liberties with which it used to be identified. There's little popular support for imprisoning enemies without charges, for torturing suspects with impunity, for kidnapping people off the streets of foreign capitals, or for invading unarmed sovereign nations without the approval of the United Nations. These are fundamental violations to international law as well as commonly held principles of human decency.

The Bush administration defends its illegal activities as an essential part of the new world order; a model of global governance which allows Washington to police the world according to its own discretion. The vast majority of people have rejected this model and polls clearly indicate declining support for US policies nearly everywhere. As former Jimmy Carter National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski noted:

“American power may be greater in 2006 than in 1991, (but) the country’s capacity to mobilize, inspire, point in a shared direction and thus shape global realities has significantly declined. Fifteen years after its coronation as global leader, America is becoming a fearful and lonely democracy in a politically antagonistic world.”

The United States is a nation in a state of irreversible decline; its foundational principles have been abandoned and its center of political power is a moral swamp. The Bush presidency represents the ethical low point in American history.

The U.S. now faces a decades-long struggle which will engulf the Middle East and Central Asia leading to the steady and predictable erosion of America’s military, political and economic power.

This is not the “new century” that Bush and his fellows envisioned.

There are still dead-enders within the Bush administration who believe that we are winning the war. Vice President Dick Cheney has celebrated the “enormous success” of the Iraqi occupation, but he finds himself increasingly isolated in his views. Reasonable people agree that the war has been a strategic and moral catastrophe. The US has paid a heavy price for its recklessness; losing over 3,000 servicemen while seriously undermining its standing in the world. A small cadre of Iraqi guerillas has demonstrated that it can frustrate the efforts of best-equipped, best-trained, high-tech military in the world. They have made Iraq an ungovernable quagmire which, by the standards of asymmetrical warfare, is the very definition of success.

But what if Bush’s plans had succeeded? What if his dark vision of “victory” had been realized and the US was able to subjugate the Iraqi people, control their resources, and create an “Arab façade” through which the administration could carry out its policies?

Is there any doubt that Bush would quickly march on Tehran and Damascus? Is there any doubt that Guantanamo and other CIA “black sites” around the world would increase in number and size? Is there any doubt that global warming, peak oil, nuclear non proliferation, poverty, hunger and AIDS would continue to be brushed aside by Washington’s corporatists and banking elites?

Is there any doubt that success in Iraq would further strengthen a tyrannical system that limits the decision-making on all the issues of global importance, even the very survival of the planet, to a small fraternity of well-heeled plutocrats and gangsters?

The “new world order” promises despotism not democracy.

Many people believe that America has undergone a silent coup and has been taken over by a cabal of political fantasists and war-mongers. But this is only partially true. The US has a long history of covert activity, black-ops, and other clear violations to international law. Perhaps, we are reluctant to accept the truth because it’s easier to stick our heads in the sand and let the marauding continue.

The truth is there’s a straight line from the founding of this country to the killing fields of Baghdad. That line may be interrupted by periods of enlightenment and peace, but it is still an unbroken stripe from the Continental Congress to Abu Ghraib, from Bunker Hill to Falluja,

from Valley Forge to Guantanamo Bay. It all grows from the same root.

The United States now faces mounting resistance from all corners of the earth. Russia, China, and the Central Asian countries have joined together in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to fend off US-NATO influence in the region. And in Latin America, an alliance of leftist governments has formed (Mercosur) under the leadership of Hugo Chavez. Africa still remains politically fragmented and open to western exploitation, although ham-fisted interventions in Somalia, Nigeria and Sudan suggest that the empire will face escalating resistance there as well.

These new coalitions are an indication of the massive geopolitical changes that are already underway. The world is realigning in reaction to Washington's aggression. We can expect to see these groups continue to strengthen as the administration pursues its resource war through force of arms. That means that the "old order"—the United Nations, NATO and the transatlantic Alliance—will come under greater and greater strain until relations are eventually cut off.

The UN has already become irrelevant through its blind support of US policy in the Middle East. Its silence during Israel's destructive rampage through Lebanon, as well as its failure to acknowledge Iran's "inalienable rights" under the terms of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) has exposed the UN as a "rubber stamp" for US-Israeli belligerence. An attack on Iran will be the end of the UN, an institution that held great promise for the world, but now merely provides cover for an elite-western agenda. On balance, the UN facilitates more wars than it stops. It won't be missed.

Afghanistan holds the key for understanding what's in store for the EU, NATO and the transatlantic Alliance. There is no possibility of success in Afghanistan. If the men who planned the invasion had a grasp of the country's history they would have known how the war would progress. They would have realized that Afghans traditionally take their time to fight back; (Eric Margolis predicted that the real war would not take place until 4 to 5 years after the initial invasion) measuring the strength of their enemy and garnering greater public support. Then they proceed with deliberate steps to rid their country of the invaders. These are fiercely nationalistic and independent people who have fought occupation before and know what it takes to win.

We are mistaken to think that the war in Afghanistan is merely a Taliban (or worse still) "terrorist" insurgency. The present conflict represents a general uprising of Pushtun nationals who seek to end foreign occupation. They know first-hand that US-NATO policy has strengthened the warlords, expanded the drug trade, reduced security, and increased terrorism. According to the Senlis Council Report, the occupation has triggered "a humanitarian crisis of starvation and poverty... US policies in Afghanistan have re-created a safe-haven for terrorism that the 2001 invasion aimed to destroy."

The Afghan armed resistance is resourceful and intractable and has a growing number of recruits to swell its ranks. Eventually, they will prevail. It's their country and they'll be there long after we've gone.

An America defeat in Afghanistan could be the straw that breaks NATO's back. The administrations' global schema depends heavily on support from Europe; persuading the predominantly white, western nations to join the battle and secure pipeline corridors and landlocked energy supplies throughout Central Asia. Failure in Afghanistan would send

tremors through Europe's political landscape and give rise to a generation of anti-American politicians who will seek to dissolve relations between the two traditional allies. But a breakup seems inevitable. After all, Europe has no imperial aspirations and its economies are thriving. They don't need to invade and occupy countries to get access to vital resources. They can simply buy them on the open market.

As Europeans begin to see that their national interests are better served through dialogue and friendship, (with suppliers of resources in Central Asia and Russia) then the ties that bind Europe to America will loosen and the continents will drift further apart.

The end of NATO is the end of America as a global power. The present adventurism is not sustainable "unilaterally" and without the fig-leaf of UN cover. America needs Europe, but the chasm between the two is progressively growing.

It is impossible to predict the future with any degree of certainty, but the appearance of these coalitions strongly suggests a new world order is emerging. It is not the one, however, that Bush and the neoconservatives anticipated. America's involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan will continue to prevent it from addressing brush-fires in Latin America and Russia, further strengthening US rivals and precipitating macroeconomic changes that could crush the American middle class. The likelihood of a major economic retrenchment has never been greater as the administrations' reckless defense spending, lavish tax cuts, and trade deficit have set the stage for the US dollar to be dethroned as the world's "reserve currency". The three pillars of American imperial power—political, economic and military—rest on the crumbling foundation of the US greenback. If the dollar falls, as many currency traders now expect, then foreign (baskets of) currencies will rise, and America will slip into a deep recession/depression.

America's military and economic unraveling is likely to take a decade or more depending on the situation in Iraq. If the Bush administration is able to exert control over Middle East oil, then the dollar will continue to be linked to vital resources and American supremacy will persist. If, however, conditions on the ground deteriorate, then Central Banks around the world will decrease their dollar holdings, Americans will face hyper-inflation at home, and the US will lose its grip on the global economic system. The Bush administration must, therefore, ensure that oil continues to be denominated in USDs and that the world economy remains in the hands of western elites, banking giants and corporatists.

The chances for success in Iraq are gradually diminishing. The US has shown that it is incapable of establishing security, providing basic social services, or keeping the peace. The guerilla war continues to intensify while the over-extended US military has been pushed to the breaking point. We expect the occupation of Iraq to be untenable within 5 years if present trends continue.

America's military and economic unraveling will undoubtedly be painful, but it may generate greater parity among the nations, which would be a positive development. The superpower model has been an abysmal failure. It has wreaked havoc on civil liberties at home and spread war and instability across the world. The present system needs a major shakeup so that power can be more evenly distributed according to traditional democratic standards. America's decline presents a unique opportunity to restore the Republic, restructure the existing global-paradigm, and begin to build consensus on the species-threatening challenges which face us all.

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