

BRUTAL IRAQ, MERCILESS WORLD

Miklos K. Radvanyi

Tyrants base their ruthless power on the universal fear of their subjects. Democracies are founded on the moral imperative of individual virtue and its worldly concept of the rule of law. Fear results in the corruption of the soul which, in turn, destroys human dignity. Virtue leads to piety out of which rises integrity. Yet, fear and virtue are interdependent concepts. Both possess the inherent ability to divide or to unite. Both have become decisive forces in the contemporary world. And both are crucial in creating or avoiding brutal terror and horrific destruction on a large scale.

In Iraq, the essential challenge for any reformer had always been to overcome the historically corrupted mentality of the private individual. Being the product of fourteen centuries of successive benevolent and oppressive tyrannies, Iraqi society had stagnated within a multitude of vicious historical spirals. The common nature of these tyrannies was a pattern of mutual dependency between a small oligarchy within a larger tribal oligarchy and the subjugated majority of the people. On the global political level this mutual dependency was based on a two-way pathological fear factor. Since tyranny is essentially usurpation of absolute power over people, it is inherently insecure, fearful and thus despotic. And since the only form of government known to the people throughout their history was tyranny, their political actions were not grounded in alternative choices, but were fatally limited to violently replacing one tyrant with another. Hence, the substitution of the old tyrant with a new one did not affect the nature of government that remained hopelessly tyrannical.

Total unfamiliarity with democracy by those who only knew tyranny is shown among other ways in this, that the latter idealize the former. The fact that democracy banishes fear from authority turns into the misguided notion that the collapse of tyranny marks the end of all fundamental imperatives of human coexistence. The tyranny of the state is thus replaced by the tyranny of man. Ironically, such an orgy of misplaced individualism recreates the same pattern of pathological co-dependency between members of the defeated oligarchy and their former subjects that characterized the tyrannical society. Thus, most of those who now profess to be committed to republican principles and democracy are actually tyrants of a new type. This is a paradox that can only be understood by the psychology and the logic of tyranny. Since tyranny was a regime of usurpation of legitimate political and emotional principles applied in reverse, cynicism and apathy toward the state guided the lives of rulers and subjects alike.

The case in point is that a sudden and unchecked increase of freedom in any formerly tyrannical society is always followed by a precipitous decrease of freedom in reality. Indeed, in today's Iraq the greatest political threat is the reestablishment of tyranny. The reason for this curiously revisionist trend is rather simple. In spite of the coalition forces' defeat of the Saddam regime, the vast majority of Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites continue to adhere to their traditional ways of life that they rejected in form, but have rescued in substance from the rubbles of their centuries old history. However irrational these developments appear, the fact remains that it is far easier to defeat a

tyranny militarily than affect fundamental changes in the mentality of both the former rulers and the newly liberated people.

Viewed from this perspective, it is rather obvious that political strategists and military planners of the war against the Saddam regime should have preferred empirical and rational data over intuition and emotion when analyzing intelligence information and arriving at crucial decisions. Unwillingness to pay due attention to Iraq's pre-Saddam history coupled with dogmatic rather than critical thinking in Washington, D.C. regarding the political, cultural, religious and ethnic realities of the region, virtually assured the rise of the violent Sunni insurgency after the occupation of the country. Moreover, putting the future of Iraq in the hands of the State Department was not exactly a decision with a definite promise of success. The appointment of Paul L. Bremmer was likened by official Washington to the Second Coming. Equipped with the customary arrogance of a Foreign Service officer and bristling with new ideas, energy and determination to do well, Bremmer the new superstar of American diplomacy initially chose to ignore Iraq's long history of instability and its rich culture of sectarian violence. The results were predictable. Having destroyed the institutions and organizations of the defeated regime while simultaneously attempting to turn the cultural identity of Iraqi society and the mentality of the people upside down, Bremmer's mission gradually resulted in shattered expectations and loud grumblings that the Americans with their grand idea of democratization are a bunch of overblown hype.

While mortal human beings inside Iraq have been forever upsetting the logical order of things according to Bremmer and his bosses, Iraq's neighbors, notably Iran, Syria and Turkey, have seen their security interests from the beginning on in a regional context, not as being even remotely identical with the Bush Administration's war on terror. For them the predictable instability of Iraq's transition from the Sunni tyranny to a Western-type democracy has been exacerbated not only by its violent history, but also by the intensity of expectations that the promise of sudden liberation aroused in of millions of people – Kurds, Muslims of many sectarian affiliations, Christians and the multitude of secular groups inside and outside the country.

As sectarian violence combined with rampant private terrorism waged against the coalition forces and the world have mounted in Iraq, the Iranian leadership succumbed to a dominating urge to take advantage of America's difficulties and the palpable weaknesses of their arch enemy across the Arabian/Persian Gulf. Besides, what could be better for Iran's regional ambitions than institutionalized mayhem resulting in predictable domestic and international pressure on the Bush Administration to withdraw from Iraq. Such a campaign also has the added advantage of uniting the internal opposition in America with a diverse collection of anti-Americans, anti-Semites, anti-imperialists, pacifists, environmental terrorists, and liberals of all political affiliations, including large segments of the written and electronic media inside and outside the United States. It is hard to think of any more devious policy designed to arouse visceral emotions and hatred in the region and beyond. Insecurity, political chaos, social discontent, anti-imperialism and religion are being used as tactical weapons to persuade the majority Shiites of the dangers they face and to provoke them into permanent violence. Simultaneously, Iranian

propaganda fosters the belief that the United States is having second thoughts about its commitment to Iraq in general and the Maliki government in particular. Taking advantage of deep-seated prejudices, Shiites are told repeatedly that America supports the Kurds and the Sunnis, that it uses democratization to secularize Iraq and thereby integrate the latter into its imperial design.

From Syria's perspective, Iran is by now clearly emerging as the dominant power in the region and as the real champion of Muslim resistance to America's politically discomfiting designs in the Middle East. The invisibility of organized Sunni opposition to Iran is another factor that motivates Damascus to collaborate closely with Teheran. Moreover, because of the Assad regime's isolation, Iran appears to provide protection against the feared political extinction of the minority Alawite sect. Finally, Syria also wholeheartedly embraces Iran's political objectives, albeit occasionally disapproves of the latter's methods.

Turkey's core dilemma from the beginning of the war has been the Shakespearean question: to collaborate or not to collaborate with the United States and its allies. The answer to this question has been complicated by the Erdogan government's self-contradictory commitments, its policies and the practical problems these two elements pose to Turkey. First, there has been a protracted blood feud between the Turkish majority and the sizable Kurdish minority in eastern Turkey, adjacent to Iraqi Kurdistan. On the other hand, Teheran's pure nationalism and single-minded religious bigotry make it nearly impossible for a basically fundamentalist government to openly challenge the mullahs' pro-Muslim foreign policy. Moreover, America's closeness to the Iraqi Kurds raises the dreaded specter of regional autonomy for northern Iraq with its obvious attraction to the sixteen million unruly Kurds in Turkey. Last but not least, the European Union's reluctance to act on the membership request of Turkey has united the government and the military to support the Muslim cause as a counterbalance to Europe and as a means of pressuring the United States to support more forcefully Turkey's political and economic integration into Europe.

China and Russia act on the simple political principle that what is bad for the United States and the West is good for them. The European Union is searching for a common identity and therefore lacks a unified foreign policy. Japan, India and most of the other Asian countries are heavily dependent on oil and gas deliveries from the Middle-East. Unless progress is made against the criminal elements within Iraq, American prestige will suffer considerably and permanently.

Where does all this leave us in the United States? It leaves us in a crisis. It leaves us a divided nation. And it leaves us with only two options. Since Iraq's worst problem is its lack of security, it is imperative for the coalition forces and the Iraqis to crush the violence by whatever force is necessary. This must be done sooner rather than later, even if it will risk some political backlash from friendly Arab countries. Iraq's second biggest problem is the egotistical mentality of its so-called political elite. Although Iraq has a new constitution and the country has held several fair and free elections, successive Iraqi governments have been monopolized by a few dozen Shiite, Kurdish and Sunni

politicians. As a consequence, it is not only the pervasive disillusionment with American and allied policies that is hardening cynicism and apathy among the population, but also the failure of liberalization and Westernization of the Iraqi polity. Most discouragingly, the message of such a state of affairs within Iraq is that the United States appears to abandon plans for a real democracy in the country. Partition of Iraq along the lines of the Ottoman Empire is not a solution. It will only create permanent hostilities among three medieval, politically and economically corrupt and thus hopelessly inefficient entities. A decision to withdraw from Iraq before normal conditions are established is equally flawed. Domestically, it will perpetuate violence among the various sects, exposing the country to Iranian and, eventually even Turkish invasion. Setting a date certain for leaving Iraq would turn the United States and its allies into practical lame ducks.

According to Charles De Gaulle, states are cold blooded monsters. So are power hungry and corrupt politicians. The key to the triumph of Western values in Iraq is adaptation. Policies must change as circumstances change. More precisely, American and allied politicians must innovate or face a long, arduous and extremely bloody conflict in Iraq and throughout the world. Victory for our efforts is achieved when the warring parties in Iraq will want to share and not exclusively rule their country.