

Did the United States Occupation of Iraq Fail?

Written by Chris Barker

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CHRIS BARKER, MAY 17 2013

The United States led by George W. Bush and his Republican administration implemented a fundamental shift in foreign policy from its two predecessors. This shift concerned the means by which the U.S. intended to achieve its foreign policy objectives (Raphael and Stokes 2010:11), but also in its political rhetoric and intentions towards the Middle East. The emphasis on international collaboration and the use of international organisations to promote 'the New World Order' moved to one of unilateral, preventive action. This was supported by political rhetoric departing from maintaining the status quo to "a forward strategy of freedom" in the region (Bush quoted in Dodge, 2008: 234). The intention was to transform the Middle East into a region of democracies. The defining element of this shift was found within the publication of the National Security Strategy of 2002 (NSS) that became synonymous with the Bush administration and, along with other speeches and documents became informally known as the 'Bush Doctrine'. The NSS 2002 redefined the legal definition of pre-emption that in reality was a doctrine for preventive war, taking the fight to the enemy (Fukuyama, 2006: 2). It was under this pretext that the invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq took place.

This essay will refer throughout to 'the Bush administration and its proponents'. These protagonists included; the Bush administration – in particular key members whose proposed actions were consistent with neo-conservative arguments, neo-conservative intellectuals, interest groups such as the Project for the New American Century, the army of Republican sympathising individuals recruited for the post-occupation phase, multinational (primarily oil) companies based in the U.S. and Republican nationalists. This essay argues that the Bush administration was particularly ideological, and that neo-conservatism overtly influenced its policies (Beetham 2009, Clarke & Halper 2004, Dodge 2009, Fukuyama 2006, Hinnebusch, 2007 and Record 2008). Indeed this essay asserts that 'The Iraq war was the point at which neo-conservative ideology became fully operational' (Clarke and Halper 2004: 230). Neo-conservatism is not difficult to pin down but it is not easy either. Rather, it is a non-static ideology that revolves around four themes, particularly evident in the Bush administration. These include; a sense of a binary world – a world divided into good and evil, and the emphasis this places on American exceptionalism, secondly the use of military force legitimised by exceptionalism – American military technological supremacy to achieve diplomatic ends, thirdly, a sense of unilateralism: the United States can work with allies but treats international organisations with great scepticism and fourthly, a concentration on the Middle East. The essay will take these combined interests within the United States supportive of the war as the 'failure' being discussed. In other words, how far the attempted imposition of policies informed predominately by neo-conservatism has proved effective in ways it was hoped by those advocating them.

In the process of analysing and evaluating these policy aspirations the essay does not focus on the binary of fail or not fail. Rather, it will frame the Bush administration and its proponents' success on a continuum of failure that have presented a minority of matters of potential that would not have existed while Saddam Hussein was in power. This overall continuum of failure is presented in the analysis of four objectives set out in the main section of the essay. These four objectives were; defeating terrorism, achieving democracy and spreading it throughout the region, preventing the use of weapons of mass destruction and proliferation of nuclear 'rogue' states, and the combined economic objectives of neo-liberalising Iraq and securing its long term energy security strategy. This essay argues that the Bush administrations' vision of a neo-liberalised Iraq was consistent with U.S. grand strategy (Raphael and Stokes 2010:21). The prioritisation of energy security by the Bush administration (Muttitt, 2011, Schwartz, 2008, Stokes, 2007 & 2010) and the process by which to achieve this – neo-liberalism, can be viewed as matters of

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potential for its neo-conservative advocates that could not have existed in the country while Saddam Hussein was still in control. This potential is slowly and arduously being achieved, albeit at a tremendous cost and with continued resistance. Thus, the neo-conservative ready-made plans for Iraq combined with deeper, historical U.S. foreign policy aspirations and acted *unilaterally* to achieve these objectives.

In the context of 9/11, perhaps the most publicly proclaimed policy objective of the Bush administration was defeating terrorism. In Iraq, its argument was that the Iraqi – al-Qaeda affiliation represented an existential threat to the U.S. security. In the years preceding the return to power of the Republicans, neo-conservative thought had been preoccupied with Iraq. Indeed, Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney were brought together with pro-Likud neo-conservatives like Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz in the group formed to petition the Clinton administration for the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime (Hinnebusch 2007:224). This coalition of interests placed U.S. strategic strategy at the heart of its proposals, protecting U.S. national and energy interests in the region. This took place under the auspices of the Project for the New American Century (PNAC) that then espoused its ideas in the *Weekly Standard*. Within this context a 'political discourse' (Clarke and Halper 2004:202) was fashioned to link a global assault on al-Qaeda with a territorial assault on Iraq. By linking this neo-conservative pre-existing agenda to a separate event, 9/11 – provided the neo-conservatives with the combined opportunity to implement its doctrine of unilateral military pre-emption underpinned by American exceptionalism. The intended consequence: regime change and the exportation of democracy as the new means by which to protect its strategic interests in the region.

President Obama, in reference to the objective of defeating terrorism in Iraq stated, "When terrorists and militias plunged Iraq into sectarian war, our troops... restoring order and effectively defeating al Qaeda in Iraq" (quoted in Visser, 2010:11). While the neo-conservatives who implemented this policy can rightly point to the prevention of another 9/11 type attack on U.S. soil, combined with the elimination of prominent terrorists such as Abdu Musab al-Zarqawi, the reality is al-Qaeda is still an active and imminent threat within the country. Visser (2010: 11) argues of the 'obvious survival of elements capable of staging spectacular and lethal terrorist attacks'. Furthermore, as recently as 15 October 2012 Federick and Kimberly Kagen state that 'AQI's (al-Qaeda in Iraq) ability to conduct spectacular terrorist attacks within Iraq has been growing' (Kagen and Kagen, 2012). Estimates of continued al-Qaeda presence in Iraq fluctuate. Perhaps one of the most informed estimates, by the then Iraqi Interior Minister, Bayan Jabr put Iraqi – al-Qaeda foreign fighters in the country at 'no more than a few hundred' (Herring and Rangwala 2006: 167). However, the continued presence, apparent organisation, cohesion and frequency of attacks by such a small number within the country suggest that their defeat hasn't occurred and is far from definitive. Moreover, there is CIA evidence to suggest Iraq has replaced Afghanistan as *the* training ground and magnet for a new generation of jihadist terrorists. (Pressman 2009, Record 2008). The immediate policy objective of defeating terrorism – specifically al-Qaeda, therefore appears very much along the continuum of failure this essay proposes. Moreover, by conflating the separate agendas of al-Qaeda and Iraq in the 'Global War on Terror', the Bush administration overstretched its resources and contributed significantly to Bin Laden evading capture at the time. (Clarke and Halper 2004: 227).

The most recognisable influence of the neo-conservatism on Bush's foreign policy was the emphasis it placed on democracy. These objectives included the democratisation of Iraq and the spread of democracy throughout the Middle East. Prominent neo-conservatives William Kristol and Robert Kagan in the 90's proposed the U.S. utilise its overwhelming military power to pursue a policy of benevolent hegemony, a benign democratic world, legitimising in its own moral superiority. The Bush administration acted in accordance with these neo-conservative arguments and the emphasis on democracy was evident in the central theme it played in the narrative employed by the U.S. and U.K. in their framing of overall strategy in Iraq (Herring & Rangwala 2006). This strategy has been beset by incompetence and has led to an incoherent, corrupt, fragile, and fragmented democratic development. For the proponents of the occupation, state building in Iraq is heading in basically the right direction, with the US playing a necessary role (Herring and Rangwala 2006: 262). Such proponents regained lost credibility with the January 2005 elections and constitution; however this was lost again in the civil war of 2006-2008 and continued insurgency. (Fukayama 2006: 8). Subsequent political developments have contained matters of potential for these proponents though. The 2010 March parliamentary elections, despite Maliki not winning a plurality vote, serves as a legitimising factor to the Iraqi people. Indeed, advocates of the forced democratisation can point to the popular and growing majority of Iraqi citizens that support democracy (D3 Systems and KA Research 2009:11). This positive outlook is epitomised by Khalizad (2010: 46), who argues 'popular support... the chances of success remain greater than the chances of

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failure.'

However critics have levelled the charge that democratisation has been a 'failure'. (Diamond 2004, Dodge 2007). Indeed, one of neo-conservative's own principles – scepticism of social engineering was not translated into the foreign policy objectives that concerned political transformation of Iraq and the Middle East. These proponents of democratisation tended to stay out of discussions on democratic institutions and simply assumed they would sort themselves out (Fukuyama 2006: 117). The well-worn clichés of democratic 'failure' in Iraq can be viewed as an amalgamation of; aggressive de-Ba'athification and the disbanding of the Iraqi army sought by Paul Bremer, the denial for more troop numbers by Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, orientation of the armed forces away from counterinsurgency and the ideological hiring of its reconstruction staff. Indeed, the administration hired inexperienced and or highly ideological staff in its reconstruction efforts. This is epitomised by the fact that a 24 year old was left in charge of Baghdad's stock exchange and loyalty to the Republican Party appeared to trump competence (Byman 2008, Chandrasekaran 2007).

The implications resulting from these 'failures' is that while the U.S. plays a necessary role in Iraq's state building process, that role is less assertive and the consequences of exogenous democratisation have produced inconsistent results often at odds with the Bush administrations preferences. Of particular concern would be the increased power balance in the Persian Gulf enjoyed by Iran that has strengthened Iran-Iraqi relations. Tehran's links to the prominent American ally; the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq represents developments that would concern even the slightest advocate of the war in the name of U.S. national interests. Despite debates of the Arab Iraqi – Iranian nature, the short term consequence has resulted in a U.S. friendly Iraqi government, but also an Iranian friendly one too. This is supported in the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction's (SIGIR) latest quarterly report (2012: 6) that states there is '[C]oncern over continuing close relations with Iran'.

Despite these assertions of failure, this essay prefers a less exaggerated analysis of Iraqi politics offered by Herring and Rangwala, (2006:262) 'focused on the notion of fragmentation rather than failure'. Utilising this analysis, one recognises that although some of its institutions in some areas of the country have failed, the process in its entirety has not. Moreover, Iraqi politics is still in the process of complicated, subtle and nuanced power struggles through caveats that often transcend the repeated western assertions of ethno-sectarian political allegiance. As a result, predicting a particular outcome with any confidence is impossible due to the massive uncertainties involved (Herring 2011: 15). Perhaps the central element of future democratic legitimacy within the country will be the frequency that these disparate political elements will resort to violence to achieve their political differences (Herring 2011:25). Using this central area of analysis, the objective of democratisation looks one with decreasing chances of success. In the most recent SIGIR's quarterly report (SIGIR 2012: 6) it states '[O]verall violence in Iraq this quarter was the worst for two years'. Moreover, United States' involvement in the political process is decreasing the prospect of comprehensive Sunni political integration, a major source of political violence. One finds it very difficult to justify the use of military force at such an expense (material and human) that produced a tentative democracy (at its most flattering description). This is not a replicable model for U.S. policy in other countries. (Pressman 2009:160).

As mentioned above, the process of democratisation was not intended to stop at Iraq's borders. Indeed, Bush and Vice President Cheney, consistent with neo-conservative beliefs argued spreading democracy throughout the region would create a 'bandwagoning' effect on neighbouring states and global opinion. This aspiration has failed definitively. Steinberg (2008: 158) argues 'Instead of encouraging U.S. allies to bandwagon in support, the strategy squandered the unprecedented rallying of support for the United States among European allies following the September 11 attacks'. Furthermore, the "forward strategy of freedom" proposed by Bush had the opposite effect on strengthening pro-democracy campaigners in the region, these advocates felt it more necessary to distance themselves from the U.S. (Steinberg 2008:157). Moreover, the Bush administration contributed to the election of Hamas in Palestine in January 2006 – undermining moderate Fatah leaders (Steinberg 2008: 157). This directly discredited the theory that "the road to Jerusalem runs through Baghdad", a theory credited by neo-conservatives with the potential to unlock the Israel – Palestinian conundrum by destroying an active supporter of radical Palestinian resistance. The consequence of these democratic policy pursuits by the Bush administration: one cannot highlight any examples of regional states that have moved towards democracy as a direct result of democratisation in Iraq. Furthermore, Iraq has exposed the limitations of benevolent hegemony on the part of the United States. Not only

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has the U.S. paid a massive political cost for the war reflected in its decline in global public opinion, but specifically in that it has virtually no credibility or moral authority in the region (Fukuyama 2006: 187). While American exceptionalism has always been major component of U.S. foreign policy, combining it with an overemphasis on power has proved disastrous.

The initial rationale for war, Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) soon proved wholly inaccurate and false. With the initial espoused objective of the Iraq war a complete failure, one turns to its implicit objective: pre-emption as a means to intimidate rogue states labelled by Bush in his 'axis of evil' speech. The Bush administration, influenced by the neo-conservative infatuation with Iraq, believed it presented a picture perfect opportunity for achieving democracy with little perceived strategic difficulty. Thus in defeating Iraq relatively easily Iran and North Korea would be intimidated into either concessions regarding their nuclear arsenal (in the case of North Korea) or halting their program in pursuit of one (Iran). These policy aspirations have presented its advocates with little other than failures. Neither Iran nor North Korea seems to have concluded that it must give up its nuclear programme. Iran, intimidated, initiated a major proposal offered in the spring of 2003 that had the support of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. However, the Bush administration ignored it and with it the last concrete bilateral opportunity for discussion. The result of which, combined with the U.S. army being bogged down in Iraq has, 'encouraged Iran to accelerate its quest for nuclear weapons' (Record 2008: 87). Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that failure to use diplomacy to contain Iran's nuclear programme has created a more difficult environment to achieve policy in other crucial issues, such as the fight against al-Qaeda (Pressman 2008: 169). Moreover, North Korea led by the then leader, 'Kim Jong-il went on to test his long-range missiles and nuclear bomb' (Steinberg 2008: 157). This situation is still one that persists today, with the North Korea successfully sending a satellite into space as recently as 12 October 2012 (BBC news 2012). One can conclude from these case studies that intimidation has indeed encouraged proliferation.

The more positive sum aspects of the neo-liberalisation of Iraq has presented the United States with matters of potential it otherwise would not have been partial to had Saddam Hussein remained in power. This potential, for U.S. led multinational, primarily oil companies and U.S. capital is being inevitably achieved with Iraq having to integrate itself into the global world market of which the U.S. is the leading hegemon. Furthermore, Iraq's continued increasing oil production, hitting a pre-1990 export high and output at more than 3.0 million barrels per day (SIGIR 2012) in the last quarter, are further successes in this process. In this perspective U.S. structural power and inevitably its oil companies will benefit from Iraq becoming the key supplier to fast growing Asian markets, mainly China. Indeed, the International Energy Authority predicts that without Iraqi oil on the global market, oil would be \$15 a barrel more (Sky News 2012).

However, this is occurring at a tremendous cost – last estimated at \$3 trillion (Herring 2011:63), and with continued resistance. This resistance combined with neo-liberal failures have led to major setbacks. As a result of these setbacks, the original neo-conservative aspiration for a neo-liberalised Iraq has not materialised. The Bush administration originally proposed an aggressive attempt at a neo-liberalised heaven, epitomised by the Coalition of Provisional Authority's (CPA) pursuit 'of making Iraq one of the most neo-liberalised states in the world through deregulation, privatisation, low taxes on companies and opening up the economy to foreign companies' (Herring 2011: 32). This aspiration, outlined in *Moving the Iraqi Economy from Recovery to Sustainable Growth*, drafted by the Treasury Department and US-AID was supported by Wolfowitz and neo-conservative favourite Fadhil Chalabi. Its proposal was mass privatisation of state-owned industries, predominately oil, but also other important state employment, to be carried out after only one year of the invasion with U.S. contractors carrying out the majority of reforms. (Herring and Rangwala 2006: 224). For a variety of reasons this brazen attempt at aggressive neo-liberalisation was not successful. An increasingly important factor in relation to the difficulties experienced by the CPA in its attempt at neo-liberalisation is the 'everyday' Iraqi's opinion on the process. Inequality and exclusion that neo-liberalism has created within the country has led to a 'growing internalisation of neoliberalism among the Iraqi political and business elite despite the clear preference among the Iraqi public for a welfare state' (Herring 2011: 62). This clear preference is depicted in the fact 63 per cent of Iraqi's preferred Iraq's oil to be developed and produced by state-owned companies (Herring 2011: 62). Perhaps the most significant achievement of the resistance to neo-liberalism has been the inability of U.S.- led multinational oil companies (with support from U.S. and U.K. governments), to pass the 'oil law', that favoured multinational oil companies, that had originally looked inevitable. (Muttitt 2011: 362). Moreover, it is significant that the oil contracts offered by the Iraqi national government to foreign

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private and state-owned oil companies are contracts signed for a fixed fee rather than the neo-liberal favoured percentage share of profits. (Herring 2011: 31). These consequences of these setbacks have led to what Herring describes as the neo-liberalisation of Iraq at 'arm's length' via its socialisation into the global neo-liberal order. (Herring 2011: 33).

The very fact that neo-liberalism has occurred at 'arm's length' emphasises the overall negative trend neo-liberalism has experienced in Iraq, *particularly* in the context of neo-conservative grand declarations for Iraq mid-2003 (Herring and Rangwala 2006: 215, 222-5). To overcome these difficulties, the Bush administration turned to a policy of repression (Schwartz 2008: 49). This policy of repression and coercion further fuelled Iraqi discontentment and as a result, the insurgency. However despite the overall negative trend, these coercive attempts at realising the matters of potential do contain the capacity to win the on-going 'economic war' (Muttitt 2011:332). Noticeable developments in the struggle to neo-liberalise Iraq have included the coalition's most sought after and politically sensitive objective: oil. Oil contracts are now signed, governing the majority of Iraq's oil for the next 20 years, the biggest offering of known oil to international companies in the history of the oil industry (Muttitt 2011: 359). Indeed, as Muttitt argues, neo-conservative aspirations of 2002/03 are being revived (2011: 360). Furthermore, oil unions have been coercively attacked, with the Iraqi central government labelling their activities as tantamount to terrorism (Muttitt 2011: 362). Such developments have decreased the ability of the most organised units in Iraqi society to resist neo-liberalism.

In conclusion the attempted imposition of policies informed by neo-conservatism that the Bush administrations sought in Iraq have not proved effective in ways it was hoped by those advocating them. Indeed, this essay argues that these policies can be viewed most accurately along a continuum of failure. Along this continuum of failure one can evaluate the key objectives of the Bush administration as distinctive and continuing failures. These include the emphasis placed on unilateral military action underpinned by American exceptionalism to transform Iraq and the Middle East region into thriving democracies. These failures have left Iraqi democracy as one characterised by political incoherence, corruption and in a state of fragility. This fragility can, and is exposed in a regular fashion by its inability to deal with the insurgency, terrorist attacks, and the desperate political demands of the different tribal, ethnic, sectarian and religious groups that compose its society. As a consequence Iraq's future relies on the result of these subtle, complex groups' consolidating or debilitating efforts to maintain power or disrupt the current status quo. The aspiration of the Bush administration of transforming the Middle East through the 'domino effect' underpinned by the concept of 'bandwagoning' has failed. Moreover, the contributory effect the Iraq invasion had on the election of Hamas in the Palestinian Central Authority has achieved the opposite intended consequence to that of the neo-conservative Likud advocates that stated 'the road to Jerusalem runs through Baghdad'. Furthermore, the objectives of defeating terrorism and preventing the nuclear proliferation of 'rogue states' can also be viewed along this continuum of failure. Al-Qaeda is still operative and evidence presented within the essay suggests their attacks are becoming more frequent. North Korea has continued to flout international laws and condemnations to test its military capabilities while Iran has emerged from the debacle a much emboldened actor, both in Iraq and in the region.

This essay has argued that these specific neo-conservative objectives merged with powerful, underlying U.S. foreign policy aspirations. These aspirations relate to its prioritisation of energy security within the Middle East. Iraq provided the perfect opportunity to achieve this historical, empirical aspiration, through its post Washington consensus, neo-liberalism. Neo-liberalism, particularly that of oil, referred to in the essay as the 'economic war' is the next battleground over which the war in Iraq will be fought. While there have been prominent developments favouring the advocates for, and against neo-liberalism the essay argues that the overall trend for neo-liberalism in Iraq has been a negative one for the advocates of its strategy. However, this war is by no means over. The inevitable and increased interaction Iraq has with the global economy will ensure more aspects of Iraq will become neo-liberalised as it is ingrained into its society. The signing off of the largest amount of oil in history to foreign companies is tantamount to the belief that the matters of potential the essay refers to are just that, matters of potential in an on-going struggle. Indeed, as the contracts are still not ratified by Iraqi law, the implications point strongly to the increased utilisation of private military contractors to preserve the agreements. The continuum of failure the United States has experienced in Iraq has led to trillions of dollars spent, defeat for its premier military superpower defeated by 'ragtag' insurgents that is likely to lead towards a strategy reliant on counter insurgency in oil rich regions (Stokes 2007), special forces, drones and remote killing and as mentioned earlier PMC's to protect U.S. interests. However, one cannot feel the overwhelming sense of obliteration for the means by which these objectives are sought in the future, that of unilateral

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preventive action implemented by the neo-conservatives and the Bush administration in its occupation of Iraq.

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