The Conquest of Iraq: What’s Next?

Now that the richest and most powerful country in the world has beat up a small country weakened and demoralized by a brutal and irrational dictator, it is important to ask “what’s next?”

The immediate answer is a tedious and dangerous period of “nation building” of unknown duration and outcome. But the hawks surrounding George W. Bush have plans that go far beyond Iraq. Before Bush was elected they laid out their proposals for how the United States and Israel should dominate all of the Middle East, shut down radical Islam, and control world oil supplies.

They have their eye on our past antagonists who not coincidentally border Iraq, namely Iran and Syria. But they also want to arrange “regime change” among our allies in the region, in particular Saudi Arabia and Egypt, which they see as untrustworthy, corrupt, and the financial sponsors of radical Islam. They want to use US military power to literally remake the map of this oil-rich but conflict-ridden region of the world.

Saddam and his putative “weapons of mass destruction” and terrorist links gave us the excuse to station 200,000 troops in the heart of Middle East along with the mind-numbing military fire-power that supports them. This delivers a short powerful message to surrounding countries: You may be next! It’s like a bully on the playground. He beats somebody up, and everybody else reluctantly cooperates. Or at least that is what these military hawks hope will be the result.

They are true believers in the “shock and awe” school of diplomacy that in an earlier period was called “gunboat diplomacy.” Just like dropping the atomic bombs on Japan served notice to the rest of the world that the United States possessed
unparalleled military power that it would not hesitate to use, the takeover of Iraq is supposed to shock the region and the rest of the world into submission.

The raw use of American military power is all that is needed according to these hawks. We do not need NATO, we do not need allies, and we certainly do not need the United Nations. Similarly we do not need international law or the World Court. Nor do we need international treaties or agreements except for those that we impose on others.

Our military and economic might alone can impose a Pax Americana on a weak, divided, and hostile world. Again, like the bully on the playground, we merely have to regularly demonstrate that we will brutally strike out at anyone who challenges our worldwide supremacy. It doesn't matter if no one else in the world likes us or if our traditional allies oppose us. We need nothing but our raw power and the guts to regularly use it.

That is a dramatic change from our isolationism in the 19th century and the worldwide alliances of which we were a part during most of the 20th century. It also turns our back on the democratic and anti-colonial idealism that has motivated much of our foreign policy in the past and brought us respect around the world.

These conservative hawks would now have us comfortably and arrogantly place the imperial crown on our own head as we thumb our noses at the world.

The cost of this new imperial ambition will be exceedingly high. We will have to foot that bill ourselves since we are insisting on going it alone. We will have to spend many hundreds of billions of dollars more on the military every year, providing them with every possible new weapons system to make sure we always maintain the same sort of overwhelming firepower we demonstrated in Iraq.

At the same time that much more money has to be spent on the military, these hawkish conservatives are also committed to dramatically cutting taxes, especially on
the rich and our large corporations. That puts a convenient double squeeze on all other
domestic spending. As deficits loom larger and larger, the only alternative will be to cut
domestic programs deeper and deeper. There will be no money to stabilize Social
Security and Medicare, not to mention extending health insurance to more Americans.
There will be fewer and fewer federal dollars available to help state and local
governments who will, in turn, be forced to cut back their own programs. Public schools
and higher education will also continue to be squeezed. Government at all levels,
except for the military, the police, prisons, and homeland security, will have to shrink.

This, of course, is not just unfortunate happenstance to these hawkish
conservatives. This is an intentional part of the agenda. Rather than saying no to
healthcare for children and senior citizens, rather than saying no to environmental
protection, rather than attacking public education, the idea is to "compassionately" say
that all of those things would be nice if we could afford to have the government provide
them. But clearly we no longer can afford such government programs. Just look at the
ballooning deficits and the threats we face around the world and across our country
from vicious enemies.

The costs of maintaining our new unilateral empire will impoverish most of the
public sector. The radical conservatives will achieve their dream of eliminating the
popular government programs that were developed during the twentieth century to
ameliorate the harsh edges of our capitalist economy. Large international corporations
will be freed of taxes, regulation, and accountability while weak and impoverished
governments focus primarily on policing their critics and other perceived troublemakers
at home and abroad.

Welcome to the “New American Century”!