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What comes next? The shape of the postwar world

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We already have a fairly good idea of what the world will look like after the Iraq War is concluded and the Iraq Occupation begins. If President Bush's vision of a quick military victory, a benign and untroubled occupation and the quick construction of a democratic Iraq is correct, then the rules and structures of the international system will be completely rewritten in favor of a U.S.-centric system.

However, the future is unlikely to be so obliging.

The reason so many governments and experts urged Iraqi disarmament short of war is that the consequences of the invasion are likely to be mixed at best and possibly catastrophic. This concern does not underestimate the brutality of the Iraqi regime, but reflects a fear that the war cure is worse than the Saddam disease.

Here are four likely consequences of America's first pre-emptive war.

Mideast Instability Will Grow

For administration hawks, Iraq is the beginning, not the end.

Iraq is the start of a plan to change all the regimes in the Middle East. "There is tremendous potential to transform the region," says Richard Perle, "If a tyrant like Saddam (Hussein) can be brought down, others are going to begin to think and act to bring down the tyrants that are inflicting them." U. S. troops will be there to help in these transformations, operating from new, more secure bases in Iraq.

It is more likely that the mass movements in the war's wake will be anti- American, not pro-democracy. Arab citizens, already inflamed over what they consider the brutal military assaults of Ariel Sharon's and willing to excuse suicide bombers, will see American troops as Israeli reinforcements, not Iraq's liberators.

Fatwas are already flowing from mainstream clerics urging all Muslims to resist the U.S. invasion. Governments may indeed fall, but it may be the rulers in Jordan that are threatened, not the dictatorship in Syria.

Terrorism Will Increase

For the president, terrorism is the new communism. "Freedom and fear are at war," he says "and we know that God is not neutral between them." There are no credible connections between Baghdad and al Qaeda, but in the president's mind the two are one and thus, he promised the nation, "The terrorist threat to America and the world will be diminished the moment that Saddam Hussein is disarmed."

But the war -- whatever the outcome -- will likely increase both amateur and organized terrorism. Much of the terrorism will be spontaneous outrage at the invasion and deaths, striking out at close by, identifiable American targets.

Some will certainly be sophisticated attacks on the American homeland. "An American invasion of Iraq is already being used as a recruitment tool by al Qaeda and other groups," a senior American counterintelligence official told *The New York Times*. "And it is a very effective tool."

Alliances Will Be Weakened

Never before has a U.S. president so scorned world opinion. Truman had the United Nations with him in the Korean War, Kennedy had the Organization of American States backing his blockade of Cuba; Clinton had NATO in the war in Kosovo. Bush goes almost alone. The United Nations and NATO will never be the same. They and other multilateral institutions are now under pressure from both sides.

U.S. conservatives have already targeted the United Nations for destruction.

"The United Nations is not a good idea badly implemented. It is a bad idea," says columnist George Will.

On the other side, there is deep distrust of Bush and his vision to transform the world. The staid *Financial Times* of London opined, "The measure of this diplomatic fiasco is that a perfectly arguable case about one of the most despicable dictators of modern times was so mishandled that public opinion internationally came to worry more about the misuse of U.S. power than about Saddam Hussein."

Of the 200 countries in the world, U.S. claims 40 governments support the war. And the people of almost all these nations actually opposed the attack in overwhelming majorities.

If the war goes well, world publics may fear emboldened, postwar U.S. intentions even more. The Bush doctrine seems likely to generate exactly the anti-U.S. coalitions that it was designed to discourage.

Proliferation May Grow

What lesson will North Korean or Iranian leaders draw from the Iraq war? Should they curtail their nuclear ambitions, or speed them up?

If inspections had been given a chance to work, if Hussein had been disarmed without war, it would have been seen as a tremendous victory for Bush and as the world's enforcement of international treaties.

This is now Bush's War, a highly personal vendetta and exercise in raw power. Worse, to justify war, the Bush administration has disparaged inspections, thus undercutting future applications in Iran or North Korea.

But the impact may be more immediate.

If the war destabilizes Pakistan, nuclear weapons, materials or scientists may flow to other nations or terrorist groups. North Korea, ignored during the crisis, may go overtly nuclear, pushing nuclear ambitions in South Korea or even Japan. Iraqi military officers or scientists, fearing war crime trials, may flee invading U.S. troops carrying their knowledge or even weapons with them to other nations or groups.

The "bold stroke" so long sought by administration hawks has now hammered not only Hussein's regime but the international institutions so patiently constructed by Democrats and Republicans over the past 60 years. It will destabilize the region, increase terrorism, decrease alliance unity and make the spread of deadly weapons more likely without measurably increasing our national security.

That will be the postwar world.

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