



## After Iraq: Part II

Thomas Sowell

Colaboraciones n° 1864

August 3, 2007

Historians in the future will undoubtedly find many and varied lessons from the war in Iraq. But we in the present do not have the luxury of waiting for all the evidence to be in before we start to understand what has gone wrong and what has gone right in Iraq.

What has gone right is that the Iraq war is already over. Our troops won it. But our politicians may once more lose the peace – and with disastrous consequences for us and for the world.

Peace has not been achieved in Iraq, though pacification continues – always at a cost in American lives – and shows signs of progress, much to the dismay of those who have bet their political future on an American defeat.

Defeatists have not yet had the courage to directly ensure defeat by

cutting off the money to continue military operations in Iraq.

That would be taking responsibility for the defeat. What would serve their political purpose better would be to legislate preconditions for the spending of military appropriations that would make defeat inevitable, but let it be seen as Bush's defeat, not theirs.

That is the direction in which the defeatists are moving, as politicians who have never deployed troops, or even worn a military uniform, speak loftily of "redeployment," as if they actually know what they are talking about.

Having politicians micro-managing a war has been a formula for disaster, whether in Vietnam or Iraq. Our troops have already been under too many restrictions as to what they could or couldn't do under the "rules of engagement" in Iraq.

The great tragic failure in Iraq has been political failure, not military failure. At the heart of that failure have been two lofty notions – "nation-building" and democracy.

Nations cannot be built.

You can transplant institutions from one country to another, but you cannot transplant the history and culture from which the attitudes and traditions evolved that enable those institutions to work.

It took centuries for democracy to evolve in the Western world.

Yet we tried to create democracy in Iraq before we created the security – the law and order – that is a prerequisite for any form of viable government.

Having made democracy the centerpiece of the reconstruction of postwar Iraq, Americans have been hamstrung by the inadequacies of that government and the fact that our military could not simply ignore the Iraqi government when its politicians got in the way of restoring law and order.

People will support tyranny before they will support anarchy. Both can be avoided by creating an interim government based on competence, rather than on its being an embodiment of democratic ideals.

Neither in Europe nor in Asia did today's democracies begin as de-

mocracies. As late as 1950, no one could have called Taiwan or South Korea democracies.

Even today, Singapore does not have the kind of freedom that Westerners regard as democratic. But it is a decent and prosperous society, vastly superior in every way to what it was at the end of World War II.

Trying to create democracy in places where it has never existed – and where the prerequisites for democracy may not exist – has been a needless gamble.

Among those prerequisites are a toleration of different views, an accommodation of different interests, and a willingness to put the national interest above one's own.

The Middle East is the last place to look for such qualities. Such things evolved in the West only after centuries of different religions and peoples trying unsuccessfully to destroy each other.

Many have argued that democracies tend not to start wars, so that having more democracies in the world is in the interest of peace-loving people.

But that is vastly different from saying that we know how to create democracies – or that so much blood and treasure should be gambled on that long shot.

©2007 Creators Syndicate, Inc.