The Post 9/11 Debacle Caused by the US Democracy Rhetoric: Assessing the Case of Iraq between 2001 and 2009

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Abstract:

This article analyzes why the Freedom Agenda, after the invasion of Iraq, did not proceed as the neoconservatives expected and how the rhetoric of the Bush administration on the Promotion of democracy was confronted by the nature of Middle Eastern society. It shows that the rush of neoconservatives for regime change in Iraq lacking real plans has compromised the administration's efforts to promote democracy and sow liberalism in the rest of the region.

Key words: US foreign policy, Iraq, neocons, democracy promotion, rhetoric.

ملخص:

الغرض من هذا المقال هو تحليل لماذا لم تسر الأجندة الديمقراطية، بعد غزو العراق، كما كان يتوقع المحافظون الجدد وكيف اصطدم خطاب إدارة بوش حول تعزيز الديمقراطية مع طبيعة مجتمع الشرق الأوسط. سوف يبين أن اندفاع المحافظين الجدد لتغيير النظام في العراق وافتقارهم إلى خطط حقيقية قد قوضت جهود إدارة بوش الرامية إلى تعزيز الديمقراطية وكذا وعوده لزرع بذور الليبرالية عبر بقية المنطقة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: سياسة الولايات المتحدة الخارجية، العراق، المحافظون الجدد، تعزيز الديمقراطية، الخطاب.

Résumé:

Cet article analyse pourquoi l'Agenda de la Liberté, après l'invasion de l'Irak, n'a pas progressé comme le souhaitaient les néoconservateurs et comment la rhétorique de l'administration Bush sur la promotion de la démocratie était confrontée à la nature de la société moyen-orientale. Il montre que la ruée des néoconservateurs pour le changement du régime en Irak, dépourvu de véritables projets, a compromise les efforts de l'administration pour promouvoir la démocratie et semer le libéralisme dans le reste de la région.

Mots clés : politique étrangère des Etats-Unis, Irak, les néoconservateurs, promotion de la démocratie, rhétorique.

Introduction :

After September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush had pledged, at least rhetorically, to make the promotion of democracy abroad a central objective of American foreign policy. There had been an emphasis on the moral and strategic imperatives for advancing freedom and democracy around the world as a response to terrorist threats. However, this task was to be carried out under different settings of unilateralism, military might and assertive hegemony. The 2003 Iraq war was justified on the grounds of pre-emptive self-defense against presumed weapons of mass destruction (WMD) proliferation and terrorism. Then, democratization became also part of the neoconservative rationale for military action.

The purpose of this article is to analyze why the freedom agenda, after the Iraq invasion, did not proceed as the neocons had expected and what kind of justifications the Bush administration advanced for that - with a special emphasis on the dismissal of the geopolitical significance of the invasion and the nature of the Middle East society. It shows that the neoconservative surge for regime change in Iraq, lacking genuine plans for rebuilding the country and a good understanding of the region, has jeopardized the Bush administrations' efforts to democracy promotion and his promises to plant the seeds of liberalism across the rest of the region.

Democracy Promotion and the Case of Iraq :

Recently, with the rise of security issues especially in poor countries and failed states, the Bush administration has come to define non-democratic, failed states as the most significant threat to national security.[1] At least rhetorically, democracy promotion has become closely related to security interests and social engineering of foreign states.[2] Given its historical legacy with US, Iraq became the primary influence behind the formulation of the National Security Strategy (NSS 2002) as a member of the 'axis of evil' and at the core of the 'Bush Doctrine' of preventive war.

Consequently, Iraq was going to undergo democratic conversion that would subsequently mark the "first phase in a grand design for the moral reconstruction of the Middle East".[3] It was considered that Saddam's demise would herald a new era for Iraq in which its longsuffering peoples would live in harmony and peaceful coexistence, and the nurturing of democracy in Iraq would become an example to the rest of the region for the benefits of embracing American ideals. Indeed, it was envisaged as a 'beacon of democracy' to be mimicked by other nations of the Middle East.

Democracy obviously has many social, economic, cultural and psychological preconditions, but those who thought America had a mission to democratize Iraq gave no thought to them, much less to helping create them.[4] For their delicate task of social engineering, the only instrument they thought to bring along was a wrecking ball. The Bush neoconservatives followed this idea, arguing that America liberates the terrorized and promotes democracy overseas in order to prevent the threatening behavior of undemocratic regimes. Definitely believing that the "internal character of regimes defines their external behavior",[5] Bush argued that "American security depended on the promotion of regime change in other societies," especially in the Middle East.[6]

Building 'A Shining City' on the Arab Hill :

The Bush administration qualified the invasion of Iraq as a divine mission to build 'a shining city on a hill' in Arabia. As Ronald Reagan emphasized, "America is a shining city upon a hill whose beacon light guides freedom-loving people everywhere."[7] These lights were supposed to shine over Baghdad's dark nights imposed by Saddam's rule to guide the Iraqi people to democracy. Many scholars[8] think George W. Bush had his city on a hill moment after September 11, 2001 when he framed the war against terror as a moral response; a mission blessed by God that the rest of the world would join in. "America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world," the president said "and no

one will keep that light from shining." But other scholars[9] have concluded that Bush had already blown his city on a hill moment with the world's condemnation of the war on Iraq and the "growing discomfort at home at mounting US casualties with no end in sight"[10] and the flare-up of sectarian violence all over the region.

President George W Bush has condemned the 'freedom deficit' in the Middle East and said the United States must remain focused on the region 'for decades'. "Our commitment to democracy is being tested in the Middle East," he said.[11] Bush said dictators in Iraq and Syria had "left a legacy of torture, oppression, misery and ruin". The establishment of a free Iraq at the heart of the Middle East will be a watershed event in the global democratic revolution. He portrayed the war in Iraq as the latest front in the "global democratic revolution" led by the United States.[12]

The Bush Doctrine, and neoconservative reasoning,[13] held that containment of the enemy as under the Realpolitik of Reagan did not work, and that the enemy of USA must be destroyed pre-emptively before they attack using all the available means.[14] Yet, after the primary justification for the invasion of Iraq had become apparently based on false premises, a solid rationale was therefore required to legitimize the continued occupation of Iraq. Rajiv Chandrasekaran claims that: [Bush] deemed the development of democracy to be no longer just an important goal. It was the goal. Iraq would have to become that shining city on a hill in the Arab world".[15] This was to be achieved by redressing the region's 'democratic deficit', something the Administration had touted as the central explanatory variable for the attacks of September 11.

Divergence within President Bush's cabinet between key players such as the Vice-President, the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State relegated State Department efforts and centralized power in the Department of Defense (DoD). Nevertheless, an interagency planning process produced guidance on issues such as security sector reform and a high-level outline for Iraqi reconstruction while departments undertook more detailed work on postwar issues.[16] This

guidance was supposed to inform later decisions taken by coalition officials in Baghdad.

Exporting Democracy to Iraq: The Neoconservative Vision :

Rhetorically, the foundations of the G. W. Bush administration's efforts to democratize Iraq were laid well before the invasion itself commenced, with its outright dismissal of the Middle East's exceptionalism. As Richard Perle argued, "A democratic Iraq would be a powerful refutation of the patronizing view that Arabs are incapable of democracy".[17] G. W. Bush himself expounded on this theme by citing the successful examples of Japan and Germany "moving toward democracy and living in freedom".[18]

Contrary to Clinton's 'democracy enlargement', Bush targeted precisely the Middle East region to exert his imperial agenda. Steven Hurst delineates the cause of the United States' search for hegemony over the Middle East region to its abundant oil revenues. However, the United States has been unable to move its hegemony in the region beyond security guarantor into "deeper economic integration and the spread of hegemonic values."[19] This failure to penetrate the region has had "significant ramifications for the United States' policies, not least in the frequent need to resort to coercion to maintain its dominant position".[20]

Thus, the new US approach to the region is manifested in adopting two coercive tools: regime change and democratization. Actually, the Administration's broad intentions in Iraq, with reference to the strategy of democracy promotion, were summarized concisely by William Robinson: "Washington hopes it can bring together a national elite that can act as effective intermediaries between the Iraqi masses and the US transnational project for the country".[21] The main goal of this formulation was to set up a viable political order able to achieve internal stability and guarantee access to oil and markets and a launch pad for further transnational economic and political penetration of the Middle East.[22] In pursuing these aims, the Bush Administration

opted for the promotion of elite-based democracy in Iraq incorporating a range of significant reforms.

Before the invasion of Iraq, President G. W. Bush promised Iraqis to determine their own form of government while guaranteeing no other dictator to emerge.[23] While this seemed comforting, it in effect meant putting checks on the will of Iraqi people in doing so. In fact, the US did not only edict the broad composition of Iraq's new government, but also to transfer power to a coalition of exiled Iraqi elites.[24] This coalition was likely to be headed by Ahmed Chalabi as a favorite of the Pentagon and influential neoconservatives. The role of Chalabi and other Iraqi exiles was publicizing the virtues of Western liberal democracy and free market economics within Iraqi society and provide legitimation for the promoted ideology.[25]

By forming a Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to administer the country temporarily, the United States undertook a large-scale assistance program meant to stabilize the country through the rehabilitation of economic infrastructure, and the formation of a representative government as the main vehicles for rebuilding the country. During the summer of 2003, the CPA's political team developed a plan for the transition to democracy and, with it, sovereignty. This plan closely paralleled Bremer's views as expressed in his first week and reflected the conclusions about democratization that the responsible CPA staffers had formed since their arrival in Baghdad.[26] To rebuild the state, initially Iraq needed a new constitution that Iraqis themselves direly wanted.

To that end, the CPA set in motion a number of initiatives.[27] With respect to democratization, the plan included specific objectives: drafting the constitution, building an electoral apparatus, and developing political parties.[28] Ironically, many decisions taken by the former CPA after the war's end in March 2003 helped strengthen the insurgency and further alienate many Iraqis while optimists saw their hopes for a new democracy dashed by violence and chaos.

US Legacy in Iraq and the Failure of Democratization :

The Bush administration's early reluctance and insufficient planning for Iraq's postwar reconstruction has had serious and deadly consequences.[29] Once Saddam's government was overthrown, a power vacuum ensued as the US did not initially step in to fill the void. Consequently a wave of widespread looting, disorder, and insecurity prevailed setting the tone for the postwar environment.[30] Moreover, this security breakdown and lawlessness, allowed a bunch of Saddam's loyalists to undertake a low-level insurgency against American forces.

Having destroyed Saddam's military and security apparatus, the thinking went; American soldiers would be viewed as saviors not occupiers. By capitalizing on the good will of the Iraqi people the Americans could quickly scale back their military presence and bring in civilian experts to help a new Iraqi government, headed by expatriates like Ahmed Chalabi, create a new democratic state.[31] Larry Diamond, a former Senior Advisor to the CPA in Iraq, commented that the immature assumptions of American war theorists "quickly collapsed, along with overall security," immediately after the war as US troops stood unconcerned, and as much of "Iraq's remaining physical, economic, and institutional infrastructure was systematically looted and sabotaged".[32]

Proponents of the US invasion sustained the moral ends of establishing freedom and democracy in Iraq with the formation of an inclusive government that encompasses all the key ethnic, religious, and tribal groups. They believed that a democracy firmly planted in the heart of the Arab world would become an ally of the West in the perceived fight against Islamist extremism. To maintain a transition from authoritarianism to democracy, recognizing that the new Iraq was an imperfect political system, many downplayed the serious and longstanding sectarian divisions that bedeviled Iraq and argued that the newly built Shiite-dominated government would be acceptable and would not align itself with Iran.[33]

Meanwhile opponents of the occupation focused on the ensuing casualties among both Americans and Iraqis and human rights abuses (e.g. Abu Ghraib prison). They contended that a continued international presence greatly exacerbated the situation. Initially, they pointed out that the occupation had had too few troops to stabilize the country and root out the growing number of insurgents, especially after the CPA ordered Saddam's military, security, and intelligence infrastructure disbanded. Opponents further blamed Washington for lack of preparation at the beginning of the operation, which would have allowed a quicker exit, especially after the 2005 Iraqi elections. For them, to maintain stability and prevent sectarian reprisals and looting, policy actions would have implemented a much more efficient transition plan that would have handed over political power sooner. These criticisms became even more pronounced after 2006 with the rapid deterioration of the Iraqi security situation.[34]

Thus, the democratization process in Iraq can be seen with respect to the impact of the US legacy in the country. By the standards that were originally set forth as the reasons for the 2003 invasion, there is in fact a gloomy and a very mixed picture about America's influence. In its occupation of Iraq, the United States fell far short of the ambitious objectives set out by the Bush administration. The failure of the US intervention in Iraq is reflected in the demise of the democratic rule of the country.

In the face of exponentially rising violence, the US had effectively lost control over the strategy of democracy promotion. It subsequently failed to secure one of its key strategic aims in Iraq, namely to facilitate a transition from authoritarian governance to elite-based democracy. Consequently, the democratization agenda has taken a different path from that designed by Washington following the invasion. This was due to direct and indirect factors that fueled instability and disturbed the US officials, precipitated plans for state-building and undermined efforts to democratization.

Reasons behind the Failure of Democratization:

There are two fundamental reasons that led to failure on the part of the US giving rise first to the insurgency, and then eventually the collapse of its main strategic objectives in Iraq. The First factors have to do with the institutional and procedural impediments that hampered the installation of infrastructure for a democratic state in Iraq. The Second reasons have to do with more rhetorical impediments to the legitimacy of coercive democratization.

a- Direct Initial Causes:

The conditions underlying post-war planning and management had led to mess and chaos. According to a legion of critics, the planners of the Bush administration made a series of critical mistakes that have turned what might have been a successful democracy into a fiasco.[35] The administration erred the most, according to critics, on disbanding the Iraqi army, which might have played a valuable role in restoring security to the country. And it erred further in its harsh decrees proscribing members of the Ba'ath Party from participation in Iraq's public life – a decision, like that which disbanded the army, needlessly antagonizing the Sunnis and pushing many of them into the insurgency as a security vacuum ensued.

In addition to lack of planning, the prospects for democracy in Iraq have been hampered by sectarian cleavage and ethnic fragmentation. The most important challenge to the success of the American effort is that Iraq is a profoundly divided society. Perhaps the most serious mistake the United States made was to organize the new political system in Iraq on a sectarian basis. Iraq does not have a single society, the society is fragmented, and there are rather 'societies'.

Thus, to bring an accord among the different Iraqi factions a uniting constitution was needed. This Constitution, as finally written, with considerable influence by Bush's Ambassador to Iraq, Zalmay Khalilzad., was approached as a "tripartite peace treaty".[36] Due to the Sunni boycott, and because Americans so dominated the constitution

writing process (TAL was written in secret mostly by Americans), the constitution's legitimacy has been undermined in many Iraqi eyes, and with it the Shiite-led government it ensued.[37]

Given these differing views about the constitution there had been a central debate in Iraq about whether federalism would strengthen the state and national identity or instead be a source of division.[38] The government that the Iraqis have formed proved ill-equipped to resolve the Iraqi differences, but it did in fact outline a decentralized federalist system that could support the division of Iraq into regions of comparative independence.

The weak role of civil society or its absence reflected negatively on the legitimacy of state power leading to the separation of people from the state because the state's power did not come out as an expression of the will of the people. Thus, this led to the use of violence and the emergence of clandestine opposition and political violence. Furthermore, the escalating violence has weakened moderates in society at large as well as within the major political parties.

b. Indirect Subsequent Causes :

The insular nature of US occupation, namely its isolation from the ordinary Iraqi people, its failure to 'internationalize' the occupation and reconstruction process early on, and the increasing death toll greatly soured its relations with the international community.[39] The US Government has openly admitted having invaded Iraq under false pretexts (no connection to 9-11, no WMDs). In fact, President Bush lied to the US Congress.[40] Moreover, The Bush administration's obsession with control throughout the occupation, inadvertently delegitimized the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) as its members were handpicked by the US among the former exiles, which convinced many Iraqis that they were effectively puppets of Washington.[41]

The already shaken credibility crisis deepened with the widespread corruption. While Iraqis had become accustomed to

corruption after years of sanctions and mismanagement, they did not expect the complicity of some American officers and officials in pushing projects of doubtful benefit and legality that cost Iraq billions of dollars that are still unaccounted for.[42]

Moreover, Iraq's geographical location in the Middle East - bordering six states different in civilization, culture and language - have had a significant and clear impact to the Iraqi demographic reality. The complex composition of the Iraqi society put the country at the center of religious and ethnic conflicts. Since the dividing line between majority Sunni and majority Shiite areas in the Middle East runs through central Iraq, its domestic politics have become "a pawn of more stable, theocratically-inclined countries on either side"[43] and susceptible for frequent meddling from its neighbors. Some neighboring countries have used this to serve their strategic political interests,[44] and largely contributed in undermining Iraq's security, and Iraqi democracy. Consequently, the sectarian polarization of regional politics has exacerbated and disrupted the Iraqi transition even more.

Conclusion:

More than a decade has now passed since the first Iraqi Constitution after the demise of Saddam's regime has been adopted and Iraq is still one of the most dangerous, unstable and corrupt countries in the world. Democracy is still creeping along the bloody streets of wrecked cities in Iraq. It is clear that the ill-conceived US experiment to remake Iraq on its image has failed. The deep structural, legal and political failings of the Iraqi state, for which both US officials and Iraqi politicians bear responsibility, have contributed greatly to this failure.

From a Machiavellian perspective, the G.W. Bush administration's policies have succeeded. Iraq will never attack America's oil-producing allies again. However, by many measures, post-Saddam Iraq suffers from poor democratic governance. The US invasion and subsequent developments in the new democratic Iraq

brought about the increasing fragmentation of social and political life and a declining of well-being in the population.

A lengthy list of mistakes made by President Bush and his officials has marked the reality of transition to democracy in Iraq: the failure to plan for the occupation, the self-serving assumptions regarding how Iraqis would respond to 'liberation', the reckless disbandment of the Iraqi army, the unprecedented scale of administrative and financial corruption in US-financed reconstruction efforts and the venomous effects of weapons on Iraqi 'hearts and minds'. In fact, Bush's strong suit in Iraq was building a successful democracy. However, the Bush administration played a potentially strong hand poorly. But these mistakes and the lack of forethought reveal a more fundamental issue: hubris and hegemony.[45]

Consequently, credibility evoked the Bush administration's discourse about democratization. As Bush had expressed earlier that the US commitment to democracy was being 'tested' in Iraq, many of the claims (made in the Bush Doctrine about encouraging democracy as a route to overcoming terrorism) have been brought into question by the case of democratization in Iraq. Critics have argued that coercive democratization in Iraq has sown the seeds of the ensuing violence and played a large role in enabling the growth of terrorism in the state.[46] While the presence of democracy is not in itself a cause of terrorism, it is often agreed that regime change and the ambiguous process of democratization adopted by the CPA helped to embolden Jihadists and facilitate sectarian terrorism between Iraqi communities.

Contrary to the Bush administration's claims about undermining Jihadism through intervention in Iraq, regime change and events in the state from 2003 to 2006 actually played a key role in fostering Jihadist violence. It is not that democracy in Iraq itself encouraged Jihadism, but rather that through its actions, the Bush administration inadvertently established in Iraq an ideal breeding ground for this ideology and the rise of ISIL.

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