

The Future of Iraq and U.S. Occupation

Noam Chomsky

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Let's just imagine what the policies might be of an independent Iraq, independent, sovereign Iraq, let's say more or less democratic, what are the policies likely to be?

Well there's going to be a Shiite majority, so they'll have some significant influence over policy. The first thing they'll do is reestablish relations with Iran. Now they don't particularly like Iran, but they don't want to go to war with them so they'll move toward what was happening already even under Saddam, that is, restoring some sort of friendly relations with Iran.

That's the last thing the United States wants. It has worked very hard to try to isolate Iran. The next thing that might happen is that a Shiite-controlled, more or less democratic Iraq might stir up feelings in the Shiite areas of Saudi Arabia, which happen to be right nearby and which happen to be where all the oil is. So you might find what in Washington must be the ultimate nightmare—a Shiite region which controls most of the world's oil and is independent. Furthermore, it is very likely that an independent, sovereign Iraq would try to take its natural place as a leading state in the Arab world, maybe the leading state. And you know that's something that goes back to biblical times.

What does that mean? Well it means rearming, first of all. They have to confront the regional enemy. Now the regional enemy, overpowering enemy, is Israel. They're going to have to rearm to confront Israel—which means probably developing weapons of mass destruction, just as a deterrent. So here's the picture of what they must be dreaming about in Washington—and probably 10 Downing street in London—that here you might get a substantial Shiite majority rearming, developing weapons of mass destruction, to try to get rid of the U.S. outposts that are there to try to make sure that the U.S. controls most of the oil reserves of the world. Is Washington going to sit there and allow that? That's kind of next to inconceivable.

What I've just read from the business press the last couple of days probably reflects the thinking in Washington and London: "Uh well, okay, we'll let them have a government, but we're not going to pay any attention to what they say." In fact the Pentagon announced at the same time two days ago: we're keeping 120,000 troops there into at least 2007, even if they call for withdrawal tomorrow.

And the propaganda is very evident right in these articles. You can even write the commentary now: We just have to do it because we have to accomplish our mission of bringing democracy to Iraq. If they have an elected government that doesn't understand that, well, what can we do with these dumb Arabs, you know? Actually that's very common because look, after all, the U.S.

has overthrown democracy after democracy, because the people don't understand. They follow the wrong course. So therefore, following the mission of establishing democracy, we've got to overthrow their governments.

I think that [conscription] is going to be a last resort. The reason is the Vietnam experience. The Vietnam experience, I think, is the first time in the history of European imperialism that an imperial power tried to fight a colonial war with a citizen's army. I mean the British didn't do it, and the French had the Foreign Legion... In colonial wars, civilians are just no good at. [Colonial wars are] too brutal and vicious and murderous. You just can't take kids off the street and have them fight that kind of war. You need trained killers, like the French Foreign Legion.

In fact you could see it happening in Vietnam. To its credit, the U.S. army fell apart. It took too long, but finally the army essentially fell apart. Soldiers were on drugs, they were fragging officers, not following orders, and so on and the top brass wanted them out. If you look back at the military journals in the late Sixties, they were writing about how we gotta get this army out of here or the army's going to collapse—much like the head of the Army reserves said two or three days ago. He said this is becoming a broken force.

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