

An Unfortunate Gambit

When even the color gray no longer matches.

Having resigned myself to the inevitability of war a long time ago, I am a little reluctant to participate in the so-called Iraqi endgame that is devolving on the world scene today. My geopolitical interests lie elsewhere in Palestine and Northeast Asia. You know, the Middle East's Cold War Vietnam, and Northeast Asia's post-war Cuba, North Korea. Notwithstanding, one might think that I were shirking my responsibility as a world citizen, if I did not take an open stand with regard to the pending war.

Obviously the US government miscalculated when it came to world opinion about Iraq and its own insistence that Saddam Hussein be removed from power. The strong resistance the US government is receiving from some of its most important allies indicates with little doubt that the United States failed to obtain their agreement before sending troops. Notwithstanding, the troops are there, and it is difficult for anyone to imagine President Bush calling them home without a tangible result. Would anything short of Hussein's dismissal be satisfactory?

If an invasion is to take place, it must take place soon, or be put off until the passing of the summer heat. It has cost the US taxpayer some US\$15 billion just to put its troops into place, and it would cost another US\$9 billion to bring them home. Leaving them in Kuwait until after the summer passes is militarily ill-advised, as it would render the troops poorly prepared for war in the fall -- a short wait builds tension and raises fighting spirit, a long wait weakens stamina and evokes question. No matter, Hussein must submit to inspections, and the troops should not be withdrawn. Though there is likely a solution to share the cost of their stay and maintain their spirit through constant rotation, who among the permanent members of the UN Security Council has offered such support? ...And what about UNSC cooperation on the other side of the Asian continent?

By the fall of next year KIM Jong Il will have had sufficient time to produce enough nuclear material to build several nuclear bombs. He will have also been able to test another long-range missile or even more. The future is not inviting. To the extent that the US is already prepared to fight a war in North Korea, Kim's ongoing development of nuclear material may not appear over threatening to many, should push come to shove. Nevertheless, having to fight two completely different full-scale wars at opposite ends of the Asian continent is likely to detract considerably from the United States ability to fight its much more diffuse, threatening, and less tangible enemy, Al Qaeda.

So why did the Bush administration push so far with regard to Iraq in the first place? This is a question that begs to be answered, but please not now. Israel already occupies every city on the West Bank and has more recently entered the Gaza Strip!

In Northeast Asia both Russia and China have offered to host multilateral regional talks that the North Korean government flatly rejects. Meanwhile, US calls for a joint economic boycott have been met with strong resistance by the South Korean and Chinese governments. In addition, South Korea is largely against a preemptory surgical attack, and the treaty between South Korea and the United States requires coordination on the part of both governments with regard to military action. So, where is the hand that will eventually force KIM Jong Il to desist?

In the Middle East Saddam Hussein continues to play cat and mouse with the UN inspection teams, while making a mockery of President Bush's overzealous fight against "Evil". Even Australia has suggested that the President sit down with KIM, the extortionist North Korean bully who does not "feed his folks". President Bush must be feeling pretty miserable.

Sometimes people mistakenly place themselves in positions from which they cannot back down, and unless others are there to provide them with an honorable way out, they do not. If the United States allies only want to make President Bush's mistake more costly to him than it already is, then they are largely succeeding. If it is their goal to avoid a war in Iraq, they appear already to have failed. When President Bush told the Israelis to evacuate Palestine many months ago, Ariel Sharon paid little heed to the President's warning. After several months, it appears the Israeli Prime Minister paid no heed at all. According to the President good friends are allowed to disagree. I wonder, if this is how the President also views his current disagreement with NATO and the UNSC? Will they be equally forgiving?

President Bush is trapped in his own black and white world with some chance of escape, should the war prove short and US troops are welcome in Baghdad. Important US allies, on the other hand, are hiding behind different shades of gray, and their feigned concern for peace poorly hides their social indifference and political self-interest. I am glad I am not an Iraqi, a Palestinian, or a North Korean, but I am also beginning to wonder, if being a USAmerican, a Frenchman, a German, a Russian, or even a Chinese, is really any better. Have I left anyone out?

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