

Good Bush stay, bad Bush go

There is more to democracy than order and stability

For nearly a decade I listened to USAmericans in Japan complain about Japan's double standards toward foreigners, and when I finally left Japan I too was happy to be rid of them. Well, almost....

By using one set of standards for foreigners and another set for Japanese, Japanese maintain an important psychological barrier between themselves and their foreign others. What makes these double standards especially alienating are the only ways to overcome them. As the barrier permeates all aspects of Japanese society, one must become Japanese and adopt them, or remain foreign, exploit them, and thereby reinforce their existence. In other words, the barrier is never overcome, one simply learns to cope with it.

Among those who exploit the barrier are the hypocrites, who preach one standard, but live under two; and the so-called apologists, who accept the double standards, criticise the hypocrites, and thus provide justification for their hosts. Unwilling to play the patient puppet in the nearly vain hope that things would change, but able to see through the hypocrisy and understand that Japan is Japan and the exit door is always open, I left.

What I knew all along, but now know better, is that double-standards abound in the world, and the United States often leads the charge.

Now that Iraq's Saddamic

institutions have been destroyed, Iraq's new leaders and the United States government must deal with their living remnants -- namely, those who see Bush as a greater evil than Hussein, those who are not sure which is worse, and those who view the United States as do most Palestinians and other Arabs -- a staunch friend and fervent supporter of Israeli oppression. These latter must represent a substantial proportion of the Iraqi population.

If this were not bad enough, USAmerica is off to a very bad start. A national library containing millennia-old documents gutted by fire; a national museum housing artifacts, not only dear to Iraqis but to all of Western civilisation, raped by thieves and hired thugs; and thousands of ancient holy scriptures of an important world religion laid to ashes. This is to say nothing of the destruction and pillage of just about every government ministry having anything to do with the upkeep of an orderly civil society. What is worse the Iraqis did it to themselves while USAmerica stood by and watched.

The price Iraqis have paid for Saddam's overthrow exceeds that of USAmerica and Great Britain by many fold. No, there is no use in crying over spilt milk, but one can rest assured that many more than just Iraqis will remember the rape of Baghdad that occurred while the US military was on duty. No, the following tug of war between what Iraq might someday become and what it has been will not be easy. What I fear most, however, are not reactionary

Muslim fundamentalists, rather influential profit-seeking, double standard toting, USAmerican pragmatists, who see Middle East order and stability as their first priority, but preach Iraqi democracy instead.

Order and stability, though necessary and sufficient conditions for economic prosperity, are necessary but not sufficient for democracy. This is especially true in a country whose national coffers are filled from the sale of oil by the few, rather than from the pocket books of the tax-fearing many. Some 90% of the Iraqi population is dependent on government handouts for basic necessities.

USAmericans constitute only three percent of the world's population, but enjoy nearly a quarter of its consumption. Of these three percent only a handful have ever lived outside the United States as anything more than passing tourists. As US presidents are accountable only to USAmericans for their overseas actions, these former have only that to fear overseas which armed body guards cannot shield. Whether it means standing at attention while Iraq's national treasures are pillaged by the "free", or Palestinian olive groves and homes are bulldozed by the "democratic", US presidents can do pretty much what they like. Few people in the United States care much for despots, and the spectre of September 11 still hangs heavy in the hearts and minds of many USAmericans. On net, these are sufficient reasons for USAmerica's overwhelming majority to approve what has happened in Iraq. This is indeed unfortunate.

No matter how close foreign correspondents come to the hearts of the Iraqi people, or any other group of world citizens for that matter, what they write is filtered, reformatted, carefully positioned, and finally printed by elite, highly professional, domestic, US editorial staffs, that place as much emphasis on what USAmericans want to hear, as on what they truly need to know. As most of those who pay for foreign press and media coverage do not live abroad, these national bulwarks of democratic freedom at home leave much to be desired in the defence of democracy abroad.

In brief, democracy only works when the ones who wield it understand it and are elected by those over whom it is wielded. Moreover, democracy must be understood by those who participate in elections -- namely, interested voters. To put it in another way, USAmerican voters are a poor surrogate for an Iraqi electorate. ... And how will Iraqi citizens who have just spent the past 30 years of their lives with Saddam Hussein in their face on every street corner know any better what to do with newly issued voting rights than did post-Soviet Russians with freshly printed stock issues?

According to the UNDP 2002 Human Development Report(1) the number of people in the Arab world age 15 or younger is more than twice that of high income countries such as the United States. There are three times fewer people age 65 or over. Iraq's Monarch fell in 1958 and the Baath Party came to power in

¹United Nations Development Program. 2002. Human development report - 2002. [[online document](#)] Table 5: Demographic trends. (25 October 2002).

1968. By 1979 Saddam Hussein sat at the helm. A rough estimate suggests that a full 60 percent of the Iraqi population was born after the Baath Party came to power and about 48 percent during Saddam Hussein's reign as Iraqi President. The numbers alone do not bode well for the near term establishment of a secure democracy.

Democratic institutions can only function as well as people believe in them. Which are Iraqis likely to know better: Alexander Hamilton's Federalist Papers or the Koran? Furthermore, who in Iraq is prepared to interpret the Koran in such a way that it supports, rather than negates, political democracy? The majority of Iraqis are not Kurds with a long recent history of independence movements. So, what in the short run can the United States government possibly hope to produce that is not a democratic plastic wrapping of the pre-war status quo less Saddam Hussein and the Baath Party? Civil society, the foundation of political democracy, is as much a national state of mind, as it is a network of high-placed, politically well-connected individuals.

When Sunni and Shiite Muslims, who have been arch enemies for more than three decades can now pray together in the hope of a rapid US departure, something is both very right and very wrong. The warning light is on, Mr. President, and flashing brightly.

Those in the US who are now asking, how long the US should remain, ought rather to be asking what needs to be done to make the US wanted? Money, food water,

electrical power. Anything else? In answer to the first and last questions the US will know it is time to withdraw, when the Iraqi people no longer want the US to leave. Just how long is enough time for the average Iraqi to understand that the key to his nation's past is not the key to its future, and that satisfying his immediate needs is no key at all -- simply more exploitation.

I was among the first to say no to the Iraqi invasion, because the stated reasons and the apparent aims simply did not begin to mesh until long after the decision to send US troops had been made. Moreover, when the reasons and aims finally did coincide, those on whose behalf the coincidence took place were suddenly side-stepped. Having now intruded, I will probably be among the last to say yes to departure.

That Allah and the Prince of Peace might someday hold hands under a sustainable Iraqi democracy!

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