

Three drives to a par five!

Post war Iraq, peace in the Middle East, and the beginning of the end to Islamic terror.

While US and British troops encircle Iraq in preparation for the final phase of the war, and Israeli troops continue their persecution of Palestinian citizens, Tony Blair's invitation to President Bush and Prime Minister Bertie Ahern in Belfast this coming week strikes me as particularly noteworthy. With Jordanians waving Iraqi and Palestinian flags in Amman only Jerusalem would have been a more appropriate venue. Certainly it is a far cry from the subtropical Middle Atlantic paradise of Ponta Delgada, even if its symbolic character is likely to be lost on those who could best appreciate it.

Though it is far too early to be celebrating the end of Hussein's Iraq, ardent discussion of a post-Saddam Middle East is long overdue. Who will lead the Iraqi people, and how they will be led in the months and years ahead is crucial to the "winning of the peace" -- not only for Iraqis, but for the entire Middle East. Those who fear that the United Nations will once again be circumvented, and an important opportunity to mend diplomatic wounds and restore credibility to the UN Security Council foregone, are probably ill-advised, however. There are several reasons for this.

Firstly, the mess created by the removal of Saddam Hussein is the doing of the US-British alliance -- not the UN. Thus, it is the responsibility of the United States and Great Britain to clean it up. Secondly, legitimisation of the war is pretty much a moot issue, in so far as the most important political gains from UN approval were forfeited when the first bombs fell on one of Saddam's several Baghdad palaces. If you doubt this claim, just ask the governments of the many Islamic peoples who have since taken to the streets in protest. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, it is in the world's best interest that the UN is left to attend to other matters of pressing concern that do not directly involve US security. Indeed, there are many developmental needs for which no military solution is possible, and the UN still has important peace

keeping roles to play in many other parts of the world. This is to say nothing of several pending major world health crises. Finally, the UN has weathered other acts of US malfeasance and recalcitrance in the past and has always managed to regain its stature as a useful world organisation. If for no other reason, because it is the only institution of its kind, and effective world government remains on the wish list of many a world citizen.

The US government has made it clear on more than one occasion that it will not subordinate its own security interests to those of the UN, and at present there is no one in the world so ill-disposed and powerful enough to make the US government think and behave otherwise. Then too, there are many other matters in which the UN and US share important room for agreement, and the UN is not the only international summit where diplomatic wounds can be assuaged and healed. Recent developments in NATO with regard to questions of security in Central Asia are a good example. In short, the unfortunate pre war tiff in the UN Security Council, as it were, is hardly the end of multilateral international diplomacy -- with or without the United States. Moreover, US allies could do far more damage to the US, if they truly felt the need, and were willing to incur the obvious losses that would arise as a result. Even the bipartisan US Congress realises that Bush's war machine must be held on a tight leash, and has demonstrated its awareness with a 50% cut in President Bush's recently proposed tax deductions.

In any case, before anyone decides what form the interim government should take, it may be useful to draw a few comparisons with other crises in the Mideast and the broader world. It should be noted, for example, that the "liberation" of Iraq and Afghanistan has resulted in two very different reactions among the so-called liberated. Though the reasons for this are several, most important among them are probably time and circumstance. No matter

how politically overbearing were the Taliban, they were not in power long enough to institutionalise their strength. Neither have they appeared as ruthless as Saddam's Baath Party. Moreover, the Taliban's political mandate was far more religious than Hussein's. No one was forced to wear a beard, forbidden to play music, or fly a kite in Iraq. Neither have Iraqi women felt the heavy axe of male Islamic dominance. Saddam's oppression was political and his social intervention restrained. Finally, no matter how ruthless Saddam Hussein has been, he offered the Iraqi people a sense of national pride that was absent under the Taliban.

Neither should one be quick to draw close parallels between Israel's war of oppression and the Bush/Bush-Hussein fist fight. Saddam Hussein consolidated his power base through brutal acts of oppression against his own people and nearest neighbours; Yasir Arafat targeted anyone and everyone who could bring attention to the plight of his people. No matter one's disdain for Arafat's so-called acts of terror against the unarmed "innocent", Yasir Arafat rose to power on a popular mandate -- a mandate among people who have rarely experienced political democracy as anything more than an Israeli diplomatic tool to legitimise often groundless acts of aggression and collective punishment against the Palestinian people. Moreover, Saddam Hussein's popular support in the Arab world appears far more widespread outside of Iraq than within.

During the Asian Pacific War the United States government was viewed as a liberating force by just about everyone in East Asia; this is hardly the case in the Middle East where the Iranian and Syrian governments are adamantly opposed to the US invasion, and the Turkish, Jordanian, and Saudi Arabian governments have sought to distance themselves from the current conflict. In short, the popular belief in the United States that US-Americans are fighting a war of liberation, contrasts starkly with that of most Arabs and many others close to the world of Islam. These latter view the United States as a post-British, pro-Israeli, neo-colonial aggressor. Indeed, among Iraq's several closest neighbours only the tiny emirate of Kuwait stands firmly behind the US. Moreover, the conflict in Northeast Asia

New Territories, Hong Kong

was and remains far more political than historical, religious, or even cultural; whereas the war effort in the Middle East is viewed by most in the region as a "clash of civilisations".

Taking these collectively held differences into account and not losing sight of the aforementioned politically dissimilar social landscapes, the United States and Great Britain have a very long, but promising road ahead with regard to lasting peace in the Middle East.

If it is not already clear to President Bush, hopefully Tony Blair will have made it so by the end of the Belfast summit: there is much more at stake in the Middle East than US security, and no resolution to the current confrontation between the industrialised North and the Islamic Middle of our global economy can be achieved until the plight of the Palestinian people has been fully addressed and the matter settled.

Indeed, with a firm foothold in the Middle East the US, British, and Iraqis can work together toward a lasting peace both within Iraq and without. The pan-Arabic dream that many Iraqis shared under Saddam Hussein can be transformed into a pan-Arabic movement toward modernisation, and the overly chummy relationship between Zionist Judaism and right wing US Christian fundamentalism can be replaced by US-Arab commercial ties and pro-Arab development and modernisation. Further cries of US world hegemony on the part of France, Germany, Russia, and China can be either ignored or assuaged through co-operation on other fronts and economic participation in Iraq's reconstruction. With the United States positioned at Syria's backdoor and Iran's front, greater moderation on the part of both these countries' governments with regard to the United States and the West in general is likely to result. Stepped up production of Iraq's vast oil reserves, compensated by co-operative reductions among other Persian Gulf oil producers, can eventually pay for the US and British troop presence and even assuage British and US-American taxpayers deeply concerned about the cost of the war and their own pocketbooks.

An important stumbling block will be deeply

rooted ethnic strife, but with a firm US and British hand, close co-operation on the part of key Iraqi stake holders, and a carefully planned, well implemented, and fully nurtured new Iraqi government these too can be overcome. Simply, USAmericans and the world must be patient, as the building of social institutions takes time. The Fedayeen and Republican Guard did not come into being overnight; neither will the institutions required to replace them and insure a healthy, prosperous democracy. After a half-century of continued occupation on the Japanese archipelago and Korean peninsula, the political effectiveness of Japanese democracy remains in question, and Korean democracy has only recently demonstrated itself to be politically mature.

My understanding is that President Bush enjoys a good game of golf. Well, as everyone knows, a good swing and well placed ball are only achievable with follow through. If you want the world behind you Mr. President, then get out of your cart and drive three home before moving on to your next fairway! Once on the green there will be many people to help you with your bad diplomatic putting. Let's see, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine. That should do it, Sir!

Word count: 1641