

Iraq: Why America wants endless war

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In promoting his recently published Quadrennial Defence Review, US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld spoke of a “generation-long war”, projecting thirty years of unceasing combat against radical Islam.

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he changes proposed to the US military plans involve more Special Forces and an ability to simultaneously undertake numerous flexible ‘irregular warfare’ missions. The message couldn’t be clearer; the US will plough on with the use of unbridled militarism as its key mechanism for sustaining its world position.

After three years since the start of the Iraq, where is the US in this project? To answer that we have to look at why the war was launched and what the neocon elite in Washington wants. Their aim is very simple, and very hard to achieve - control of the world order.

That doesn’t mean the impossible Utopia of direct control of the internal affairs of every country. What it means is that every significant country, and certainly every major power, has to make relations with the United States determine everything else about their international economic-political relations. Then the US will continue to hold all the key levers of power which give the United States unique access everywhere and enable it, uniquely, to live well beyond its means by sucking in vast loans and tribute from East Asia and elsewhere.

For this the strike in Iraq was vital. The idea that the war was about oil is simplistic, but of course it contains an important element of truth.

Occupying Iraq and thus controlling the world’s largest proven reserves of oil, but also vitally having strategic dominance of the vital oil routes out of the Middle East gives the United States an unparalleled power and massively reinforces US clout with East Asia (especially Japan) and Europe.

But more than that, the strategic axis of US military-political policy is the domination of the Eurasian landmass.

This means pushing into central Asia, which in turn is part of the long-term objective of disrupting Chinese regional dominance or the re-emergence of Russia as a significant power. With the collapse of the Soviet Union a vast strategic void opened up in central Asia.

This is where US, Russian and Chinese interests intersect and this where the US is extremely keen to stabilise a significant military presence - in countries like Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan - in all of which the US has backed extremely repressive regimes.

In addition the massive US intervention into the so-called ‘Orange Revolution’ in Ukraine is part of

the process of bringing US-friendly regimes to all key parts of the Eurasian landmass, and denying Russia influence.

Connected with the drive against Chinese influence is the return of US soldiers to the Philippines, another part of the jigsaw of military encirclement.

Taking hits worldwide

Focus on the Middle East has meant the US taking hits worldwide in terms of influence and ability to call the shots. Most stark is the case of Latin America, where the 'war on terror' has virtually no traction or popular appeal, and where the election of Evo Morales of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) as president in Bolivia and above all the deepening of the Bolivarian revolutionary process in Venezuela are serious blow to American plans.

Ideologically these developments are vitally important. Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and the vast popular movement which led to the election of Evo Morales are giving for the first time in a generation an arithmetic content to the algebraic formula of 'another world is possible' - the only possible one, socialism!

It's true that Bolivia especially, but also Venezuela, don't threaten US economic interests much. But the political impact of people calling themselves socialists being in government is immense. It gives a greater political space for opposition movements, but also for moderate pro-capitalist governments like Lula's in Brazil, to manoeuvre and defy US policies.

And in the long term the regrowth of socialist movements in the region is really bad news for the US.

At the same time, overall the 'war on terror' has little popular support in East Asia, except perhaps in Indonesia. South Korea, a lynchpin for decades in the US order of battle, has become a basket case for US influence.

Anti-communist fear of the North has lost its hold and indeed support for reunification of North and South on a nationalist, anti-American basis, is massive.

So much so that the line expressed by sections of the South Korean military top brass is "a reunited Korea with its own nuclear bomb"! Korean trade links with China are now pervasive; China is Korea's one indispensable economic partner.

As in Latin America, the US is paying the political price for neoliberal globalisation in its crudest form - "privatization by expropriation". When the South Korean economy crashed in 1997 World Bank president James Wolfenson declared "Now there will be many opportunities for globalisation!" - which meant, bluntly, now is the time for US finance capital to buy up bankrupt Korean companies. This brutal approach has not been forgotten.

Opinion in East Asia is also polarized by the magnetic attraction exercised by China. The Chinese government is engaged in exceptionally aggressive economic diplomacy with countries like Thailand and Vietnam, granting hugely favourable aid and trade deals which bring China little or no economic reward in the short term, in an attempt to tilt structural economic dependence towards China long-term.

This is not designed to force any kind of political confrontation between these states and the US or to break their many political ties with the US system of alliances. Rather the effort is longterm

subversion of the US position.

To bolster its Asian position the US has been vigorously courting India, appearing at one point to promise the Indian government the status of accepted and legitimate nuclear power, in return ironically for Indian support over Iran's nuclear weapons and the 'war on terror' in general.

However the US position turned out to be so hedged round with demands for economic and political concessions from India that this rapprochement has faltered.

Regime of accumulation

The basic thrust of Donald Rumsfeld's military Quadrennial Review is easy to understand. Step up the 'war against terror', whip the US's allies into line and demand they provide more resources for it, and prepare for stepped up US military activism in the Horn of Africa and Central Asia.

Despite all the political hits the Bush administration is taking at home, including George Bush's falling popularity ratings and the deepening unpopularity of the war, the truth is that no major strategic alternative to the Rumsfeld-Cheney endless war is emerging in mainstream politics. Democrats and Republicans both have eyes fixed on the November 7 Senate and governor elections, and the Democrats and Republican critics like John McCain are running scared of being accused of being 'soft on the war on terror'.

This of course is the main strength of the neocon coalition - the near unanimous support they get for the basic thrust from mainstream politicians and the dire mass media in the US itself.

This is enabling them to rather easily ride the endless revelations about the brutality of their torture chambers and the deepening brutality of the war itself.

Despite the large and vibrant US antiwar movement, all this has long-term negative consequences. The war on terror is becoming an organising principle of US politics long-term, like the anti-communist Cold War before it, a political regime, a "regime of accumulation".

Such regimes limit the discourse of official politics, create new reactionary norms on surveillance and civil liberties, swivel the economy to higher allocations to the military, baptise torture and murder as the defence of freedom, heighten racism and xenophobia and bathe the whole of public life in a reactionary atmosphere.

What the anti-war and other progressive movements in the United States need now is that their struggle is boosted and magnified 100 times on an international basis.

P.S.

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