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**Analysis**

## **Iraq Occupation Erodes Bush Doctrine**

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The occupation of Iraq has increasingly undermined, and in some cases discredited, the core tenets of President Bush's foreign policy, according to a wide range of Republican and Democratic analysts and U.S. officials.

When the war began 15 months ago, the president's Iraq policy rested on four broad principles: The United States should act preemptively to prevent strikes on U.S. targets. Washington should be willing to act unilaterally, alone or with a select coalition, when the United Nations or allies balk. Iraq was the next cornerstone in the global war on terrorism. And Baghdad's transformation into a new democracy would spark regionwide change.

But these central planks of Bush doctrine have been tainted by spiraling violence, limited reconstruction, failure to find weapons of mass destruction or prove Iraq's ties to al Qaeda, and mounting Arab disillusionment with U.S. leadership.

"Of the four principles, three have failed, and the fourth -- democracy promotion -- is hanging by a sliver," said Geoffrey Kemp, a National Security Council staff member in the Reagan administration and now director of regional strategic programs at the Nixon Center.

The president has "walked away from unilateralism. We're not going to do another preemptive strike anytime soon, certainly not in Iran or North Korea. And it looks like terrorism is getting worse, not better, especially in critical countries like Saudi Arabia," Kemp said.

As a result, Bush doctrine could become the biggest casualty of U.S. intervention in Iraq, which is entering a new phase this week as the United States prepares to hand over power to the new Iraqi government.

Setbacks in Iraq have had a visible impact on policy, forcing shifts or reassessments. The United States has returned to the United Nations to solve its political problems in Iraq. It has appealed to NATO for help on security. It is also relying on diplomacy, with allies, to deal with every other hot spot.

"There's already been a retreat from the radicalism in Bush administration foreign policy," said Walter Russell Mead, a Council on Foreign Relations senior fellow. "You have a feeling that even Bush isn't saying, 'Hey, that was great. Let's do it again.' "

Some analysts, including Republicans, suggest that another casualty of Iraq is the neoconservative approach that inspired a zealous agenda to tackle security threats in the Middle East and transform the region politically.

"Neoconservatism has been replaced by neorealism, even within the Bush White House," Kemp said. "The best evidence is the administration's extraordinary recent reliance on [U.N. Secretary

General] Kofi Annan and [U.N. envoy] Lakhdar Brahimi. The neoconservatives are clearly much less credible than they were a year ago."

The administration would not make a senior official or spokesman available for quotation by name to support its policy. But top administration officials insist the Iraq experience has not invalidated Bush doctrine, and they contend its basic principles will endure beyond the Bush presidency.

Policy supporters argue that current realities will keep some form of all four ideas in future policy. "Despite all the problems of implementation and despite mistakes made by the Bush administration, I don't see many other choices," said William Kristol, editor of the Weekly Standard and chief of staff for Vice President Dan Quayle.

"No one thinks the Middle East pre-September 11 is acceptable, or that we should work with its dictators. No one says in a world of weapons of mass destruction we can rule out preemption or that they're not worried about the linkage between terrorism and states producing weapons of mass destruction," he said. "So I don't see much of an alternative to the Bush doctrine."

Challenges to its four central tenets, however, are likely to influence U.S. foreign policy for years, some analysts predict.

### **The Preemptive Strike**

The most controversial tenet of Bush doctrine was also the primary justification for launching the Iraq war. In the president's June 2002 address to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Bush said deterrence and containment were no longer enough to defend America's borders. The United States, he said, had the right to take preemptive action to prevent attacks against the United States.

"We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans and confront the worst threats before they emerge. In the world we have entered, the only path to safety is the path of action. And this nation will act," Bush told cadets.

In the policy's early days, its supporters hinted that preemption could eventually justify forcible government change in Iran, Syria and North Korea as well as in Iraq. But that sentiment is evaporating, because Iraq showed the "pitfalls of the doctrine in graphic detail," said Ted Galen Carpenter, vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute.

Preemption has been "damaged, if not totally discredited," and the outcome in Iraq may prove to be "an inoculation against rash action" by the United States in the future, Carpenter said.

The administration is working overtime to reduce the sense of alarm that Washington is posed "on a hair trigger" to launch a new offensive against governments it does not like, said James F. Hoge Jr., editor of Foreign Affairs magazine. White House officials are relying on diplomacy to defuse confrontations over nuclear programs in Iran and North Korea, the two other countries with Iraq that Bush labeled the "axis of evil."

The administration now contends its decision was discretionary, not preemptive, because Saddam Hussein had a decade to meet several U.N. resolutions. U.S. officials also say that after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, they had to learn to deal with threats faster -- and proactively.

"The notion that preemption has been discredited is entirely mistaken," said Robert Kagan, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace who has argued for a muscular approach to international affairs.

"It's a fact of life in the international system, because of the reality of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction," Kagan said. "The normal lead time that a nation has to protect itself is not what it used to be, so preemption will have to be part of the international arsenal."

### **Unilateralism**

Bush has repeatedly made clear his intent to act alone or with a U.S.-led coalition when the international community balks at confronting perceived threats.

"I will not wait on events while dangers gather. I will not stand by as peril draws closer and closer. The United States of America will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons," he said in his 2002 State of the Union address.

Later that year, he told the U.N. General Assembly that Washington would work with the world body to deal with the "common challenge in Iraq" but stressed that action would be "unavoidable" if Hussein did not comply. "The purposes of the United States should not be doubted," he warned.

Yet Washington has made a grudging retreat after its limited coalition could not cope with all the problems in Iraq, analysts say. The shift was evident when the administration turned to a U.N. envoy to form an interim Iraqi government after two failed U.S. attempts. It has also deferred to the United Nations to oversee elections and to help Iraq write a constitution.

"Going it alone doesn't really work in the world as it exists today," said Mark Schneider, senior vice president of International Crisis Group, a nonpartisan Brussels-based group that tracks global hot spots. "We need allies. We become more vulnerable and exposed when we don't have them."

The administration counters that its coalition included more than 30 countries, including the majority of NATO members, and that the idea is far from new. "Every administration reserves the right with respect to protecting vital American interests to act alone, but every administration seeks to avoid it," said a senior administration official involved in Iraq policy.

### **The War on Terrorism**

Bush turned his sights on Iraq within weeks of the war in Afghanistan. "Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror," he said in the 2002 State of the Union address. He added later: "The price of indifference would be catastrophic."

Whatever the merits of deposing Hussein, foreign and domestic polls now consistently show that the failure to find concrete evidence of significant ties or joint actions between the Iraqi leader and al Qaeda has dissipated international support for the United States and generated skepticism at home about the benefits of the Iraq war.

The Iraq war may even have hurt U.S. efforts to combat terrorism, analysts say, noting the increase in car bombings, hostage abductions and beheadings in Iraq as well as oil-rich Saudi Arabia. "We have assisted al Qaeda in recruiting fresh adherents by the war in Iraq and the antagonism it's generated," Hoge said.

The administration is "drifting," Carpenter said. It "clings to the idea of state-sponsored terrorism as a motive for the Iraq war, but it was wildly off the mark," he said. "Afghanistan continues to be the real central front, to the extent there is a front at all."

U.S. officials say waging war in Iraq was vital to eliminate a refuge for extremists after Afghanistan.

Early supporters of administration policy also say the problem is not with the principles, but with their implementation. Any government has limited chances to enact policy, and early setbacks in execution can lead the public or policymakers to back away even if the ideas remain valid, Kristol said.

### **Promoting Democracy**

The most ambitious aspect of Bush doctrine is pressing for political and economic reform in the Islamic world, the last bloc of countries to hold out against the democratic tide that has swept much of the rest of the world. Iraq was to be the catalyst of change.

"Iraqi democracy will succeed -- and that success will send forth the news, from Damascus to Tehran -- that freedom can be the future of every nation. The establishment of a free Iraq at the heart of the Middle East will be a watershed event in the global democratic revolution," Bush said in a November 2003 speech to the National Endowment for Democracy.

Although the administration is still pushing its new democracy initiative for the wider Middle East, Muslim disillusionment with the United States over Iraq has deeply hurt this goal, analysts warn. Democratic and Republican foreign policy experts almost unanimously predict that progress will be much slower than expected even six months ago.

"The idea that the Middle East can be repaired by external intervention has been seriously damaged. And the ideas of reform are going to be a much harder sell after Iraq," said Moises Naim, editor of Foreign Policy magazine.

After six decades as the main mediator in the region, the United States may also be losing its standing as an honest broker because of Iraq and the U.S. failure to fulfill promises to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Naim said.

The Iraq intervention also discredited the president's approach to regional peace. "The administration argued that if you removed the security threat in Iraq, you'd improve the chances of solving the Arab-Israeli conflict -- that the road to Jerusalem went through Baghdad. If anything, we learned it's just the other way around," Hoge said.

Supporters of the administration's efforts argue that promoting democracy is the oldest goal in U.S. foreign policy worldwide, dating back more than 200 years. Whatever the current problems, they contend, it will remain a top goal -- particularly in the Islamic world as a key to countering extremism.

The overall impact of policy challenges in Iraq, analysts say, is that the Bush White House has been forced back to the policy center or scaled back the scope of its goals. They cite the president's appeal for NATO assistance and cutbacks in the democracy initiative.

"It's a lesson in hubris," Carpenter said. "The administration thought it had all the answers, but it found out through painful experience that it did not."

Yet administration supporters say Iraq has not produced backtracking or policy reassessment. "Enormously sharp distinctions are being made between different policy views, which are largely artificial," Kagan said. "There was an enormous consensus going into this war and there's a consensus now about what needs to be done. So we are having a huge, vicious debate, and yet I'm not sure what the debate is about."