

## A better use for our \$87b

By Jeffrey D. Sachs, 9/13/2003

THE WORLD IS out of kilter when President Bush asks for \$87 billion for Iraq and only \$200 million for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. The administration displays profound confusion regarding national security as well as moral purpose. It is ready to pump tens of billions of dollars into a middle-income oil-rich country of 24 million people, while utterly neglecting 500 million impoverished Africans, 10 million of whom will actually die this year of extreme poverty, too poor to buy the drugs, bed nets, fertilizers, tube wells, and other basic contrivances that could keep them alive.

The juxtaposition of Iraq and Africa may seem irrelevant, but it is not. We are told that the Iraq War was an act of compassion and liberation, when in fact the Bush administration is without compassion for those who most need it, whether in the United States or abroad. Liberation is in fact military occupation, which in turn is a lightning rod for attacks on US troops. The United States is less secure than before the Iraq War.

Why would a US government that overlooks suffering around the world and poverty at home be ready to invest \$150 billion in Iraq over the course of two years? The argument that the war was about an imminent risk from Iraq has been thoroughly trashed. The war had nothing to do with any immediate threats from Saddam Hussein, and the intelligence agencies knew that last fall. Containment was already working. The war was about oil, specifically about a long-standing and simplistic US vision about the need to militarize the Persian Gulf in order to ensure the steady flow of petroleum.

Since the 1950s the United States, often with the partnership of the United Kingdom, has put the highest national priority on securing alliances and military bases in the Persian Gulf, changing partners as one situation after another has soured.

From the US-UK toppling of Mohammed Mossadeq in Iran in 1953, to the American embrace of the shah in the late 1970s, to the embrace of Saddam in the 1980s, to the American "special relationship" with the corrupt and autocratic Saudi monarchy, the goal has been the same: Keep the oil flowing, with whatever "friends" in the region can advance the cause.

After the Saudi complicity in the 9/11 attacks, and with foes in Iran and Iraq, the Bush neo-conservatives decided they needed to occupy Iraq in order to establish a new base in the region.

The repeated outcome of this policy, however, has been "blowback." America's long-record of putting oil before the interests or voice of the region's people has created a deep reservoir of ill will, suspicion, and unrest. US leadership has not understood, or perhaps cared, that others in the world do not want to be pawns in a plan for US hegemony. Thus, every time we install a government or embrace an autocrat in the region, we also foment unrest and instability.

Iraq does not need tens of billions of dollars from the United States or Europe for its reconstruction. Iraq is not an impoverished country. It sits on the second largest oil reserves in the world. It could have functioned adequately even in the immediate aftermath of the recent war had its electricity grid, water system, and oil pipelines not been blown up by the foes of US occupation. This is not an economic problem, but a political one.

Even with 140,000 troops, the United States will be no more able to keep the infrastructure intact than Israel is able to keep peace in the West Bank. Intrusions of occupying armies are degrading,

destabilizing, and ready targets for terrorists with broad support in the occupied communities. The US occupying army is therefore delaying rather than accelerating Iraq's reconstruction and recovery.

If the electricity and oil pipelines had not been blown up this summer, Iraq would be producing at least 1 million barrels per day more than now, or roughly another \$10 billion per year. That could easily rise to an incremental \$20 billion above today's levels within another year or two. There is simply no need for foreign aid, only political stability. And only Iraqi sovereignty can achieve that. But alas, the United States would have to give up its quest for hegemonic control.

The cruelest twist, though, is that the all of the talk about US and UK compassion is accompanied by indifference where compassion is truly needed. Nine months ago, Bush spoke movingly about the tragedy of millions of people with AIDS turned away from African hospitals, because they were too poor to afford the drugs. During those nine months another two million or so Africans died, and the United States accomplished absolutely nothing to change the situation. The president's much vaunted \$15 billion five-year program for AIDS is on paper only.

This year Bush asked for only \$200 million for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria, a sum equal to 1.5 days of spending on the US occupying forces in Iraq. The US annual contributions to fight malaria are less than the costs of one day's occupation, and as a result, 3 million Africans will die needlessly from that preventable and treatable disease.

But who is talking about \$87 billion for the 30 million Africans dying from the effects of HIV/AIDS, or the children dying of malaria, or the 15 million AIDS orphans, or the dispossessed of Liberia and Sierra Leone, or the impoverished children of America without medical insurance?

True security in the world will not be bought by US hegemony. The world will not tolerate unilateral control by a country that accounts for less than 5 percent of humanity. The United States will continue to destabilize Iraq as long as the occupation continues, and the American people will end up paying a high price for the fantasy of hegemony.

It is time for the United States to withdraw from Iraq in favor of a sovereign Iraqi government. The United Nations is very well placed to assist in that transition, and could do that for perhaps \$10 billion in the coming year, or around 10 percent of the costs that Bush has requested. The balance of the US funds could be turned to truly urgent needs of the long-suffering at home and abroad.

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