
Interview: Military Analyst

U.S. saw Iraq's independence as a threat; the war was a tragedy

The following interview conducted by Leo Scanlon is a background discussion with a Middle East expert in the U.S. military who presents some reflections on what it was, really, that the United States decided to obliterate. As the comments contain some wide-ranging political assessments, the official requested anonymity. It is important to note that he and his colleagues did accurately forecast the outcome of the administration's policies in the Gulf.

EIR: Can you give us a perspective on the outcome of the conflict, and can you review the reasons why war with Iraq should have been avoided if possible?

A: In 1968 the Ba'ath Party instituted mandatory universal education. For a Muslim country to do that was remarkable, because that included women. The Ba'ath Party, the Ba'ath philosophy, is secularist, and was virulently secularist—French Revolution style—until the strains of war made the reintroduction of religion a good thing to do, sort of like the Soviets . . . so, from '68 on, you had the beginnings of the foundations, at least the human potential of a modern state, and they have gone further in that direction than any other Arab country has been able to.

That's not to say that they have achieved universal literacy or universal suffrage by any means, but they have made a significant commitment to it, and in the Iran-Iraq War, they held off messing with the universities and the schools until 1986, when it became obvious that they had to go to full mobilization. So they protected their educational investment up until the very last minute, recognizing that that was their hope for the future.

Then you add to that the fact that although they haven't done as well as the Israelis in adapting Western technology, they began to build a modern infrastructure, which in time would allow them to move forward in a semi-independent fashion. Their goal after the Iran-Iraq War appeared to be arms independence; partly they had suffered, as rightly they should have, a shortage of arms, of access to arms on a couple of occasions.

In other words, these guys are long-range planners, they

are future thinkers, they have a vision of where they want to go, and they are en route—or they were en route. This is the kind of thinking that is not evident in most other Arab countries, and yes, it's all taking place in a milieu of political repression and human rights violations. But nevertheless, Iraq still has, as it did then, the potential for being the only viable state in the Middle-East.

Of course, part of that viability rests with their oil reserves which will allow them to build the infrastructure that they will need to become a modern state. They have enough agriculture potential, enough manpower potential and enough money to become a viable state.

Now given that—before Desert Shield, or before the invasion of Kuwait—you have to say “Well, is it in the United States' interest to antagonize these guys or come to grips with them in some sort of fashion?” And that's all beside the point now.

EIR: Then, why do you think the U.S. chose this collision course?

A: A number of parties in the region saw the potential strength and the potential threat from this victorious military power, and they apparently looked deeper and saw this same potential for viable statehood; and to certain parties more than others, this was a closing window.

None of the other states has the capability of achieving the condition of genuine state power, that the Iraqis had at that time, and it looked like an interminable slide in one direction—their potential was going to go up, at whatever rate, and nobody else's was going to go up much. In the long term, the potential for them being the dominant power in the Middle East scared a lot of people.

EIR: If we are going to continually find ourselves fearing the evolution of viable states, you have to question the wisdom of this policy.

A: You're right, one of the questions we are going to have to ask, is how do our friends out there see this? I am working with a foreign officer on a project, and we have discussed

this. I have asked him, "What does this say as a message to you? Does it say that if you choose to go out and start nuclear research, we're going to bomb the hell out of you?" He says, "We have to consider that now." I said, "Okay, how about your fertilizer plants, do you expect international inspectors to come in to see that you're not making chemical weapons?" He says, "We have to consider that." So we have a major diplomatic task ahead of us, and that is to reassure people that they can make peaceful progress and no one is going to be looking over their shoulder.

But if you make progress in the "wrong direction" you're going to upset people and there is at least one precedent for the only existing world policeman to come in and impound your means of progress if it goes in the "wrong direction."

EIR: Henry Kissinger sees this as the reason the U.S. must confine itself to acting as a balancer among powers.

A: I just hope some smart people have been thinking deeply about it. But I don't see a lot of evidence to date. I'm sorry, I would like to be more sanguine about it, but I'm not.

EIR: So if this continues, we're going to have to pit ourselves against any country which through "devious means" finds its way to sneaking these capabilities into existence.

A: The conclusion to that then, the direct fallout of that, is that the Japanese better start building bomb shelters!

EIR: That's been suggested more than once, and CIA director Webster threatened as much when he said that since the Cold War is over, Japan and Germany are now the countries which threaten us internationally.

A: . . . Let me just give you one observation . . . and I'm not a guy who's either an economist or qualified to make any more than a passing statement. The world financial situation strikes me, even before the war, as being in a very precarious position. The United States already had the S&L failure, which in gross terms cost more than the war; it is facing a bank situation that is similar in orders of magnitude; it is facing a drug situation that is consuming, in orders of magnitude, something that makes this war insignificant financially. Nevertheless, the disruption that has taken place worldwide pushes us closer yet to a slide back into some kind of international chaos. And there is probably only one country left that can act. . . . The Japanese are probably the only people who have the reserves to restore the balance and keep the machine running, but everybody else is in a terrible state.

The statements coming out of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait indicate that their reserves are down to dangerously low levels, and they are already attempting to borrow on the international market—and who's left to borrow from? There's only one country to borrow from. Now, have we set up a situation where they will act in their own interest—as we have always done—as we did after the Second World War? They very likely will, and as an economic animal. That's the way some

of that stuff is going to go.

EIR: The reconstruction burden on Iraq will be enormous, and some Iraqi officials claim ten years to reconstruct the power grid alone.

A: I'm sure there are people who hope that that is true, and depending on how they manage their money, that will be more or less true. That was one of the problems they had coming into the war; they spent their money in two directions at once, and the biggest spender was the military, because they perceived the military threat and so on, so the civil industry didn't get its "fair share." If the civil industry gets its "fair share" now, it's going to get it, but it's going to be at a rate about one-third of what it was before the war. So ten years may not be unrealistic.

On the other hand, we have transportable water units, and Caterpillar has already gone into Kuwait to supply power on a generator basis, and, if it wasn't such a "bad thing" to even think about, there was a time, back in the '60s, when the Army had a transportable nuclear electric generating power facility. . . .

EIR: The Iraqi military has not historically been political, but people speculate that the military has been "humiliated" and ethnic tensions will become a national political factor.

A: I don't really have any idea about that . . . but if you look through the command structure, you will find Shia, Sunni, Kurd, and Christian filling positions apparently on a basis of merit, without any apparent regard for their ethnic background. For us to aggravate that ethnic background would not be wise, in my personal opinion: Having seen what ethnic strife does over in the Soviet Union, I don't think we need to induce any of that.

EIR: With respect to the theory that this war was necessary to thwart an attempt to develop nuclear capabilities, it remains the case that it was the Israelis who introduced nuclear weapons into the Middle East. The drive of the Iraqis for nuclear weapons was similar to the situation on the Indian subcontinent.

A: That's a good model. In fact, the Indians will tell you that, "yes, we did detonate a weapon, but we do not now possess one." Whether, in fact, they do or not I don't know; but they have said, "You people need to look to us as a model. We did it to demonstrate that we could do it, and of course we have the components and we can assemble them if it gets to that, but we do not possess any nuclear weapons. There isn't a nation in the world other than us that can say that." Well, that's not an insignificant statement.

EIR: Had we pursued a policy of building water projects, we could have had a lot of support.

A: Yes, but if Saddam had done the same thing, the confrontation could also have been avoided. This is the tragedy.