

# Iraq: A War Already Lost?

---

## Recommended Citation

Zulfiqar Ahmad and Peter Hayes, "Iraq: A War Already Lost?", Global Problem Solving, March 19, 2003, <https://nautilus.org/global-problem-solving/iraq-a-war-already-lost/>

---

*By Zulfiqar Ahmad and Peter Hayes*

**March 19, 2003**

**Iraq: A War Already Lost?**

---

The United States has embarked on its first full-fledged battle in a war guided by the Bush doctrine. Our enemies, President Bush declared when he delivered his ultimatum to Iraq, are "terrorists and terror states" who can attack us without "fair notice."

"Responding to such enemies only after they have struck first is not self-defense," he asserted, "it is suicide." With this assertion, Bush set in motion a new American security strategy that envisions many anticipatory battles in an effort to secure the United States against terrorist threats, and to indefinitely maintain its predominant position in the world.

The United States may have already lost the long-term, global war that President Bush unleashed tonight. His victory in Iraq may be swift. But America suffered significant setbacks in its global anticipatory war even before the first bombs fell. It deeply alienated longstanding allies. It drove away many of its best ambassadors--the millions of immigrants and foreign students who carried the American dream to every corner of the world. It ceded political space to militant Islamists, who are organizing anti-war protests in Muslim countries and now will move from the wings to political center stage. Its actions accelerated recruitment to extreme, violent groups. In Pakistan, pictures of Osama bin Laden, complete with garlands, jostle with posters saying 'No War on Iraq'.

### **American Hegemony Abandoned**

The Bush Administration has not only squandered the enormous sympathy generated by the September 11 atrocity. It has exhausted in a few years much of the moral capital earned by American leadership in the twentieth century. For the last half century, the world lived under American hegemony that was based at least in part on consent grounded in legitimacy and rule of law, not just fear flowing from the exercise of military power.

---

Now, the US has subverted even the most fundamental principle of state sovereignty which emerged over 350 years ago as a result of the Treaty of Westphalia. The concept of state sovereignty was further reinforced in the United Nations charter of 1945 which is "based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members."

If respect has been eroded, trust seems non-existent - there are few nations now that trust America to keep its word; the sad sight of Hamid Karzai in Washington urging the US to keep the promises it made was just one example; Turkey's demand that American aid be paid upfront another, as is the constant fear in Pakistan that it will be 'betrayed' by the US soon. The current Administration's unquestioning and absolute support of Israel's increasingly brutal occupation of the Palestinians has in many peoples mind stripped President Bush of any moral authority to speak of democracy, human rights, fair play or the sanctity of UN resolutions. Its refusal to talk with North Korea is inexplicable. And now war on Iraq.

The United States has dug itself into a deep hole by attacking Iraq. Whether fast or slow, military victory may make the hole even deeper. If it knocks off Saddam Hussein quickly and easily, then the Bush Administration may feel dangerously confident that it can move onto other battles in short order. Next in line are Iran and North Korea.

But these two target countries are fundamentally different than Iraq. Iran has a vibrant civil society, a government that enjoys legitimacy, a strong army, and, as it demonstrated in its long war with Iraq, a will to fight. North Korea has a totalitarian government, a nuclear-armed ally, and in a military confrontation can destroy Seoul and destabilize the whole region. Iraq may be easy to occupy. Assuredly, Iran and North Korea will not.

The Bush doctrine may prove to be very short-lived when it collides with less brittle and much stronger small states than Iraq. When and if it collides with big states engaged in their own anticipatory wars, say Russia in Central Asia or China in Taiwan, the Bush doctrine will evaporate.

### **Unavoidable Strategic Double-Bind**

A drawn out Iraq war will create immense political instability, especially in the Middle East and Pakistan. A military coup in nuclear-armed Pakistan by officers sympathetic to Islamic fundamentalists cannot be easily ruled out. And militant Islamist organizations may have to hire additional help to keep up with the volunteers willing to sign-up for the grand Jihad!

In the Middle East and in the Muslim world in general, the situation is ripe for large upheavals that will be highly anti-American. In the Muslim world, the American-led war on terrorism translates too easily into a war against Muslims. The social tide is also moving against the United States. The population of the Muslim world is young --about 50 percent is under the age of twenty. The gulf between state and people is large. Most people are highly discontented with their social and economic lot. Secular democratic parties are generally weak. This is fertile soil for fundamentalist Islamist parties. Their success depends largely on how much the Bush Administration creates anti-American sentiments that help them mobilize recruits to their war against America.

Meanwhile, terrorist attacks on the United States and its allies are a certainty. The only question is the location, scale, and frequency. Everyone in the world will be watching to see if al-Qaeda can rise to the challenge. Failure to respond will relegate al-Qaeda to the ranks of hundreds of small, obscure and violent sectarian outfits all over the Muslim world. The United States will have to respond to these attacks; especially those orchestrated on a large scale by al-Qaeda against US forces or territory, or those of its allies or friends. Thus, war on Iraq will likely plunge the United States into deeper and more dangerous global military engagements in search-and-destroy missions in stateless

rural and urban sanctuaries that have no national government and are loaded with private weapons ready to kill Americans.

Followed to its logical and historical conclusion, the Bush doctrine of anticipatory and preventive war means that either the entire world is effectively subordinated to the American imperium, or the entire world must push back against the United States until it abandons its imperial logic. Along the way, any country - insurgency - that fears falling on the wrong side of the United States must now consider seriously acquiring nuclear weapons to deter against American attack.

In short, a fast victory in Iraq will lead to rapid collision with other states and the early termination of the Bush doctrine of anticipatory invasion-or a general conflagration between great powers. A slow victory in Iraq that preoccupies the United States for years will fuel the flames of general Islamist and anti-American insurgency at a global level while the other great powers get on with their business. Bush has put the United States and the world in this double-bind by invading Iraq.

### **Fallout for North Korea?**

The Bush Administration's strategy of dealing with one rogue state at a time is an illusion. Iraq and North Korea are synchronous crises that are joined at the hip. How might the war on Iraq affect the situation in Korea?

Not much is the answer that is least likely correct. There's no reason to expect that a paranoid and mobilized North Korea will cooperate with the American doctrine of anticipatory and preventive war. Instead, the war on Iraq may lend the time to the DPRK to accelerate the development of deliverable nuclear weapons before United States can present an ultimatum to Kim Jong Il to leave his country. The North Korean fear that they are next in line may push them to test and deploy nuclear weapons to preempt any American consideration of military strike during or after the attack on Iraq.

This strategy would mean that the North had abandoned using nuclear threat as a battering ram on the White House door in search of direct talks and negotiations. Instead, the DPRK would go into a Spartan huddle behind a nuclear shield. Along the way, it might solicit support and reassurance from allies, friends and adversaries to isolate the United States politically. The US administration's Korea policy of resolving the nuclear issue by peaceful dialogue with the North is in shambles.

If the war and American military deployments in the East Asian region threaten the DPRK sufficiently, it may turn the tables by borrowing the American doctrine of preventive war. It could, for example, mount military provocations against American forces in or around the Korean Peninsula by enforcing an air/naval blockade in its unilateral maritime security zone in international waters. It could fire another missile over Japan. Or, the DPRK could support offshore, disavowable large-scale terrorist operations against American forces around the world to divert attention away from Korea. Rather than regional nuclear gridlock, we could end up with a second Korean war on our hands in the midst of the Iraq campaign. The pressure to terminate this conflict with decisive use of force-aka nuclear weapons-may be immense in such a spiraling conflict.

### **Wild Cards**

Conflict zones like Pakistan or Korea are volatile. Many wild cards are possible. The Nautilus Institute intends to cover the impact of the war on Iraq on Northeast and South Asia. Our goal is to keep the Nautilus community informed about developments in these regions that may have significant immediate or future implications for these regions and the world.

We will highlight news and analysis from and about the region that are likely to missed or

underreported in the Western media-wild cards that may prove portentous of rapidly emerging transformation of local situations and that herald structural change at a global level. In coming days, for example, we will alert you to the fact that in Pakistan, an entire city that hosts a US military base has been handed over to the Pakistani military to ensure that opposition does not get out of hand.

In Korea, anything can happen. There are many ways that US forces could find themselves extraordinarily challenged in various scenarios of instability and collapse of the Korean standoff into war or near-war. We will draw your attention, for example, to the remarkable call recently by South Korean activists to send "human shields" to the North.

We solicit input from our readers, especially your alerts as to wild cards that otherwise might pass unnoticed

---

---

View this online at: <https://nautilus.org/global-problem-solving/iraq-a-war-already-lost/>

Nautilus Institute

608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email:

[nautilus@nautilus.org](mailto:nautilus@nautilus.org)