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Has the Implementation of the US Security Strategy failed in Iraq?

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Because of what happened on September 11, 2001 ('9/11'), the second Bush administration was forced to act immediately. After a one-year process of strategic thinking, a new doctrine was established: the so-called Bush Doctrine. The official version of the document was published in September 2002 under the title *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (NSS). The strategic principles, however, on which the NSS is based on, were not really new at the time of publication. Even before this incident, various members of Bush's advisory group kept mentioning central parts of the final strategy document in public, including the US President himself (cf. his speech at West Point, June 2002, released by the Office of the Press Secretary, the White House).

In the following period, the initial international reaction to the NSS was mainly negative, or at least controversial. Especially some European allies, e.g. France and Germany, made it quite clear that they would not support the idea of 'superpower acting in a unilateral way'. The danger of an abuse of military power (and its fatal repercussions) stood between the western allies like an insurmountable obstacle. As a result, the separation between 'old' and 'new Europe' (Rumsfeld) became a sad reality in those days and led to serious divergences of opinion on both sides of the Atlantic.

In addition, Gulf War III (2003) and the following debate over a post-war strategy have made the ongoing crisis even worse: Ever since the beginning of the transatlantic crisis, it has been France that has profited the most from Germany's (problematic) change of direction in its foreign policy towards the United States. Consequently, the danger of an axis between Paris, Berlin and Moscow has to be taken seriously by the political decision-makers in Washington. Paris, as many times before, cannot resist the temptation of a policy of counterbalance towards the world's only superpower. Unfortunately, the clear and present danger of a split in the Western world is being ignored by many European politicians, especially by the leading members of the French and German government.

But what can be said in this context about the strategic developments in Iraq between 2003 and 2004? What is the outcome of a critical analysis of the post-war policy and strategy of the United States? Has the military intervention in Iraq been a success for US policy in the region from a strategic point of view?

The following can be said about the situational description in Iraq:

- The military intervention of the US Army and its coalition forces (from countries like Britain, Italy, Spain, etc.) has been a success in so far as the victory over the Saddam

regime could be reached within a very short period of time. It took only six weeks (from the 20th of March to the 1st of May 2003) to defeat the Iraqi armed forces and to finally overthrow the dictator.

- Nevertheless, many mistakes have been made; not only political but also tactical-operational ones.

The above-mentioned facts were put forward by some acknowledged international experts on security policy. One of them, the former German Under-Secretary of State for Defence (1982-89) Lothar Ruehl, links the mistakes that have been made by the Bush administration to four categories:

- (1) The misjudgement with regard to the importance of the opening of a second front in Northern Iraq – foiled by the Turkish Parliament – led to an undesirable side effect: the strengthening of the organised resistance. Thus, the spreading of terror could not be stopped by coalition forces. Moreover, from a military/strategic point of view, the opportunity of launching a ‘double offensive’ against Iraqi forces had been missed out.
- (2) In general, the supposed advantages of massive air attacks are often overestimated. But, nevertheless, the US Army continues to rely on their ‘effectiveness’.
- (3) The euphoria over the new high-tech weapons and the so-called Network Centric Warfare (NCW) might have been a little too early – those weapons have not stood the test of time. This is one of the conclusions that can be drawn.
- (4) The same old mistakes are made again: as before in Afghanistan, the systematic creation of a competent military police has not been realised sufficiently. And because of that there is no guarantee for the protection of property and the protection of human life. There is also the fact that neither enough interpreters/translators nor enough objective and reliable information exist. This, however, is essential for a successful outcome of an efficient post-war strategy.

So what do these factors say about the effectiveness and the practicability of the NSS? Does the ‘Bush Doctrine’ work in actual practice?

With regard to the strategic situation in Iraq, the outcome of a critical analysis is rather a negative one:

- The learning ability of the Pentagon strategists and the US military leadership does more or less not exist. Those responsible have not yet learned their lesson from incidents like the Kosovo Conflict (1998-99) and the Afghanistan War (2001-03).

- In addition, in case of emergency one cannot rely on the Iraqi Police and the Iraqi National Guard (ING), as television pictures illustrate day by day.
- Furthermore, the organised resistance does still exist. Some military experts even speak of a growing professionalizing of terrorism.
- Before taking military action, the Pentagon was convinced that the support of the Iraqi people would be guaranteed. This, as we all know, has not been the case at all. Besides, there is another problem one has to be aware of: the new political leaders in Iraq are not very reliable in this respect either. Personal rivalries and power struggles do have a great impact on everyday political events and decisions in post-war Iraq. For this reason, which is hardly surprising, it is very difficult to reach the necessary stability in the country.
- Military experts have been harshly criticizing coalition forces for military action, e.g. in cities like Fallujah and Mosul, since the beginning of the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. Looking back, this kind of reaction was evoked by the big mistakes that had been made with regard to the situational description and the evaluation of the enemy, i.e. resistance fighters, international and national terrorists.
- The military success of the allied armed forces in Iraq is comparatively small. A large number of resistance fighters and terrorist groups were able to escape capture (among them probably the extremist leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi). The danger of a new spreading of terror throughout the country is quite a realistic one. Even foreign fighters, either recruited by other extremist groups or by the al-Qaida network itself, could now get involved in the ‘fight for the recapture of Baghdad’ (the exact wording of the terrorists).

In other words: The applied strategy for fighting terrorism is not very suitable in reality. The US crisis management in Iraq cannot give any guarantee for peace and stability in the country, although it really should. The ‘democratic process’ in Iraq (and in the Middle East) can only be successful – in a long-term perspective – if a political satisfaction in the whole region takes place. To achieve this, one needs to have a balanced overall concept (some would rather call it ‘grand strategy’).

On the other hand, these circumstances on its own do not give sufficient information about whether the NSS is a practicable concept or not. That is why at present a final judgement cannot be made. Nevertheless, one thing is certain: the NSS needs supplementing, in some parts even further improvement. In its essence the NSS represents just *one* possible way of how to cope with international/transnational terrorism. The US strategy will have to be replenished with political and diplomatic efforts; it should not only include military options like pre-emptive strikes and other pre-emptive measures. In each case, this should be clear now, a cost-benefit calculation has to be done beforehand.

On the other hand, one has to vigorously oppose the (false) assumption that the NSS represents a ‘radical’ paradigm shift. Such an opinion only shows a lack of knowledge of US foreign and security policy and its history. In this context, the cross-reference to military options in the mid-1980s – during the Reagan administration – has to be taken into consideration. At the time, the former US Foreign Secretary (1982-89) George P. Schultz already called for ‘active prevention, preemption, and retaliation’ (cf. *The Work of Diplomacy*, FPRI, 2002). At least in this respect it should be obvious that the strategy document of September 17, 2002, is not exactly new. The only thing about the doctrine that is ‘new’, in the true sense of the word, is the clarity and directness of its intention and language. This in fact does make a difference compared to other national security strategies of the United States in former times.

The NSS, as some well-informed authors (e.g. Irlenkaeuser, Krause and Schreer) have already proved it, is an adequate response to the challenges of global terrorism and to the strategic changes that have taken place since the end of the Cold War in 1991. Therefore one should read the US strategy document as a ‘geo-strategic foundation paper of the 21st century’ (Reiter). Contrary to popular belief, the NSS provides a ‘wide fan’ (as Ruehl puts it) of opportunities for action to face the challenges and threats that do not only concern the United States, but also the entire Western world.

Anyway, let us return to the starting point. The overarching question at the beginning was: *Has the implementation of the US security strategy failed in Iraq?*

At present, it would be too early to ‘carry the strategy document to the grave’, all the more considering the office-holding US government is not willing to let this happen. Admittedly, it is a fact: the American responses to the threats of the 21st century are, at first sight, not always the ‘right ones’; but at least they have the advantage that they are far more realistic – from practical politics’ point of view – and more extensive than the half-hearted ‘solutions’ of most European politicians.

Besides, there is one thing that remains unchanged and true: a serious European strategic debate has not taken place yet, although it is about time. The unshakeable European belief in the ‘cure-all’ multilateralism and in the ‘miracle cure’ United Nations (UN) will get us nowhere – it will not solve the problems either. Multilateralism cannot be the ultimate cure for every political situation and problem one can think of. Apart from

that, multilateralism should not be used as an excuse for not acting, for simply sitting a crisis out, or as an excuse for justifying any kind of political passivity. Such an understanding of politics has to be called into question anyway.

However, this is true as well: multilateralism is an integral part – at least to a certain extent – of any kind of strategy that intends to overcome the transatlantic rift. It is necessary, more than ever before, to make a fresh start in the relations between the so-called old Europe and the United States, especially in view of the spreading of Islamist terror in the Western world. The disagreements over the last Gulf War should be left behind; it is about time to turn over a new leaf in transatlantic relations. Common challenges do require common responses – it takes a new political agenda to face the mutual enemy of the 21st century: global terrorism.

So what can finally be said about the NSS and its Iraq precedent?

Well, the old problem of putting a political plan into military practice has once again proved to be true. That is why it does not come as a surprise that mistakes and problems have emerged. On the other hand, it is doubtful whether there is any simple solution to this kind of problem. The implementation of military strategies is, of course, not trouble-free. In fact, armed conflicts tend to gather a dangerous momentum of their own. Moreover, one has to realise that any kind of rash military operation could lead to even more escalation in the ‘Middle East powder keg’. This region definitely remains an incalculable risk; there is no doubt about that. For this reason, a strong political commitment of the Bush administration in the Middle East (also called ‘Broader’ or ‘Greater Middle East’) is desirable. And this commitment should not only include pre-emptive measures, it should also include genuine diplomatic efforts.

To cut a long story short: The US Iraq War precedent will – in all probability – either strengthen the tendency with the political decision-makers in Washington towards the increasing use of the security strategy on ‘rogue states’ or will lead to revision in the long run. A complete surrender of the NSS is hardly to be expected in Bush’s second term. Everything else would be quite surprising. One can also imagine a scenario in which the NSS will be just *one* of a large number of strategies for fighting international/transnational terrorism. With regard to what the Iraq War of 2003 taught

the Western world, such an assumption seems to be fairly realistic. Finally, there is one truism left: time will tell.