

LESSONS OF IRAQ

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[Opening courtesies]

The British have a typically cynical proverb that ‘he who laughs last, laughs longest’. My feeling is that it is still too early for any of us to start laughing over Iraq. It is true that things in that country are looking very dark at present as the occupying forces struggle to control mounting security threats and to preserve at least some appearance of reconstruction and reform. Even the ability of Iraq’s different communities to live together and the implications for the territorial integrity of the country have become sources of serious anxiety. Meanwhile, there has not been any wave of democracy sweeping over the Middle East, and the cycle of violent and unilateral action between Israel and the Palestinians is going through a particularly bad phase, and the wave of transnational terrorism has certainly not been rolled back. Yet if we were to jump from this to draw a final conclusion that the invasion of Iraq was all bad, or uniquely bad, or even that it was the worst thing that happened in relations between the USA and the rest of the world in 2003 we would probably be jumping too far.

Getting rid of Saddam Hussein was not all bad, and the shock that it gave both to other bad guys and to the good guys has stirred up a lot of useful efforts to find different ways of stopping so-called ‘rogue state’ behaviour and proliferation problems. As for being uniquely bad, we have seen other cases of military intervention before—not just by the United States—that have created problems possibly worse than the ones they tried to solve, and we should remember that some nations now considered very successful have been born or re-born out of scenes of violence even worse than what is happening now in Iraq. As to whether this was the worst thing the USA did last year, history could still develop in directions that make us regret even more bitterly the way that US budget and trade deficits have been allowed to escalate out of control, or even the US’s stubborn refusal to reduce its high energy consumption and to make real sacrifices for limiting climate change.

In fact, to make a completely fair assessment of the lessons of Iraq even at this interim stage would mean balancing so many factors that there just is not time to talk about them here. I will only discuss a limited set of issues that are of interest to SIPRI and to me personally: what we have learned about US power, about crisis management, about managing terrorism and the challenge of weapons of mass destruction, and about the role of security institutions. At the end I would like to come back briefly to the question of policy areas that the Iraq war may have damaged not by its direct effects, but by robbing them of the attention and the united international efforts they deserved.

US Power

The Iraq story proved in at least three ways that the USA today really does possess unique military and political power, and unique freedom to use it. First is the simple fact that the Americans could occupy a large and distant country so rapidly, with only limited help from others, without being able to use their usual bases in Saudi Arabia or routes through Turkey, and with such relatively low casualties. Second was the fact that no local country dared to resist or even to try to make serious mischief out of the situation. Third was the fact that the countries

politically opposing the action, although including some of the US's most powerful usual partners, did not apparently manage to change or even delay the US's plans at all.

As against this, one could list even more ways in which the episode showed the limitations on US power. The most obvious point is that the US troops who won the war proved much less competent at building and holding the peace. The US's advance planning and intelligence seems to have been badly wrong in many more respects than just over WMD. The standard of post-conflict administration and reconstruction work was probably lower and certainly more confused and inconsistent than in most recent international interventions. In the political sphere, the US and UK had to abandon attempts to convince or pressure enough states at the UN to give them the enabling resolution they wanted before the attack. The military mission which followed attracted only a relatively small coalition of loyal US supporters and did not get public backing from any single institution, not even NATO. At home in the USA, the limits of political and public support for a lengthy and costly military adventure have become gradually clearer as time has gone on. Having started the action with clear popular support and an almost silent Democrat opposition, President Bush must now be very uncertain whether the Iraq situation will help or undermine his chances in the forthcoming Presidential elections.

The result of those elections remains very open as of today, however, and they will be decided not by what we think the lessons of Iraq were, but by what the American people think. This is one of the results of the unusual situation in which the only potentially hegemonic super-power in the world today is a democracy. The point I would like to stress here is that what the American people decide and how the next President (of either party) decides to play his cards will end up influencing our own final judgement on the Iraq episode as well. I pointed out in the Introduction to the Yearbook we are launching today that many people's main worry about both the Afghanistan and the Iraq operations was that they might start a pattern of, as it were, serial invasion by the US, anywhere that it saw a threat to be 'pre-empted'. We still do not actually know if that will be the case.

For the moment the US is so bogged down in Iraq that other similar operations are ruled out just for practical reasons—finding extra US troops to answer the appeal to intervene in Liberia and enforce a regime change in Haiti has already been quite a strain. If the next US Presidency is determined to go on intervening unilaterally and can find the openings and build up the resources again to do so, then and only then could we say that the rules of the world security order are starting to change definitively. If a US President of either party recognizes the same lessons that most other people have seen about the limitations and negative effects of excessive force, and looks for other ways to meet his people's unchanging and still very urgent need for security against new threats, analysts in a couple of years may be looking back on Iraq as a kind of 'war to end war'. I do not want to make my own prediction here, either optimistic or pessimistic; but just to point out that any other nation which concludes from Iraq that might is going to be the same as right from now on, and that any kind of violence can be excused by an appeal to national interests on the US example, could still find it had made quite a costly mistake by 'backing the wrong horse'. I would also add that for the USA to swing to the opposite extreme of passivity and lack of seriousness about the threats would be equally destabilizing for the world order, and pretty bad news for ourselves!

Conflict Management

I would like to say a little more about the lessons for conflict management, just to stress that the problems faced by US military power in post-conflict Iraq are not necessarily a judgement on US efficiency but rather, reflect limitations on the value of military force in general. During the 1990's, a lot of armed forces around the world (including Russian forces) spent a lot of time on

peace operations trying to clear up the mess that other people's conflicts had made. In Afghanistan and Iraq, some of the world's leading nations have actually used conflict as a tool or catalyst to overthrow obstacles to security. In both cases we have found that defeating the bad guys in the battlefield is only the start of the problem and that even if we succeed in suppressing open violence afterwards, this is only the equivalent of covering up wounds, not of healing them. As long as some players have goals which they think more important than peace or which are even threatened by peace, violence will find a way again whether through new conflict, terrorism, sabotage or the corruption and misuse of the reconstruction process. The rule is the same whether in Afghanistan or the Congo, Iraq or Kosovo.

The lessons of this are almost too clichéd to bear repeating and the sad thing is that we had any number of chances to learn them already in the 1990's. The decision to use force in the first place needs extremely careful thought and planning and is always going to be a gamble for very high stakes. Many people concluded from the experience of crisis in the 1990's that the world community should have used decisive force earlier in Bosnia or Rwanda, Serbia or Iraq itself. Now the early use of force has been tried and we see that it can carry a heavy price not just in the zone of combat but for the unity and confidence of the world community itself. While we probably should not shrink from taking such risks in the worst cases, we need to try much harder to find other ways to mend weak states and control dangerous ones for example through economic sticks and carrots, manipulation of resource flows, mediation, and what is coming to be defined as coercive diplomacy. And above all, we must make sure that no operation is launched without the guaranteed capacity to re-build afterwards and a vision of how the country will be re-built, which in the end has to be done by its own people. Letting democracy take its course in a post-conflict society has obvious risks, but the world has surely progressed too far for the alternative which is creating new "puppet states" or de facto colonies.

The 'New Threats'

When the leaders of the coalition against Iraq chose to use the threat of Saddam Hussein's supposed weapons of mass destruction (WMD) capabilities as the main justification for their action, it was understandable in many ways. Saddam had been the target of UN warnings, sanctions, and forceful inspections for the same reason, and this threat had great power to unite the US's own people and its chosen partners. We know now, of course, that it was the wrong answer to the wrong question because no such weapons were found. If the result of this embarrassing surprise had been to make the world generally stop believing in the threat of WMD proliferation, that would have been disastrous indeed. In an ironic way it was lucky that such clear evidence came out elsewhere during the year about North Korean threats of nuclear development, about Libya's experiments with buying WMD capability on the black market, about Iran's reluctance to close the door completely on developing a nuclear fuel cycle for possible weapons use, and about Pakistan's earlier leakage of dangerous nuclear technology to several problem states. As of now, the net result seems to be that the majority of the world's states have been stimulated to work much harder to solve these problems; but that the great majority of them are trying to find ways that do not involve attacking the countries with force of arms or, indeed, leaving the way open for the USA to do so. The remedies explored include diplomatic efforts like those of EU countries towards Iran or the 6-power group drawn together by China on North Korea; tougher export controls on WMD materials and related technologies; greater efforts to control and destroy existing stocks (where the Global Partnership programme now being sponsored by the G-8 on Russian territory in both a big direct contribution to the problem and an interesting model for use elsewhere); consideration of new universal standards for defining and punishing crimes connected with WMD trading and possession; and some forceful methods falling short of war like the new Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) designed to stop the illegal transport of WMD goods by sea.

All this is creating a de facto pattern of multi-functional, multi-layer anti-proliferation policy, addressing all stages of the WMD cycle with a mixture of global and local, legal and operational and other types of measures. It is particularly well laid out in the WMD strategy document adopted by the EU last December. In itself this is a good thing, and something that SIPRI actually argued for in the general chapter on arms control that you will find in the present Yearbook. But let me just make a few points against complacency. First, the last two years have confirmed that treaties and other formal, binding instruments to establish the goals and rules of arms control are not out-of-date and not even the weakest link in the disarmament process, but actually a vital foundation for any effective strategy on WMD (or indeed other kinds of armaments). Without them we would not know what the rules are, and the good states who obey the rules would have no confidence that others would: we would have no transparency and no chance to establish the real facts about possible violations through international, impartial monitoring and inspection. We ought to be strengthening and reforming the old treaties where they are weak, not abandoning them; or we may find that by yielding to the temptation to slip out of restraints that are temporarily inconvenient for ourselves we have unleashed a law of the jungle in which our own chances of survival are much poorer. (In a parenthesis, I would say that I believe this applies to the CFE Treaty as well.)

Secondly, as I stressed in a talk here last year, arms control in general cannot just be something that is done to the bad guys: we have to accept that our own actions could also be part of the problem. Obviously this applies to the part the advanced nations may play in allowing the leakage of destructive technologies through both legal and illegal trade. But it also means looking closely at our plans for building up our own positive and defensive military capability against the people we now see as enemies. To take just one example, the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq have popularized the use of various kinds of missiles as a low-risk, relatively accurate strike weapon, and the measures being taken by the USA and its allies (now with Russian cooperation) to build up missile defence systems will themselves rely on using missiles of new and advanced types for purposes of interception. But missiles are also among the best ways to deliver WMD and they are already proliferating much too freely among states like Pakistan, India, Israel, North Korea and Iran. No good universal solution has yet been found for restricting the development and use of these technologies, yet if we ignore the risks—or if we limit ourselves to a probably hopeless attempt just to stop a limited number of bad guys using missiles—we could be storing up a whole new wave of strategic destabilization including possible new ‘asymmetric’ threats for the future. The new developments involving a possible militarization of outer space are another case in point.

I will not add much on the other so-called ‘new threat’ of terrorism because SIPRI does not pretend to have any expertise in the matter, other than its specialized linkages with arms control and with conflict. However, I must make the obvious point that waging ‘war’ on terrorism with the usual weapons of war has not worked, either in the most prominent cases of Afghanistan and Iraq or in more specific regional situations. Where terrorism is part of a conflict it is fairly obvious that it will never be ended except by ending the conflict, and ending it with a genuine and legitimate settlement. The new style of trans-national terrorism represented by Al-Qaeda, if defeated in one place, can just shift its operations to others and possibly gain new supporters by what are seen as its heroic struggles and cases of martyrdom. You in Russia and we in other parts of Europe have borne the blows of terrorism only too recently, and the lessons of the last couple of years’ failures and partial success in tackling it are not just lessons for US policy but ones we need to reflect on very gravely as well. One conclusion should probably be that the danger of terrorism can never be eliminated entirely, partly because it is a spiteful and vicious revenge against strength and order, and the stronger and more ordered our national and international communities become, the fewer other methods will remain available to our enemies. Secondly, the world was right after 9/11 to declare that this is a universal menace against which we most

stand together, and some aspects of it such as the blocking of terrorist financing, and intelligence exchange and judicial cooperation to track down and punish terrorist networks, can objectively only be solved by universally harmonized and binding measures. Thirdly, while the military suppression of terrorism either at home or abroad must remain within our range of available measures, really effective policies will require the combination of many different kinds of instruments (just as in the case of arms control), coordinating the means of internal and external security, but also of politics and economics, and even psychology and education. Unlike many other dangers we have faced in the past, terrorism is also an 'enemy within': it is a disease of a healthy democratic body which we can only cure by making our own societies more healthy and more irreversibly democratic.

Impact on Institutions

2003 started as a terrible year for institutions, with the UN's authority pushed aside over Iraq, with NATO paralysed by a quarrel over contingency aid to Turkey that was only one small symptom of the US/Europe tensions building up elsewhere, and with the European Union badly split among its own members. For a while, it looked as if the downgrading and relativizing of institutional cooperation implied by the Bush Administration's doctrine that "the mission makes the coalition, not the coalition the mission" was a disease that had infected other major players and put the very credibility of leading institutions at risk. Already by the summer, however, and certainly by the end of last year the picture was looking rather different. Some people would argue that the UN actually kept more of its credibility by not authorizing the attack on Iraq than it would have done by legitimizing it. It was remarkable, in any case, how quickly US policy shifted in the post-conflict phase, recognizing that a UN legal framework was indispensable for solving problems like Iraqi debts and oil sales and lifting sanctions, and even calling on the Secretary-General's help to judge the trickiest political aspects of the transition of power to the Iraqi people. The UN also proved its importance during the year by mandating various smaller peace operations and, in another sphere of security, by being obviously the right framework for tackling the major and costly threat of SARS. At last autumn's General Assembly even the USA was calling for the UN to enhance its role and improve its principles for dealing with the latest global threats in future, and Kofi Annan set up a group of eminent persons to report later this year on ways of doing just that.

As for NATO, it also found a way out of its crisis by devoting itself even more fully and exclusively to developing elite multilateral forces for missions outside the European area, expanding its existing responsibilities in Afghanistan and now even considering some kind of follow-on mission in Iraq. This new focus involves more than just technical changes since it is effectively diverting the greatest part of NATO's strategic energy away from its traditional task of territorial security in Europe. This should have benefits in allowing the alliance to help and work with a wider range of partners: but it seems to me that it must also strengthen the trend towards making NATO more of an executive agency (some people would use the less elegant name of "tool-box") and less of a major policy-forming and consensus-creating forum. While East-West security was very much NATO's own business and even the UN never interfered with it in practice, the big political and strategic decisions on how to handle Afghanistan, Iraq or the greater Middle East should and will be made in other ways and other places, involving a wider range of actors, before the specific tasks to be handed down to NATO can be defined.

As a European I find the impact of the Iraq crisis on the European Union particularly interesting. It first split Europe in a number of ways between so-called old and new, big and small, Atlanticist and anti-US tendencies. But already by last summer, it was clear that neither the European leaders who joined the Iraq operation nor those who tried to block it had managed to exercise any decisive influence over events. Not just Europe as a whole, but individual European

nations were never going to make themselves strong by saying either a simple Yes or a simple No to America. At philosophical level, the feeling grew that at least some European interests and European values could now be defined distinctly from those of the USA, and at political level there was an increased drive to decide first and foremost what Europe itself wanted and needed to do for its own security interests. Hence the document on a European security strategy that was first drafted by Javier Solana and then approved by the European Council last December: hence the separate strategy developed by the EU on WMD; hence the rather sudden decision to launch an EU peace operation in the Congo without applying for NATO help; and hence the continuing trend for the EU to take over lead responsibility from NATO for military operations on Europe's own soil in the Balkans. By the autumn, France and the UK were back in alliance with each other pushing for further improvements in the EU's own military capabilities, including a new military planning cell and an armaments and capabilities agency. Throughout the same period, the EU was pressing on in a quite united way with its plans for enlargement and the drafting of a new European Constitution which among other things would give stronger, more permanent political leadership in the European Council and in the conduct of common foreign and defence policies. It is true that the draft constitutional Treaty was blocked in December but this Spring, notably under the impact of events in Spain, prospects for approving it have brightened again and EU members have decided to pull out of it and adopt immediately the new principle of "solidarity" against terrorist attacks on each others' territory. To my mind this "solidarity" idea is the real new-age equivalent of NATO's 20th-century collective defence guarantees, and one of its advantages is that it does not have to be directed against any other State..

The general implications of the EU's reactions are worth noting because we have seen them also reflected in less tightly integrated regional organizations elsewhere, for instance in Africa and the African sub-regions, in South-East Asia and the Asia-Pacific, and in Latin America. All these groupings have adopted tough new policies on threats like terrorism and WMD but they have signalled a wish to solve these problems as much as possible by their own means on their own territory, inter alia through the independent peacekeeping capacities they are developing. This is not an anti-US policy, since the actual goals of policy are largely shared with Washington; but it is one designed to minimize the risk of forceful intervention by the US and also of the US using divide-and-rule tactics against the regions' members. It is still far from creating a "multi-polar" security system in the sense that some thinkers have advocated; but it does not seem to me to fit in with any normal definition of a one-power hegemony either.

Non-Iraq Challenges

Finally, a quick word about developments not tied up with Iraq that have been probably too much overshadowed by it. The first I would like to mention is the opening of NATO and the EU to a much large number and variety of new members this Spring, which is a historic gamble on a great scale and in my view a basically positive one. Between them, these two institutions are now tying down more than 30 countries to habits of cooperation, democracy and peace and thereby getting rid of nearly every geographical region of instability that has led to wars in Europe in the past – though this process will of course not be truly complete until it covers the Balkans. The economic benefits of integration are moving physically nearer to Russia and perhaps politically nearer too, because a larger Europe should be even more aware of its strategic common destiny and interdependence with Russia and of the need to handle these relationships in a way that respects Russia's own needs and aspirations. All that said, it must be admitted that the short-term transition into enlargement has involved some turbulence between Russia and both the EU and NATO and that some quite important issues opened up have not yet been properly resolved, perhaps inter alia because they came up too hastily and too late. Our common distraction with wars outside Europe may have had something to do with that, and personally I would like to see much more serious policy thinking going on in the next couple of years within

Russia, within Europe and between them about exactly what our vision is of the way forward to security, reform and integration in the wider Eurasian space. It is not only a bit contradictory but perhaps risky for us to be going out trying to rearrange regions like the greater Middle East when we are still not sure of the road we are marching on within our own shared continent.

Last but not least, events last year have reminded us that terrorism and proliferation are not the only asymmetrical and invasive threats that our societies share. Diseases like AIDS and SARS fully deserve to be classified as security threats, and so do violent weather and the effects of climate change and environment decay, or the risk of uncontrolled migration, or the sudden interruption of energy supplies or the sabotage of the Internet. All of these have the potential to shake the economic and political foundations of our countries and in some cases, to cause far more deaths than any single terrorist event so far. If we do not want to be always hurrying to catch up with some new set of “new” and “even newer” threats, I would suggest that we really need to broaden our national and institutional security strategies and our resource allocation plans to balance up and deal proportionally with the risks from all these other kinds of challenges as well. To have any hope of doing so, we will need to build important new partnerships with the actors outside governments (and traditional security institutions) who stand in the front line and control many of the resources necessary for our defence and emergency control in these sectors: scientists and technicians and health professionals, the private business sector, and - not least - the individual citizens themselves.

Ladies and gentlemen, SIPRI is far from being expert in all the fields of security I have mentioned but we have tried in our recent Yearbooks at least to show that we appreciate their importance, and to warn against letting temporary security fashions or the passion of short-term disputes distract us from the inescapable necessity for very broad, very open and very disciplined global cooperation to deal with them. This is one of the many respects in which the correctness of Russia’s own future policies, and the correctness of the lessons that Russia draws from Iraq among other things, will be of great importance for the rest of us. We deeply appreciate the chance to bring SIPRI’s views and findings before a Russian audience again through our close partnership with IMEMO and with the essential support of the Swiss Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces. I hope you will like this latest Yearbook and I thank you very much for your patience in listening to me today.