

“AFTER RUMSFELD: A WORLD IN SEARCH OF A GAME PLAN”

ECPA briefing document for the Commission on Globalisation Conference, ‘National Sovereignty and Universal Challenges: Choices for the World After Iraq’

31st March 2003

After Rumsfeld, the events of the first week of the war may have changed matters more than is immediately obvious. A war that takes weeks or months rather than days potentially shifts the power balance inside the US Administration.

The Neo-Conservative strategy currently being executed by Vice President Cheney, Secretary Rumsfeld and the rest is both clear and extremely risky. We should not be dazzled by its audacity into thinking that it can be put successfully into practice. The nature and execution of the plan is increasingly part of the public debate on both sides of the Atlantic. The interaction of the New American Century paper of 1991, the role of large US corporations and Conservative think tanks, the nature of inter-service and inter-departmental rivalries over the militarisation of space, are all available for public inspection given the splendid transparency of US society. The way in which the Neo-Conservatives made use of the horror of September 11th to turn their aspirations into reality can be easily mapped.

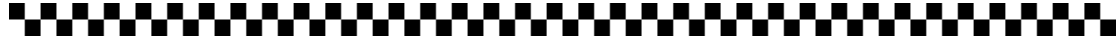
As of the end of March, the weakness of this strategy is already becoming apparent. Overly optimistic assumptions about the conduct of the war in Iraq (“shock and awe”, spontaneous welcome, Turkish access, small numbers of troops etc), mean, that at the very least we are now committed to a longer war, and more importantly, a difficult aftermath. Secretary Rumsfeld has been keen to prove that Iraq could be dealt with elegantly and relatively cheaply in order to set up the next targets amongst the rogue states, presumably starting with North Korea in late June. The exposed domestic flank of the strategy is also appearing in the shape of military criticism of Rumsfeld, embarrassment over the award of contracts to Halliburton and the retirement of Richard Perle as Chairman of the Defence Board due to commercial conflict of interest.

I whole-heartedly agree with Phillip Stephens writing in the Financial Times of March 28th “...maddening contradictions have all along been at the heart of the wilful destruction of the international security system during the past few months. The US quest for untrammelled primacy is doomed. America's security and prosperity depend on its political influence as much as on its military might. The US has been strong because it has been admired”. The damage done in a few short months to America's reputation around the world is quite extraordinary. The economic consequences of this are also becoming clear in the form of damaged trade relations, the unsupportability of the US budget and threats to global growth. As with a corporation, the value of reputation only becomes apparent when it is lost.

The Rumsfeld-Cheney strategy called for the deliberate disruption of the three great pillars of post-war multilateralism - the European Union, the United Nations and NATO - with a form of “shock and awe diplomacy” based on the claimed inevitability of US dominance. All three institutions are now in the process of devising their survival strategies in the face of this attack. The European Union must now get over the shock of finding itself so dramatically attacked and successfully divided, and concentrate on putting its own constitutional house in order. Brussels needs to design its own institutions, for its own purposes, with as much clarity as those in Washington have shown in expressing American's post cold war self interest. Rebuilding the Atlantic relationship cannot be done on the basis of fuzzy aspirations to “repair the damage of recent weeks”. On the day when European troops take up their duties in Macedonia, wearing for the first time Europe's blue and gold stars on their lapels, the British, French and Germans must surely draw the conclusion that allowing themselves to be divided serves none of their interests.

The USA is prone to fits of enthusiasm for coherently expressed new ideas. In recent years we have had the Goldilocks economy, the Internet hype and America as Empire. However, the world is a more

complex place than phrases such as the “uni-polar moment” imply. What the world needs now is a burst of institutional creativity, which accepts reality. Post-Iraq thinking needs to recognise that neither the seamless continuation of the Bretton Woods multilateralism of the last fifty years, nor a transfer to American empire is feasible. We should accept that we live in a new world and set about consciously redesigning its institutions. The Commission on Globalisation Conference “National Sovereignty & Universal Challenges” in Brussels on 18th-20th June provides the first serious opportunity for a ‘bruised’ America and a ‘shocked’ Europe to engage in this discussion in a global context.



© Tom Spencer