

Impacts of Iraqi War on World Order and China's Responses

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The Iraqi War is over. The international attention is shifting to the postwar reconstruction in Iraq and the challenges to world order. The Iraqi War has exerted important impacts on global and regional order, the role of the United Nations, the future of the trans-Atlantic alliance, etc. It is widely concerned about the future role of the United States in world affairs. Equally importantly, other major powers in Europe, Russia, China and Japan will also contribute to the making and operating of an evolving international order. In the wake of the Iraqi War, China is facing with both opportunities and challenges. On balance, China will have better chance to emerge peacefully and successfully in the coming decades.

I. Impacts on Global and Regional Orders

As far as the current developments of international situation could tell, since the end of the “non-suspension” war, there is no fundamental change in the world configuration of powers. To put it simply, the world configuration of powers means the co-relation of major powers in the world. The Gulf War in 1991 did happen along with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and eventually established sole superpower status of the United States. After the Gulf War, the world entered into the so-called Post-Cold War era. But this is not the case with the Iraqi War, which had only consolidated U.S. position and brought no fundamental changes in the co-relations of powers in the world.

Having said so, one must realize that the Iraqi War did greatly impact the world system and international order. The world order are, to a large degree, made up of international regimes and institutions as well as international law on the basis of the present co-relations of powers. Once an order is established, it will exist for a relatively long time and restrain on the behaviors of nation-states and non-state actors. This is why all the major powers pay great attention to and try hard to have a say in various international institutions and other mechanisms.

The hardest-hit one is the United Nations, which was marginalized because the United States had bypassed it. The United States is intentionally or unintentionally dismantling the international political and security systems, the making of which the U.S. had greatly contributed to as the World War II drew close. Another victim is the North Atlantic Treaty

Organization (NATO). NATO was also brushed aside. The United States under the Bush administration had not shown much respect to this alliance it produced in 1945. Instead, the United States set up the so-called Coalition of the Willing and talked about the division between the Old Europe and New One. The United States and Great Britain on the one side and the France-Germany-Russia on the other side have constituted the new trans-Atlantic contradiction. The essence of this contradiction is not whether Saddam's Iraq should be eliminated by military actions, but how the military actions be carried out under the framework of current international regime. France, Germany and Russia were criticizing the United States for its unilateralism and non-respect for the United Nations. The trans-Atlantic division seems to represent a new round of competition for the leading role between a uniting Europe and the established power of the United States.

The United States is also undermining the framework of major power relations it intends to build up in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. After the 9/11 the United States readjusted its global strategy. In its National Security Strategy issued in September 2002, the Bush administration has identified the combination of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction as its major and immediate threat. Therefore, the United States has been trying to set up a cooperation of major powers under its own leadership. To certain extent, the United States succeeded in shaping up this framework by achieving mainly positive interactions among the major powers in the world. However, the U.S. unilateral and preemptive military actions against Iraq have put this framework at stake. France threatened to use its veto power at the UN Security Council. Germany openly attacked the U.S. unilateralism. Both Russia and China openly and strongly opposed the U.S. military actions, and so did India. Finally the United States has to withdraw its attempts to win a UN Security Council support, thus failing in getting legitimacy in using forces against Iraq.

The Iraqi War has posed serious challenges to some of the major principles of international law. The existing international law recognizes the principle of equal sovereignties. The United States has made itself superior to the others and entitled to change the regimes of the countries concerned. Another principle in jeopardy is about the non-use of force or threat use of force. During the Iraqi War, the United States overstressed its right of self-defense and made the use of force from an exceptional to a general case. Besides, the Iraqi War also damaged the principle of non-interference. The United States now could intervene in other countries' affairs by many "reasons and excuses" ranging from possessing WMD to the leaders' anti-humane crimes. Now the war is over and the international community is concerned very much about the future of the existing international law.

The Iraqi War has also shown the dual role of the United States in international affairs. Obviously, the United States is the only superpower in the world and possesses immense powers. In the four major wars in the Post-Cold War era, namely the Gulf War, the Kosovo War, the Afghanistan War and the Iraqi War, the world reaction towards the United States have been different. When the United States had some rightful reasons and legitimacy, it

can play a positive role and win support the world over. When the United States had little justification and legitimacy, it will meet strong criticism and resistance. All the four wars have shown both positively and negatively how the United States could wield its powers and play its role.

The Iraqi War has also complicated the global coalition of combating international terrorism. After the 9/11, the world has by and large reached a consensus to combat international terrorism despite the fact they differ on the exact definition of what international terrorism really is. The Afghanistan War was the first stage and the global coalition of combating internationalism maintained its unity. However, the international community differs widely on whether the Iraqi War should be the second stage. Rather, many countries are concerned that the expansive definition of international terrorism by the United States would know no boundary. Such definition would also mislead the international struggle against international terrorism.

The international community faces a more chaotic world. By bypassing and marginalizing the United Nations, the United States has exerted a very damaging effect on the future UN operation. Moreover, the United States used military forces to change a regime that posed no immediate and direct security danger has set up a very bad precedence. Again the so-called preemptive strike strategy would result in encouraging other bigger powers follow suit to preempt the smaller ones. When the existing international order is being shocked and undermined, there is still no sign that a new and functional order comes into being. Indeed, the international community is puzzled and confused by the situation as a result of the Iraqi War.

In terms of regional situation and configuration of powers, two regions are worthy discussing. The Middle East stands out prominently. The United States has further strengthened its position in the region by toppling the Saddam regime. In political landscape, the United States will put a pro-American government in Iraq, a key country in the region. It also wants to promote the so-called democratization in the region. Economically speaking, the United States has seized another important oil-rich country, thus holding one of the keys of the world economy. However, the Bush administration is confronting several major challenges. First of all, it is one thing to win military victory but another to govern the country. This military victory is very probably only a beginning of many troubles to come. Besides, the United States is sowing seeds of discords between itself and its allies in the region by promoting democracy. The imposition of democracy by the United States in the Middle East will certainly lead to a more complicated situation. Finally, the perennial Arab-Israel disputes would become tenser. With the changed configuration of powers in the region, the United States would further tilt towards Israel in the said-disputes. The Arabic countries, especially Palestine would intensify their struggle. Consequently, the region would expect more instabilities and uncertainties.

The Iraqi War has affected the Asia-Pacific Region in several ways. First and foremost, the Iraqi War has made the North Korea nuclear weapon issue high on the priorities of the U.S. security targets. In October 2002 the North Korea nuclear issue was made close to a military showdown. All the countries concerned have their own positions, while the United States considers all options. Its two allies of South Korea and Japan oppose military means. China calls for peaceful solution and Russia also tries to have a role to play. People are talking about the possibility of the North Korea being the next target on the U.S. list. While the recent announcement of U.S.-North Korea-China talks in Beijing being somewhat positive, no one should underestimate the fluctuation of the Peninsular situation. Second, the Iraqi War has undercut the basis of supports to the U.S. by Asian countries, especially the Islamic countries. Third, the Iraqi War has made it even more difficult to build up a regional security cooperation framework in the Asia-Pacific Region.

II. China's Perspectives and Responses

The Iraqi War has a multi-fold impact on China. Generally speaking, China's overall external environments of reform and opening-up, especially its peripheral one have not been fundamentally changed. In a considerably long period of time China will not be the focus of world contradictions. Therefore, China can seize upon tightly the strategic opportunities in the first two decades of the century by concentrating on modernization program and developing itself in a peaceful way. However, in terms of partiality and specific issues, the Iraqi War has presented at least the following challenges:

First, the Iraqi War has demonstrated the conflicting positions between the United States and China on how to enforce the will of the international community. China and the United States share common grounds and differ in the use of forces. Both China and the United States call for that the Saddam regime should fully and completely abide by all the UN resolutions on the Iraqi's would-be weapons of mass destructions. But on the issue how this should be implemented, China and the United States did not see eye to eye. China asked for a political solution through the United Nations whereas the United States insisted on military means. Now the Iraqi War is over and China has to meet the new reality squarely.

Second, China has to readjust to the situation that in the wake of its military victory in Iraq the United States has greatly strengthened its position and tried to change the international order in a unilateral way. China has always been opposed to hegemonism and power politics, advocating for a fairer international political and economic order, and standing for democratization of international relations. But China needs both matching power and proper strategies and policies to translate these above-mentioned positions into reality. For the time being, China should work out its plan to specify the much-talked-about international order, and define its roles and national interests.

Third, China has to seek for a proper balance between morality and reality. On the one hand, China has long been influenced by Confucianism and put morality and just high on its agenda of foreign relations. Moreover, China is emerging, which makes its people express their pros and cons more readily and openly. On the other hand, China is still a developing country and its power and influence are very limited. According to the behest of the late Deng Xiaoping, China will continue to pursue a low profile strategy in world affairs. China has succeeded in striking a proper balance during the Iraqi War and it would certainly have more tests of this kind.

Fourth, China cannot adopt a hands-off policy towards North Korean nuclear arms issue. The quick ending of the Iraqi War has made this issue prominent on the agenda of China's foreign policy and relations. Korea is China's close neighbor and the nuclear issue holds great importance to China's national interests, especially security interests. China has appealed for a peaceful and diplomatic solution and made patient efforts to bring North Korea and the United States back to the negotiating table. China will contribute to a stable and peaceful Korea Peninsula and a possible framework of security cooperation in Northeast Asia.

Fifth, while not confronting squarely with the United States, China is perceived as more sensitive to East Asian needs than the United States and is assuming an increasingly important role as a regional economic leaders and military player.¹ In the post-Iraqi War period, China will further readjust its relations with the allies of the United States, i.e., Japan, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines and Australia in the region. The United States has to develop a long-term and better-coordinated regional strategy and account for the complicated politics and economics of the region.

Last but not least, in the post-Iraqi War period, the Chinese new leadership has to match up with the Bush administration on how to preserve the Sino-U.S. relations on the stable and healthy track. In the CCP 16th Congress Working Report, China has put Sino-U.S. relations on the top of its foreign relations.² China has also readjusted its policy towards the United States by being more cooperative and less confrontational. In the cooperative side, China values its exchanges of views and strategic dialogue with the United States in order to enhance mutual understanding and reduce mutual suspicion. China has increasingly stressed building up constructive factors by having a more mature and interest-oriented policy towards the United States. As to the conflicting issues, China tries to seek for an optimal balance of principles and pragmatism. It goes without saying that there still exist difficulties in the Sino-U.S. relations. Most of the major difficulties and problems have remained unsolved, such as the Taiwan issue, Tibetan issue, trade frictions, human rights, and others. The Iraqi War has presented a new challenge. China and the United States have certainly had great differences on how the international system and order should work. The United States has so determined to pursue a

unilateral line that it has provoked confrontations even with its old allies in Europe. The fact that China is not in the front of the line of conflicts does not change the nature of the differences between China and the United States. Indeed, their strategic divergence has taken a broader dimension. Again this is a difficult problem between an established power and an emerging one. After all, China has a long and difficult way to go on its road of peaceful emerging, which, with all our sincere wishes, could become a fact in the future.

III. Future Trends

The future trends of the international situation depend very much on the development of political multipolarization and economic globalization. As the Chinese often say, the multipolarization is advancing through twists and turns. This will remain so for quite a period of time. On the one hand, neo-conservatism seems to hold sway in the United States and “New Imperialism” a target to pursue. The United States tries hard to fully exploit its power to preserve its dominating position in the world affairs. On the other hand, other major powers are increasing their strength and power as well. In the framework of 20 years, Europe would become a very strong entity and its aggregated economic strength will definitely take over that of the United States. A united Europe will also hold weightier political and security power vis-à-vis the United States. China, Russia, Japan and India will also increase their overall national strength. Besides, some regional or sub-regional organization like ASEAN will also gain weight in international affairs. Comparatively speaking, the U.S. power and influence will decline rather than increase in the longer run.

Another important factor is economic globalization. In spite of all its demerits, economic globalization has made the world an entity. Whether we like it or not, economic globalization is a reality of life today and will be even more so in the future. The foreseeable challenges facing the world will be, among other things, the widening gaps between the rich and poor nations, the digital divisions and the qualities of life. It will greatly affect the behavior and thinking of all the countries and people alike. If we believe in that economic infrastructure determines political superstructure, then economic globalization will eventually change the configuration of world powers and international relations. The international community has to build up corresponding mechanisms, organizations and global efforts to deal with these challenges.

Both political multipolarization and economic globalization will exert a combined effect on the future international order and regimes. Established some 60 years ago, the existing major international organizations such as the UN, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank will confront with a serious challenge of rejuvenation. Even the World Trade Organization (WTO), a continuation and extension of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), has to have a future plan. The international community also needs to keep pace with the times by working at new international regimes, mechanisms

and procedures. Democratization of international relations or mono-polar world will be the focus of international order in the coming decades.

China faces an important strategic opportunity in the coming decades by emerging peacefully as a major power in the world. In modern and contemporary world, there are several ways for countries to emerge as global or major powers. At the turn of 19th and 20th centuries the United States and Great Britain achieved a peaceful change of positions in the world. In 1930s both Germany and Japan tried to challenge the established powers by launching the Second World War. The United States and the Soviet Union knew well enough the devastating result of a nuclear showdown and tried to eliminate the other by a Cold War. China might take a different course. It is doing its best to identify itself with the mainstream of the international community and make its emergency acceptable by the neighboring countries. By advocating coexistence of different social system and political ideologies, integrating with the international community and making each other increasingly interdependent, China is proving itself capable to emerging peacefully and successfully.

¹ Elizabeth Economy and Eugene A. Matthews: "A chance for America to check China's rise", *International Herald Tribune*, April 24, 2003, p.6.

² The original line reads: "We will continue to improve and develop relations with the developed countries. Proceeding from the fundamental interests of the people of all countries concerned, we will broaden the converging points of common interests and properly settle differences on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, notwithstanding the differences in social system and ideology." Although the United States was not mentioned by name, but it is generally believed that it refers to the United States in the first place.