

Post-Civil War era a template for Iraq / Reconstruction of South was called a 'fool's errand'

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It has a familiar ring: The war is won. The United States moves quickly to eliminate the old repressive regime, setting up new democratic institutions and holding elections. U.S. troops remain to ensure a smooth transition to democracy, but it's assumed that this transition will be both peaceful and swift, and that a prolonged military presence will not be necessary. Tragically, this is not to be.

Much of the population sees the United States as an occupier. A violent insurgency develops, undermining the new institutions. The United States is unable to win over the hearts and minds of the people, or crush the insurgency. Finally, after more than a decade, with both Washington and the nation losing interest, the effort is abandoned. Troops are withdrawn, the new institutions collapse, and an evil, repressive regime emerges in its place.

A vision of Iraq's future? No. Not yet.

It's a short history of a previous U.S. effort to introduce democracy to a defeated but restive population in the American South, after the Civil War. Optimists looking for hope in the Iraqi situation repeatedly point to the successful nation building performed with Japan and Germany after World War II.

But the situation in Iraq differs from that in post-war Germany and Japan in one vital respect: the view of the future. Once the war ended, Germany and Japan immediately realized they faced a severe threat from an expansionist Soviet Union. Embracing American-style democracy and accepting U.S. hegemony was an easy choice compared with the possibility of becoming a permanent Soviet satellite.

In today's sole-superpower world, no such outside threat faces Iraq. In fact, many Iraqis see America as the expansionist bully, with their country as possible victim.

Which returns us to the South after the Civil War.

In the post-Ken Burns era, the Civil War often is seen as a sort of hockey game with guns -- beautiful, apolitical white guys all valiantly met, for unclear reasons, on the field of

honor. Too often this knightly mist obscures the fact that, after Appomattox, both sides didn't exactly just bow to each other and agree to forgive and forget.

Quite the contrary. [The North](#) viewed the South as conquered territory badly in need of reconstruction (i.e., nation building) before it was worthy of readmittance into the United States. And many in the South viewed the North as an occupying power deserving unwavering resistance. Conquerors bent on instituting change; conquered wanting the occupiers out ... sound familiar? A further parallel between the South and Iraq involves racial and ethnic issues. The North wished former black slaves to have equal rights and a role in government. White Southerners, the beneficiaries of the previous system, did not.

Iraq wasn't a slave society, but clearly Sunni Arabs, who benefited from [Saddam Hussein's](#) repression of the Kurds and Shiite Arabs, are the most resistant to the U.S. presence and the interim government. And finally, although the Iraq insurgency is far more violent, the insurgents are quite similar to the well-organized, militant, hate-filled ideologues of the post- Civil War South: the [Ku Klux Klan](#), the Sons of Midnight, the Knights of the White Camellia. Like today's insurgents, these groups sought to disrupt daily life through acts of terror. And one of their favorites was kidnapping and murdering -- occasionally even beheading -- ex-slaves and whites who cooperated with the U.S.-imposed state governments.

In their violent, anti-democratic nature, Southern night riders and today's radical Muslim terrorists in Iraq have much in common. [Nathan Bedford Forrest](#), the Confederate general who founded the Klan, and [Abu Musab](#) al- Zarqawi are virtual twins in their fanaticism, hatred of the United States and love of brutality.

What was the outcome of 11 years of nation building in the South? It failed.

In 1877, all the Confederate states were readmitted to the Union. Meanwhile, without U.S. troops propping up state governments and protecting freedmen, the South became -- for almost 100 years -- a nation unto itself, poorer, more economically backward and less educated than the rest of the nation, with a unique legal system unashamedly founded on racism. So divorced was the South from the rest of America that Vicksburg, Miss., which had fallen to Gen. [Ulysses Grant](#) on July 4, 1863, did not celebrate Independence Day until World War II.

So what's the lesson for us in Iraq? It's simple. Iraq is not Germany or Japan, which wanted our protection. The Iraqis just want us to leave. Those who draw comfort or inspiration from our post-World War II successes are deluding themselves.

Iraq is not the post-Civil War South either. But the similarities are real. American politicians and policy-makers would be well advised to look to our own past for a realistic understanding of the challenges we face. The time is now for them to ask whether we want to continue wasting blood and treasure on what a disillusioned Northern reconstructionist bitterly called "a fool's errand."

The American Civil War, Reconstruction, and Iraq: A “Teachable Moment”

by Gary J. Kornblith

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Every so often one hits upon a way to make past events “relevant” in the classroom only to discover that in doing so, one begins to reevaluate one’s own views about both historical and current events. I had such a moment on April 12, 2006, in my course on the American Civil War and Reconstruction. The class was discussing a group of readings on the “dynamics of Confederate defeat.” I asked if Confederate defeat was inevitable, a pretty standard question. A student responded that the question was hard to answer because we already knew the South lost the Civil War, and we could only speculate about other scenarios. Opening the way for the study of Reconstruction that we were scheduled to begin the next week, I asked the student if she was sure the South lost the Civil War. She and her peers looked at me quizzically. Was I just playing games with them? After admitting that I was trying to be provocative, I went to the blackboard (the old-fashioned kind in the front of the room, not the electronic software kind), and I said, “Imagine it is April 12, 1865. Richmond has fallen, and the Robert E. Lee has surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House. All major military operations have been completed.” Then I wrote on the board in big letters: “Mission Accomplished.” I proceeded to ask if the Civil War was really over by April 12, 1865, or whether it was just entering a new phase—one that would turn out differently than the phase of conventional warfare.

A fascinating discussion ensued, and over the next few weeks the class repeatedly returned to the question of when the Civil War really ended. I began to see more and more parallels between the debates over Reconstruction and debates over American intervention in Iraq—parallels that sometimes made me uncomfortable about my own scholarly and political positions. Like many other leftists, I opposed American intervention in Iraq from the start. Although no fan of Saddam Hussein, I believed that the U.S. should work through the United Nations rather than take unilateral military

action. I also believed that any attempt to impose Western-style democracy on Iraq from the outside was bound to fail.

Three years after the toppling of Saddam Hussein, I felt vindicated. Clearly events in Iraq had not turned out the way Bush and his advisors had predicted. The mission of creating a stable, democratic, pro-American Iraq remained unaccomplished. So should we get out? The obvious answer was yes if the mission was -- and always had been -- virtually impossible.

But then I began to think about E. L. Godkin, Horace Greeley, and the Liberal Republicans in 1872. Hadn't they called for an end to Federal intervention in the South because the terror and turmoil of Radical Reconstruction proved that biracial democracy was virtually impossible and not worth more northern, white sacrifice? Like many other historians of progressive bent, I wanted to believe that Reconstruction could have succeeded had the Federal government stuck by the freedpeople and maintained a stronger military presence in the postwar South. But perhaps making biracial democracy work in the South in the 1870s was no more do-able than making multi-religious, multi-ethnic democracy work in present-day Iraq. Or, alternatively, perhaps Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times* was right after all: we should stick with the project of democracy-building in Iraq even if it takes many more years and many more lives because the moral and political consequences of writing off the possibility of democracy developing there would be enduring and awful.

Then again, the parallels between the American Civil War and the war in Iraq are hardly exact. There are no "lessons" of history that one can derive from nineteenth-century precedents and apply in simple ways to twenty-first century challenges. I still believe that Radical Reconstruction was a worthy cause – a good mission – and that the invasion of Iraq was not. Yet my "teachable moment" on April 12 has given me pause. I feel less confident than before about passing judgment on how others have tried to shape the world. To this extent, historical reflection has proven personally destabilizing but also edifying. What began as my attempt to disrupt the unthinking assumptions of my students has resulted in my questioning of my own accepted truths and in my recommitment to the value of scholarly skepticism.

- See more at: <http://hnn.us/article/27591#sthash.tvJuF94q.dpuf>

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Reconstruction -- after the US Civil War or in Iraq -- takes time

By [Mary Mostert](#)

With the death of a U.S. soldier in Iraq on Wednesday, the total number of Americans killed in Operation Iraqi Freedom now totals 147, equaling the total in the 1991 Gulf war. Financial costs, so far for total \$48 billion, compared to Desert Storm's cost of \$61 billion in 1991.

And, so far, it appears, the gist of the news coverage around the world and certainly among Democrats running for George W. Bush's job in the White House makes it appear that nothing much was accomplished by either war.

However, the big story in the Arab news is not the number of Americans who have died, which is miniscule compared with the deaths caused by Saddam Hussein from torture and execution of his own people, use of chemical weapons against Kurds and Iranians, and his invasion of Kuwait. The story that dominates the news of Iraq's neighbors is the continuous discoveries of mass graves that contain the bodies of thousands killed by Saddam Hussein's various "security" organizations, a story that is generally not even mentioned in the Western media.

Much is made of the "Iraqi people" not "trusting" the American forces. News reports alternate between Iraqi complaints that their air conditioning isn't working, to complaints that the American security is no better than Saddam Hussein's to emotional stories of women and girls afraid to step outside their homes for fear of being raped by the marauding gangs of Iraqis, some of them part of the 100,000 criminals released from Iraqi jails by Saddam Hussein in his closing hours of power.

It should not surprise anyone that the Iraqi people have had reason to hate and fear security forces under Saddam Hussein or that many Iraqis show are also skeptical of American security forces. The fact is their experience with the six different security organizations of Saddam Hussein was universally negative. With the Democrats and the national media trying to stir up visions of our having lost Operation Iraqi Freedom, trying to correct the misinformation is like trying to stop a flood by sticking your finger in a break in a dam.

For example, on "Meet the Press" Sunday an exchange between Rumsfeld and moderator Tim Russert went like this:

RUSSETT: The country very much focused on Iraq. Let me bring you and our viewers back to May 1st, when the president addressed the nation. Let's watch.

PRESIDENT BUSH (from videotape): My fellow Americans, major combat operations in Iraq have ended. In the battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed.

RUSSETT: Since that evening, 79 American soldiers have died in Iraq; 382 have been wounded or injured. Was the president too premature in uttering those words?

RUMSFELD: No. If you listen to the words carefully, he was very precise. He said major combat

operations had ended. He did not say the war had ended. He did not say there would be no one else killed.

As a matter of fact, President Bush said the day after 9-11: "The deliberate and deadly attacks which were carried out yesterday against our country were more than acts of terror. They were acts of war.

"This will require our country to unite in steadfast determination and resolve. Freedom and democracy are under attack.

"The American people need to know that we're facing a different enemy than we have ever faced. This enemy hides in shadows, and has no regard for human life. This is an enemy who preys on innocent and unsuspecting people, then runs for cover. But it won't be able to run for cover forever. This is an enemy that tries to hide. But it won't be able to hide forever. This is an enemy that thinks its harbors are safe. But they won't be safe forever.

"This enemy attacked not just our people, but all freedom-loving people everywhere in the world. The United States of America will use all our resources to conquer this enemy. We will rally the world. We will be patient, we will be focused, and we will be steadfast in our determination.

"This battle will take time and resolve. But make no mistake about it: we will win." Have we won yet? No. The war is still going on. In fact, in less than two years from that attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, American forces have eliminated brutal regimes and killed or scattered terrorists on two continents that were determined to bring down America.

It has been only five months since we started Operation Iraqi Freedom. In that five months, for the first time on Sunday, a "governing council" composed of 25 free Iraqis was formed that included ALL elements in the country - Shiites, Kurds, Assyrians, Christians, Turkmen, Sunnis, and women. Before the fall of Baghdad, only the minority Sunnis ruled in Saddam Hussein's government. It should not surprise anyone that there are some disgruntled former Baath Party leaders in Baghdad today who are whining. After all, under Saddam Hussein they had electricity 24 hours a day, while the poor and non-Sunni groups got little or no electricity and few jobs. It also should not surprise people that Al-Queda groups, that fled Afghanistan in 2002, are taking "credit" for the killing of American soldiers in Baghdad and that thousands of terrorists are pouring into Iraq from Syria.

The reconstruction of Iraq into a viable and well-ordered nation will take time. For those who think the Iraqis will never be able to make democracy work, remember that the U.S. Congress in 1865, after the death of Abraham Lincoln thought the same of the eleven Confederate states and junked Lincoln's reconstruction plan for military occupation of the South.

After nearly a decade of martial law, which created a bitterness in the South towards the North that lasted over 100 years, the occupation of the South was ended and the Southern economy began its slow climb out of permanent depression.

Iraq has the oil resources that, with good governance, could dramatically raise the standard of living of every Iraqi, instead of a few elitists who spend billions on weapons. Once they catch that vision, and the terrorist nests are cleaned out, Iraq could become a beacon light for the Arab people.