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The Adventures of Bush the Crackpot

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"April is the cruelest month." Here we are; May 1st, just a little over a year ago on the bridge of an aircraft carrier close to the California coast, George W. Bush, dressed up as an aviator declared: "Mission Accomplished." One year later, the famous opening of T.S. Eliot's *Wasteland* applies. The month of April just past has been the cruelest of a "selected presidency" (to use Susan Sontag's expression) that owes its election more to the Supreme Court than to voters.



While he was governor of Texas, Bush, according to Richard A. Clarke in his best-seller *Against All Enemies*, declared: "God wants me to be President." Guided by the Almighty from the Highest Heavens, Bush has recently confirmed his Messianism by asserting that he does not obey his father, former president George H. W. Bush, but the Most High: God in person.



Since God has no channel to answer Bush's absurdities in words, He does it through acts. One year after having declared the end of major military operations in Iraq - "Mission Accomplished" -, Bush confronts the brutal and naked reality of the war he on his own initiative needlessly unleashed. Chaos reigns in Iraq. The Bush government was not prepared for the war after the war: the violent peace in an occupied and resistant country.



The North American proconsul in Iraq, Paul Bremer, aggravated the initial mistakes. He dismissed 30,000 officials of the Saddam regime, for the most part members of the official Baath party. So from then on, as long as it was not replaced, the bureaucracy ceased to function, with chaotic consequences for the country's administration.



That was May 16, 2003. On May 22, 2003, Bremer proceeded to dissolve the Iraqi army, persuaded that the "coalition" forces dominated by the United States were going to impose the post-war order he expected. Result: a half-million unemployed Iraqis, armed and ready to fight, should the opportunity arise, on the side of forces recruited against the occupier.

Bremer committed another colossal mistake when he divided the Shi'ite majority's clerics who had opposed Saddam Hussein's Sunni regime.

Such is the summary picture of post-war Iraq: a North American occupation force confronts a tribal and religious insurrection. The technological air war, the master card in the Bush offensive, turned into what we Mexicans, Central Americans, Vietnamese, Algerians, Central Europeans and all people who have suffered the rigor and disgrace of a foreign occupation know well: the street by street, house by house fighting, with growing losses for the invader. Today, gangs occupy whole neighborhoods of Baghdad.

The invaders believed themselves to be liberators, but the occupied people do not want "to be seen as a United States' ally", according to the Polish Defense Minister. This benefits chaos, as those Iraqis who don't join the guerillas also don't fight against them. Under such conditions, the North American political plan has lost all credit.

A man without any local political support, Ahmed Chalabi, a pure United States' marionette, was called back from exile. The real forces on the ground - Shi'ites, Sunnis, and Kurds - didn't put off their demonstration that there would be no new government in Iraq without them. Impotent and pushed to the side, Chalabi has also ended up turning against the United States. The occupation itself has become untenable. The United States can do nothing now but eat its hat; in other words: admit it made a mistake.

Unbridled arrogance, "hubris" in Greek, is expensive. "Take it or leave it," Bush declared as he launched the war against Iraq. "With us or against us. It doesn't matter. The United States can and will act alone." A half-century earlier another rabid imperialist, John Foster Dulles, had said: "The United States doesn't have friends. It has interests." Today, Advisor Condoleezza Rice echoes him. To hear her tell it, the United States looks after its own interests and not those of an "illusory international community." This pride finds expression in acts that are deadly for the "illusory" international community.

The policies aimed at deterrence and containment have been abandoned. The barbarous principle of preemptive attack has been instituted. The competent authority (the UN Security Council) has been treated with contempt. The United States has snapped its fingers at the principle of war as the last recourse by unleashing its Shakespearean dogs without any legal authority whatsoever. The requirement of a just motive has been sidestepped in favor of the oil motive and the contractual largesse showered on friends of Bush.

One reason after another for going to war has melted away. Saddam didn't have, had not had, and would never have weapons of mass destruction. These, as the disconcerting Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz has admitted, were invoked to go to war for "bureaucratic reasons". Once that pretext was uncovered, a second was invented: to overthrow the infamous Saddam Hussein, the United States' own Frankenstein monster. However, why Saddam and not some other of the dozens of big and little tyrants in our world: Mugabe in Zimbabwe, the Burmese military junta, the Korean despot Kim Jong-Il, the brutal Khadafi, specialist in the art of bringing down airplanes full of civilians and Washington's favorite son today as Saddam was yesterday... ?

It's an oil war in which strategic appetites prevailed over every other consideration. Unsurprisingly, Bechtel, George Schulz's company, obtained the first construction contract in Iraq.

An unjust and unnecessary war has led to a long and costly post-war: close to 800 Americans dead in battle; 4,000-11,000 Iraqi civilians killed, a monstrous regimen of humiliation and torture practiced by United States' citizens in the prisons that were once Saddam Hussein's deadly jails. I shall evoke Kurtz words in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*: "The horror...the horror."

How to exit this disaster? By eating one's hat. The despised UN offers a new way, uncertain, but unique. France's foreign policy, elaborated by Jacques Chirac and put into motion by Dominique de Villepin, proposed a political way out that is legal and rational. The United States alone cannot assure a political transition in Iraq. This task reverts to the UN and consists in establishing a technocratic provisional government that replaces the present puppet Council, convokes a Constitutional Assembly, and allows the real forces in Iraq, religious and secular, tribal and nationalist, to express themselves.

The Iraqi National Conference proposed by Chirac is realistic. It doesn't exclude the occupying powers. However, it does demand of the United States a high level of that "humility" G. W. Bush made his

2000 electoral slogan. The task is not easy. The unity of Iraq is at stake. In order to save it, the UN as well as the United States must return to the path of international law, so manhandled today, and acknowledge that while there may be military unilateralism, on the legal and economic fronts, there can be no salvation without multilateralism.

This was the message delivered with vigorous clarity by Mexico's former President, Ernesto Zedillo, at Harvard in 2003. This was the message of former Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso to the French National Assembly: terrorism can be vanquished only by a global cooperation sensitive to the wounds that serve as its growth medium. This was the message of Dominique de Villepin, for whom "only respect for the law gives strength legitimacy and legitimacy strength ". This was Harry Truman's message when he founded the UN in San Francisco: "We must all acknowledge that however great our power, we must deny ourselves the freedom of doing whatever we want." This was the Bill Clinton's message in 1999: "Let us abandon the illusion that we may forever reserve for ourselves that which we refuse to others."

And-referring to Pascal's timeless wisdom - incapable of making what is right, strong; let us make whatever is strong, right.

By attacking a tyrant who had no connections to al-Qaeda or bin Laden, Bush put the struggle against the terrorists off for later and gave them the opportunity to grow stronger and to strike Morocco and Spain. He easily conquered a weakened Iraq, brought to its knees by the sanctions and embargo stemming from the Gulf War. Moreover, he allowed Islamic fundamentalists to gain strength even as he pushed them towards the mosques. Because US-backed authoritarian regimes had monopolized local political power, the fundamentalists had few competitors.

The greatest paradox of all is that the North American victory has found expression in a weakening of the United States both inside and outside Iraq. Its most solid alliances have been cracked, its policy has been rejected by a great majority of the world and it will have to pay an enormous economic bill for the adventures of George W. Bush, the Crackpot.

North American military expenditures have risen to 350 billion dollars a year, some 36 % of world military expenses, and more than that of the sum of nine next highest nations on the list. Nonetheless, such sums are insufficient to subjugate and govern one country, Iraq, let alone to open new possible and probable fronts.

Who is paying for the war? A class-based economic policy, according to economist Paul Krugman. A right-wing Keynesianism that converts a surplus into a deficit through an increase in military expenditures, tax reduction, protectionism, and the rescue of failing companies.

Unilateralism damages the United States politically and economically. It hurts the standard of living since the country is too dependent on foreign energy and capital. The society's internal demands are too great to allow endless expenditures for military domination.

The Democratic candidate, John Kerry, tackles these subjects belatedly and slowly only. The Massachusetts senator represents above all a major opportunity for North American diplomacy: to provide the United States with the credibility Bush's mistaken policies have lost it. Who will be able to believe Bush again the next time he cries: "Wolf!"

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