

ORLANDO SENTINEL

"More than a change of Iraq's regime"

December 30, 2002

By Kenneth W. Stein

Jerusalem - When is this?

War preparations with Iraq abound. International markets are jittery. UN resolutions are in place. Preservation of Persian/Arabian Gulf state territorial integrity and access to Middle Eastern oil at reasonable price are two objectives in forming the international coalition against Saddam Hussein. Moscow, Peking, and Paris sit on a wobbly fence. In synchronized step, the British Prime Minister and American president are preparing to use force to reverse Saddam's actions. President Bush leads the international coalition's charge against Iraq; US troops and war materials wind their way to the Persian Gulf. Arab leaders weigh factors in joining the coalition: need for American strategic and economic assistance on the one hand, pacifying Arab populations who do not want to be too cozy with US support for Israel. No Arab League or Arab state solution is available as an alternative for the pending attack against Iraq. The Arab media criticizes an inept, weak, and disorganized Arab leadership. Former American political leaders counsel restraint in the use of force. Israel is asked by the US to refrain from engagement in the coming confrontation with Iraq. War with Iraq is estimated to take place this month or in February.

You tell me.

Is this New Years 1991, 2003, or 2009, with America's 44th president, former Florida governor Jeb Bush, the third in his family to face a resilient Saddam Hussein?

What is different about the present confrontation with Iraq? It is not about redrawing international borders, or a Trojan horse for long term American occupation of Iraq, or control of international oil reserves (though one can not totally rule out these unlikely outcomes.) It is about Saddam's sinister behavior in acquiring the capability to produce weapons of mass destruction.

It is about who rules Iraq, but of longer term consequence, it is about how Iraq and other Arab states are ruled. It is about how rulers, especially Arab ones, are expected to behave domestically and internationally. It is about aging rulers and styles of governance. It is

about how Middle Eastern leaders relate to their citizens; it is about how, if, and when they incorporate norms of international and domestic behavior as defined by the international community.

After World War II, when Britain and France withdrew from the region physically, Middle Eastern regimes were left with western originated political institutions (parties, elections, constitutions, parliaments). These were grafted onto indigenous autocratic and dynastic rule. The power of traditional elites was preserved, upward mobility was stifled. In 1991, Middle Eastern states, concurred that Saddam could not unilaterally change the same Middle East borders which the British and French basically imposed upon the region three-quarters of a century earlier. Without hesitation, Saddam was told that he could not steal a country, its assets, or liquidate his creditor. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of existing Arab states was protected and the west was asked to be Wyatt Erp and enforce international law. And yet, Saddam survived as did his nefarious production of weapons of mass destruction. He persevered like regimes around him who use coercion, huge military machines, and pervasive security services to stay in power. Only with Saddam, it is blatant dictatorial rule, not benign autocracy.

Today, many could live with Saddam's voluntary abdication and Iraq's weapons controlled or destroyed. Different Iraqi regime in power, more attuned and responsive to its people's needs would be accepted by virtually everyone. Only the naive believe Jeffersonian democracy will emerge in a post-Saddam Iraq. But something more temperate than Saddam's excesses means Arab political governance elsewhere will remain under scrutiny, as it has been since the September 2001 attacks on America.

While publicly blaming the US for "cowboy" type action against Saddam, one has to wonder how widespread is Arab glee for his early demise? Over the long run, his demise augurs well for broadened rights of the Arab individual. There is more to a doctrine of preemption which says do unto others before they do unto you; applied to the Middle East, it also means hastening the glacial pace of internal political change.

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