

GulfWire

Perspectives



April 12, 2003

POSSIBLE REGIONAL RIPPLE EFFECTS FROM IRAQ

By
John Duke Anthony

EDITOR'S NOTE

Last evening the Associated Press interviewed GulfWire Publisher Dr. John Duke Anthony on possible outcomes of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Below is an edited and unofficial transcript/summary of the interview.

Patrick W. Ryan
Editor-in-Chief, GulfWire

POSSIBLE REGIONAL RIPPLE EFFECTS FROM IRAQ

by John Duke Anthony

AP: What are some of the implications of the war in Iraq?

JDA: The implications for international law, the norms of international legitimacy, the United Nations, U.S.-Arab relations, U.S.-Mideast relations, U.S.-Islamic world relations, and U.S. relations with individual countries are already enormous and numerous. A fuller, more definitive assessment of the near- as well as longer-term implications -- stemming from how the war was launched and conducted, and its outcome -- will likely not be clear for quite some time.

AP: What implications are there likely to be for the Arab-Israeli conflict?

JDA: It's too early to say exactly what either the near- or longer-term implications will be. As yet, there is much speculation as to what comes next but, as yet, no convincing consensus. In that regard, much will turn on the degree to which President Bush is prepared to prove that he meant what he said and said what he meant in his various statements supportive of a two-state

solution between Israelis and Palestinians. More specifically, much will turn on the reaction that will follow the public unveiling of the so-called "Road Map" in the coming days.

AP: That's the plan that calls for an independent Palestinian state no later than 2005, right?

JDA: Yes.

AP: What's the reaction likely to be?

JDA: We'll soon see. As of now, the Palestinian Authority has indicated its acceptance of the "Road Map." I'm unaware of its having attached any caveats, qualifications, or conditions. The Israeli response, as reflected in statements attributed to its national leadership, has been quite different. The Sharon government is said to have originally had as many as 100 reservations to the document, which those privy to its contents say is not more than seven-pages long. At a forum that discussed this today on Capitol Hill, and which I attended, four authorities, including a leading Israeli specialist, were in agreement that Israel's "reservations" have been reduced to some 14 or 16 "clusters" of concerns about the "map." Whether these will be allowed to be introduced as a prerequisite for obtaining Israel's concurrence to resume talks with the Palestinian Authority is an open question, especially as [National Security Affairs Adviser] Dr. Condoleeza Rice, at a recent meeting of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, is said to have indicated that the "map" is not negotiable. It remains to be seen whether there will be any official American back-tracking on this position. Also uncertain at this point are what might be the nature and extent of pressures on the Bush Administration to add to or delete from the "map."

AP: In terms of pressure, you're talking about the Israeli lobby, aren't you?

JDA: I'm unaware of who is or will be doing any pressuring. Thus far, the source of the reservations to the "map" has been attributed mainly to the Sharon government. This said, it was reported in today's forum that some members of Congress are preparing to make the case that the "Road Map" ought not to be regarded as impervious to changes insofar as Israel is concerned.

As to whether such efforts will succeed, and what the prospects for the road map's implementation would be either way, no one can say for certain at this juncture. Much will depend on whether President Bush decides that implementing the road map will be among his highest possible foreign policy priorities, or, alternatively, whether he elects to delegate its implementation to someone else. Thus far, I have seen no reports about any of the other three partners in the "Quartet" having any reservations to the "map."

AP: And who are the other three?

JDA: The European Union, the United Nations, and Russia.

AP: But what about all this talk among some in the Administration that the United States is going to reconfigure the Middle East?

JDA: Right now, that's what it is: namely, talk. It's a school of thought with various supporters.

AP: But aren't many Middle Eastern countries quaking in their boots right now, given what happened to Iraq. Don't they worry that they might be next?

JDA: Not necessarily.

AP: What do you mean? I hear that members of the Bush Administration want to target additional countries for regime change ...

JDA: It's easy for outsiders to think that what happens in one country is bound to happen elsewhere or that an event in one sub-region will spread like wildfire to other places. It could, but not necessarily. More often than not, it doesn't happen that way. For example, I have been an official observer for both of Yemen's national parliamentary elections. On each occasion, almost every first-time election observer in the country was convinced there would be a political earthquake someplace else in the region merely because Yemen's national elections were taking place. In both instances, nothing could have been further from the truth.

AP: But national elections are not the same as a major war.

JDA: True. But in this instance the principle and the frame of reference are much the same. Just because war was waged against Iraq does not ipso facto mean that, as a direct result, the United States will wage another war against a neighboring country or one nearby. In any event, what you are talking about is not policy, at least not as of this moment. It's a line of argumentation by some within the Administration and by others who write for publication. Countries, situations, and people are like snowflakes and fingerprints; no two are the same.

AP: But of the countries reported to be threatened by some in the Administration, the ones I hear about are Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. Of these, which ones are likely to be more worried than others?

JDA: Of the four you named, Egypt and Saudi Arabia would, or should, have much less reason to be concerned than Iran and Syria - that is, if Egypt and Saudi Arabia are on any list at all; certainly, it's hard to see either of them being on any American President's list.

AP: Why is that?

JDA: For one reason, the countries one reads about the most are not those two but Iran and Syria. It has to do with the fact that Israel occupies Syria, and that, for quite some time, Israel's national leaders and many in the Bush Administration have repeatedly expressed their concerns regarding Iran and Syria's support for Hizbollah, which has long been active in Lebanon.

By contrast, it's hard to see any leading Bush Administration official being serious about targeting Egypt. Not least among the reasons is that it is home to one out of every four Arabs on the planet. It has the Suez Canal. It's a major media and education center. It's at peace with Israel. Egypt plays a prominent role in regional and international affairs. It's the headquarters of

the Arab League.

As for Saudi Arabia, the country's overall strategic importance to the United States is similar, if not greater. To begin with, it's the size of a continent. It has 13 neighbors. Its role is vital to world economic growth. It's the world's most important Islamic country. It's the most prominent player in several international organizations. Practically every government in the world would readily trade places with the United States if it too could gain what the United States does from the relationship in terms of strategic, economic, political, and commercial benefits.

AP: But surely all these countries must feel that they have to liberalize and democratize as a result of what has happened.

JDA: Not as a result of the reason you just gave. In this regard, the situation in the region has hardly been static. Reformist movements in numerous Arab and Islamic countries began and were well underway long before what has been happening in and to Iraq, and the reasons had little, if anything, to do with Iraq or Saddam Hussein. It is hard to find a link between the two.

The fall of the Soviet Bloc and the onset of political reforms in central and Eastern Europe gave particular impetus to reform efforts in Arabia and the Gulf. The trend towards increasing popular participation in the national development processes throughout the GCC region has existed for some years now. On the whole, the driving forces have been far more indigenous to these societies than many seem to realize.

AP: What you're saying then is that these countries are likely to move further towards liberalizing and democratizing their societies only if Bush makes it an issue.

JDA: No, I did not say that. You're mixing things. I said that what President Bush does or does not do with regard to the "Road Map" for achieving Arab-Israeli peace will have a great deal to do with whether it is likely to be implemented. And I also said that whatever he does or does not do in this regard is likely to turn heavily on American domestic dynamics.

AP: May I quote you on that?

JDA: Yes.

AP: Thank you.

Dr. John Duke Anthony is President and CEO, National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations; Publisher of GulfWire; and Secretary of the U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee. All three are Washington, D.C.-based non-profit and nongovernmental organizations dedicated to educating Americans and others about the Arab countries, the Middle East, and the Islamic world.

Visit the GulfWire Archive ~ ~ <http://www.ArabiaLink.com/Archive>

GulfWire is a public service of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations and the U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee

Independent commentary provided in 'GulfWire' and materials contained in the linked Internet sites do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations or the U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee. GulfWire and the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations/U.S.-GCC Corporate Cooperation Committee have not independently verified the accounts referred to and do not vouch for their accuracy or the reliability of Internet links.