

USA

# Iraq, Iran

By Robert Fantina

*The US in typical saber-rattling style, believes in deadly force to achieve its vision for sovereign nations in which it has no business meddling*

**T**HE US's current cheerleader for American imperial arrogance, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, has now stated that Iran presents a major obstacle blocking the US's vision for the Middle East. In her fairy-tale world, this vision is of a region where the countries "trade more, invest more, talk more and work more constructively to solve problems".

This entire bizarre concept needs further exploration.

The first puzzling aspect is why the US, in the form of President Bush and his neocon cronies, has a 'vision' for the Middle East that it thinks it can establish. While anyone can have a wish or vision for any nation, all one can reasonably do is encourage such actions and foster any gains. Nations may have a vision of Iraq at peace; North Korea allowing freedom of the press and the US allowing free speech; yet they have no inherent right to force those countries to adopt those principles. The US, however, in typical saber-rattling style, believes in deadly force to achieve its vision for sovereign nations in which it has no business meddling.

One indeed has a short memory if one forgets Mr Bush's 'vision' for Iraq just four short years ago. In this happy picture, Iraqi citizens were throwing rose pedals under the feet of the US soldiers who had liberated them, democratic elections quickly followed the 'Shock and Awe' invasion, and a whole new world of freedom, equality and democracy rose from the ashes of

Saddam's Hussein's reign of terror. It appears that Mr Bush might have been somewhat over-optimistic in this assessment, since the people of Iraq have been violently resisting his naïve vision for four years now. Acting upon his goal to force this 'vision' onto the unwilling targets of his misplaced largess has left them in far worse conditions than they were in under Saddam Hussein.

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included with those who masterminded the tragic invasion of Iraq, and who continue to be tireless cheerleaders for the failed, deadly occupation in that beleaguered country.

It is an important part of this vision, Ms Rice states, for the people in the Middle East to 'talk more.' Of course, Mr Bush rejected the Iraq Study Panel's recommendation to 'talk more' in the Middle East when he disdained negotiations with Iran and Syria in December of 2006, when the panel issued its report. And while Arabic translators could provide significant help in talking

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meaning greater riches for Halliburton and other oil companies with long ties to members of the Bush administration. That the middle class in the US continues to shrink, not due to the growth in numbers of the wealthy, but because more and more people have fallen, and continue to fall, below the poverty level under Mr. Bush's disastrous policies, is not of Ms Rice's concern. Her own lucrative career with Chevron, ending only when she became Secretary of State, may never be far from her mind. If it were perhaps she never would have been

to people in the Middle East, the US does not seem particularly interested in keeping them available. For example, Mr. Stephen Benjamin was a petty officer in the Navy. He trained to serve in Iraq as an Arabic translator and by all accounts his skills were exemplary. Yet he was discharged from the Navy without ever serving in Iraq. What infraction, one might ask, had Mr Benjamin committed that was so serious that the US military felt it could do without his valuable skills? What had he done that so compromised the security of the United

# and the US 'vision'

States that the military had no choice but to discharge him, thus losing his valuable, life-saving and very rare skills? There was no infraction; Mr. Benjamin broke no major rules, and performed his duties in an exemplary fashion. So why, in fact, was he discharged? Mr. Benjamin could no longer serve in the US military, could no longer use his valuable, life-saving language skills, simply because it was discovered that he was gay.

The Bush administration wants countries in the Middle East to 'work more constructively to solve problems.' Does this mean, perhaps, not resorting to war when diplomacy has not been tried? Could it mean respecting the differences of others without attempting to kill them? Perhaps working 'more constructively to solve problems' means to do it Mr Bush's way: if one perceives a problem, attempt to annihilate the other party before one even confirms whether or not a problem actually exists.

If, for Mr Bush and his neocon Cabinet, working 'more constructively to solve problems' implies that the Kurds, Sunnis and Shiites should simply sit down and iron out their differences, one wonders what planet he hails from. His bombs, bullets and soldiers, all the components of his deadly war machine, have not helped the diverse groups within Iraq to come together in anything other than their hatred of the US. Rather, he has spawned a catastrophic civil war that will not end for generations. It may result in the partitioning of the once united Iraq.

Mr Bush has been critical of Turkey's threats to use force against Kurdish incursions into Turkey. Why, one wonders, does the US not need to seek more constructive ways to solve problems, yet it insists that Turkey does so.

The current administration and the

Democratically-controlled Congress have completely lost sight of reality in terms of the Middle East, assuming of course that they ever had even a slight glimpse of those realities. Peoples who lived together in relative, if tenuous, harmony for years under a dictatorship are now at each others' throats and the throats of the poor US soldiers struggling to do some good in Iraq, without any direction on how to accomplish that. The number of Iraqi citizens who have died since Mr Bush's astoundingly cruel and heartless 'Shock and Awe' campaign began is far greater than the number

One cannot expect Mr Bush to learn from the past; expecting him to do so is a fantasy in and of itself. But Congress, which appears to be gaining more and more of an appetite to invade Iran, should know better. The US has created a catastrophic mess in Iraq; does Congress expect a better result in a country with more than double the population? How long can the US expect to meddle so violently in the Middle East, overthrowing governments and sparking civil wars at will, before it incurs serious repercussions at home and abroad? One of Mr Bush's ever-changing reasons for

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killed during the years of Saddam Hussein's reign. And now Mr Bush and Congress are focusing their murderous designs on Iran, a nation that Vice President Cheney insists the US will not allow to have nuclear weapons. One wonders how and why Mr Cheney has the right to decree how Iran will protect itself, when its nearest neighbor was invaded by the most militarily powerful country in the world. Do not the 70,000,000 people of Iran deserve to escape the fate that their Iraqi neighbors continue to suffer?

attacking Iraq was to prevent the non-existent threat of terrorists that he claimed were headquartered there from bombing the US. He is using that same reason in his threatening rhetoric towards Iran. Does Congress not see how wrong he was then? Are there no cooler heads to prevail in Washington, DC, or is everyone there a candidate for president wanting to avoid appearing 'soft' on terror and therefore willing to ignore reality?

The problem, if all this can be boiled down to its worst, but entirely too likely,

case scenario, is that as Mr Bush & Co go about trying to force their vision on selected countries around the world, with Congress timidly following along, the risk to America and the world increases. Iraq, since the US invasion, has become a hotbed of terrorist activity, which it was not before. A war with Iran would compound that disaster many times over. With a population more than twice that of Iraq, and with infrastructure far superior to that country's, Iran will not be an easy target for the US. One must be cautious if Mr. Bush, prior to any invasion of Iran, begins spouting once again his nonsense about US soldiers being hailed as liberators. One can see how accurate that assessment was prior to the US invasion of Iraq.

Where, one wonders, does all this leave the US, Iran and the world? Certainly it is not in a safer place than it was prior to Ms Rice's peculiar visionary pronouncements. As the US struggles to keep a resurgent Taliban from regaining total control in Afghanistan, and tries to subdue the Iraqi people sufficiently to grab that country's oil, another war on a new front does not seem like a reasonable course of action. But Mr Bush and his neocon yes-men advisors do not seem concerned with the facts as they have lived them these past four years. Rather, they prefer their pie-in-the-sky visions of the Middle East being overrun by US soldiers and emerging a short time later as a model of peace and democracy. That Congress does not seem willing to prevent this colossal error is terrifying for much of the world. For the people living in the Middle East, the fear must be entirely overwhelming. And one cannot blame them if that fear turns to an anger that will threaten the world, much as Mr Bush has threatened it. **COURTESY COUNTERPUNCH**