

## Foreword



Heraldo Muñoz, Chile's ambassador to the United Nations, is a known scholar and political leader. I am pleased to have been asked to provide a foreword for this interesting book, which contains his views on a subject that has instigated so much debate around the world.

Muñoz's personal testimony on the events surrounding the Iraq war deserves to be made public. I was, and will always be, a strong advocate for multilateralism, for collective solutions to common security problems. Iraq has offered one more opportunity to validate the benefits of collective action and to understand the problems that may arise by not following that path. As explained in this book, the imperatives of war are always slim, obliging every one of us to look for alternatives that will not be so costly in terms of loss in human lives and destruction of critical infrastructure.

*A Solitary War* argues that missed opportunities can result in costs, and it makes the case for upholding the legitimacy of the United Nations Security Council. The author provides a detailed narration of the strenuous behind-the-scenes efforts that were made by several countries, at the highest level, to avert war and press the Iraqi government to comply with UN Security Council resolutions.

Muñoz underscores a key point in international policy,

particularly when it pertains to a superpower: no country can ignore the legitimacy the Security Council can confer when it comes to war. He recounts, as a firsthand witness in the Security Council discussions, how the tone in the Security Council changed when the situation demonstrated the need for UN involvement. When the Security Council refused to endorse the U.S. intention to go to war, the UN was described as “irrelevant.” However, after the war began, when it was clear that the UN’s help and legitimacy was needed, these same actors approached the UN and asked for its cooperation to establish an Iraqi Governing Council. The work of my special representative Sérgio Vieira de Mello was crucial. Vieira de Mello, the experienced, skilled, and evocative representative of UN values, would lose his life in Baghdad during the mission. Later, the Security Council supported delicate negotiations for the transfer of sovereignty to an interim government, chosen largely by my special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi, and asked the UN to organize the 2005 elections and collaborate in the drafting of the new Iraqi constitution. In the end, as Muñoz states, “the UN returned to play a crucial role at the explicit request of the United States.”

One of the key lessons of the Iraq war has been the revalidation of the UN seal of approval and recognition of the legitimacy it provides to actions consistent with its charter and agreed upon by member states through its organs, such as the Security Council. I agree with Muñoz’s argument that the most efficient way to confront new threats such as proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism, as well as less conventional threats such as poverty, AIDS, or global warming, is through collective action. True, UN negotiations to reach agreements on common strategies to confront crises can be slow moving and frustrating,

but ultimately, such decisions carry greater weight and are sustainable, for they are the expression of the international community's will.

As the author reminds us, "A war of choice is quite different from a war of necessity." Countries must persist in the effort to reinvigorate the UN so that it can serve as the effective international instrument for peace and security, development and human rights that its founders conceived. Heraldo Muñoz's book is a well-informed reflection on this challenge, and an indispensable record on a solitary war and its hard lessons.

—Kofi Annan

Geneva, December 2007



## Introduction



On Sunday, January 30, 2005, an upbeat President George W. Bush spoke from the Cross Hall of the White House to congratulate the Iraqi people on their successful election of delegates to a National Assembly.

The election had signified the launch of an unprecedented democratic process in the country. The Iraqis, defying terrorist threats that had created an atmosphere of insecurity, had gone to the polls in massive numbers to exercise their sovereign right to vote.

During his speech, President Bush specifically thanked the United Nations, an organization that he described as having provided “important assistance in the election process.” Months later, in September 2005, at a packed UN General Assembly meeting attended by more than 150 world leaders, President Bush thanked the UN once more for having “played a vital role in the success of the January elections” in Iraq, and for supporting the drafting of a new constitution. He then requested that the United Nations “continue to stand by the Iraqi people as they complete the journey to a fully constitutional government.”

By contrast, about three years before, in October 2002, Bush had warned the UN that failure to act against the Saddam Hussein regime would lead the organization “to

betray its founding and prove irrelevant to the problems of our time.” And in the run-up to the invasion, on March 17, 2003, Bush had severely criticized the UN Security Council for not “living up to its responsibilities.”

These disparities in the American stance toward the UN were due to the late recognition that the UN was the only legitimate institution able to broker a viable alternative to permanent military occupation so that the United States could begin disengaging, at least politically, from Iraq. The Bush administration’s plans for a transition to an interim Iraqi government had been soundly rejected by the Iraqis in 2003. A key player in the process, the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Husseini al-Sistani, had even refused to meet with *any* American official! So, at the request of the United States, the United Nations stepped in to consult with all concerned parties and develop a solution to hand sovereignty back to an interim government, one that was chosen largely by UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi. This set in motion an unprecedented democratic transition process, which completed its first key stage in the January 30, 2005 elections, followed by the approval of the new constitution in October 2005.

In November 2005, UN secretary general Kofi Annan made his first visit to Iraq since the invasion. One newspaper reported that the United Nations had become “a crucial advisor in the American-backed political process unfolding in Iraq” and had deployed staff to help organize the December 2005 elections for a full four-year government.<sup>1</sup> That same November, the Security Council voted unanimously to extend the mandate of the U.S.-led forces in Iraq, as it did again repeatedly in 2006 and 2007.

In the absence of political progress and with sectarian violence on the rise in Iraq, during the summer of 2007, the

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American representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Zalmay Khalizad, argued for a “larger United Nations role” in Iraq. In an op-ed piece, Khalizad stated that the organization “possesses certain comparative advantages for undertaking complex internal and regional mediation efforts; it can also help internationalize the effort to stabilize the country.”<sup>2</sup>

A deepening Iraqi crisis pushed the U.S. government from ignoring the UN to relying on the UN. It was not a full embrace of multilateralism, to be sure. Multilateralism had become both the default U.S. position and a practical requirement of any plan that would begin getting the United States out of the post-invasion quagmire in Iraq. At first, the idea was to put the Iraqis in charge as quickly as possible while maintaining the American-led military presence on the ground.

So, starting in 2004, the United States began working again with the UN in Iraq and slowly repairing its ties with its previously alienated allies. But the long-term benefits of multilateralism were still not fully appreciated, and the U.S. administration felt it was important to show that its hands were not tied and that solitary options were always open. So that there would be no confusion about this, Vice President Dick Cheney asserted at the 2004 Republican National Convention that President Bush had never sought “a permission slip to defend the American people.” For his indirect criticism of the UN, Cheney received a thunderous round of applause at New York’s Madison Square Garden.

The bottom line was that not long after invading Iraq, the United States executed a dramatic foreign policy reversal by returning to the multilateral table and attempting to woo back those allies who had become distanced. This reversal was not a strategic commitment to multilateralism, but rather an undesired change of course by the Bush administration, one

made necessary by the deepening of the war. An American-led invasion with a reduced “coalition of the willing” had seemed to proceed well at first, but had devolved into a veritable nightmare of increasing military casualties, mounting resistance to occupation, bloody suicide bombings, and continued insecurity for coalition forces and Iraqis.

During 2007 and 2008, a growing number of Americans demanded a quick exit strategy from Iraq, with a concrete timetable for the withdrawal of U.S. troops. Numerous press reports revealed the public’s increasing unrest with the course of the war. Dissenting voices, well beyond the Democratic Party, included leading Republican senators and conservative commentators. Likewise, the Iraqi government strongly agreed with the idea of designing a strategy for the withdrawal of foreign troops. However, President Bush vowed not to extricate military forces from Iraq “on artificial timetables set by politicians” and suggested that “the allure of retreat” from Iraq could lead to the same disastrous defeat experienced by the United States in the Vietnam War.

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This book tells the story of missed opportunities and of the costs for the United States of going to war in Iraq without enough significant allies. It discusses the downgrade of multilateralism at a moment when broad alliances and UN Security Council endorsement were needed, and reveals how no single nation, no matter how powerful, can do as it pleases or win a war in a complex environment without real international cooperation and support. Former president George H. W. Bush showed an understanding of multilateralism’s value during the Gulf War in 1991, and President George

W. Bush seemed to show a similar understanding during the 2001 war against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. In the latter war, the United States had major allies because of shared outrage, unequivocal evidence, and a common motive. However, America's decision to go to war in Iraq when there was no evidence of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) was a unilateralist decision, making Iraq an American rather than an international war.

The desertion of the multilateral road in Iraq was costly. The United States lost the favor and support of many friends whom America sorely needed to succeed. This book offers the story of the loyal allies who were initially ignored or rejected when they proposed alternatives to war in order to disarm Iraq and who were later urged to assist the war effort when matters on the ground demanded more partners and greater legitimacy.

The underlying argument of this book is that unilateralism, even when it operates under the cover of a "coalition of the willing," cannot succeed in cases like Iraq, where a strong military force is needed as much as diplomatic alliances are and where the legitimacy of UN endorsement is also a must. The policy reversal to tactical multilateralism may have led to the successful 2005 Iraqi electoral process and the constitution of an elected government in 2006, but that reversal alone may be insufficient to earn the United States sustained support and trust from strong allies in other situations.

In short, the most important lesson of the second Iraq war is that in this world characterized by global media, new threats, and inextricably interwoven political and economic interests, the United States of America needs the support of significant allies and multilateral organizations for the long haul.