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What Europe Can Do for Iraq: A Blueprint for Action

Justin Vaisse and Sebastian Gräfe

At a time when the Obama administration is pressing NATO allies to do more in Afghanistan, should Europeans devote resources to support stabilization and reconstruction efforts in Iraq? Some observers think that it would be an unwelcome diversion. Europeans, they advise, can't make a difference there and should concentrate their efforts instead on Afghanistan, a truly Transatlantic enterprise that appears to matter more to the current administration. Others maintain that Europe should do more in the Congo and the rest of Africa – where the challenges are immense, and the already stretched US is not doing enough – to thereby "share the burden" through a regional repartition of roles.

But many observers, including an ever greater number of Europeans, have begun to think otherwise about engaging Iraq. Not only can Europe help, and bring specific contributions to Iraq, but it should – for Iraq itself, for the sake of Transatlantic relations, and above all for its own good. Regional stability, the alleviation of humanitarian tragedies such as those endured by refugees and internally displaced persons, and economic development leading to foreign direct investment, trade opportunities, and decreased migration pressure, are among the many European political interests at stake in Iraq.

Signs of increased interest have multiplied in the recent months. In March 2008, the European Parliament adopted its first report and recommendation¹ to the Council on the role of the EU in Iraq, showing it could overcome the profound political divisions about who was right and who was wrong in the war's early decisions in 2003. In fall 2008, the 27 countries adopted a common text² stating "It is in our common interest to contribute to Iraq's

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¹ Document available online at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:066E:0075:0081:EN:PDF>

² For more information see: http://www.brookings.edu/events/2008/1112_kouchner.aspx

success... The EU intends to re-engage immediately in this country". Announcement of the text's adoption was followed by high-level meetings, including prominent leaders such as French President Nicolas Sarkozy and German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier who visited Baghdad and pledged additional support and investment.

To explore the strategies by which Europe can increase its commitment in Iraq and make a constructive difference, the Center on the US and Europe at the Brookings Institution and the Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBF) convened a workshop³ in April 2009 featuring a distinguished group of European, American and Iraqi experts who cover Iraq and nation-building issues to discuss the conclusions of a study commissioned by the HBF and entitled "What can Europe do for Iraq? Recommendations for a New U.S.-European Collaboration".⁴ (An agenda is attached to this paper.) During the workshop sessions, the panelists and participants endorsed many of the study's observations and recommendations. Furthermore, the participants reached a number of additional conclusions regarding European support for Iraq. This paper summarizes the consolidated advice advocated by the workshop participants. The recommendations for European policymakers are:

1. Listen to Iraqi needs and help Iraq see itself as a normal country.

The importance of matching European contributions with the needs identified by Iraqis themselves, and coordinating with them on implementation, cannot be overstated. Even in

³ For more information see:
http://www.boell.org/Events_read.cfm?EventID=265

⁴ Document available online at:
<http://www.boell.de/intlpolitics/publications-6137.html>

cases of policy disagreement (on refugees, for example), the process of engagement and negotiation with Iraqi authorities is crucial to restoring the nation as a full-fledged sovereign actor. European efforts can go a long way towards supporting Iraqi normalization as the process of engagement in and of itself helps restore the perception of normalcy in the eyes of other nations and in Iraq's own estimation.

"Stealth contributions" (like some aspects of the EU police mission in the past years) should be discontinued, and the public announcement of European efforts should be the rule. Trade and investment are also crucial to the normalization process, and should be encouraged and even guaranteed. The support given by the European Parliament to the Commission's negotiations of a trade and cooperation agreement should also be increased.

2. Consolidate existing instruments, especially the EU police mission (EUJUST LEX), and step up civilian efforts.

Europeans should build on efforts started in 2005 with the EU Rule of Law Mission for Iraq (EUJUST-LEX)⁵ and expand them significantly. So far, the mission has mostly consisted of training Iraqi police officers outside of the country, with positive, although limited, impact. In late March 2009, the EU approved a renewal of the mission and authorized in-country activity, which is a strong step in the right direction. The EUJUST mission, under the able leadership of Stephen White, should be upgraded to a full-fledged criminal justice mission so as to do even more in the realm of justice and penitentiary authorities. However, the mission has been repeatedly impaired by the difficulty of finding competent personnel. This leads to a larger recommendation for European policymakers: the need to upgrade "capacity-

⁵ For more information see:
<http://consilium.europa.eu/showPage.aspx?id=823&lang=En>

building resources". Whether for Iraq, Afghanistan, the Balkans, or the Congo, these resources are indispensable. Europeans already have distinct assets, and they pride themselves on their capacity to project such civilian resources – so it is time to build stronger capacities in this domain, starting with the training of foreign justice and police specialists.⁶

3. Coordinate with the US and play to Europe's strengths.

There is a solid reconstruction effort in place in Iraq, and it is, for all practical purposes, a joint US-Iraqi effort. This reality, and the memory of some European countries opposing the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, can sometimes lead Americans, and even some Iraqis, not to be very welcoming of Europeans. This is especially true if European assistance strategies are seen as seeking trade and investment opportunities without additional help for Iraq (which, it should be noted, has not been the case so far. French and German leaders have stepped up cooperation and support for Iraq while encouraging trade deals). So it is crucial to coordinate with existing American efforts, to dispel the notion that Europeans are just duplicating the American undertakings, and to play to Europe's strengths. This means focusing on building state capacities, for example on supporting the Interior Ministry (which has no equivalent in the US), where European advisers should be sent, and expanding the EUJUST LEX mission. The EU Parliament set up a permanent ad hoc Delegation for relations with Iraq in February 2008: it should implement its stated project of supporting and training the Iraqi Council of Representatives. Finally, European NGOs generally have a better image than their US counterparts and are sometimes better

⁶ Additional recommendations made by Daniel Korski and Richard Gowan on the reinforcement of the EU mission, and the merger with the NATO mission, can be found on page 85 of the HBF report.

placed to act. The EU should grant them specific support on the basis of this added value.⁷

4. Act regionally – but don't overestimate what you can do through regional action.

Europeans can help Iraq through their diplomatic support and initiatives for the region – whether by trying to strengthen the quasi nonexistent security dialogue and encourage regional players to participate or by supporting neighboring countries faced with an influx of Iraqi refugees. Europeans, with their diplomatic capacities and their successes in settling territorial disputes, can also help resolve the thorny question of the status of Kirkuk and the implementation of Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution (outlining a plan to resolve the status of Kirkuk and other "disputed territories"). This said, it is important not to take regional action as a substitute for concrete help inside Iraq, for at least two reasons: First, Iraqis want less, not more, regional involvement, and prefer the US, the UN and the EU to Saudi Arabia, Turkey or Iran. Second, there are few prospects for what the regional actors can really do for them, except in a negative sense – such as by the smuggling of small arms and fighters. Europe should therefore focus on deterring such behaviour, to the extent it can.⁸

5. Do more on refugees.

Europeans can do more to support the 2.5 million-plus internally displaced persons and the 2 million refugees in neighbouring countries, since the future of Iraq will be largely determined by the question of their return. They

⁷ Additional recommendations made by Daniel Serwer and Megan Chabalowski on European civilian support, including the "adoption" of the Interior Ministry by European nations, can be found on page 71-72 of the HBF report.

⁸ Additional recommendations made by Bülent Aras on the regional situation can be found on page 59-60 of the HBF report (and see also Korski and Gowan on page 85).

can increase help to European NGOs working in this field. Even more importantly, they can step up their support to the United Nations. Since the reputation of the UN in Iraq is not very good, and the US presence is overwhelming, Iraqis need to be encouraged to let the UN do what it usually does well – take a leadership role in coordinating dozens of NGOs, bilateral donors and other international organizations – in recovery efforts and the return of refugees. Europeans should also have more patience with the tens of thousands of Iraqi refugees in Europe and refrain from sending the rejected asylum seekers and Iraqis with various forms of legal status back to Iraq until the situation is much more stable than it is now, as their early return in mass could have a destabilizing effect. Finally, they should pay particular attention to the situation of "double refugees" – most notably Palestinian refugees expelled from Iraq.⁹

6. Additional recommendations from the Heinrich Böll Foundation report.

It is worth reprinting here a few of the concluding recommendations made by Dan Korski and Richard Gowan, as well as Bernd Asbach and Marc Berthold.

The European Union should:

- Europeanize the existing NATO military/gendarmerie mission in Iraq. Combine it with the existing EUJUST LEX mission into one ESDP mission and add a third pillar dealing with border security. Place this consolidated mission under the authority of **a senior EU Special Representative (EUSR)** who would be appointed to head this mission as well as

⁹ Additional recommendations made by Layla Al Zubaidi and Heiko Wimmen on refugees can be found on page 50 of the HBF report.

an expanded Commission office in Baghdad.

- **Support the United Nation's electoral activities** through financing and monitoring, and promote the new EUSR as champion of free and fair polls through 2009.
- Develop **a comprehensive package of EU initiatives to improve stability and security in Iraq**, including training of police and armed forces and support for the development of the legal system (through EUJUST mission or the new, consolidated mission suggested above). It should be presented to and negotiated with the Obama administration in order to develop a common strategy and a coordinated approach.
- Make use of its rich experience of state-building and managing transition and peace-building processes to support the Iraqi government and state infra-structure by **educating, training, and mentoring personnel of key ministries, such as the ministries of the Interior and Justice**. This calls for human resources of about 200 to 500 European officials as part of a broad initiative with consent and in coordination with the Iraqi government to empower state institutions and to train officials and qualified staff, as well as support and enhance the UN in resolving institutional issues and electoral issues.
- **Establish permanent and intense relations with Iraqi decision makers on different sides of the political spectrum:** Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish. This should include in particular a younger generation of potential future leaders.
- Invest in and promote the **development and exchange of the younger generation of Iraqis** by setting up EU-funded exchange programs between European countries and Iraq, leadership training, scholarships, and dialogue forums

- Put a special effort into **resolving the Iraqi refugee crisis by offering assistance to the Iraqi government** in order to develop an applicable strategy for the return of refugees. The EU should build the capacity of the Iraqi security services to protect minorities and facilitate their return to a safe and just environment.
- Appoint a **second EUSR to pursue regional diplomacy** with the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) and **hold a GCC conference of heads of state**, also inviting Iraq.
- Offer the GCC – and Iraq – a **regional security process** based on the Security Pact model in the Balkans.
- Focus attention on **border security and maritime security** in this process, aiming to develop regional security concepts on both – potentially as the basis for a new “Gulf Conflict Prevention Centre.”

ABOUT CUSE:

Europe is currently undergoing a profound transformation in terms of its leadership, the composition of its population, the expansion of memberships in the European Union and NATO, changing relations with key countries like France, Turkey, and Russia, and a regained willingness to address global challenges. In April 2004, Brookings launched the Center on the United States and Europe (CUSE) to understand these challenges and their relevance to U.S. foreign policy. The Center offers an ongoing forum for research, high-level dialogue, and public debate on issues affecting U.S.-Europe relations.

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Appendix 1: Briefing Agenda

What can Europe do for Iraq? Recommendations for a new U.S.-European collaboration

Cosponsored by
The Center on the United States and Europe at Brookings
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The Heinrich Böll Foundation North America

April 1, 2009
9:00 am – 12:30 pm
The Brookings Institution
1775 Massachusetts Ave, NW, Washington, DC

Agenda

- 9:00-10:30am:** **1st panel**
Domestic perspective - Recommendations for EU actions inside Iraq
Economic aspects, domestic security, training, state building, democracy, human rights situation
Chair: **Justin Vaisse**, Brookings
- Presentation* **Daniel Serwer**, US Institute of Peace, co-author of HBF study
- Discussants* **Stephen White**, EU Council
Michael O'Hanlon, Brookings
Marina Ottaway, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
- 11:00am-12:30pm:** **2nd panel**
Regional perspective - Recommendations for EU actions in the region
Role of Iraq's neighbors, refugee situation, regional security
Chair: **Sebastian Gräfe**, HBF North America
- Presentation* **Cem Özdemir**, European Parliament
- Discussants* **Ken Pollack**, Brookings
Elizabeth Ferris, Brookings
Richard Gowan, European Council on Foreign Relations, co-author of HBF study