THE SABAN CENTER FOR
MIDDLE EAST POLICY
AT THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

ANALYSIS PAPER
Number 1, January 2004

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ASSESSING THE RECONSTRUCTION OF IRAQ

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Executive Summary

The situation in Iraq is extremely complex. In some areas, American and Coalition efforts have helped Iraqis to make real progress toward transforming their economy, polity, and society. What's more, many basic factors in the country augur well for real progress if the pace of reconstruction is maintained. By the same token, there are also numerous negative developments in the country, many the result of mistaken American policies.

The Good News

There is enough going well in Iraq that there is no reason to believe that the U.S.-led reconstruction effort is doomed to failure. Indeed, quite the opposite. There is so much good in Iraq, even in the face of numerous and crippling American errors, that pessimists need to be cautious in making prognostications of doom. Four "positives" stand out as key elements on which the reconstruction of Iraq should be founded:

- Iraqi public opinion remains largely favorable to reconstruction. This is certainly true of the vast bulk of the Kurdish and Shiite populations, but it is also true of many urban Sunnis (the bulk of that ethno-religious group). Most Iraqis don't particularly care to have so many foreigners in their country, but there is a widespread fear that if the United States were to leave Iraq, the country would slide quickly into chaos and civil war—a fear amply justified by patterns on the ground. Consequently, most Iraqis do not want the United States to leave; they just want the United States to do a better job rebuilding their country.

- Similarly, most of Iraq's leaders have shown great patience and urged their followers to cooperate with the U.S.-led reconstruction. They appear to recognize that the United States ultimately is striving to build the stable, prosperous, and pluralist nation they hope for. They also seem to realize that all of the alternatives to cooperation with the United States are much worse, and much less likely to produce their ideal outcome; thus they have generally counseled restraint despite repeated missteps by the United States.

- The insurgency is not likely to undermine reconstruction by itself, and the greatest threat is simply that the slow trickle of American dead will cause the American people to lose heart. Support for the insurgency is limited mostly to the Sunni tribesmen who inhabit western Iraq (the Sunni triangle) and other fringe elements of Iraqi society. Few of the insurgents have demonstrated an ardent commitment to their cause, and as a result they have caused comparatively few casualties to Coalition personnel given the daily number of attacks they conduct.

- American and other Coalition personnel have enjoyed considerable success working with Iraqis in their villages and neighborhoods to restore basic services, rebuild schools, restart the local economy, and create new political institutions. In particular, the military's civil affairs personnel are making real headway in rebuilding the country from the ground up—the only way that it can be done—wherever they are present.

The Bad News

As important as the positives in Iraq are, they must be contrasted with a range of problems in the reconstruction. None are unsolvable, and so they should be seen as challenges, not pitfalls. In every case, if the United States takes appropriate action, there is no reason these challenges cannot be met. That said, tackling some of these challenges will probably require the Bush Administration to shift or even reverse course on a range of issues it has so far resisted.

- The United States must fundamentally reorient its security strategy. To date, U.S. forces have concentrated on chasing insurgents and protecting themselves. Although not unimportant, these pale in comparison with the need to provide basic security for the Iraqi people. Today, the fear of common crime and attacks committed by those who seek to undermine the course of the reconstruction is the single greatest impediment to Iraq's economic and political reconstruction. This will likely require the commitment of more American forces, or a significant shift in U.S. policy to secure additional foreign forces, because Iraq's indigenous security forces are not ready for the job and probably will not be for 6–24 months.

- The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) must reach out to the Sunni tribal community, to eliminate its sense of grievance against the United States and so quell its support for the insurgency. At this late date, this will probably require diverting significant assets to the tribal shaykhs to secure their loyalty and launching a massive education program (necessary for the entire country, but particularly acute with the Sunni tribes) to convince Sunnis that they too will be better off in a new, pluralist Iraq. In the course of doing so, however, Washington and the CPA must be careful not to alienate the larger Shiite and Kurdish communities whose support so far has been the key to progress in Iraq.

- After months of mistakes, the CPA has developed a feasible plan for handling the political transition and the construction of a new system of government in Iraq. This plan, embodied in the so-called November 15 agreement, is probably the best conceivable approach given the difficult circumstances in which the United States currently finds itself.

However, the plan is extremely complicated and has a number of key hurdles to overcome, derived largely from the inherent complexities of Iraq and past American mistakes. Consequently, it will require the unflinching commitment of CPA Administrator L. Paul Bremer and President Bush himself to see this plan through to completion.

- The economic revival of Iraq has been stunted by several American failures that should be addressed quickly. The first is the failure to provide security for the Iraqi people, which makes the ordinary flow of goods and personnel across the country difficult, raises production costs, and cripples investment. The second is the failure to provide basic services. Here the Coalition has done much better than it has on security, but it still has not corrected shortages of electricity, clean water, and gasoline, to name only the most pressing.

- The reconstruction effort is desperately short-staffed. This is true on the security side, where there simply are not enough U.S. and Coalition infantry to provide security for the Iraqi people, and the Iraqi security forces are not yet ready to do the job. It is true in the political and economic realms too, where the CPA is so short-staffed that it has virtually no presence outside of Baghdad and as a result, numerous aspects of reconstruction are suffering. And it is also true in terms of the number of civil affairs personnel in the field working with the Iraqis. Where these men and women are present, they are doing a remarkable job, but there are far too few of them for the tasks they face.

- Finally, the United States has major communications problems, in at least two respects. First, Coalition personnel do not coordinate with one another enough. Baghdad and the field are often completely cut off from each other and as a result, efforts in the field are not supported and decisions in Baghdad are often misdirected. Second, and in some ways of greater importance, the United States must do a much better job communicating with the Iraqis themselves. Because of shortcomings in both capabilities and intentions, the CPA provides the Iraqi people with too little information about developments in their own country, leaving them anxious, frustrated, and resentful.

The Bottom Line

If the United States is unwilling to change its policies to address these challenges, but is willing to continue to maintain the current commitment of resources to Iraq ($18 billion per year in economic and political assistance, 150,000 troops, and a strong political role in the country's governance), there is enough good there that, even with its failings, the current course of the U.S.-led occupation is unlikely to result in disaster.

It probably will not produce a functional state and society, but it is unlikely that Iraq will simply descend into chaos—although such a worst-case scenario cannot be ruled out.

Various political, military, and economic factors make it unlikely that Washington will simply maintain its current economic and military commitments to Iraq indefinitely, however. The key question is whether the Bush Administration adapts its policy to the needs of reconstruction or instead opts to phase out its engagement in Iraq. There is enough good in Iraq and enough positive developments there that if the United States and its Coalition allies are willing to address the challenges listed above, there is every reason to believe that Iraq could be a stable, prosperous, and pluralist society within a period of 5–15 years. In contrast, there is great danger for the United States in disengaging from Iraq. Without a strong American role, at least behind the scenes, the negative forces in the country would almost certainly produce Lebanon-like chaos and civil war that would quickly spill across Iraq's borders and destabilize politically and economically fragile neighbors such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iran, and Syria, and possibly Turkey and Kuwait as well.

The Author

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Author's Foreword

An important source of the views expressed in this paper was a trip I made to Iraq from 15–23 November 2003. I spent that time in Baghdad and at Balad Southeast airbase in the Sunni triangle, north of the capital. In Baghdad, I met with a variety of different people to garner as much information from as many points of view as possible. I spent time with CNN journalists (I am a consultant for CNN), following them on some of their research trips, talking with some of their sources, and hearing from them their sense of events in Iraq. I met with over a dozen officials of the CPA—most of whom were friends and colleagues of mine before they were assigned to Baghdad. They provided me with the CPA's view and a much better understanding of their plans and operations. I also met with scores of Iraqis from all steps of the socioeconomic ladder and all of the major ethnic and religious groups. These included members of the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), cabinet ministers, lower-ranking government officials, and working-class people from secretaries to cab drivers to construction workers and shop clerks.

When I was there, Balad Southeast airbase was the home of a brigade combat team of the 4th Infantry Division, two Army aviation brigades, and the 3rd Combat Support Command, which is the central logistical support command for all U.S. forces in Iraq. Balad is a massive, sprawling base full of American military equipment, supplies, and personnel. Roughly 17,000 U.S. military personnel were stationed there in November 2003. At Balad I met with both Americans from the base and Iraqis from the vicinity. In particular, I spoke to U.S. military civil affairs personnel who are the "tip of the spear" in terms of getting out and working with Iraqis in the villages around Balad to help them rebuild their society and build a new, pluralist system of government from the ground up.

Useful though these personal insights were, this type of research has its limits. I spent a brief period of time in a limited geographic area, and spoke to what could only amount to a tiny fraction of the Iraqi (or American) populations there. Consequently, I have supported my own observations with those of other Americans, Iraqis, and others who have spent time there since the fall of Saddam's regime. In addition, wherever possible, I have relied on statistical data and polling results to add quantitative support to these qualitative accounts.

The results should certainly be taken with a grain of salt, but I believe they reflect a reasonable, objective assessment of where the reconstruction of Iraq stands, as well as a defensible set of recommendations for what needs to be changed for it to succeed.

After Saddam:
Assessing the Reconstruction of Iraq

The capture of Saddam Hussein was an important psychological victory for the United States and the Iraqi people. As long as he remained at large he was a rallying point for many of those opposed to the U.S. presence in Iraq, and at least a source of inspiration—if not funding and possibly even direction—for many of the attacks being carried out by the Iraqi insurgents. His capture means the closing of a terrible chapter in the history of Iraq. However, it does not necessarily mean that the U.S.-led reconstruction of Iraq is now sure to succeed. Saddam was never the major impediment to its success nor the major source of its problems. Indeed, the same could be said of the insurgency in general, which remains more of a nuisance than a true threat. Ultimately, there are far greater problems in Iraq than Saddam or the anti-American insurgents.

By the same token, it should also be said that all is not lost in Iraq. There is much good happening in the country, and many positive developments since the end of major combat operations in April 2003 that make it eminently feasible for the U.S.-led reconstruction to produce a stable, prosperous and pluralist Iraq over the course of the next 5–15 years. Yet there are also many problems with the current course of U.S. policy, strategy, and tactics in Iraq that threaten to undermine the positive. If these negatives are not remedied within the next several months, they could permanently cripple the course of the reconstruction, making the best possible scenario impossible and raising the specter that Iraq might instead slide into a Lebanon-like disaster.

The first task for the United States, and for the Bush Administration in particular, is to recognize that the future of Iraq (and through it, the future of the entire Middle East) is very much in our hands. Washington can talk about "Iraqification" all it wants, but if the United States is unwilling to shoulder the burden of leading the reconstruction—economically, politically, and militarily—for years to come, it will fail. The Iraqis simply cannot do it on their own, and the Administration's own determination to do things "its way or the highway" has so far made a handoff to the international community impossible.

The *sine qua non* of success in Iraq will be the willingness of the United States to remain fully engaged in Iraq for many years. As long as the United States does so, Iraq can at least be kept afloat. Even if poor policy decisions prevent realization of the best-case scenarios, they are likely to allow us to stave off the worst-case scenarios and leave us with a Bosnia-like muddle. Bosnia is no one's idea of a success story, and it is unclear when it ever will be, but it is also unquestionably better off today than it was prior to the international intervention. In contrast, if the United States withdraws from Iraq, or retains only a minor presence, Iraq could come apart quickly and slide into chaos and

civil war. While many positives are apparent on the surface and could prevail if given the chance, the forces of entropy lurk farther down.

The Bright Side

It is useful and important to start with some of the most important positives in Iraq, both because too often they have been overlooked in the American media coverage, and because they point to the opportunity that we have there—an opportunity that could be squandered if we do not remain committed to Iraq's reconstruction and amend some of our mistaken approaches. Indeed, the problems that we are creating through some of our own mistaken policies are doubly frustrating because the positives are significant enough to demonstrate that Iraq could become a stable, prosperous, pluralist state over a period of 5, 10, or 15 years if the United States would commit itself to the right course of action. Still, just as many of the "negatives" in Iraq have a silver lining, so it is also the case that all of the positives have their dark sides too—and if allowed to grow, they could become forces that will undermine these positives.

Public opinion is still favorable to reconstruction. There are certainly Iraqis who hate the United States and want us and our coalition allies out of their country as quickly as possible. There are others who are delighted to have the United States in Iraq. However, the vast majority of Iraqis tend to see us as a necessary evil. This may not be our preference, but it is perfectly adequate for our purposes. In numerous conversations, Iraqis expressed some variant of the following sentiment: "We really wish you weren't here occupying our country—but please don't leave. If you leave, there will be civil war." Other American officials, military personnel, journalists, and aid workers in Iraq, as well as many other Iraqis, agreed that this was the majority attitude throughout the country. Indeed, the superb study of Iraqi public opinion by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) found the same, reporting the view best expressed by a former secretary general of the Iraqi Communist Party that, "If the CPA were to withdraw from Iraq, there would be a civil war and democrats would have no chance."[1]

Indeed, the fear that the withdrawal of U.S. troops would lead to a quick descent into civil war is palpable throughout the country. While I was in Iraq, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld had just announced plans to draw down U.S. forces in Iraq by 30,000 troops. This caused a virtual panic among many Iraqis that the United States intended to withdraw altogether. The fear that a U.S. withdrawal would lead to civil war was a constant theme in Iraqi conversations about the occupation. Again, the NDI study found the same, quoting one Shiite woman as saying, "If the Americans are not here, everyone will kill one another."[2]

These fears also have a disconcerting basis in truth. Just beneath the surface in Iraq, it is easy to discern the forces of chaos and internecine violence lurking. Many local militias fiercely guard their patches of territory, and other militias are forming. Muqtada as-Sadr has formed a particularly strong militia in Sadr City in Baghdad, and various other Shiite militias control different southern cities—just as Sunni militias control certain towns in western Iraq and the Kurds maintain their control of the far north. Many Iraqis expressed to me growing anxiety because "their leaders" (who were generally unnamed) were beginning to talk about the need to take matters into their own hands, which they saw as being the start of a Lebanon-like process of disintegration.

Ironically, it is this negative fear of civil war that seems to be the greatest impetus to continued, if grudging, Iraqi popular support for the U.S. presence to date. In this context, the positive efforts of the U.S.-led

1 National Democratic Institute, "NDI Assessment Mission to Iraq, June 23 to July 6, 2003," p. 4. Also see the report prepared by two members of the NDI team: Thomas O. Melia and Brian Katulis, "Iraqis Discuss their Country's Future: Post-War Perspectives from the Iraqi Street," National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, July 28, 2003, p. 15.

2 Melia and Katulis, p. 15.

Coalition to help Iraqis to build a new, better Iraq assume a secondary importance.

Most Iraqi leaders remain patient. At the top of the Iraqi political pyramid, most of the country's surviving leaders—religious figures, tribal shaykhs, the Kurdish leaders, and a small number of others—remain largely committed to the U.S. reconstruction process. Particularly among the leading Shiite clerics like Grand Ayatollah 'Ali Sistani, Hussein as-Sadr, 'Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim, and other members of the Shiite *Hawza* (or *al-Hawza al-'Ilmiyah,* the Shiite religious establishment largely resident in the southern city of an-Najaf), there remains a strong conviction that if the American-led process can work, this is Iraq's best chance to avoid civil war and build a strong, independent new country in which its majority Shiite population will finally have political weight equivalent to their demographic presence. Similarly, the Kurdish leaders also remain committed to the U.S.-led process as the most likely to produce a democratic Iraq in which Kurds will not be oppressed and will enjoy considerable autonomy, even though the details of that status remain contentious.[3]

Of course, not all of Iraq's leaders are committed to this process. Certainly many Sunni tribal shaykhs are deeply opposed to the U.S. occupation (see below). Similarly, a smaller number of religious figures, particularly Shiite religious figures such as Muqtada as-Sadr, continue to rail against the U.S. presence. The Sunni tribal leaders are influential with their followers, but these are only a tiny percentage of the total population. Likewise, Muqtada as-Sadr and his colleagues have largely been marginalized by the Hawza within the Shiite community. Probably as a result, as-Sadr has toned down his rhetoric, although he continues to actively recruit and expand areas under his control in expectation that at some point the United States will withdraw—or lose control—and he will then be able to reassert himself.

Overall, the pattern has been quite good: the majority of Iraq's leaders, those who managed to survive Saddam's brutal, decapitating reign, want to see the U.S.-led occupation succeed. Most have been willing to cooperate with the American CPA, if only surreptitiously. So far, these leaders—indeed most Iraqis—have demonstrated a remarkable degree of patience with the U.S. process of reconstruction, which has not delivered basic security or services anywhere near the pace that they and their followers desired. Of course, it is unlikely that their patience will endure forever, and there were hints of this already in Baghdad in November 2003.[4] Several Iraqis told me that they were concerned because their leaders were beginning to question whether the Americans would ever be able to do what we had promised and were beginning to make plans to take matters into their own hands should the U.S.-led occupation fail at some point in the future. When asked when in the future, the universal response was simply "soon," but this may reflect the uncertainty of my interlocutors rather than the actual intentions of their leaders.

Most of the insurgents are neither very capable nor very committed. U.S. military officers in Iraq note that the foe they face is not a terribly formidable one—at least not yet. By and large, the insurgency is not an obstacle to reconstruction. Insurgent attacks can be deadly, but at this stage they are mostly a form of harassment.

It is hard to know precisely who is attacking U.S. forces, although American military officials believe that it is principally former members of Saddam's regime, including former Special Security Organization and Special Republican Guard personnel. Some, possibly many, of the insurgents are likely tribal Sunni Arabs who live in western Iraq and who may or may not have been members of the regime. There is also believed to be a contingent of foreigners, mostly

3 On the Kurds, see Steven R. Weisman, "Kurdish Region in Northern Iraq will get to Keep Special Status," *The New York Times,* January 5, 2004, p. A1.

4 For corroborating reporting, see Alex Berenson, "A Baghdad Neighborhood, Once Hopeful, Now Reels as Iraq's Turmoil Persists," *The New York Times,* December 14, 2003; Kevin Whitelaw, "The Quiet Iraqis," *U.S. News and World Report,* October 27, 2003, p. 18.

associated with al-Qa'eda and other Salafi Jihadist groups, although estimates of their numbers range from the hundreds to the low thousands. Regardless of their numbers, over the past six months, the foreigners appear to have been able to build a network of logistical bases, information gathering operations, communications and transportation links, and basic operating knowledge to allow them to conduct a number of devastating attacks. Finally, some of those attacking U.S. forces are undoubtedly independent Sunni and Shiite fundamentalists who have their own reasons for hating the Americans and wanting us out, although these seem to be the smallest contingent. In short, there is a wide range of people seeking to undermine the American presence through violence in Iraq.

U.S. intelligence can do little more than guess at the size of the insurgency. American military commanders have frequently cited an estimate of roughly 5,000 full-time insurgent fighters (with possibly as many as 50,000 part-time fighters and support personnel). That may be a reasonable estimate. Most of the attacks are conducted by very small numbers of people. For instance, U.S. intelligence personnel estimated in November that only 8–10 groups of no more than 10–20 insurgents each were operating in the Baghdad area.

What's more, the insurgency is principally located in western and northwestern Iraq—the area commonly called the "Sunni triangle" running from Baghdad west to ar-Ramadi and ar-Rutbah, and then north to Mosul. While there are insurgent attacks from time to time elsewhere in the country, it is believed that in most cases, the attackers originated in the Sunni triangle and simply sprung their ambush or laid their improvised explosive device (IED) elsewhere in the country.

American military personnel stress that the threat posed by the insurgents is generally quite modest. Coalition forces continue to suffer about 20–30 attacks per day. The vast majority are IEDs detonated from roughly half a mile away; mortar attacks in which 2–4 personnel drive up in a pick-up truck with a mortar on the back and lob a handful of rounds at a major Coalition facility; or ambushes in which the attackers fire off a magazine or two from their Kalashnikovs and then flee. In short, they are not determined attacks by insurgents willing to die for their cause—nor are they always very skillfully conducted. The attackers generally place a premium on their survival, not on killing Americans. As a result, most of the attacks do little damage, and the United States continues to suffer only an average of about 1–2 dead per day. As one sergeant who had fought in Vietnam put it to me, "if this were the Viet Cong, we'd have a hundred dead per day."

For this reason, there is a widespread sense that most of the insurgents are motivated primarily by money. While he was on the loose, Saddam reportedly paid $250 for killing an American. Consequently, his loyalists—who never evinced much willingness to die for him while he ruled—were willing to conduct large numbers of rather paltry attacks in the hope that they might get lucky and kill one or more Americans, rather than stand and fight (especially against U.S. firepower) and risk being killed, even though by doing so they would have a much greater likelihood of killing Americans.

The one exception to this rule is the al-Qa'eda terrorists and other foreign jihadists. They have demonstrated a willingness to sacrifice their lives (including in suicide attacks) and fight to the death in places like Afghanistan and elsewhere. In part for this reason, American military and intelligence personnel generally believe that al-Qa'eda has been responsible for most, if not all, of the various car bombings and other suicide attacks. These attacks also demonstrated a degree of sophistication in their choice of targets, reconnaissance, simultaneity, and attack parameters that were well in keeping with al-Qa'eda capabilities and practices, but beyond what the Iraqis had ever managed themselves. Some even suspect that the ambush at Samarra at the end of November, in which several dozen insurgents slugged it out with a heavily armored American task force for

several hours, may actually have been conducted by al-Qa'eda or other foreign elements because the determination of these attackers to stand and fight and die was so unusual and incongruous for former regime loyalists or Sunni tribesman.

Thus, overall, U.S. military personnel contend that most of the insurgents are not very committed to their cause (certainly not enough to die for it), and not very competent at what they do. The small number that are willing to die for the cause appear to be mostly foreigners, who are often resented by the Iraqi population, and therefore could be neutralized by convincing the domestic population to inform on them. As a result, there is a strong sense that the insurgency itself does not represent an insurmountable challenge to the reconstruction effort—if the United States is willing to take a number of important steps to deal with it. Possibly the greatest concern for many American military personnel confronting the insurgency is that the daily toll of American dead and wounded will erode domestic political support for the mission.

Numerous local successes. Finally, it is important to mention the numerous successes enjoyed by U.S. military and (to a lesser extent) civilian personnel throughout Iraq. American military civil affairs personnel, U.S. AID and State Department officials, contractors, and members of non-governmental organizations have spread out into many Iraqi villages and neighborhoods. In virtually every case, their presence has proven to have had something of the Midas touch. They have built schools, restored bridges, repaired hospitals, cleaned out irrigation ditches, dug sewers, and performed a host of other activities. They have formed local councils (roughly 250 as of early December) and given them decision-making authority regarding local political and economic activities. They have created new police and security forces and helped find local magistrates from judges to mayors to police chiefs. In a very real sense, they are the ones helping the Iraqis to rebuild their political, economic, and social systems from the ground up—the only way that it can work.

These personnel acknowledge that they have made mistakes. They were sent in, in most cases, with very little understanding of Iraq or its needs, and little guidance on what to do or how to do it. They have made things up as they have gone along. One U.S. military civil affairs officer estimated that no more than a simple majority of his team's decisions were good ones, but over time, they had corrected their mistakes, continued their successes, and won the trust and gratitude of the Iraqis that they worked with. Another civil affairs officer noted that some of his American colleagues alienated Iraqis through arrogance and bad judgment, but that over time they had been weeded out—although he said that it generally took a month of progress to make up for a week of such bad behavior in terms of winning back Iraqi trust.

Along similar lines, AID has been an important source of help and progress in Iraq. In particular, AID sponsors a remarkable program run by the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) that has already made a tangible difference in the lives of many Iraqis. Through this program, money is made available directly to the local governing councils. In the words of one senior AID official, "We go to them and say, 'if you want to build a bridge, say so and we'll provide the money. If you want to build a school or a road or whatever, we will provide the money." Roughly 1,000 such grants have been provided to the nearly 250 local governing councils and most have brought immediate benefits to the Iraqis who received them. The project effects positive changes in the lives of ordinary Iraqis, and bypasses the American and Iraqi bureaucracies to let the average Iraqi see tangible results from the fall of Saddam's regime. One thing that many Americans (particularly American military personnel) found was that in a society that was used to taking orders from the capital and having to get permission to do anything from Baghdad, this program has begun to encourage Iraqis to look to their own local leaders on their governing councils when they have a public problem that needs to be fixed. Thus, this program not only puts resources directly into the hands of the people who most need them and can best use them; it also helps to

decentralize power and build an understanding of pluralism by instilling the notion that people should decide matters for themselves and look to local government rather than expecting everything to come by fiat from the capital.

Of course, there are dark clouds lingering over virtually every aspect of these successes as well. For instance, according to American officials at AID and CPA, the RTI program is being fought by members of the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) in Baghdad. Some on the IGC reportedly want to control all of the resources being distributed in Iraq—to increase their power, be able to reward their own political cronies, and cut off those who don't support them. The RTI program is a bane to them because it bypasses Baghdad and sends the resources directly to the locals. Another, related problem is that overall there is a desperate shortage of personnel, resources, and attention supporting these local activities. These various troubles threaten to undo much of the wonderful work that is being done day-to-day by American military and civilian officials aiding Iraqis across the country.

Summary of the Challenges for the U.S.-Led Reconstruction

The positive forces assisting the process of reconstruction in Iraq have proven quite potent, and continue to make the goal of building a new, stable, prosperous, and pluralist Iraq feasible. However, Iraq is hardly an unmitigated success story. There are also considerable problems there and, in particular, a number of problems could hobble or potentially even undermine the reconstruction. None of these problems appear impossible to solve. Consequently, they should be viewed as challenges, not simply pitfalls. These problems can be broadly grouped into six general categories—six issues that the United States must address if the goal of reconstruction is to be achieved:

- The most important problem is simply the continuation of the status quo. If the United States is unable to provide security for the Iraqi populace, restore basic services, and revive Iraq's economy, Iraq's people and its leadership will eventually turn against us. In other words, the status quo itself is deadly for the United States. If we do not demonstrate progress—and at a quicker pace than we have over the past eight months—the Iraqis are going to begin to conclude that we can't do the job for them and they will instead move to solve these problems on their own by creating local fiefdoms protected by local militias. Not only would such a development make the continued U.S. presence impossible, it would be the first step in what could be a quick descent into civil war.

- There is no question that the United States can and must do a better job of appealing to Iraq's Sunni population, but if in doing so we overreact and push the pendulum back too far in the opposite direction, we risk alienating the Shi'ah and the Kurds, who are the vast majority of the country (roughly 80 percent of the population) and those most committed to building a new, pluralist Iraq.

- The United States needs to firmly commit itself to creating a new Iraqi political structure as laid out in the CPA-developed "November 15 agreement." This plan is probably the best approach available given the difficult circumstances the United States currently finds itself in. However, it is extremely complicated and has a number of key hurdles to overcome, derived largely from the inherent complexities of Iraq and past American mistakes. Consequently it will require the unflinching commitment of CPA chief administrator L. Paul Bremer and President Bush himself to see this plan through to completion. In particular, the United States needs to move quickly beyond the current IGC. Some members of the IGC do represent sizable constituencies (particularly the Kurdish leaders Jalal Talabani and Masud Barzani), some are respected elder statesmen who have yet to prove that they can lead modern Iraq (like Adnan Pachachi), and others are building a following (like Ibrahim al-Jaafari and Muwafaq ar-Ruba'i); many others are unknowns

and some (like Ahmed Chalabi) are widely disliked. The more the United States depends on the IGC and particularly its most unpopular members, or is seen as favoring the transfer of power to them, the faster the Iraqis will turn against the United States and the reconstruction.

- The economic revival of Iraq has been stunted by several American failures that should be addressed quickly. The first is the failure to provide security for the Iraqi people, which makes the ordinary flow of goods and personnel across the country difficult, raises production costs, and hampers investment. The second is the failure to provide basic services. Here the Coalition has done much better than it has on security, but it still has not corrected shortages of electricity, clean water, and gasoline, to name only the most fundamental needs.

- The reconstruction effort is desperately short-staffed. This is true on the security side, where there simply are not enough U.S. and Coalition infantry to provide security for the Iraqi people, and the Iraqi security forces—the Administration's alternative to internationalization—are 6–24 months away from being able to do the job. It is true on the political and economic sides too, where the CPA is so short-staffed that it has virtually no presence outside of Baghdad and as a result, numerous aspects of reconstruction are suffering. And it is also true in terms of numbers of civil affairs personnel in the field working with the Iraqis. Where these men and women are present, they are doing a remarkable job, but there are far too few of them for the need.

- Finally, the United States must do a better job communicating, both within the Coalition chain of command and between the Coalition and the Iraqi people. Coalition personnel in Baghdad are often completely cut off from those outside the Green Zone, with the result that efforts in the field are not supported and decisions in Baghdad are often misdirected. In some ways of greater importance, the United States must also do a much better job communicating with the Iraqis themselves. Because of shortcomings in both capabilities and intentions, the CPA provides the Iraqi people with too little information about developments in their own country, leaving them deeply anxious, frustrated, and resentful.

Each of these challenges is presented in the sections that follow, along with appropriate recommendations for how best to address each.

Security, Security, Security

The conventional wisdom maintains that reconstruction in Iraq will be impossible if the Coalition is not able to create a secure environment. In this case at least, the conventional wisdom is also unequivocally correct. For this reason, the current strategy being employed by the U.S. military in Iraq should be cause for real alarm. Simply put, there is reason to believe that the approach to security the United States is employing in Iraq is badly misguided. It is not meeting the security needs there and seems to have little likelihood of doing so unless radically revised.

Today in Iraq there are three security challenges:

1. **Protecting the Iraqi people against common crime and persistent lawlessness.** Although generally better in the countryside than in the cities, crime remains the greatest single problem for the vast majority of Iraqis. Bandits roam the roads, making travel unsafe. Gangs of criminals operate in most urban areas, and common crime is rampant. Theft, armed robberies, random killings, rape, kidnapping (especially of young women), assault, car-jackings, and burglary are constant concerns for the average Iraqi. A poll conducted in early October by the Iraq Center for Research and Strategic Studies (ICRSS) under the auspices of the International Republican Institute found that 60 percent of Iraqis felt "not very safe" or "not safe at all" in their neighborhoods, and virtually the same percentage had either "not very" [sic] or "no" confidence that coalition forces

would make their cities safe. Only a little more than a quarter of those surveyed felt "very safe."[5]

Indeed, in part because complaints about the provision of electricity have declined as the power situation has improved, crime is the overwhelming complaint of Iraqis—as attested to by the Iraqis themselves and by CPA personnel. Iraqi women generally do not venture out at night and many do not go out even in the day. Many of those who do feel compelled to wear Islamic dress for fear of being attacked by Islamic extremists. Homes are unsafe unless their owners are heavily armed—making the CPA's limits on the possession of weapons problematic even for law-abiding families who want only to protect their possessions from criminals. In those sectors where local American commanders have insisted that there be only one gun per family, many Iraqi families are forced to make the unpleasant choice of deciding whether the father or son takes the gun with him to protect himself, or leaves it behind to protect the home and the women. (Or they pick the most common option of simply disobeying the American edict and keeping multiple weapons.)

The fear Iraqis have of crime and lawlessness is, without question, the single greatest impediment to social, political, and economic reconstruction in Iraq today. If we cannot make the Iraqis feel safe in their own streets (let alone their own homes) they will not go to work, they will not go to the market, they will not go to the polls, they will not go to town meetings, and worst of all they will begin looking to find another way to solve their security problems. Indeed the festering problems with lawlessness are the most powerful force that could push ordinary Iraqis to seek protection behind local militias of one sort or another—which would spell the end of reconstruction and be the first step on the road to civil war.

2. **Protecting the Iraqi people against attacks by former regime loyalists.** No matter how many people and resources the United States lavishes on Iraq, we cannot rebuild the society by ourselves. The most we can do is to help the Iraqis do it themselves, but so far, the Iraqis have proven frustratingly unwilling to participate actively in reconstruction. To some extent, this passivity is a common feature across the Arab Middle East, but in Iraq, the problem was greatly exacerbated by Saddam's 30-plus years of misrule. Saddam did not want the people to show initiative and act independently. Instead, he wanted them to be controlled to the greatest extent possible by his lackeys, and the more that they looked to Baghdad for permission before doing anything—or even to do it for them—so much the better.

   Today, this broad apathy is being reinforced by the threat to those who cooperate with the CPA from former regime loyalists (FRLs, in CPA lingo). The FRLs deliberately attempt to target any Iraqi who actively participates in the reconstruction—they have attacked Iraqi policemen, clerics who preached cooperation with the Americans, even Sunni tribal shaykhs who were working with the CPA. Saddam's regime instilled an overpowering fear in every Iraqi, and the hope of the FRLs is to resurrect, or simply preserve, that fear so that no Iraqi will cooperate with the CPA, causing reconstruction to collapse. The more Iraqis fear that the United States cannot protect them from retaliation by the FRLs, the less likely they will be to overcome this ingrained apathy and the more likely the entire project of reconstruction is to fail.

3. **Protecting U.S. and other Coalition troops from attack by former regime loyalists and other forces.** There is no question that Coalition military forces must defend themselves against attack by the various insurgent groups waging a nascent guerrilla war in Iraq, and that includes some degree of

5 Iraq Center for Research and Strategic Studies, "Results of Public Opinion Poll #3," International Republican Institute, available at <http://www.iri.org/pdfs/iraq_poll_3.pdf>.

offensive action to try to arrest or kill the insurgents in their hiding places. However, as noted above, the insurgents are an irritant to reconstruction more than they are a true threat. Every American killed by insurgents is a tragedy for his or her family, and it is understandable that preventing these deaths is a priority for American commanders. However, most of the attacks are simply harassment—designed to induce American military personnel to overreact and undermine support for the Coalition presence, and hopefully earn a few hundred dollars for the attacker in the process.

The greatest single problem in Iraq today is that the U.S. military has put security mission number three (protecting U.S. forces from the insurgents) first, to the neglect of missions number one and two (protecting the Iraqi people from lawlessness and deliberate attack by the insurgents). American forces in Iraq are obsessed with force protection and with tracking down the insurgents who are attacking them, and as a result they are providing little security to the Iraqi people. And the Iraqis know it: in the IRI poll taken in early October, only 7 percent said that Coalition forces or Coalition patrols contributed most to their sense of security.[6]

This is a counterproductive and dangerous approach. The political and economic reconstruction of Iraq will succeed or fail based on whether the Iraqi people embrace it, and the greatest impediment to their doing so is the fact that they do not feel safe in their own country. The attacks on U.S. forces are not unimportant, but they are of secondary significance (particularly because they are not very effective) compared with providing security for the Iraqi people. This is a basic rule of any counterinsurgency operation: *job one is making the local populace feel safe,* and we have singularly failed in that all-important mission. Indeed, by devoting so much of our efforts toward force protection, at the expense of protecting the Iraqi people, we are playing into the hands of the insurgents by undermining our own support among the Iraqi people. Many Iraqis resent the fact that American forces take such pains to protect themselves and do so little to protect the Iraqi people.

Instead, U.S. forces generally remain penned up in formidable cantonments. They are cut off from the populace and have little interaction with them. In the field, they come out to attend to logistical needs and to conduct raids against suspected insurgents. In the cities, they generally come out only to make infrequent patrols—which are virtually always conducted mounted in Bradley fighting vehicles or HMMWVs (the ubiquitous "Humvees" or "Hummers") at speeds of 30–50 km per hour. Although Coalition forces claim that they make 700 patrols per day in Baghdad, and that at least some are on foot, there is little evidence that this is the case. During my time in Baghdad I never saw a single Coalition foot patrol, and found that there were intervals of several hours between the mounted patrols—which the Iraqis justifiably considered useless, since it was impossible for the patrolling troops to see anything and they were not present long enough to serve as a deterrent, let alone to talk to people in the street to find out their problems.

This is a constant (and fully justified) complaint of Iraqis: the Americans have no presence and make no effort to stop street crime or the attacks on them by the FRLs. Many British officers (and some Americans too) argue that the United States should instead be employing the kind of foot patrols backed by helicopters and/or ground vehicles that the British Army learned to use in Northern Ireland, and that all NATO forces eventually employed in the Balkans. This is the only way that American forces can get out, reassure the Iraqi civilians, find out from them where the troublemakers are, and respond to their problems.

This was also the demand I heard regularly from the Iraqis themselves. Their preference was to have mixed

6 Iraq Center for Research and Strategic Studies, "Results of Public Opinion Poll #3."

American and Iraqi patrols—something that the new Iraqi Civil Defense Corps (ICDC—a force of 40,000 locally recruited Iraqis who are to work in conjunction with American units in their hometowns) should attempt. However, most Iraqis were so desperate that they invariably indicated they would settle for American soldiers alone on the streets. The NDI study of Iraqi public opinion found the same; one Shiite woman in Diwaniyah asked about the reconstitution of the Iraqi police said, "If there is an [Iraqi] officer standing there, no Iraqi would be afraid of him. But if an American soldier were there, they would be afraid of him."[7] Even though Iraqis generally want Americans to be more in the background in every other aspect of reconstruction, they are so desperate for help to deal with crime and lawlessness that in this one area they want to see more Americans, not less.

Such an emphasis on foot patrols, presence, and the eradication of crime and attacks on Iraqis would doubtless expose U.S. personnel to greater risks. However, this is absolutely necessary if reconstruction is to succeed in Iraq. There is no question that force protection must always be an issue of concern to any American commander, but it cannot be the determining principle of U.S. operations. If our overriding goal is to protect American troops, we should get them out of Iraq and bring them back to the United States where they will be perfectly safe. The fact is that they are in Iraq because the reconstruction of that country is critical to the stability of the Persian Gulf and a vital interest of the United States. In their current mode of operations, our troops are neither safe nor are they accomplishing their most important mission. Consequently, executing that mission must become the highest concern of U.S. military commanders, and their current strategy—focusing on force protection and offensive operations against the insurgents—is misguided. If it does not change, the reconstruction may fail outright.

We need to keep in mind the analogy of Yugoslavia. For nearly fifty years after the end of World War II, Yugoslavia was a stable, reasonably peaceful state because it was ruled by Tito's brand of totalitarian communism. During that time, as Balkan experts note, most of the people of Yugoslavia—and particularly the majority who dwelt in the cities—downplayed their ethnic and religious differences and developed a much more cosmopolitan perspective. To a very great extent, they stopped seeing themselves as Croats, Muslims, and Serbs, and instead considered themselves "Yugoslavs." But when Tito died and the central government collapsed around them, it opened up a power vacuum that created a state of lawlessness and fear. Crime, looting, and revenge killings—and the wildly exaggerated rumors of such behavior—are a fixture of every such sudden political collapse. Average Yugoslavs suddenly no longer felt safe in the streets or in their homes. As stories of militias forming in the countryside spread, they began to fear their neighbors—people from other ethnic or religious groups they previously might have trusted with their possessions or even their children. That fear drove average men and women to seek protection where they could find it, and that meant returning to their ethnic and religious roots. They once again resumed their ethnic and religious mantles to seek protection by their homegrown militias against others who might harm them just because of who they were. This is a basic pattern of human behavior. It is at the heart of family, clan, and tribe: people of common descent and common heritage banding together to protect themselves against people of a different heritage who they simply fear mean them harm because they are different. This pattern destroyed Yugoslavia and sent the country into a long slide into civil war, ethnic cleansing, and international intervention. If we do not provide for security in Iraq, that same pattern could easily be repeated there. The handwriting is already on the wall.

7 Melia and Katulis, p. 13. This survey was conducted in mid-summer when the Iraqi police were new and before they became thoroughly corrupted. By the time I visited Iraq in November, no one I spoke to expressed the sentiment that Iraqis would not be "afraid" of an Iraqi police officer. They indicated they probably would not respect him, but because the police had become so corrupt and were now engaged in a wide range of criminal activity, they were definitely feared.

The Chimera of Quick Iraqification

The fall of Saddam has produced the same kind of power vacuum in Iraq that the death of Tito did in Yugoslavia. Not surprisingly, it has produced a similar state of lawlessness in Iraq. And the United States has not adequately filled that vacuum.

Part of that failure lies in the size of the U.S. force in Iraq. There are not enough American and Coalition troops in Iraq—and particularly not enough infantry, civil affairs personnel, and military police—to provide the kind of security that is needed. If Generals Abizaid and Sanchez were authorized tomorrow to begin patrolling the streets, they probably would not have the troops to do it.

Adequately providing security for a country of 25 million people is a massive task. Military analyst James T. Quinlivan of the RAND Corporation has demonstrated that stabilizing a country requires roughly 20 security personnel (troops and police) per thousand inhabitants. In his words, the objective "is not to destroy an enemy but to provide security for residents so that they have enough confidence to manage their daily affairs and to support a government authority of their own."[8] For Iraq, with a population of nearly 25 million, that would require a total security force of nearly 500,000. However, the United States has fewer than 130,000 troops there and the 32 Coalition allies have so far provided only another 24,000—producing a ratio of barely seven security personnel per thousand Iraqis.[9] What's more, as noted above, most of these troops are not even trying to conduct basic security operations but either remain in their cantonments or come out only for mostly useless mounted patrols or frequently counterproductive raids against suspected insurgents. Hence the state of lawlessness.

This problem is not a new one. Throughout the 1990s, in prior postwar stability operations, the solution that was employed for this problem was to create a multilateral force that would fill the needed gap in troops until local forces could be created. Experts from all points of the American political spectrum—including many who wholeheartedly supported the war—have called for the same solution to be employed in Iraq. However, the Bush Administration's resistance to allowing the United Nations to play a leading role in the reconstruction of Iraq has eliminated the Security Council as a vehicle for garnering such international support, and has made it more difficult to secure commitments from the countries most able to furnish large numbers of troops for stabilizing Iraq. France, Germany, Russia, India, Pakistan, and a host of other nations have refused to commit the tens of thousands of troops that would be needed to bring real security to Iraq.

Unfortunately, rather than accept a larger international role, the Bush Administration's answer to this problem is what it has dubbed "Iraqification"—turning over both more political power and more security responsibilities to the Iraqis themselves. In the political realm, the approach that L. Paul Bremer and the CPA have fashioned is probably the best we could follow. However, in the security realm, Iraqification at this time is a mistake. It is a mistake because the Iraqis are not yet ready to handle the security problem that is the greatest threat to reconstruction. The sentiment that "the Iraqis need to do this for themselves" is not incorrect, but it is premature. Right now, they absolutely lack the *capacity* to do so, in terms of both their security capabilities and their political acumen. Consequently, we must do it for them until they are ready to do it for themselves. Over time, the burden can shift, but right now we must shoulder much of that burden, especially in the security realm. Our failure to do so is allowing the same forces that drove

8 James T. Quinlivan, "The Burden of Victory: The Painful Arithmetic of Stability Operations," *RAND Review,* Summer 2003. Available online at <http://www.rand.org/publications/randreview/issues/summer2003/burden.html>. Also see James T. Quinlivan, "Force Requirements in Stability Operations," *Parameters,* Winter 1995, pp. 56–69.

9 Department of Defense, "Draft Working Papers: Iraq Status," unclassified version released by DoD, December 1, 2003, p. 14.

Yugoslavia to chaos and civil war to threaten the same in Iraq, and our determination to ignore the problem—or to make it the problem of the Iraqis themselves—is a very bad answer.[10]

The concept of Iraqification is seductive because there are important kernels of truth in it: at least theoretically, the Iraqis are the best suited (culturally, linguistically, etc.) to handle security in Iraq, and someday they will have to assume this responsibility anyway. Thus the Administration is racing to create as many new Iraqi security personnel as possible to make up the massive shortfall in numbers, and to have them take on the tasks that American military officers can't, won't, or aren't being permitted to do. Thus the Pentagon emphasizes its claim that there are roughly 150,000 Iraqis currently in the Iraqi police, ICDC, New Iraqi Army (NIA), Border Police, and Facility Protection Service.[11]

However, there are two problems with this claim. First, the numbers don't reflect the reality. Privately, numerous Administration and CPA officials in both Washington and Baghdad have conceded that probably only about half of the Iraqi security personnel that we keep on the books actually show up for work, with the police and the Facility Protection Service people being the worst (and they account for 80 percent of the total force).

Second, the Iraqis can't handle the job yet. Most of the Iraqi security personnel are very poorly trained.[12] For instance, originally the CPA planned to take 12 months to train 9 battalions (about 10–12,000 troops altogether) for the NIA. However, when the Administration decided to try to solve its security problems through Iraqification, that was pushed to 27 battalions in the same 12 months. As a result, the recruits will receive greatly abbreviated training and will not get the same kind of inculcation ("immersion" is probably a better term) in the values and methods that are needed to take what was once the most coup-prone and internally disruptive military in the Arab world and turn it into a guardian of Iraqi democracy. The recruits for the ICDC will only get 2–3 weeks of training before they are turned loose on the streets. American military personnel and officials in Iraq are uniformly pessimistic about the ability of these forces to do their jobs. One U.S. official told me, "If you give me six months to train these guys, I might give you a decent soldier. But with two weeks, I can't promise anything."

Finally, there are real concerns about whether these forces will make the situation better or worse. Many fear that the locally recruited ICDC personnel (especially after only a few weeks of training) will quickly become the base for new local militias. Because of their expected close working relationships with U.S. troops, this problem seems less worrisome. The real cause for alarm is the growing corruption of the Iraqi police, a problem that began after the departure of Bernard Kerrick, who had initially been charged by the Administration with building the new Iraqi police force. Because of the rushed manner in which the Administration is trying to create Iraqi security forces to demonstrate that it does not need either more American troops or the internationalization of Iraqi reconstruction to bring in more troops from other countries, the vetting process has suffered.[13] CPA officials repeatedly told me that to speed the intake of personnel, they had to short-circuit the process of checking the background of potential recruits.

As a result, a lot of "bad eggs" slipped in and this has proven particularly problematic among the Iraqi police, where many of the former policemen recalled to the colors have proven to be criminals themselves.

10 For a similar view from an author with differing political views, see Reuel Marc Gerecht, "Premature Iraqification," *The Weekly Standard,* Vol. 9, No. 2 (September 22, 2003).
11 Gerecht, pp. 14–15.
12 For corroborating reporting, see Ariana Eunjung Cha, "Flaws Showing in New Iraqi Forces," *The Washington Post,* December 30, 2003, p. A1
13 For corroborating reporting see Cha, "Flaws Showing in New Iraqi Forces," and Whitelaw, "The Quiet Iraqis," p. 20.

Iraqis and Americans state that too many Iraqi policemen are guilty of extortion, bribery, prolonged absences (often never showing up at all), kidnappings, rape, arson, assault, and even murder. A common story is that the police will pick up a man or woman off the street and hold them—sometimes in the local police headquarters—until their family pays to have them released. If the family does not pay, the hostage can be beaten or raped to encourage them to do so, and if they are unwilling or unable (and sometimes even if they do pay) the hostage may simply disappear. The problem is so bad that three different CPA officials told me that if they were out alone outside the Green Zone (admittedly a rare experience for many American officials) and they were flagged down by an Iraqi police officer, they probably would not stop because they would be too frightened of what he might do. This is not to say that there are not thousands of honest, hard-working, well-intentioned, and extremely brave Iraqi police officers, only that there are also many felons and would-be felons now charged with keeping order in Iraq's streets.

Fighting the Insurgency Better

Even within the narrow realm of the campaign against the insurgency, to which the United States has devoted a disproportionate amount of effort, there is room for improvement. Two areas loom largest: conducting tactical raids better so as not to alienate the population, and addressing the enmity of Iraq's Sunni tribal population.

American forces continue to conduct raids against suspected FRLs in ways that are counterproductive to U.S. efforts to win Iraqi "hearts and minds." Many American units continue to see the targets of the raids as enemies and treat them as such—invariably turning them and their neighbors into enemies regardless of their feelings beforehand. Once again, the priority placed on force protection comes at the expense of the larger mission—the safety, psychological disposition, and dignity of Iraqis. Busting down doors, ordering families down on the floor, holding them down with the sole of a boot, searching women in the presence of men, waiving around weapons, ransacking rooms or whole houses, and confiscating weapons all come with a price. Because too much of the intelligence that the United States is relying on is poor, it is not a rare occurrence that houses raided turn out to be innocuous. In some cases, the wanted personnel may have been there at some point and fled, but in others no one in the house was guilty at all. Indeed, too often U.S. forces are directed to raid a house or arrest a person by someone else who simply has a grudge against them and turns them in to the Americans as a "Saddam loyalist" to settle a personal score.

These are exactly the same problems U.S. forces encountered in Vietnam and elsewhere. Unfortunately, we are slow to learn the lessons. Army civil affairs personnel say that they have a great deal of difficulty convincing their colleagues in the infantry to change their tactics. They indicated that they had been trying to convince the infantry not to kick in doors, but to knock on them. Better still, they suggested that the infantry bring civil affairs officers along to do the knocking, since in many cases the civil affairs personnel might know members of the household from their work in the villages. Unfortunately, they reported that they were having little luck both because of the priority placed on force protection and because the presumption that anyone in a house that is targeted for a raid is a bad guy. Of course, too often when the raid is over, they have *become* bad guys.

The Coalition must also do a better job with the Sunni tribes. Here the problem is as much that of the CPA as it is the U.S. Army. Unfortunately, as a result of some bad early decisions, the United States has completely alienated the vast majority of Iraq's Sunni tribesmen. Although this is not a huge percentage of Iraq's population (it may represent only 1–2 million people) they are not insignificant, and they control a sizable chunk of Iraq's territory—the so-called Sunni triangle west and northwest of Baghdad. Because they are so antipathetic to the U.S.

presence, they have furnished a very receptive base of popular support for the various groups attacking the American and other Coalition forces.

Their opposition to the U.S. presence and reconstruction does not necessarily have anything to do with love or support for Saddam Hussein.[14] To a great extent, it is a function of their total alienation from the process of political reconstitution by the Americans. The arbitrary and excessive U.S. program of de-Ba'thification—which increasingly appears to be inspired by Ahmad Chalabi and other members of the IGC, who are employing it to delegitimize internal rivals with little basis in evidence or necessity—has struck most deeply at tribal Sunnis. Men from the al-Jubbur, ad-Dulaym, al-'Ubayd, albu-Nasr, Shammar, and other Sunni tribes were the backbone of Saddam's regime. They were considered very loyal to Saddam (even though their members revolted against him or mounted coups against him on a variety of occasions) largely because Saddam struck solid deals with the tribal shaykhs and richly rewarded their members. They filled a disproportionate number of the slots in Saddam's security services, officer corps, and senior bureaucratic ranks. The arbitrary decision by the United States to exclude the top four ranks of Ba'th party members from all government positions and to disband the Iraqi Army completely has meant that huge numbers of these men were sent home. They are often important members of their tribes; they once had dignity, power, wealth, and patronage, and now they have nothing. Not surprisingly, many have gone home and either joined the insurgency or encouraged their sons and nephews to do so.

To make matters worse, after forcing the tribal Sunnis out of the old government, the United States has largely excluded them from the new government. There is only one Sunni tribesman on the current IGC, and Iraqis told me that he was not well respected among the tribesmen. Moreover, the tribal shaykhs formerly depended on power and payments from Baghdad, which have not been forthcoming from the CPA (understandably, given both American values and intentions). Nevertheless, a number of Iraqis suggested that at least some of the harassing attacks in the Sunni triangle are being conducted by tribesmen put up to it by their shaykhs as a way of coercing the United States to resume the former system. One middle-class, secular Baghdadi put it this way: "In the past, Saddam would go out to the tribes and he would sit down with the shaykh and he would say, 'You have a road (or an oil pipeline, or a power line) running through your territory that keeps getting attacked by bandits. I will pay you to keep that road safe. As long as the road is safe, I will pay you. If people on the road get attacked, I will hold you responsible.' And what everyone knew, including Saddam, was that the people attacking the road were the shaykh's men themselves." In other words, it was a protection racket. But it worked. It kept order, and until or unless the United States can find a substitute—and brute force alone is not that substitute—the CPA is going to have to adopt a similar approach.

If the Bush Administration had properly prepared to do so, there were much better ways it could have handled the Sunni tribes right from the start of the war. Unfortunately, it did not, and that is now water under the bridge. The question is how to deal with the unpleasant situation that has developed. A short-term approach and a long-term approach are now needed. The short-term approach is, in the wake of Saddam's capture, to reach out to the tribal shaykhs, largely as Saddam did, and again offer to provide them with resources if they will "assist with security"—i.e., stop attacking the roads, power lines, oil pipelines, and coalition forces in their territory and prevent other groups from doing the same. Our payments do not necessarily have to be cold cash, like Saddam's, but we too need to find ways to provide resources that will give the tribal shaykhs and their people an incentive to cooperate with us. This can come in the form of goods, construction equipment or funding for

14 See for instance, John Burns, "Talk of Tikrit's Favorite Diner: Hatred of Hussein, Fury at U.S.," *The New York Times,* December 23, 2003, p. A1.

projects, or even the projects themselves. It can come by "deputizing" tribal military leaders, enlisting their personnel in an Iraqi security force (probably the ICDC, which is intended to be locally based) and then paying them for their service. The key is to start meeting with the shaykhs and convincing them that if they cooperate, there will be resources and other benefits for them and their followers.

The longer-term approach will involve repairing the deeper psychological damage created by Saddam's misrule and our own initial mistakes. We need to begin a long process of education among Sunni tribesmen (indeed, all across Iraq) that will make them understand our vision of the new Iraq and their role in it. For instance, we need them to understand that in a system where the rule of law prevails they will not have to fear being oppressed by the Shi'ah as they oppressed the Shi'ah themselves for at least 80 years. Similarly, we need to persuade them that while they will no longer enjoy the privileged position they had under Saddam, and so will no longer be *relatively* better off than the rest of the country, if the reconstruction succeeds, Iraq will be so much more prosperous than it was under Saddam that in *absolute* terms, they will be much better off.

Finally, the United States must also help the Sunnis develop new political institutions.[15] Here the need may actually be even more pressing than it is for the rest of the country. The Kurds have their two great parties. For the present, the Shi'ah at least have the Hawza—although that too is an imperfect vehicle for expressing their true political aspirations. But the Sunnis have nothing. Their principal political institution was the Ba'th party and it has been proscribed, along with all of its senior members. Consequently, the United States is going to have to revise its arbitrary and draconian de-Ba'thification measures to allow prominent Sunnis, including Sunni tribal leaders, to participate in Iraq's political process and help them create new, progressive political institutions that will allow their voices to be heard. Even in these, the Sunni tribesman cannot predominate, and should have no more political power than their demographic weight, but they cannot be excluded entirely as they effectively have been so far.

Overall, the U.S. military and political authorities must remember that insurgencies are not defeated principally by military operations. They are defeated by eliminating the underlying political and economic grievances that gave rise to the insurgency. Overly aggressive military operations can therefore be extremely counterproductive by exacerbating those grievances (or creating new ones).

Too many U.S. military personnel are demanding more and better intelligence. While at some level they are right that good intelligence will be key to success, they are wrong to blame their S-2s or the national level agencies. In an insurgency, in Mao's famous metaphor, the people are the sea in which the guerrillas (the "fish") swim. As long as the sea is accommodating to the fish, the counterinsurgency forces will never catch them. However, if the people turn against the insurgents, then it becomes much easier to eliminate them. Only the locals know that there are a couple of FRLs hiding in a drainage pipe in an irrigation canal just outside of town. If they tell U.S. forces, it becomes easy to nab the FRLs; if they don't it is highly unlikely U.S. forces will find the insurgents themselves. In other words, if the Iraqi people turn against the guerrillas and overcome their paralyzing passivity, they will begin providing the intelligence to U.S. forces that will be critical to eliminating the guerrillas. To some extent the intelligence does appear to be improving in some areas of Iraq. However, the more that the U.S. forces insist on conducting terrifying, humiliating, and callous raids the more they will turn the population against us, and keep them from providing the information that will be crucial to eliminating the insurgency—the kind of information that only the Iraqi people themselves can provide.

15 Some Sunnis are attempting to do exactly this. See for example, Edward Wong, "Sunni Groups Form Council to Gain Input into Iraqi Rule," *The New York Times,* December 25, 2003.

Building a New Iraqi Political System

It is important to address up front two dangerous canards that continue to hold considerable sway in the West: Iraqis would prefer an Islamic theocracy like Iran's to democracy, and each ethnic and religious group would like to secede from the "artificial" creation of Iraq. While there certainly are some Iraqis who do hold these notions, they are hardly the majority. In fact, they are very much in the minority. In my own conversations with Iraqis, I found it to be true among all ethnic and religious groups and in all walks of life. Every American I spoke to either in Iraq or with experience there since the fall of Saddam reported the same. And the results of every serious study of Iraqi public opinion since the fall of Baghdad has confirmed these first-hand impressions. The poll conducted by the ICRSS found that 56 percent of those polled wanted some form of democratic government, with the only other large bloc supporting an "Islamic" system, although it was unclear what they meant by that—and most other studies indicate that they do not necessarily mean an Islamic fundamentalist regime like Iran.[16] In a Zogby poll conducted with *American Enterprise* magazine in August, respondents were asked which foreign country they should model their new government on. The United States got the most (24 percent), while Iran got the fewest (3 percent).[17] A Gallup Survey in Baghdad found that a multiparty parliamentary democracy was both the preferred form of government (39 percent) and the form that was most acceptable to the respondents (53 percent said that such a system would be acceptable to them). By comparison, an Islamic theocracy such as Iran's was preferred by only 10 percent, and was acceptable to only 23 percent.[18]

Indeed, even when polls found that the Iraqis were ambivalent when specifically asked about "democracy" (which often contains the connotation of Western culture, and not just a political system), they invariably found that the Iraqis were overwhelmingly positive when asked about specific aspects of a political system that Westerners would consider the cornerstones of democratic governance. For example, in October, the U.S. State Department conducted a poll of Iraqis in Baghdad, Basra, Fallujah, Ramadi, Irbil, Sulaymaniyyah, and Najaf. One of its principal conclusions was that:

> In all seven cities in the Office of Research poll, large majorities support what are generally considered to be democratic values. Nine in ten think it is very or somewhat important that people vote in free and fair elections (95%), that people abide by the law and criminals are punished (94%), that people can criticize the government (86%), and that major nationality (89%) and religious groups share power (87%). Majorities also value media that are independent of government censorship (78%) and rights for women that are equal to those of men (71%). There is very little, if any, variation among the cities on these components, and there are only minor differences between men and women in their attitudes toward gender equity.[19]

16 Iraq Center for Research and Strategic Studies, "Results of Public Opinion Poll #3."

17 Zogby International Survey of Iraq, August 2003, p. 2. Available at <http://www.taemag.com/docLib/20030905_IraqpollFrequencies.pdf>. The Zogby survey also points to the problems with using polls in a country that has no experience with public opinion and for 35 years has lived in a world of misinformation and rumors. Even more so than elsewhere, in Iraq the results are highly dependent on how the question is asked. Zogby specifically asked a question about democracy, but did so in a truly foolish fashion. They asked Iraqis whether "democracy could work in Iraq," or whether it was "a Western way of doing things and it will not work here." The words "Western way of doing things" are code in Iraq: they refer to the importation of Western cultures, values, and conceivably even religion. Many conservative Iraqis will automatically shy away from anything associated with that term. Indeed, what is surprising is that even with such a poorly phrased question, the results were 40 percent agreeing with the first statement and only 50 percent agreeing with the second.

18 The Gallup Poll findings are presented in Appendix Table 2 of Dina Smeltz and Jodi Nachtwey, "Iraqi Public Opinion Analysis," U.S. Department of State, October 21, 2003, p. 13. Available online at <http://www.cpa-iraq.org/government/political_poll.pdf>.

19 Smeltz and Nachtwey, p. 1.

Nor do Iraqis want to divide their country up. Most I spoke to regard this as impossible without sparking a civil war. They pointed to the impossibility of determining peacefully how to divide Iraq's oil wealth or its huge mixed-population cities, like Baghdad, Mosul, and Kirkuk. Indeed, even the Kurds felt this way. Kurdish leaders were more blunt, indicating that even if they could somehow succeed in gaining their independence it would likely be disastrous for them at this point: as one key Kurdish leader put it to me, "If I get my fondest wish and Kurdistan gains its independence, we will find ourselves a small, weak, landlocked state, surrounded by four much bigger states [Syria, Turkey, Iran, and Iraq] who all hate us." The NDI study asked its participants to choose from a list of words which one best described them: "Iraqi"; "Arab" or "Kurd" depending on the group; "Muslim"; their particular tribe; their family; and either "Sunni," "Shiite," or "Christian" again depending on the group. The leading response, everywhere in the country was simply "Iraqi."[20] One member of the NDI team told me that the degree to which all Iraqis considered themselves to be part of an Iraqi collective was the most surprising of all of their findings given everything they had heard about Iraq before the war.

The November 15 Agreement. As with the security question, the United States started off by making any number of mistakes with regard to the running of Iraq and the creation of a new political process. However, after many false starts, the CPA appears to have come up with a feasible vehicle to move Iraq down a path toward stable new government. That vehicle is embodied in what is now referred to as the "November 15 agreement," because Bremer secured the consent of the current Iraqi Governing Council for his new program on that date.

The November 15 agreement has received a lot of bad press. In particular, many American correspondents have mistakenly characterized it as a way for the Bush Administration to throw together a new Iraqi government on which they could dump the task of reconstruction, allowing the United States to "declare victory and go home" before the U.S. presidential election. Although it seems clear that some in the Administration would like to do exactly that—and may still convince the President to do so—that is *not* at all what the November 15 agreement is designed to do. In fact, its intention is to do exactly the opposite: create a political framework that will allow the United States to remain in Iraq for the long term to continue to guide the process of reconstruction, but to do so in a way that is more efficient and more palatable to the Iraqis.

At present, the United States has too much of a role in the governing of Iraq. American officials make all of the important decisions, and often involve themselves in aspects of governance that would be better left to the Iraqis. This has created severe problems for the reconstruction. The first of these is that it is humiliating and infuriating to the Iraqis.

Those without experience in the Middle East often underestimate the importance of honor and dignity in the Arab world. These concepts are even more important to Iraqis than they are for most other Arabs. The Iraqis are fiercely nationalistic and they have resisted outside rulers since the days of the Ottoman empire. Simply put, the Iraqis do not like seeing Americans calling the shots in their country. At the most basic level, many Iraqis said that they understood the need for our presence—and did *not* want the United States to leave—but that it was enraging and humiliating for them to see us so publicly exercising authority in their society. In particular, many complained about the humiliation that this situation inflicted upon them. For instance, outside of the gates of the Green Zone every day, one can see middle- and even upper-class Iraqis—well-educated (some with law degrees or Ph.D.s), extremely knowledgeable, pillars of their community—effectively reduced to begging 19- and 20-year-old American soldiers to be able to see

20 Melia and Katulis, pp. 22–23.

someone in the CPA to try to get a job or help contribute to the reconstruction effort.

A second problem is that many of the Americans who are running Iraq with the best of intentions really don't know what they are doing. Many Americans attempting to accomplish tasks in Iraq either expect or, worse still, demand that the Iraqis they are working with accomplish a task the way that it would be done in the United States, and in the process trample on Iraqi customs regarding working hours, working conditions, and female modesty, to name only a few. Iraq is a very different society from the United States, and it works in a very different fashion. Although the Iraqi system may not make sense to us, it does to them. It also may not be the most efficient system in the world, but at present we need to get the system running again—not try to build a new one.[21] And the Americans often don't know how to make the system work, while the Iraqis do. Consequently, at the level of day-to-day administration, the American presence is often more of a hindrance than a help.

According to members of Iraqi ministries, the ministries function best when their American advisers (every ministry has a team of American advisers designed to oversee their operations) remain in the background, serving as quality control, ensuring that there is no graft, and acting as liaison with the CPA and the U.S. military, leaving the actual implementation to the Iraqis themselves. They indicated that the ministries with the greatest problems were those where the American officials inserted themselves into the administration of the ministry and the execution of daily tasks. In those cases, it was humiliating for the Iraqi employees to be taking orders about every minor issue from an American, and worse still, the Americans often created bureaucratic snarls by insisting on doing things as they would be done in the United States, rather than as they are done in Iraq. A bunch of Americans insisting that the Iraqis conform to American traditions and methods is not a recipe for good government.

Last, there are too few Americans and other Coalition personnel in Iraq to be trying to run the country on a day-to-day basis. The CPA has 1,300 people and is trying to run a country of 25 million. This simply will not work. The CPA has never had enough personnel, but in the beginning this shortage was felt less because the things they were trying to accomplish were limited and focused on only the most important projects. Today, enough of the most basic issues (like preventing mass starvation and getting the oil infrastructure running again) have been taken care of so that the next set of tasks is to revive the broader economic and political structures of the entire country, and there just aren't enough CPA personnel to handle that mission. Only the Iraqis themselves can provide the tens and eventually hundreds of thousands of middle- and low-ranking officials who will be needed for that undertaking.

Nor is the current IGC the answer. This group was pulled together during the summer of 2003 and has proven to be mostly a liability. The IGC is largely reviled by Iraqis. Most don't know anything about it, and more importantly, don't believe that it has had any impact on their lives. Most Iraqis don't know the majority of its members, and dislike some that they do. In the State Department poll conducted in late August and early September, only seven of the 25 members of the IGC were known well enough for more than 40 percent of the population to have an opinion about them. Of those seven, Ahmed Chalabi was the only one whose unfavorable rating was higher than his favorable rating (35 to 26 percent).[22] In fact, this imbalance may have increased considerably since then.[23] In late

21 Building a new system would require overhauling the entire country and re-educating the entire population. It is worth considering, but it is a generation-long project, and should not be undertaken at the expense of getting the country back on its feet in the near term.

22 Smeltz and Nachtwey, p. 8.

23 See also Joel Brinkley and Douglas Jehl, "Iraqi Exiles Face Uncertainty as Enthusiasm for Them Dims at Home and in Washington," *The New York Times,* December 8, 2003.

November, I found much greater and more widespread opprobrium for Chalabi than did the State Department poll from September. American officials reported similar sentiments among the Iraqis they dealt with, and contrasted Chalabi's behavior—making little effort to build a popular base of support and instead attempting to use his connections in Washington to have himself appointed to ever greater positions of authority—with that of other IGC members who were diligently working to get to know their constituents and put themselves in position to be elected by a genuine popular vote. Obviously, other members of the IGC (notably the Kurdish leaders—Talabani, Barzani, Hoshyar Zebari—and some Shiite leaders—like 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Hakim, Muhammad Bahr al-'Ulum, Ibrahim al-Ja'fari) do have the support of their particular constituencies, and someone like the elder statesman Adnan Pachachi appears to have some degree of support with a number of Iraqi demographic groups, but this does not confer legitimacy on the IGC as a whole.

Moreover, the presence in the IGC of so many exiles who lack popular support creates another problem. It means that they have an incentive to use their current, anomalous position to try to lock themselves in as members, if not the leaders, of any future Iraqi government. There are a number of people on the IGC, Chalabi in particular, who recognize that they probably could not get elected in truly democratic elections. Consequently, they are working hard to use their current powers and responsibilities not to advance the cause of reconstruction, but to advance their own political interests, even at the expense of the reconstruction effort. Rather than actually helping to administer the country, they spend most of their time politicking to promote themselves. This means that it would likely be a disaster for the United States to hand over greater power to the current IGC. Moving forward on reconstruction requires the United States to move into the background and allow Iraqis to take the lead—but the current IGC would be the wrong vehicle for that transition.

These various factors create the backdrop and starting point for the November 15 agreement. The agreement establishes a complicated process intended to create a new interim Iraqi governing body that can assume sovereignty and (of greater importance since no Iraqi really has a sense of how "sovereignty" will materially affect their lives) greater authority over the day-to-day affairs of the country. It also will inaugurate a process for the writing of a new constitution and the establishment of a new, legitimate Iraqi government.

In its most basic form, the timeline laid out by the November 15 agreement is as follows:

- **February 28, 2004:** The CPA and the current Governing Council produce a "Transitional Administration Law"[24] that will serve as the interim constitution, governing the activities of the Iraqi Interim Assembly (IIA) which will supplant the IGC completely and the CPA in terms of handling the administration of Iraq, until a permanent government can be formed.

- **March 31, 2004:** The CPA and the current IGC will craft a new "Status of Forces" agreement governing the U.S. military presence during the period when the IIA is running Iraq under the terms of the Transitional Administration Law.

- **May 31, 2004:** The IIA will convene to select an executive and appoint ministers for a new interim government. The members of the IIA will be selected through a very complex process. In each of Iraq's 18 provinces, a panel of 15 overseers will be chosen. For each panel, five of the overseers will be nominated by the current Governing Council, five by the council of the provincial government (currently being formed up in each province from the local councils), and the last five selected one apiece by the local councils of the five largest cities and towns in the province. These overseers will then choose a number of delegates to the IIA

24 Formerly referred to as the "Fundamental Law," but since renamed.

relative to the demographic weight of the province. However, every delegate chosen must secure the votes of at least 11 of the 15 overseers, to ensure that each is at least minimally acceptable to all three of the different groups.

- **June 30, 2004:** The IIA assumes sovereignty and a greater degree of authority over day-to-day affairs. The extent of that authority is yet to be determined, however. At this point, the CPA will dissolve, but it is expected to be replaced by another entity—whose shape has also not yet been defined.

- **March 15, 2005:** Direct, popular elections will be held for a constitutional convention to devise the new, permanent constitution, which will in turn be ratified by a popular referendum.

- **December 31, 2005 or whenever the new constitution has been ratified:** Elections for a new Iraqi government will be held under the provisions of the new constitution. Once the new government takes power, the Transitional Administration Law will expire and the new constitution will become the law of the land.

The November 15 agreement may not be the best plan imaginable, but in the circumstances in which we now find ourselves, it is probably the best plan possible. It will allow the United States to remain in Iraq, guiding the process of reconstruction but moving more into the background, and it will create a new interim government that should be more representative and legitimate than the current IGC.

The November 15 agreement also recognizes that Iraq is a long way from being ready for direct democracy. Most Iraqis do not really understand how democratic processes work or how a democratic government actually operates. A considerable amount of education is going to have to be provided to the Iraqi people before they are ready to handle real democracy. Political parties are mostly still in their infancy. Institutions of civil society are likewise just starting out, or are slowly cleansing themselves of Saddamist contamination, and attempting to change into entities that can really benefit, support, and represent the Iraqi people.

Probably of greater concern, there are few real leaders in the country. Jalal Talabani and Masud Barzani generally do speak for their Kurdish constituents, but this is mostly not the case for any other leader, even among the Shi'ah. My own conversations, the reports of other visitors to Iraq, and the public opinion studies available all suggest that many Shi'ah look to religious figures as their leaders largely by default. Saddam killed or drove off all of their secular leaders just as he did with the Sunnis, and only the clergy were left to lead the people. Supporting this, the ICRSS poll found that 61 percent of Iraqis felt that there was no "trustable" leader in Iraq. Of the 29 percent who did say that there was a "trustable" leader in Iraq, they were divided into tiny percentages among 41 other figures including Jalal Talabani, Muqtada as-Sadr, Saddam Hussein, and others.[25] Similarly, the State Department poll asked its respondents who was the leader they trusted most; the overwhelming preference was for "Don't Know/No Response," with 64 percent. Of those named, IGC member Ibrahim al-Ja'fari topped the list with a mere 12 percent, followed by five other leaders (including Saddam Hussein and the two Kurdish leaders) who each garnered between 2 and 4 percent. Several others, including Chalabi, Muqtada as-Sadr, and Sharif 'Ali bin al-Hussein (the pretender to the Hashemite throne of Iraq) had no more than 1 percent apiece.[26]

The new interim government should be an improvement over the current IGC. Because it will be elected by several different Iraqi groups, it should have some degree of legitimacy—and certainly much more than the current IGC, which was simply

25 Iraq Center for Research and Strategic Studies, "Results of Public Opinion Poll #3."
26 Smeltz and Nachtwey, p. 14.

appointed by the Americans. Nevertheless, because it won't be truly legitimate, its powers will remain circumscribed and the U.S. presence will have to remain to ensure that the new government does not attempt to make itself permanent, fleece the country, or otherwise act illegally or against the best interests of the country. And the key to the agreement is that it creates a period of at least two years before a permanent Iraqi government is to be established—a period which CPA officials freely admit could be stretched out further if the Iraqis need it to help them establish the preconditions for real democracy. It will give Iraq the time to get democracy right, rather than rushing to self-governance—a mistake that has proven fatal to other countries trying to make the transition from autocracy to democracy.

However, the November 15 agreement is hardly without its problems. There are many challenges that the United States and the Iraqis have to overcome if this plan is to work. These problems are inherent in the current situation in Iraq, rather than indicative of deficiencies in the plan itself. Because of the many initial mistakes the United States has made, we now are confronted with a situation in which any course will be fraught with obstacles. The November 15 agreement simply has the fewest obstacles, or at least has obstacles that *can* be overcome. Briefly, the most important potential challenges include:

- The agreement is extremely complicated so as to close off loopholes and rectify problems created by earlier American mistakes—all of which is for the good. For instance, the complicated process of selecting overseers who will then choose the delegates to the Interim Assembly was designed to minimize the chance that one or another set of Iraqi institutions created by the Coalition in the early days after the fall of Baghdad—none of which are terribly representative or legitimate—can gain control over the process and pack the new Interim Assembly with its own supporters. Nevertheless, governments have a great deal of difficulty executing complicated plans, and the more complicated an undertaking the greater the risk of problems.

- The key to the entire agreement is the continued presence of the United States to guide Iraq's reconstruction—financially, militarily, and politically. However, the details of how the United States will remain have not yet been worked out. A number of potentially dangerous positions have been floated on this matter. For instance, some have suggested that the CPA should simply become the U.S. embassy, with nothing more than a U.S. ambassador to oversee the process. Our experience in Vietnam should be lesson enough that this is unworkable. Moreover, because the new Iraqi government will not be fully legitimate and should not have the full powers of a legitimate, permanent government, it is critical that the chief American be some kind of supranormal plenipotentiary, able to take the kind of steps that it would be inappropriate for an ambassador to take. At the very least, the senior U.S. representative must have the power to overturn damaging legislation by the IIA.

- Although the November 15 agreement puts the current IGC out of business (much to the dismay of some members of the IGC who fear, with good cause, that they will not be able to get elected to the new IIA, let alone the final democratic government), it relies on the IGC to formulate the Transitional Administration Law and the agreement on the continuing American presence in Iraq. This gives the IGC leverage that it no doubt will attempt to use to get the November 15 agreement modified in its favor. Already, Ahmed Chalabi and Jalal Talabani have called for the IGC to be "grandfathered" into the new interim government as an upper house—a Senate to the IIA's House of Representatives.

- The IIA itself might turn out to be as problematic as the IGC, or even more so. Although it should be more representative and legitimate than the IGC, there may well be delegates who will either want to use their position on the IIA to strengthen their

political position or line their pockets. Other delegates might believe that while they could get elected to the IIA because of its complicated machinery, they might not get elected to the permanent government in truly representative elections. This would give them a similar incentive to use their positions in the IIA to subvert the larger process. And because the IIA will have greater legitimacy and authority than the IGC, it may be much harder for the United States to prevent it from taking truly damaging actions—at the very least, it might force the United States to give up the "behind the scenes" role that it would like to assume to step in and quash a particularly dangerous initiative by the IIA. It is for this reason in particular that the senior U.S. representative must be more than an ambassador—who would have no standing to discipline a runaway IIA, if it ever came to that.

- Last, there remains the Kurdish question. The November 15 agreement is silent on the question of the Kurds. However, it provides for delegates to be drawn from Iraq's existing 18 provinces. The Kurds have strenuously rejected this, demanding instead that Iraq be divided into three simple parts—which they believe would be more advantageous to them and pave the way for a federal system that would maximize their own autonomy. So far, this has been a deal-breaker for the Sunni and Shiite Arabs.

The key to overcoming all of these problems lies in the determination of President Bush to see the agreement followed through to completion. In Baghdad, a variety of CPA officials all gave the same account of the acceptance of the November 15 agreement. Ahmed Chalabi's supporters within the Pentagon and the Office of the Vice President were fighting to have the United States simply turn things over to Chalabi, or to the current IGC—where he has gained an inordinate amount of power, and which is the forum most conducive to his gaining complete control over the government. On the weekend of November 7, Bremer was called back to Washington, and there he met in private with the President and convinced Bush that his plan (what eventually became the November 15 agreement), and not the Chalabi idea, was the right course for the United States. As a result, in the National Security Council meeting that followed, the President made crystal clear that his decision was to go with the plan devised by Bremer and the CPA, and that silenced Chalabi's supporters in Washington. In Baghdad, Chalabi opposed the agreement and tried to maneuver the IGC to oppose Bremer until Bremer let it be known that the President had already approved the plan, and therefore it was going to happen whether they wanted it to or not. Again, the President's unswerving commitment overrode all opposition.

That same determination, on the part of the CPA and its successor, but particularly on the part of President Bush, will be absolutely essential if this plan is to succeed. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the President to push the process along and prevent those seeking to subvert the agreement from doing so. If the President is willing and able to do so, the plan can succeed. If he can't or won't, the risk of failure will be high.

Understanding the Ayatollah. One last point is in order regarding high politics in Iraq today. This is the role of the Grand Ayatollah 'Ali as-Sistani and the other members of the Hawza. Earlier in the fall, the Grand Ayatollah issued a *hukm* (a ruling by the chief Islamic jurisprudent which carries the weight of law among the faithful)[27] that all members of a new Iraqi government must be chosen by direct election. Sistani restated this position just a few weeks after the November 15 agreement. Many have taken this to be

27 It is important to understand the difference between *hukms* and *fatwas:* a fatwa is the statement of a view by a *faqih*—an expert on Islamic jurisprudence—on religious or related matters derived from divine sources, while a hukm can only be issued by the *hakim* (the supreme religious leader or ruler) and it compels either the implementation or avoidance of an action. A fatwa can be issued by any faqih, but is confined in its observance to himself and his followers. It is not binding on others. However, a hukm can only be issued by the hakim and it is to be observed by other jurisprudents and their followers, and even supersedes their own fatwas. Therefore whenever there is a contradiction, a hukm has priority over a fatwa.

a sign that Sistani opposes the November 15 agreement and is determined to have direct elections that would allow Iraq's Shiite majority to take power and establish any kind of state they like.

Shiite interlocutors—some of whom speak to Sistani on a regular basis—as well as other Iraqis and Americans likewise in contact with the Grand Ayatollah all report something very different. Both the Iraqis and Americans indicate that the CPA presented the November 15 agreement to Sistani and secured his acceptance before Bremer ever presented it to the President. For 25 years, Sistani and his chief allies among Iraq's Shiite clergy have opposed the creation of an Iranian-style theocracy in Iraq. They insist that such a state is contrary to Islam and particularly Shiite Islam. They have also made clear that they are determined to see a true democracy established in Iraq. Their great fear is not of pluralism, but that the United States will simply hand over all power to a new dictator of our choosing—and specifically to Ahmed Chalabi. As best we can tell, Sistani wants Iraq to be an Islamic state but, as one high-ranking Shiite told me, he wants it to be Islamic "the way that Israel is a Jewish state." He undoubtedly recognizes that true democracy in Iraq would give the Shi'ah, if not the dominant voice, then certainly political weight equal to their demographic status, and that, as best we can tell, is his principal goal.

This is the critical background to Sistani's statements. The original hukm, according to various Shiite interlocutors, was a way for Sistani to lay down a marker to the Pentagon and Chalabi's other supporters that Washington should not even consider going that route. (Some have suggested that it was also meant for Muqtada as-Sadr and other "rogue" mullahs as a way of saying that they too would not be allowed to build an Iranian-style theocracy through their own undemocratic means.) Sistani's restatement of the hukm came the day after Chalabi and Talabani suggested publicly that the current Governing Council be made an upper house in the new interim Iraqi government. Chalabi was clearly looking for a route into the new interim government without having to win popular support, which triggered Sistani's fears that Chalabi would use his friends in Washington to be appointed to power since he could not achieve it legitimately. Among Shiite and CPA personnel, Sistani's move was seen as pushing back against the IGC and warning the Americans not to accept Chalabi's "suggestion." Even today, the CPA and knowledgeable Shi'ah believe that a compromise can be reached that will assuage the Grand Ayatollah's concerns without sinking the November 15 agreement.

Sistani and the members of the Hawza have proven to be the most important allies the United States has in Iraq. They have consistently told their followers to support the U.S.-led reconstruction effort. They have repeatedly counseled patience when their followers have complained of the inadequacies of the American efforts. They have restrained their followers from seeking revenge for the death of key Shiite leaders for fear of sparking a cycle of retributive attacks that would escalate to civil war. Sistani, Hussein as-Sadr, 'Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim, Muhammad Bahr al-'Ulum, and other Shiite leaders recognize the danger of civil war and believe that the success of the U.S.-led reconstruction is in the best interests of all Iraq, but particularly the Shi'ah.

Unfortunately, some Americans seem to have missed this. Some accuse Sistani and the Hawza of wanting to establish an Iranian-style theocratic state. Others complain that the United States "can't allow Sistani to dictate terms to us," as one American military officer put it. They see Sistani as wanting to control the political process and argue that the United States should refuse to accommodate his views as a way of demonstrating that he "won't be able to call the shots," again quoting the same officer. This is probably wrong: there is a consensus among the Shi'ah, and a view shared by many of the most expert Americans, that Sistani is not looking for such a controlling influence, and indeed that his writings on political matters indicate that he does not see himself playing such a role. It is also very dangerous. The Hawza is likely to

be an important institution in Iraqi society for many years to come, and at the moment it is all important among the Shi'ah because they have no other leaders. The Hawza's concerns are legitimate and reflect those of its followers. Accommodating them means securing the cooperation of the majority of Iraq's population. Rejecting them could drive the Hawza to finally give up on the U.S.-led process of reconstruction, and with it would go the majority of the Shi'ah, and so the country.

Resurrecting Iraq's Economy

Iraq's economy is unquestionably starting to revive, but the process is moving too slowly. Eight months after the fall of Baghdad, the Iraqi people still cannot meet their most basic needs and this contributes to the overall popular dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs.

Provision of electricity has improved with time. Today, most of Iraq gets anywhere from 18–22 hours of power each day. For Baghdad, this is a decline from the round-the-clock power that it received under Saddam. For the rest of the country, however, it is an enormous improvement. (Saddam had diverted Iraq's limited power to serve Baghdad's needs first, leaving whatever was left for the rest of the country.) Thanks to U.S. efforts to expand the power grid, electricity is now available in parts of Iraq that previously had none. On the other hand, the power grid is extremely fragile and minor problems can cause major disruptions. While I was in Baghdad, the loss of two towers that had been left unprotected for a brief while and so were stripped by looters caused a blackout in the capital and a fair chunk of the rest of the country for over 24 hours.

Likewise, the potable water situation is also getting better. Again, parts of Iraq that previously had none now do, thanks to American and Iraqi efforts to build sewers and pipelines and repair long-damaged infrastructure. On the other hand, large parts of Iraq are still without clean water. The Iraqi Minister of Water Resources told me that at least 40 percent of southern Iraq still did not have potable water in late November, and on December 1, the Pentagon estimated that 50 percent of Iraqis still did not have access to clean water.[28]

Although Iraq has the second-largest proven oil reserves in the world, oil products are another problem area. In particular, there have been severe shortfalls in the production of gasoline and kerosene, with production levels in November barely topping 50 percent of demand.[29] This problem is especially vexing for Iraqis since Saddam was always very careful to ensure that Iraqis had what they needed for driving, cooking, and heating their homes (it gets quite cold in Iraq during the winter). One of the most important problems is that the oil pipelines and pumping stations are constantly being attacked or simply looted.

The difficulties in providing these basic services have a wide range of causes, but they all have some things in common. They are being crippled by looting, sabotage, and other criminal behavior. Pipelines are shot or blown up. Cables are cut. Equipment is stolen the moment it is left unguarded. In addition, all of these systems are fragile thanks to some 30 years of neglect. Iraq's infrastructure was never very good and was badly neglected during Saddam's reign, in part because of twelve years of sanctions, but hardly because of them alone. Indeed, construction in Iraq is uniformly shoddy. Hospitals, factories, power stations, oil refineries—even Saddam's palaces—were very poorly constructed by people who either did not know or did not care how to do things right.

This ubiquitous shoddiness is an issue that will have to be addressed sooner rather than later and will be very costly when it is. A good example of the problem is the famous Sinjar Cement Factory in northern Iraq. As *The Washington Post* reported, the

28 Department of Defense, "Draft Working Papers: Iraq Status," unclassified version released by DoD, December 1, 2003, p. 11.
29 Department of Defense, "Draft Working Papers: Iraq Status," pp. 6–7.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers suggested that the plant be rebuilt completely by American contractors with an estimated price tag of $23 million. Instead, the U.S. 101st Airborne Division contributed $10,000 from divisional funds and found $240,000 in the factory's bank accounts, which was then used to get the factory working again. On the one hand, this points to the costs involved when big U.S. contractors get involved, and the story has mostly played as a tale of gold-plating and corporate greed. But this obscures the heart of the matter; the 101st and the Iraqis put the factory back together with the proverbial "bailing wire and chewing gum." They cannibalized parts, improvised solutions, devised work-arounds, and found substitutes to get the plant back on line. As a result, it is up and running and producing about 1,500 tons of cement each day. This is all to the good, but it does not get to the heart of the problem: the Sinjar Cement Factory is only producing at roughly half its actual capacity, and because it was brought back on line through cannibalization, work-arounds, and substitutes, it is unlikely to be able to keep producing even at 50 percent capacity for very long.[30] Unless it is thoroughly overhauled, as the Corps of Engineers originally proposed at some point in the near future (although perhaps not quite for $23 million), it is going to fall apart all over again.

Unemployment is the most observable economic problem in Iraq. No one knows exactly how many Iraqis are unemployed, but the numbers are very high. Private estimates put the figures at 60 to 70 percent.[31] Dissolving the military and the security services threw possibly as many as 1 million young men onto the streets with no real skills except how to use a gun or a shovel. Far worse is the fact that so many factories are either idle or working at only partial capacity. As with the Sinjar Cement Factory, part of the problem is the decrepit physical plant, but there are other obstacles as well. The delivery of supplies—the inputs needed for manufacturing—leaves much to be desired. The elimination of the central controlling bodies in Baghdad (such as they were) has dislocated and disorganized the economy. Moreover, much that is sent does not arrive because it is stolen or destroyed or delayed along the way. Kevin Whitelaw of *U.S. News and World Report* described the owners of an Iraqi resin factory who tried to restart production only to have the factory robbed—convincing them not to sink additional funds into the enterprise until the crime situation improves.[32] Consequently, although Iraq is desperate for cement to meet its reconstruction needs and the price of cement has increased fourfold, only 10 of Iraq's 14 cement plants are functioning and none at better than about 50 percent capacity.[33] American officials hope that the disbursement of the roughly $18 billion in economic assistance approved by the U.S. Congress will create as many as 500,000 new jobs—which would be a very good start, but will still fall far short of the millions Iraq needs.

Agriculture is doing better, but there is still work to be done here as well. There is no shortage of food and many *suqs* can be quite busy. What's more, because the United States abolished all taxes, there has been a tremendous influx of goods from outside of Iraq and remarkably low inflation. Nevertheless, because of Iraq's rationing system, and the tight control exercised by Baghdad, most Iraqi farmers were largely dependent on Saddam's ministries for permission and guidance on their activities. For example, markets required permission from the state. With the regime gone, the farmers don't know what to do—and they tend to ask the local American military commander for permission for basic agricultural and business activities that they previously would have directed to Baghdad. Although they are learning that they now can and must make these decisions for themselves, there is a steep learning curve involved. What's more, the farmers too must worry about the problems of crime on Iraq's

30 Ariana Eunjung Cha, "Success, Traced in Cement," *The Washington Post,* November 10, 2003, p. A1.
31 Kevin Whitelaw, "Humpty Dumpty Time," *U.S. News and World Report,* December 8, 2003, p. 26.
32 Whitelaw, p. 24.
33 Cha, p. A1.

roads, which can affect their ability to procure supplies and deliver their produce.

All of these problems again underscore the importance of providing basic security to the reconstruction of Iraq. The lawlessness results in power failures, water problems, unemployment, underemployment, and creates massive snarls and other inefficiencies throughout the Iraqi economic system—a system that was a notoriously inefficient command economy to begin with. Sorting out these problems by themselves will be hard enough. Trying to do so in a climate where people are frightened and unable to make calculations because of the level of crime is probably impossible.

Unfortunately, the one panacea offered by some in the Bush Administration—privatization of Iraq's horribly inefficient state-run enterprises—has as many liabilities as it does benefits. There is no question that Iraq's state-run enterprises are often disastrous and are part of the reason that Iraq's economy is so unproductive. There is also no question that eventual privatization of much of Iraqi industry would be highly beneficial, but it would be a huge mistake to rush this process. Nationalization of industry has a long history in Iraq that predates either Saddam or the Ba'th rise to power; it would be difficult to reverse this process overnight. The IGC lacks the legitimacy to begin auctioning off what are currently public assets, and it is unlikely that even the new IIA will have the proper legitimacy. Consequently, real privatization should wait, for political reasons, until a permanent Iraqi government has taken power some time in 2006. Worse still, for the moment there are few in Iraq who could afford to buy Iraq's dilapidated state factories and transform them into profitable ventures, except for the beneficiaries of the old regime. It would be a tragic irony if the United States toppled Saddam's parasitic regime only to hand Iraq's manufacturing base right back to them. Beyond that, a principal problem with many Iraqi industries is, believe it or not, that they have too many unnecessary employees (many of whom never even bother to show up for work). Privatization would likely mean laying off many of these people, thereby adding to Iraq's already dangerous unemployment problems. Until new jobs are being created by other programs and the revitalization of other aspects of Iraq's economy—and massive worker retraining programs have been put in place—any large-scale move toward privatization would likely make Iraq's economic and political problems worse, not better.[34] For this reason, the CPA's decision to delay and scale back many of its original plans for privatization is to be applauded.[35]

A better approach than pure privatization would be to allow the central government to retain control over most utilities and major industrial concerns (including Iraq's oil industry) for the short run but encourage private firms to compete with the state-run enterprises through various incentive programs. In particular, foreign donors (and eventually, Iraq's oil revenues) should provide a pool of capital available for low-interest loans to private entrepreneurs looking to create new businesses in Iraq. This, coupled with an improved security situation, could quickly produce a booming new private sector. After all, the explosion of the black market during the twelve years of sanctions demonstrated that Iraqis retain a keen entrepreneurial spirit. If Iraq's oil production returns to levels that will allow large-scale reinvestment in Iraq (i.e., if Iraq's debts are forgiven, reparations are annulled, and reconstruction continues to be underwritten with foreign aid) hiring foreign firms to start large-scale job retraining programs would also be a considerable help.

Understanding the Challenge

From the distance of the United States it is hard to understand in full the transformation that must take place for Iraq to become a stable, prosperous,

34 For concurring views, see Mohammad Hussain Al-Najafi, "Privatization of the Public Sector in Iraq," The Iraq Foundation, September 4, 2003, available online at <http://www.iraqfoundation.org/news/2003/isept/4_sector.html>.

35 See Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "Attacks Force Retreat from Wide-Ranging Plans for Iraq," *The Washington Post,* December 28, 2003, p. A1; Sue Pleming, "U.S. Says Mass Iraqi Privatization Still Way Off," Reuters, December 10, 2003.

functional, pluralist, new state. By the same token, the efforts that Iraqis are making to tackle these very challenges are too little reported. In some ways, it is the most important part of the story.

Latif Rashid is currently the Iraqi Minister of Water Resources. He is a long-time member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, one of the two main Kurdish groups. An intelligent, quiet, and gentle man, he never wanted to be minister of anything. Nevertheless, he was pressed into service and has proven to be an outstanding minister.

The first thing that Latif recounted was that unbeknownst to him, every Iraqi ministry under Saddam Hussein had a prison in its basement. In the Ministry of Water Resources, there were cages, torture rooms, and other macabre facilities. "So this is where I have to start," Latif said. On the first day that he came to work, the staff of the ministry feared him although they had never met him and clearly knew nothing about him. They would not look him in the eye. He would smile at people, say, "Good morning," and try to shake their hands, and they would recoil in terror. Kanaan Makiya's immortal sobriquet the "Republic of Fear," applied not only to Iraq as a whole under Saddam Hussein, but to every institution within it. Ministry staff were terrified of the minister—terrified that they would end up in a cage in the basement prison if they displeased him in some way.

The entire ministry was run in completely top-down fashion. This is common throughout the Arab world, but in Saddam's Iraq it was reinforced by the fear of the repercussions that could follow if anyone stepped out of line. Not shame, but torture awaited those who took any action that was not specifically ordered by the minister himself. Latif told me that on his first day at work he held a meeting with key personnel from around the country to give him an assessment of the overall situation (it was not good: 60 percent of the ministry's equipment, from pencils to massive dredgers, had been looted, and only about 15–20 percent of the country had access to clean water). His deputy minister showed the men in and then went to leave. Latif called him back, saying, "Where are you going? I want you to join us, to hear this, and help me understand it." Latif said that his deputy was shocked: he had worked in the ministry for 23 years and had never been asked to sit in on a meeting with his boss.

Other problems abounded. Although his staff slowly became accustomed to his smiling and even shook his hand now, they continued to work and think in the old fashion. Iraq's civil service system was purely seniority-based. Promotion was based entirely on time served—or, of course, on political connections, which is why so many bright, ambitious young Iraqis joined the Ba'th party. As a result, Latif's ministry did not work efficiently, and often could be dysfunctional. He believed the problem was with the system, not the people. He insisted that after a thorough review of personnel matters, he was confident that 90 percent of the people were good, smart, honest civil servants, "but they had to learn to work and think in new ways." One of his priorities was to create a merit-based promotion system, but he freely admitted that this would be a herculean labor, "along with all of my other priorities!"

Another problem Latif had inherited was Saddam's abuse of Iraq's resources for his own goals. Latif and his staff explained that for roughly the last 15 years, decision-making on water resource issues had been dictated almost entirely by Saddam's military or hedonistic considerations alone. Members of the ministry staff bemoaned the draining of Iraq's southern swamps as unnecessary and harmful—but Saddam had demanded it to root out the Shiite insurgents who had fled there after the failed 1991 uprising. In the late 1980s, Iraqi hydrologists had determined that Iraq needed a new dam on the Little Zab River to control its flow and provide greater irrigation for farmland in northern Iraq. However, after Saddam got done with the proposal, the dam was redirected to the Tigris just north of Tikrit so that it would create an artificial lake on which Saddam could build yet another palace. Of course, this dam had absolutely no impact on agriculture in northern Iraq and the Water Ministry is

again studying the question of a dam on the Little Zab. They have also created a project with several U.S. and international NGOs to try to figure out if they can restore the southern marshlands.

Neither Latif nor his staff believe the challenges they face are insurmountable. Quite the contrary. They remain very optimistic. They have their complaints. Security, as always, is at the top of their list: the women in the ministry hate the fact that they don't feel that they can be out at night and that their daughters have to be driven everywhere lest they be kidnapped. The ministry staff also pointed out, on the professional side, that progress in restoring and then improving Iraq's water services is entirely dependent on getting crime under control so that everything does not have to be guarded 24 hours a day so that it won't be stripped clean by looters, and so that people and goods can move freely along the roads and rail lines. However, what every one of them agreed on was that while they have a lot of work to do, they are confident that if given the support they need by the United States and the international community, they can make Iraq into "a very nice, very good country."

Communications, Or the Lack Thereof

Even at the Ministry of Water Resources the fog of postwar hangs thickly. I was there shortly after Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld announced plans to scale back the American troop presence from 130,000 to 100,000, and even the relatively well-connected personnel at the ministry, who have considerable contact with Americans, were desperate to know if this meant that the United States was abandoning them. Unfortunately, this is too often the rule rather than the exception in postwar Iraq. The Iraqis simply do not know what is going on. The CPA does not provide enough information to the Iraqis, nor does it provide information in forms that they can receive and understand, and an out-of-control rumor mill fills the vacuum.

The problem is one of both capabilities and intentions. After eight months, the CPA still does not have an effective communication system to allow it to convey information to the entire population. The United States did set up a television network, initially called the Iraqi Media Network (IMN), but it proved to be a disaster. I asked roughly a dozen different people—Iraqis and Americans—what the problem was with the station and got a dozen different answers. At least one problem with it was that too much of the "news" consisted of Americans or Iraqis reading bland press releases from the CPA's public affairs shop. Although everyone has a different explanation why, the bottom line is that no one watched IMN. In recognition of this problem—and to its great credit—the CPA has overhauled the station and recreated it as "al-'Iraqiyyah." So far, the jury is out on al-'Iraqiyyah but even if it proves more popular than IMN it is still unlikely to solve the problem entirely: al-'Iraqiyyah is a broadcast network and most Iraqis cannot pick up its signal. They instead rely on satellite dishes, where the venomous and distorted news from al-Jazeerah and al-'Arabiyyah holds the field by forfeit.

On top of that, too few Americans and other Coalition personnel are out interacting with the Iraqis on a daily basis, where they can gather information about what the Iraqis are saying, doing, and thinking—and what their hopes and concerns are. There are simply too few Coalition personnel in the country. CPA Administrator Bremer has roughly 1,300 people working for him in Baghdad and that is just not enough. The CPA is so short-staffed that it had to abandon its initial plans for a fully staffed web of provincial and local CPAs and makes do with one or two people in each of Iraq's major cities (and generally nothing in Iraq's towns, let alone its villages). Because of the fear of crime and insurgent attack, the overwhelming majority of Coalition personnel who are assigned to the CPA staff in Baghdad tend to stay closely confined to the Green Zone. They are "prisoners of the palace" and many will say very bluntly that they do not have enough contact with Iraqis to be able to help the course of reconstruction the way they know it needs to be done.

The inadequacy of the Coalition's Arabic-speaking presence in Iraq is also part of this problem. Both the military forces and civilian bureaucracies are woefully

short of Arabic speakers. This is a constant complaint from CPA officials, U.S. military officers, and the Iraqis themselves. This deficiency means that it is very difficult for the Americans to gather information from the Iraqis and to convey information to them. It is why projects like the new Iraqi Civil Defense Corps, in which locally recruited Iraqis will operate alongside American military personnel, are so important. Ideally, mixed U.S and Iraqi units should patrol on foot in the streets of Iraq's cities, with the Iraqis providing the interpreting skills and local knowledge and the Americans reassuring the Iraqi civilians that they will not be brutalized by the Iraqi security personnel.

Nevertheless, as crippling as the limits on capabilities are, the CPA is also guilty of not paying enough attention to the need to explain events to the Iraqis. Members of the CPA, including officials charged with public relations responsibilities, readily admitted this and complained of the difficulty they had in getting their superiors to make communicating American actions and plans to the Iraqis a priority. A comparison is useful here to illustrate the point. During the fall of 2003, a power failure blacked out much of the northeastern United States. Immediately, residents of the affected area were on the phone to their local power company, asking when service would be restored. In responding to these calls, the representatives of Con Edison and the other power companies explained why the power was down, what they were doing to fix it, and when they expected to have service restored. Many northeasterners did not like the answers they got, but at least they had an answer. They felt reassured that someone was working on the problem and they were able to plan for the period without power. When I was in Baghdad, there was a blackout lasting over 24 hours. As noted above, because of the improvement in electricity generation, this was exceptional. CPA knew what the problem was: two towers had been left unguarded and stripped by looters, causing much of the power grid to fail. However, unlike Con Edison, the CPA said nothing. Iraqis were left both literally and figuratively in the dark.

This anecdote illustrates what tends to be the norm in Iraq. The CPA makes decisions and takes actions, while keeping the Iraqis abreast of these developments is too often an afterthought. One Iraqi told me, "I know that my wife and daughters can't go outside tonight because the streets are unsafe, but what I don't know is whether they will be able to go outside in two weeks, or two months, or when." He went on to say that if the CPA could just give him some sense of when they expected to have the security problems mitigated, he might not like the answer—six months was the time frame he used—but at least he could plan accordingly. He suggested that his brothers and sons and nephews could make plans for running errands and making sure that their various homes were protected. But they all just wanted to know what to expect from the future and have some sense that their unhappiness would end at some point.

The U.S. authorities do not spend enough time and effort speaking to the Iraqi people, and speaking in a language they can understand (again, both literally and figuratively). The fact that the CPA provides so little information makes Iraqis anxious and fearful, but it also makes them angry and resentful. It makes the United States look like an arbitrary and aloof imperial power, with little regard for its colonial subjects. To Iraqis, it is humiliating because it makes them believe that the United States does not even respect them enough to tell them what we are doing with their lives and their country. We simply do it, and they find out about it however they can after the fact.[36]

36 The fact that virtually every American military or civilian command facility is housed in one of Saddam's former palaces also does not help the situation. To many Iraqis, we have simply replaced Saddam's regime: the country is run by a small group of heavily armed people, holed up in palaces, mostly out of touch with the populace and little concerned about providing them with information about the political course they plan to take. One could just about put up banners across the palaces saying "Under New Management," and it would accurately reflect the image conveyed to many Iraqis. The sooner the Coalition forces get out of the palaces, the better.

In addition to breeding fear and resentment, the CPA's poor communications record also feeds the Iraqi rumor mill, which needs little encouragement. Again, to a certain extent, this is a problem across the Middle East, where conspiracy theories, gossip, and absurd rumors tend to be the coin of the realm. However, it is probably worse in Iraq than anywhere else. For 30-plus years, the Iraqi people lived in an information vacuum. Saddam's regime told them only what he wanted them to hear. The people understood this and so tended to discount everything that he said, but since they did not have alternative sources of good information, rumors, gossip, and conspiracy theories were the only things they had to fill the gap. What's more, because there were no objective sources of information against which to measure the rumors and conspiracy theories, no one did so. Consequently, over time, these forms of misinformation became just as legitimate to many Iraqis as the official organs of information. Although Saddam's system is gone, the non-communicativeness of the CPA has allowed the old ways to continue and even flourish. Indeed, Saddam's misinformation has been replaced by al-Jazeerah and al-'Arabiyyah, which in some ways are equally distorted, but because they come from outside Iraq are seen as having a veneer of greater legitimacy.

This is all very damaging to the reconstruction effort. There is no question that crime is a problem throughout Iraq, but in some places it is clearly worse than others, and across the country it may not be quite as bad as the Iraqis seem to believe. Real stories of rapes, kidnappings, car-jackings, robberies, burglaries, murders, etc., are likely being magnified by the rumor mills to the point where many Iraqis are terrified to go out at night even though they may live in a safe area. Similarly, the Iraqis widely believe that Halliburton, Bechtel, and other big American contractors are bringing in tens of thousands of foreign laborers from South and Southeast Asia to handle construction and other menial labor. I was unable to confirm these numbers and I suspect that they are exaggerated (although in truth, because there is such a huge unemployment problem, the CPA should make it extremely hard to import unskilled workers).[37] But every Iraqi believes them, and is angry at the contractors and the CPA as a result.

There are also potential political effects. Since Saddam never told the Iraqi people about the demographic realities of Iraq (to avoid admitting that the Sunni Arab population from which he derived his support was only a smallish minority), Iraqis believe all kinds of nonsense about the make up of their own society. I had well-educated, secular Shi'ah insist that the Shi'ah made up 90–95 percent of Iraq's population. I had equally well-educated and secular Sunni Arabs assert that the Shi'ah were less than 50 percent of Iraq's population—and one upper-middle-class Sunni stated categorically that the CPA itself had just released figures showing that the Shi'ah represented only 47 percent of the population.[38]

Communications Within the Coalition Chain of Command. The situation is sometimes no better when it comes to Coalition personnel talking to one another. The military chain of command continues to function, passing orders down to those at the tip of the spear, but on the civilian side, there is often very little communication at all. American and Coalition personnel in the field frequently complain that Baghdad is either uninterested in what is going on in the field or out of touch with the realities beyond the Green Zone. They complain that CPA personnel do not visit the field enough (or at all), they do not solicit information, and they do not seem to digest it when it is reported. Far from a

37 One American contractor confirmed that South Asians had been brought in to handle at least some jobs with security implications. For example, all of the workers in the various cafeterias and mess halls being run by contractors for the U.S. military—who were involved in food preparation—were South Asians to eliminate the risk that Iraqi insurgents could infiltrate the staffs and tamper with the food being served.

38 Of course, no one knows the exact numbers because Iraq's census data under Saddam was always deeply suspect. However, the best estimate is that Shiite Arabs comprise 60–65 percent of Iraq's population, Sunni Kurds about 15–20 percent, and Sunni Arabs about 15–18 percent. Source: CIA World Factbook 2003, available online at <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/iz.html>.

"he said, she said" situation, CPA officials readily acknowledged the truth of these complaints in private conversations. Again, they attribute these problems to a combination of too much work and too few people, security precautions that make it onerous to travel outside the Green Zone, and a mindset among some senior CPA officials that in Baghdad they had a much better understanding of the big picture than those with only a "worm's eye view" in the field.

As noted above, the CPA is so short-handed that it has been unable to fill out the original organization that had been planned to include a network of provincial and local offices that would have facilitated both the gathering and the transmission of information between Baghdad and the rest of the country. This alone does account for at least some large part of the problem. However, for every official at the CPA in Baghdad who understood that they lived in a "bubble" and did not have good information regarding conditions outside the Green Zone, there were others who seemed oblivious to the problem.

Moreover, even on the military side of things, the situation could use improvement. This is particularly the case with the military's civil affairs personnel. They are performing what is arguably the most important job in all of Iraq. They are the ones going out into the villages and neighborhoods and trying to help the Iraqis rebuild their economy and build a wholly new system of government. They are the most egregiously short-staffed of all. The United States could use hundreds—if not thousands—more civil affairs personnel. These men and women have been sent out into the field with virtually no instructions or direction. They were simply told to go and help the Iraqis get their country running again. In their own words, they are making it up as they go along. Because they are mostly intelligent, honest people, they have been making great progress (where they are present), but they readily admit that it came through a difficult process of trial and error.

Their greatest complaint is that there seems to be no one monitoring their operations, directing resources and experience, collecting their reporting, and turning it into guidance for future operations. One civil affairs officer told me flat out, "I would love it if someone said to me, 'Hey, they tried this down at Amarah and it worked pretty good, so why don't you guys try it as well. Or, some other guys tried this at Nasiriyah and it was a [disaster], so don't anybody else try it.'" After eight months, there is a compelling need for those higher in the military chain of command to gather lessons learned and use them to better direct ongoing missions.

The Stakes

There is certainly much room for argument over how well the United States is handling Iraq and what we should be doing differently. However, on one aspect of U.S. policy toward Iraq there is a compelling case: the United States must stay in Iraq and see the job through to completion. The United States does not need to remain heavily engaged in Iraq until it has become the Arab equivalent of Germany, but we must remain until Iraq has a functional government that is representative and legitimate, and governs under the rule of law. We must remain until Iraq's economy is once again providing basic services, furnishing adequate levels of employment, generating revenue, attracting foreign investment, and harnessing its oil wealth to be the engine of development for the entire country. And most important of all, the United States must stay until Iraq is once again safe and secure, so that people can resume their lives without fear, engage in commerce, go to their jobs, participate in politics, and live without the threat of violence—both random and politically motivated.

If the United States withdraws prematurely from Iraq, it is highly likely that the result will be chaos and civil war. Iraq will become a failed state. The signs are there for all to see. The militias will coalesce very quickly. Most are already there in some nascent form, and they will grab as much real estate as they can. But none of the fiefdoms they carve out will be large enough to be economically or politically viable by themselves. It is

unlikely, for example, that all of southern Iraq would unite under a common Shiite banner. Far more likely would be the fragmentation of the south among a variety of different petty warlords and religious figures—the Da'wa grabbing some territory, Muqtada as-Sadr other chunks, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq grabbing others, and the Hawza (if it could remain cohesive) taking still others. Other militias would emerge that no one has ever heard of today. What's more, in Iraq the ethnic and religious populations are too intermingled, and there is too much fear, too many blood feuds, too many scores to settle, too many high-value economic sites (particularly the oil fields), and too stark a difference between good land and poor land for the militias to be able to live in peace with one another. The militias would fall to fighting quickly—if only in their scramble to gain the best territory and defend themselves against preemptive attack by their enemies—and the result would be a catastrophe.[39]

After the experience of the last thirty years we now know quite a bit about failed states—enough to know that allowing Iraq to become one would be disastrous. The chaos bred by a failed state can never be successfully contained. Iraqi refugees would flow out of the country and into neighboring states. Chaos in Iraq would breed extremists and terrorists who would not limit their targets only to those within Iraq's nominal borders. Groups within Iraq would call on co-religionists, co-ethnicists, tribesmen, and fellow political travelers across the borders for aid. Petty warlords would seek help from neighboring powers, and the neighbors themselves would inevitably begin to intervene in Iraq's civil strife if only in the vain hope of preventing it from spilling over into their territory.

The problem with failed states is not only the misery and suffering they inflict on the people of the country itself, but how they destabilize their entire region. Lebanon fomented instability in Israel and Syria. Lebanon also bred some of the worst terrorist groups around—groups like Hizballah, which haunt the region to this day. Afghanistan helped create the dangerously volatile situation in Pakistan, created internal unrest in eastern Iran, and has spawned problems for many of the Central Asian states. Afghanistan also became the breeding ground for al-Qa'eda. The chaos in Congo has helped spread instability throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa. The failure of Yugoslavia (and then of Bosnia) threatened to destabilize the entire Balkans, prompting the intervention of NATO, which had the size and resources to stabilize the situation.

The same would likely hold true for Iraq and its impact on the countries of the Persian Gulf. They would be inundated by refugees and armed groups seeking sanctuary and assistance. They would be sucked in by tribal rivalries, ethnic and religious ties, and fear that a failure to act would cause the chaos to spread across their borders. They would likely become battlegrounds for rival Iraqi militias and breeding grounds for Islamic fundamentalists and terrorists.

And these are countries that the United States cares about deeply. Saudi Arabia is frail enough as it is. Many analysts fear that even on its own, the Saudi state might not last another ten years. Add to that the tremendously destabilizing influence of civil war in Iraq next door, and no one should be sanguine about Saudi prospects. Kuwait is another major oil producer, and if chaos consumed Iraq and Saudi Arabia, it would be hard for tiny Kuwait to remain inviolate. The loss of oil production as a result of chaos or revolution in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait would cripple the international oil market with unimaginable consequences for the global economy. Beyond them, Jordan, Turkey, Iran, and Syria are all also economically and politically fragile and all would suffer from the political, military, and economic spillover of a failed state in Iraq.

39 For an excellent study of this phenomenon in ethnically intermingled populations like Iraq, see Barry R. Posen, "The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict," in Michael Brown, ed., *Ethnic Conflict and International Security* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

Nor are these simply abstract warnings. They are being played out on the ground even today. Already the Iranians, Syrians, Turks, and Saudis have begun to stake out their turf and potential proxies in the event that Iraq falls apart. The Iranians, Saudis, and Turks have all (generally) been urging their supporters to cooperate with the U.S.-led occupation, recognizing that chaos in Iraq would be the worst possible outcome for them, but behind the scenes they all appear to be making plans for the possibility that reconstruction fails and they are forced to provide for their own security. Throughout the region, officials and other elites are terrified that the United States will fail or abandon Iraq and the country will slip into Lebanon-like strife. All of them are convinced that it will create massive problems for them. Even Israeli officials are beginning to plan for the possibility of such a development, although they recognize that they will be powerless to control the evils that will arise for them if Iraq collapses.

Given the history of failed states, we simply cannot allow Iraq to slip into chaos and civil war. The results would likely be catastrophic for the entire region—a region that is vital to the interests of the United States and the economic health of the entire world.

If the United States remains in Iraq there is no guarantee that everything will work out well, but we must recognize that there is simply no "exit strategy." U.S. withdrawal would lead quickly and inevitably to the worst-case outcome for us, the Iraqis, and the entire world. If we do remain engaged in Iraq for the next five years or more, the worst-case scenario is still possible, but the risk is much lower. Even if we continue to pursue less than optimal policies in Iraq, it seems more likely that we will end up with the Bosnia of today (a country not capable of surviving on its own but not torn apart by violence), than the Lebanon of the 1970s and '80s. And it is also worth remembering all of the positives in Iraq today. They suggest that if we remain engaged while adjusting our policies and strategies, there is good reason to believe that a stable, prosperous, and pluralist Iraq can eventually be achieved. That too is not guaranteed, but it can only be achieved if we stay in Iraq and see this campaign through to completion.

The Saban Center for Middle East Policy

The Saban Center for Middle East Policy was established on May 13th, 2002 with an inaugural address by His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan. The establishment of the Saban Center reflects the Brookings Institution's commitment to expand dramatically its research and analysis of Middle East policy issues at a time when the region has come to dominate the U.S. foreign policy agenda.

The Saban Center's purpose is to provide Washington policymakers with balanced, objective, in-depth, and timely research and policy analysis from experienced and knowledgeable people who can bring fresh perspectives to bear on the critical problems of the Middle East. The Center upholds the Brookings tradition of being open to a broad range of views. Its central objective is to advance understanding of developments in the Middle East through policy-relevant scholarship and debate.

The Center's establishment has been made possible by a generous founding grant from Mr. Haim Saban of Los Angeles. Ambassador Martin S. Indyk, Senior Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies, is the Director of the Saban Center. Dr. Kenneth M. Pollack is the Center's Director of Research. Joining Ambassador Indyk and Dr. Pollack in the work of the Center is a core group of Middle East experts, who conduct original research and develop innovative programs to promote a better understanding of the policy choices facing American decision makers in the Middle East. They include Dr. Tamara Wittes, a specialist on political reform in the Arab world; Professor Shibley Telhami, who holds the Sadat Chair at the University of Maryland; Professor Shaul Bakhash, an expert on Iranian politics from George Mason University; Professor Daniel Byman from Georgetown University, a Middle East terrorism expert; Dr. Flynt Leverett, a former senior CIA analyst and Senior Director at the National Security Council who is a specialist on Syria and Lebanon; and Dr. Philip Gordon, a Senior Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies at Brookings who specializes in Europe's and Turkey's relations with the Middle East. The Center is located in the Foreign Policy Studies Program at Brookings, led by Vice President and Director James B. Steinberg.

The Saban Center is undertaking original research in six areas: the implications of regime change in Iraq, including postwar nation-building and Gulf security; the dynamics of the Iranian reformation; mechanisms and requirements for fulfilling a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; policy for Phase III of the war on terror, including the Syrian challenge; and political change in the Arab world.

The Center also houses the ongoing *Brookings Project on U.S. Policy Towards the Islamic World,* with National Security Fellow Dr. Peter W. Singer as the project's Director. This project, established in the wake of the September 11 terror attacks, focuses on analyzing the problems that afflict the relationship between the United States and the Islamic world with the objective of developing effective policy responses. It includes a task force of experts that meets regularly, an annual dialogue between American and Muslim intellectuals, a visiting Fellows program for experts from the Islamic world, and a monograph series.

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