

# Revisions in Need of Revising: What Went Wrong in the Iraq War

David C. Hendrickson and Robert W. Tucker

Much has gone wrong in the American war against Iraq. Two years after the American invasion, the contrast between what American officials expected would occur and what in fact did occur is stark. A telling symbol of that contrast was the deployment of 150,000 US troops in the country on the eve of the 30 January 2005 elections. Before the war, by contrast, Pentagon planners had assumed that US forces might be reduced to as little as 35,000 by the autumn of 2003. Before the war, US military officials did not take seriously prospect that a raging insurgency might face the US occupiers and had assumed that widespread revulsion among Iraqis against Saddam Hussein's rule would translate quickly and effectively into support for a temporary American occupation. In the event, Iraqi opinion –outside the Kurdish community – proved far more hostile to the US occupiers than had been foreseen, such that overwhelming majorities in the Sunni community and a substantial portion of the majority Shia community deemed the United States an 'occupying' rather than a 'liberating' power. Before the war, administration officials minimised the financial costs of the enterprise, emphasising that Iraq's oil reserves would enable the Iraqis to pay the lion's share of the costs of reconstruction. In the event, the costs of the Iraq occupation have proven to be far greater than had been predicted, with war costs amounting to \$200 billion by the end of 2004 and much more on the way.<sup>1</sup> Even with such large expenditures, precious little reconstruction had actually taken place in Iraq. Only \$1–2bn of the \$18bn authorised for reconstruction by Congress in late 2003 had been expended a year later, and Iraqis had yet to see much tangible improvement in employment or quality of life after a year and a half of occupation. One study, by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington DC, argued that in every area necessary for a successful reconstruction of Iraq there had been not only lack of progress but an actual dete-

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rioration of conditions on the ground.<sup>2</sup> The best case, according to a Chatham House study in autumn 2004, was that a new Iraqi government, buttressed by US military power and given a boost by elections in early 2005, would hang on in the face of a continuing insurgency. The worst case was that Iraq was headed towards a breakup of the country and protracted civil war.<sup>3</sup>

The dramatic contrast between the administration's hopes and the reality it confronted has sparked a wide-ranging debate over 'what went wrong'. According to a legion of critics, the planners of the Bush administration made a series of critical mistakes that have turned what might have been a successful war and occupation into a fiasco. The most common critique takes roughly the following form: though the war plan to topple Saddam was brilliant, planning for the peace was woefully insufficient.<sup>4</sup> The United States did not have sufficient troops to restore order in Iraq after the US invasion and was thus incapable of stopping the widespread looting that occurred in the immediate aftermath of the fall of Baghdad. Though the US State Department had made a comprehensive study of the problems of occupying Iraq, its conclusions were ignored by Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, to the extent that the director of the State Department study on the Future of Iraq, Thomas Warrick, was prevented by the administration from joining Jay Garner's team.<sup>5</sup> The administration erred, according to the critics, in disbanding the Iraqi army, which might have played a valuable role in restoring security to the country, and it erred further in its harsh decrees proscribing members of the Ba'ath Party from participation in Iraq's public life – a decision, like that which disbanded the army, needlessly antagonising the Sunnis and pushing many of them into the insurgency. The Bush administration also needlessly antagonised the international community – including both the United Nations and its European allies – and made it much more difficult to obtain help for the occupation and reconstruction of the country. It was too slow in making funds available for reconstruction and created a labyrinthine bureaucracy for the awarding of contracts.

These views are representative of the opinions of left-leaning writers and critics and many of them were featured prominently in John Kerry's presidential campaign in 2004. Right-leaning authors have joined in some of this criticism – especially the argument that the United States invaded with too few forces – but their emphasis has often differed. Some argue, for instance, that the many US troubles stemmed from the fact that the war was conducted in too humane a fashion, such that the enemy was never really defeated. Others argue that the original Pentagon plan for the war called for a rapid transfer of sovereignty to an appointed Iraqi government, followed by elections, and that this plan, which would have stood a much better chance of providing Iraqis with a sense of 'ownership' over their own

society, was mistakenly shelved and the decision made to install a Coalition Provisional Authority with a very slow timetable for the writing of a constitution and the holding of elections.<sup>6</sup>

These criticisms do not exhaust the litany of errors the Bush administration is said to have committed in the course of the Iraq war, but they are representative of a broad swath of the criticism that had developed as of late 2004. Underlying them is the conviction – sometimes explicitly voiced, at other times merely implicit – that the administration ‘squandered an unprecedented opportunity’.<sup>7</sup> Had things been done differently, it is often assumed, the United States would have faced a far more pleasant prospect than it did two years after the initial invasion. This criticism has arisen most often from those who supported the invasion and were distressed by how badly the occupation fared, but even critics of the war have often left, if only by implication, the same impression. The problem with US policy in Iraq, in short, lay not in the end chosen but in the means embraced, and had those means been different the outcome would be different as well.

These revisions, we shall be arguing, are themselves in need of revising. Though the critics on both the left and the right have made a number of telling points against the conduct of the war and the occupation, it is not so clear that different choices on the part of civilian or military officials would have led to a significantly improved outcome. We can see the deleterious consequences flowing from certain of the administration’s decisions, but we can only speculate about what consequences might have followed had a different route been taken. Nevertheless, there are strong reasons for believing that the most serious problems facing Iraq and its American occupiers – ‘endemic violence, a shattered state, a nonfunctioning economy, and a decimated society’<sup>8</sup> – were virtually inevitable consequences that flowed from the breakage of the Iraqi state. At best, the critics have pointed to policies that, had they been adopted, would have provided the necessary conditions for a successful war and occupation. Whether they would have been sufficient, however, must be subject to grave doubt.

‘Success’, of course, is subject to varying measurements, and it is to be expected that the larger political assessment of the Iraq war will continue to provoke deep divisions. Advocates of the war, whose shaken optimism recovered with the November 2004 offensive against Falluja and the January 2005 elections, are likely to remain advocates even if political and economic reconstruction remains elusive. However bad it gets, the answer is ready that something much worse lay in prospect had Saddam Hussein been left in power. Opponents of the war, who insisted that containment and deterrence were workable policies that need not have been displaced by preventive war, will continue to deplore the war as causing great and unnec-

essary dangers but must deal with the new reality created by the American occupation – above all, the disastrous strategic implications of an Iraq that dissolves into warring statelets or remains an economic wasteland.

The larger argument that rages and will continue to rage over the justification of the Iraq war is not our concern in this essay. Here we want to focus on the decisions made in the initial year of the intervention and ask whether they were those best calculated to achieve the results the administration wished to achieve – the creation of a secure, liberal and democratic Iraq. The exercise is not entirely an academic one. Like the long argument that arose over the Vietnam War, the lessons drawn from the Iraq experience will unavoidably exert a profound influence over force structures, war strategies and public attitudes for a long time to come.<sup>9</sup>

### **Obstacles to a successful reconstruction**

Three great problems have emerged since the fall of Saddam's statues in April 2003: as criminal anarchy, a protracted insurgency and a society deeply divided on ethnic and sectarian lines. Each of these has ramifications for the ability of the occupying power to provide security. 'If you don't master security', noted one observer, everything else 'gets washed away like sand castles on the beach'.<sup>10</sup> It is, as it were, the *sine qua non* of economic reconstruction, political rehabilitation, and the fostering of a new civil society.<sup>11</sup> If we are to think clearly about the 'might have beens' of the Iraq war, these three factors, and the bearing they have on the provision of security, are crucial. If the critical accounts of the planning and implementation of the Iraq war are to be accepted, it must be shown that a different course of action would have dealt in a satisfactory fashion with these formidable obstacles.

Symbolic of the problem of criminal lawlessness and anarchy that has pervaded Iraq since the collapse of the regime was the widespread looting that occurred after US forces raided Baghdad and toppled Saddam's statues on 9 April 2003. By the time it had run its course (after which there was little left to loot), virtually no industrial plant, government ministry or cultural institution was left intact. Over the course of the following months there emerged a spasm of car-jackings, kidnappings and murders that added to the sense of a society under siege. Saddam, as one columnist put it, had not been replaced by Bremer but by Hobbes – the state of nature in which life was 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'. This widespread criminal anarchy dug a hole from which the occupiers have found it very difficult to climb. It not only made the challenge of reconstruction immensely more difficult, but made freedom seem indistinguishable, in the Iraqi mind, from anarchy. By demonstrating that coalition forces could not control the basics of security, the persistence of anarchy undoubtedly gave a significant fillip to the resistance.<sup>12</sup>

The second obstacle to a satisfactory reconstruction has been the emergence of a protracted guerrilla and terrorist insurgency. American planners not only failed to anticipate the scale of the anarchy that would befall Iraq in the aftermath of the American conquest; they also failed to anticipate the emergence of a guerrilla insurgency. 'What we were really hoping', commented one US commander, 'was to just go through and everyone would wave flags and stuff.'<sup>13</sup> It is now clear that the insurgency enjoys advantages on its own terrain that are just as formidable as the precision-guided weaponry deployed with devastating effect by the United States. Because US forces can destroy everything they can see, they had no difficulty in marching into Baghdad and forcing resistance underground. Once underground, however, the resistance acquired a set of advantages that have proved to be just as effective. Iraq's military forces had no answer to smart bombs, but the United States has no answer – at least no good answer – to car bombs. Iraq's military forces were powerless to resist America's overwhelming dominance in the air, but, by the same token, America finds it very difficult to guard against insurgents able to strike unprotected targets. American losses are painful and unexpected, but the key strategic vulnerability does not consist of the 1,453 dead and 10,740 wounded American soldiers,<sup>14</sup> but rather the capability of the insurgency to sow such conditions of fear and insecurity as to make virtually impossible the various tasks required for the reconstruction of the Iraqi state and the rehabilitation of its economy. The American invaders and the Iraqi resisters have both, in their different ways, confirmed the old adage that it is far easier to destroy than to create. For the side for whom 'not losing' is the key imperative, that circumstance makes for a profound advantage; for the side that must win, as the occupying power must, it is a profound and perhaps fatal handicap.<sup>15</sup>

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The third important obstacle to the success of the American effort is that Iraq is a profoundly divided society. Ruled historically by the Sunni minority, who comprise approximately 20% of the population, Iraq also contains a minority of Kurds in the northern part of the country and a majority Shia population (estimates range from 55 to 65%) whose base of power is in the south but who are to be found also in Baghdad and points north. The existence of these historic divisions has made problematic any reconstruction of the Iraq government. Any solution that gives power or significant advantage to one of these groups at the expense of another immediately raises the prospect of civil violence. Over the course of the past two years, significant factions within each of these groups have threatened non-cooperation or violence if their vital interests were not safeguarded. The Kurds, for

example, threatened secession from Iraq unless they gain control of Kirkuk, a city they consider to be theirs but from which they were driven by Saddam Hussein's 'Arabisation' campaigns.<sup>16</sup> Most Shia, by contrast, tolerated the American occupation but only on condition that the United States was seen to be moving rapidly toward democratic elections that would give them power. The Sunnis, who have been the biggest losers in the US invasion and were the ethnic base of Saddam Hussein's regime, provided the largest number of fighters for the insurgency.

These are clearly formidable obstacles; any one, by itself, would have posed fundamental problems for the occupying force. Together, they have made for an extremely difficult situation. Clearly, it has been the parlous security situation that has made economic reconstruction go slowly. The US programme was undoubtedly misconceived in the exclusive role given to American primary contractors (required by Congress) for expenditures in Iraq, but misgivings over its character have been greatly heightened by the bad security situation and the need to divert funds from civilian infrastructure to protective forces.<sup>17</sup> So, too, projects for building civil society could barely get off the ground when participants feared for their lives. The insurgency, as one observer noted, 'sucked the oxygen out of the liberal experiment', with large numbers of Iraqi liberals having 'taken refuge behind barbed-wire gates, fled the country, gone broke, or been murdered'.<sup>18</sup>

Given the vital importance of the provision of security for the reconstruction of Iraq, and the fatal role that insecurity has played in making progress in every other sector highly problematic, it is remarkable that neither the problem of acute anarchy nor that of a raging insurgency were anticipated by American force planners before the war. What planning there was for 'Phase 4' (post-combat) operations did not foresee these dangers. In one sense, of course, these failures amount to a kind of directed verdict against the civilian and military war planners. It is only a kind of verbal legerdemain that allows observers to say that the war plan was superb and the peace plan was a bust. The United States has been at war in Iraq since March 2003; it cried 'peace' when there was no peace; victory when there was no victory.

### **The numbers game**

One persistent criticism is that the invasion was mounted with altogether insufficient US forces. The Bush administration, writes Larry Diamond, 'was never willing to commit anything like the forces necessary to ensure order in postwar Iraq'. Diamond believes that 'around 300,000 troops might have been enough to make Iraq largely secure after the war', but also insists that 'different kinds of troops, with different rules of engagement', were needed, including 'vastly more military police and other troops trained for

urban patrols, crowd control, civil reconstruction, and peace maintenance and enforcement'.<sup>19</sup> Others have put the numbers needed much higher. According to one study, the same ratio of peacekeepers to population as in Kosovo would generate a force requirement of 480,000 troops for Iraq; if Bosnia were the model, 364,000 would be required.<sup>20</sup> James Fallows, in his incisive critique of American war planning, notes that the original army plan (prepared in the 1990s by then Centcom commander Anthony Zinni and later updated) called for an invasion force of 400,000. Over time, in response to the persistent objections of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, it was pared back so that only some 200,000 forces were in theatre at the time of the invasion. Of these, less than half were actually in Iraq itself when Baghdad fell. One division, scheduled to invade Iraq from Turkish territory, had been refused admittance by the Turks and was in transit to Kuwaiti ports; most remaining forces were marshalling in Kuwait.<sup>21</sup>

That additional US forces would have been useful can scarcely be denied. Iraq's borders were left unguarded for a year, according to Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, and clearly more might have been done on that score. There were also a large number of ammunition dumps across the country that were left unguarded for months, including critical facilities like the Al-Qaqaa facility south of Baghdad. US forces were clearly short handed for dealing with the anarchical conditions in Iraq. Even when looters were arrested there was no place to put them and no way to process them, and they were simply released.<sup>22</sup> The large number of Iraqis swept into the US-managed prison system – approaching some 40,000 in the first year alone, of whom about nine-tenths were not part of the insurgency – were processed by US forces that were 'overworked, overwhelmed, and under-resourced'.<sup>23</sup>

But two large qualifications to the critique stressing insufficient US forces committed to Iraq must be made. The first is that the United States did not actually have the requisite 'different kinds of troops' that critics, not unreasonably, insist ought to have been sent. Secondly, and more seriously, a much larger force at the beginning would have substantially decreased the ability of the United States to maintain higher force levels over the course of the occupation. Indeed, experience from spring 2003 to autumn 2004 indicates that ground forces were stretched extremely thin by the pressures of maintaining a force in the 108,000–150,000 range, as compared to the 300,000–500,000 that critics have called for, with unsustainable reliance on National Guard and reserve units and a 'broken' mobilisation system. A large number of American troops at the beginning would only have been possible if there had been a rapid drawdown by the following year. Once the problem is seen as one of maintaining a force over a protracted period (say, 3–5 years), there was simply no way to generate those large numbers within existing force

constraints. It might be argued, of course, that had the initial invasion force been 300,000–400,000 troops, the later problems confronting the occupiers would have been substantially reduced,<sup>24</sup> but this is unlikely. Even if considered probable, it would still have been a big risk. Military planners were just as blind as civilians in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) to these

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factors. They too assumed it would be a ‘quickie’, a glorious one-night stand from which an uncomplicated withdrawal would be possible. Very few to none were thinking in terms of the protracted commitment that now seems all but inevitable.<sup>25</sup>

One way of solving this problem was to obtain sizeable contributions from allied nations. This was, in fact, part of the Pentagon’s pre-war plan. It called for four divisions (one from NATO, one from Britain, one led by Polish forces and one from the Arab emirates) to replace withdrawn US forces. It was modelled, that is to say, on the previous multilateral experience of the 1990s, in which the Americans ‘made the meal’ and NATO and UN forces ‘did the dishes’. As it happened, however, only the British and Polish-led divisions materialised. The failure to gain additional international support was a criticism often directed against the Bush administration by domestic critics. The absence of UN authorisation is one part of this indictment, but another part is that 90% of the casualties and the cost of the war has fallen on American shoulders. John Kerry in particular made this a central part of his campaign against Bush in the 2004 presidential elections, but calls to increase the international character of the foreign presence in Iraq have been part of the litany of criticisms from the beginning. ‘We’ve got a real problem because it’s an American face as the occupier’, argued Democratic Senator Bill Nelson of Florida. ‘The anger and frustration of Iraqis could have been avoided had it been the world community occupying Iraq and stabilising it instead of us.’<sup>26</sup>

This critique, however, is more properly focused on the decision to go to war in the first place rather than on the failure to gain much allied support in the aftermath. Public opinion in allied countries that might provide support was uniformly unconvinced by the three rationales the Bush administration offered for the Iraq war – that war was necessary to enforce UN resolutions calling for Iraq’s disarmament; that war, in any event, was justified to deprive Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction; and that war, finally, was imperative to free the Iraqi people from the grip of a cruel tyrant. Instead, solid majorities found US actions to partake of some mixture of the illegal, immoral and imprudent. Because the nations that might have provided outside support

were mostly democracies, public opinion inevitably constrained their ability to offer troops. Even sharp opponents, however, did not actively obstruct US actions. The Security Council recognised, in May 2004, the United States as the occupying power and subsequently the council and the secretariat contributed constructively, under the mediation of Lakhdar Brahimi, to the formation of the interim Iraqi government and a plan for nationwide elections. (Recall that influential Shia leader Ayatollah Ali Sistani refused to meet with Bremer and they never exchanged so much as a bow.)

The UN's formal acceptance of the occupation, however, did not have a transformative effect on Iraqi opinion and it is doubtful that even a larger UN presence would have done so. The tragic loss of the UN mission under Sergio de Mello in August 2003 made it clear that terrorists and insurgents would target any group cooperating with the US mission in the country. This in turn meant that the call for additional foreign forces under the UN banner was made in circumstances in which there would be real danger. The traditional model of UN peacekeeping assumes that there is a peace to be kept, and that UN workers can go about their mission of state-building without extreme peril. These were not the conditions of post-invasion Iraq. The 30 UN officials in Iraq who worked on the organisation of the January 2005 elections were themselves largely confined to the Green Zone, and the unions representing UN workers warned Secretary-General Kofi Annan against sending them to areas where their lives would be imperilled.

The situation with respect to UN workers also pertains to the prospect of significant forces from other countries. The Governing Council appointed by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) made clear that it wanted no soldiers from states bordering Iraq, and vetoed a Turkish offer to send forces. Though the Bush administration did get a Security Council resolution passed calling on member states to aid in the reconstruction effort, contributions from other states were nominal at best. Given the overwhelming unpopularity of the war in the countries most often mentioned as likely providers of outside forces – France, Germany, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan – the odds that more adroit diplomacy could have succeeded in eliciting this effort seem not too great.

Once one dismisses the prospects of significant allied contributions – which followed from the unilateral character of the war – and once one takes into account the need to plan for a protracted instead of a one-time deployment of US soldiers, the numbers question appears dramatically different. Critics stressing the need for much larger US forces have not taken these factors into account. There were real constraints on the numbers available to prosecute the war.

### Avoiding anarchy

Of all the mis-steps of the US invasion, surely the most important was the failure to stop or deal seriously with the widespread looting and anarchy that enveloped Iraq, and most especially Baghdad, in the days and weeks following the collapse of the Iraqi regime. Despite attempts to downplay the scale of the disaster by Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld – freedom, he said, is ‘untidy’ – the episode clearly had extremely prejudicial effects on the prospects for a successful occupation. That it would have been desirable to prevent this is very nearly self-evident, but it is not clear that it would have been possible, even had the will been present and the contingency received the planning it deserved.

The reasons for the lack of preparedness for budding anarchy and lawlessness are complex. There is some evidence that American officials made no attempt in the first few days to stop the looting because they believed the mob would direct its anger at symbols of the old regime and take revenge on the same people that US forces were themselves pursuing. Commented one US-educated Iraqi political scientist:

I believe the United States has committed an act of irresponsibility with few parallels in history, with the looting of the National Museum, the National Library and so many of the ministries. People are saying that the U.S. wanted this – that it allowed all this to happen because it wanted the symbolism of ordinary Iraqis attacking every last token of Saddam Hussein’s power.<sup>27</sup>

This is an exaggeration, but contains a degree of truth. The United States did not want the destruction of the National Library and other cultural treasures, but it did want the symbolism of ordinary Iraqis striking the Ba’athists. It just got much more than it bargained for, and by the time it realised that what was happening was fundamentally prejudicial to American interests in ensuring a successful reconstruction, much of the damage had been done.<sup>28</sup>

The failure to deal with the looters had further causes. Warnings from outside observers that anarchy would be a real and formidable danger after the regime fell were not reflected in the orders given to American units participating in the fall of Baghdad. The units of the Third Infantry Division (Mechanized) that took the city had no orders for ‘Phase 4’ operations and were forced to improvise.<sup>29</sup> Though the administration was warned prior to the war that certain cultural institutions like the National Museum would be endangered, the scale of the looting came as a great surprise to American officials and to many Iraqis themselves, who were shocked at the criminality that ‘freedom’ unleashed.<sup>30</sup> The toppling of Saddam’s statues did not

signal the end of Iraqi resistance, which moved underground but continued to attack US forces, and this made it difficult to transition to 'peace and stability operations'. Over and above these considerations was the belief that the peacekeeping and stability tasks needed after the invasion were 'someone else's mission', not in keeping with the army's warrior ethos.<sup>31</sup>

It is not difficult to establish a certain culpability on the part of the US forces in failing to contend with the wholesale criminality and anarchy unleashed in Iraq. Nor can this culpability be assigned simply to Rumsfeld and the OSD. Had the need for peacekeeping and law enforcement capabilities been behind the army's preference for a larger invasion force,<sup>32</sup> it would have been reflected in the orders issued to the units that took Baghdad, and there is no evidence that it was. What is misleading about this interpretation is not the contention that Centcom *ought* to have had a well-developed plan to deal with the looting but the assumption that it would have successfully mastered the problem had it done so. This seems implausible. The criticism too readily assumes that if problems are foreseen there must in principle be a solution to them. In all probability, however, a war plan keyed to the problem of postwar disorder would itself have inevitably confronted a substantial gap in time between the disintegration of the state and the arrival of forces of sufficient size to establish order, creating a window of opportunity for looting that even a far-sighted plan could not have closed. There is, moreover, substantial evidence that some of the destruction was carried out by Iraqi intelligence agents and could not have been guarded against even had a determined effort been made to do so.<sup>33</sup> That the deliberate fostering of anarchy was part of Saddam's plan is also suggested by his release of some 100,000 criminals from Iraqi prisons several months before the invasion. Nor was the anarchy confined to Baghdad: looters arose from Mosul in the north to Basra in the south and attacked an astonishing array of targets across the country. A different plan could in all probability have prevented the worst consequences of the looting, such as the destruction of irreplaceable cultural sites and important government ministries, but it is difficult to see how the larger consequence of widespread anarchy, with all its implications for the success of the American mission, could have been avoided. In large measure, this consequence flowed directly from the breakage of the Iraqi state.

Seen in broadest perspective, the breaking of the state in effect destroyed Iraq's immune system, making it vulnerable to a host of ailments. Among these were criminal anarchy, the ease with which foreign terrorists set up shop on Iraqi territory, widespread access to arms and a protracted insur-

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gency. These consequences followed from the act of war itself. They may have been mitigated by a fundamentally different war plan, but they were likely to ensue even if military plans had been informed by greater foresight and better calculated to meet the dangers presented.

### **The emergence of the insurgency**

Reflecting on the emergence of a protracted insurgency, some American military officials and outside observers have concluded that the United States was 'too gracious' in its victory.<sup>34</sup> President Bush himself has spoken of a 'catastrophic success', by which he meant to say that the Ba'athist regime had not really been defeated during the phase of 'major combat operations'. Sometimes this is attributed to the inability to secure Turkish approval for launching part of the US attack from the north, from which it might have swept through the 'Sunni Triangle' region northwest of Baghdad and dealt summarily with Ba'athist resisters. Whatever the case, there is little question that the phase of major combat operations did not really defeat the regime. Before the war, the US military had expected a formal surrender from units that would remain intact; instead, Iraqi military units simply dissolved. Many soldiers simply went home, relieved that their service was at an end. Many others, it is apparent, faded underground with the intention of continuing resistance.

Because those Iraqi forces willing to continue the fight against the United States were not defeated, it is often assumed that US forces might have followed a strategy that *could* have defeated them. Like a strategy for dealing with anarchy, however, this is implausible. The Iraqi insurgents were not somehow obliged to present themselves in such a fashion as to be destroyed by precision-guided US firepower. Indeed, one could argue that Saddam Hussein played far more into the hands of the United States than it was advisable for him to do. In attempting a futile defence of Baghdad, he moved many units into positions that were easily detectable by US reconnaissance and just as easily destroyed. His logical strategy from the beginning was to avoid confronting US forces with massed forces, for in such a fight his troops were certain to be annihilated, but to save them for the coming resistance.<sup>35</sup> This too casts an interesting light on 'one of the most brilliant invasion successes in modern military history,'<sup>36</sup> for what the attackers aimed at – the dissolution of formal resistance by Iraqi main-force units – was the very thing it was in the interest of the defender to accept. What the attackers did not think of – the scorched-earth tactics of a guerrilla insurgency that would make reconstruction impossible – was, by contrast, the very thing that it was most likely the defender would adopt.

It is clear, in any event, that the insurgents have proved themselves far more cunning and determined than initial estimates predicted. The insurgency also enjoyed a number of advantages stemming from its superior knowledge

of the terrain – a ‘home-field advantage’ far more significant in guerrilla war than in competitive sports. In the first place, the insurgency enjoyed widespread access to arms and explosives. Given the ubiquity of such materials in Iraq, it was probably impossible to reduce seriously the insurgents’ access to them, even if a determined effort had been made to guard the arms depots. Secondly, the capacity of the insurgents to strike from unexpected directions inevitably made US forces suspicious of any approaching Iraqi. It has sometimes been argued that the isolation of the occupying forces, whether in the US-controlled Green Zone in Baghdad or in armed patrols throughout the country, worked strongly against gaining the trust of the population, but this was forced on the occupiers by the insurgency. It is not clear that anything could have been done about it, save at the risk of much greater casualties for US forces or administrators. Perhaps the key advantage enjoyed by the insurgents was the capability to put US forces in situations where the military response would further antagonise the population and make any contact with them a source of profound danger.

The vulnerabilities revealed by events include the assassination of Iraqis working with US forces in any capacity, whether as translators, police or soldiers, together with threats made against their families; attacks on oil facilities and other vital infrastructure projects; strikes against the country’s transportation arteries, making safe travel and logistical re-supply extremely problematic; incessant attacks on patrolling US forces; and kidnapping or killing of workers for NGOs and commercial enterprises needed to rebuild to Iraq’s infrastructure.

Guerrillas are classically able to place occupying forces in situations where they are damned if they do and damned if they don’t. US forces made determined efforts to root out the insurgency, but these measures had the effect of increasing hostility toward them in the broader population. Insurgents setting off roadside bombs sometimes attacked US forces responding to the disaster, so US forces frequently adopted the tactic of spraying fire rather indiscriminately once they were attacked – an expedient that did not endear them to the local population.<sup>37</sup> One of the most alarming and depressing features of even the most egregious terrorist attacks against civilian targets has been locals on the scene screaming their hatred at the United States and holding US forces responsible.

It seems clear that the insurgency could not have enjoyed the success it has without significant support from the local population. American officials repeatedly characterise the insurgents as die-hard Ba’athists or foreign terrorists; it is now understood that there are multiple groups with varying agendas.<sup>38</sup> US officials also downplayed the overall number of insurgents throughout the first year after the fall of Baghdad, usually placing the size of the insurgency at 2,000–5,000 men. By autumn 2004, unofficial estimates from American military officers

put the number at 20,000; a British general in the south put it at 50,000; one US intelligence analyst placed it, conservatively, at 100,000 among Sunnis alone.<sup>39</sup> With opinion polls in spring 2004 showing some 50% of Iraqis expressing the belief that attacks on occupying forces were morally justified in some instances, the number of sympathisers was certainly in the millions. Whatever the true number of insurgents, there seems little doubt that US forces fell into the trap of believing their own propaganda, failing in particular to understand that most insurgents were probably motivated by a nationalistic revulsion against the invader or feelings of revenge for a wrong done a kinsman rather than by attachment to Saddam or al-Qaeda. It was clearly a mistake to misperceive the size and motives of the insurgency, but it is not so clear that there was a solution to the problem once its scale had been fully appreciated.

The most critical weakness of the US forces was the absence of good intelligence. One army officer on patrol in the Sunni Triangle noted that 90% of the information fed to his unit by Iraqi informers turned out to be bogus. It was the imperative of gaining better intelligence with respect to the sources and composition of the resistance that led directly to the Abu Ghraib scandal, perhaps the most dramatic instance of how a response to an insurgency may itself compound an occupying force's alienation from the population. But this alienation also followed from the incessant raids that US forces conducted against suspected insurgents. The humiliation of seeing one's door broken down, the male inhabitants tied up, houses and apartments ransacked for weapons, female undergarments scattered about, followed in the largest number of cases by a lame apology – 'gee, we're really sorry' – was such that these tactics could only increase the numbers of those willing to join the insurgency.<sup>40</sup> The same is true of the vast number of persons who passed into the US prison system in Iraq. At the same time, it is not clear that a far less aggressive approach would have worked. It may well be true that various US practices have made the insurgency larger and more determined than it would otherwise have been, but it is also highly probable that for a substantial core of fighters the willingness to resist the occupation through force arose in the first instance from an alien invasion and could not have been avoided through milder tactics.

The existence of these dilemmas, and the unhappy choices they disclosed, were revealed in the confrontation between US forces and insurgents in Falluja after four American contractors were slain in April 2004. While public attention and criticism focused on the inconsistency of ordering a large attack and then calling it off after a massive outcry of Iraqi public opinion, the more basic point is that this inconsistent conduct arose out of the extremely disagreeable alternative that was presented. The same was true of the confrontation that ensued throughout southern Iraq after US forces closed the newspaper

of Moqtada al-Sadr and attempted to arrest him, prompting widespread attacks by his followers from Baghdad to Basra. The US objective of killing or capturing Sadr was abandoned in April, as it was in August, after the intervention of Ayatollah Sistani. Given the inconsistent conduct of US forces in both instances, whereby they ultimately accepted what they had previously declared unacceptable, it would be difficult to defend the overall record, one of vacillation and inconstancy.<sup>41</sup> But the record does underline the critical point: US forces frequently found themselves in situations where they, not unreasonably, felt compelled to respond to provocation but where the response imposed extreme political costs. The Falluja operation after the November 2004 US presidential elections had the signal advantage of destroying many car-bomb factories, but it also drove 300,000 Sunnis from their homes and completely devastated the city.

The problems flowing from bad intelligence seem virtually endemic to the situation American forces confronted in Iraq. They were strangers in a strange land. They lacked the linguistic and cultural skills that might have defused misunderstandings, and even had these been possessed in greater numbers they would, as foreigners, have inevitably excited the suspicion and fear of the population they were garrisoning. These difficulties, moreover, would have existed even if American forces had been much larger in size. The assumption that the United States would have won the hearts and minds of the population had it maintained occupying forces of 300,000 as opposed to 140,000 must seem dubious in the extreme. Certain things it could have done better, like protecting critical infrastructure, securing arms depots, guarding borders, or processing prisoners, but the larger force would also have enabled the US to do more things that would have inflamed rather than quelled the insurgency.

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### **Abolishing the Iraqi Army and proscribing the Ba'athists**

A persistent criticism of the Bush administration's conduct of the Iraq war has focused on the political maladroitness with which it handled the Iraqis. The initial plan was for a rapid transfer of sovereignty to an indigenous Iraqi authority, probably headed by Ahmed Chalabi. It also assumed that the Iraqi Army, shorn of its Ba'athists officers, would remain in existence. In the confusion and mayhem of post-liberation Iraq, however, the administration soon decided to install Paul Bremer as the pro-consul of the country and to shelve plans for a rapid transfer of sovereignty. One of the first acts of the CPA was to disband the Iraqi Army, a measure complemented by a far-reaching proscription of the Ba'athists. Both measures elicited a great deal of criticism.

Unlike the various classes of Republican Guards or the irregular fedeyeen forces, say the critics, the army was a national institution. Several studies before the war – from the US Army War College and the Council on Foreign Relations, among others – argued that an attempt should be made to negotiate with Iraqi units and make use of them as a force for maintaining order.<sup>42</sup> In the event, however, the army simply disintegrated; their bases were stripped bare by looters and rendered effectively unusable. The situation that confronted the CPA and Bremer was not that anticipated by any of the prewar studies. Like any other body whose head has been decapitated, this conscripted and ill-paid force (whose privates received the equivalent of \$2 a month) was unlikely to be reconstituted without major surgery.<sup>43</sup>

However much the reconstitution of the Iraqi army might appear as a kind of *deus ex machina* to stem the immense disorder of occupied Iraq, it is doubtful whether it could have done so. At best we have a series of unanswered questions regarding who might have officered the force, the functions it would have performed and its political reliability.<sup>44</sup> Because it simply dissolved in the course of major combat operations, it would have been useless to stem the first tide of anarchy and looting. Though often described as ‘highly trained’, it was not trained for the policing and peace-keeping tasks most urgently needed in the new Iraq. It is now regularly said that the programme to train Iraqi police, national guard and army forces has been beset by incompetence and mismanagement, and undoubtedly the United States did not give this task the high-level attention it deserved, farming it out in the first instance to private contractors.<sup>45</sup> These limited results, however, may simply reflect the profound difficulties in seeking to train Iraqis to serve a foreign master. In effect, the CPA ruled out making use of various militias, such as the ‘Badr Brigades’ of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), holding that the existence of these militias was a threat to the integrity of the Iraqi state. However reasonable the fear of fractionalisation and civil war that lay behind this attitude, it also underlined the artificial character of the national forces the United States sought to build and could not but foster the suspicion among recruits that they were being asked to fight for objectives not their own. Until autumn 2004, when a handful of Iraqi units – largely Kurdish and Shia in composition – began participating in American operations, the uniform record was the unreliability of all classes of Iraqi forces – police, national guard, army. There is no reason for thinking that the same difficulty would not have arisen with respect to a reconstituted Iraqi Army, and the inauspicious results from the creation of the ‘Falluja brigade’ after the retreat of American forces from the city in April 2004 provides telling evidence on this score. It is, in any case, difficult to think of a preceding case in which an invader sought to rely

upon the army it defeated for the maintenance of order, and one should not exclude the possibility that US forces would have been providing arms and equipment to forces thoroughly infiltrated by the insurgency.

These reflections are not inconsistent with the view that the manner in which the disbanding of the army took place was a mistake. Bremer initially disbanded the force without pay and later felt compelled to rescind that decision so as to stifle the anger it caused. Certainly there was nothing to be gained from any measure smacking of a gratuitous humiliation, but that does not mean that a reconstituted army would have acted as a loyal servant of the occupation. Given the US experience with forces that have been vetted and trained, this seems altogether unlikely.

A broader question may be raised with respect to the political strategy that the CPA followed during its brief existence. If there was a simple formula by which a coherent political strategy may be expressed, it was to communicate to the Shia that they would, as the majority group, quickly gain power through free elections; to reassure the Sunni that, despite losing their historic dominance over Iraq, they would not be subject to persecution; and to persuade the Kurds to cooperate in the maintenance of the Iraqi state and to rest content with an autonomous status short of independence. In fact, the American occupiers did not consistently pursue any such logic. The proscription of the Ba'athists, many of whom had joined the party as a condition of employment, was inconsistent with this strategy and was partially reversed when the Allawi interim government took power in summer 2004. The Ba'athist proscription, together with the incessant raids in the Sunni Triangle, virtually eliminated the prospect of reconciling the Sunnis to the new order. At the same time, the CPA took some measures that also seriously disaffected the Shia. The most important (and least defensible) of these steps was the cancellation of local elections, a measure taken because it was thought that the best organised forces would be the Islamist parties.<sup>46</sup> The CPA also adopted a seven-step constitutional process whereby free elections would only take place at the end of two-year process drawing up a new constitution. Opposing a quick transfer of sovereignty to the Iraqis, Bremer told a congressional committee in August 2003 that

no appointed government, not even one as honest and dedicated as the Iraqi Governing Council, can have the legitimacy necessary today to take on the difficult issues Iraqis face as they write their constitution and elect a government. The only path to full Iraqi sovereignty is through a written constitution, ratified and followed by free, democratic elections.<sup>47</sup>

The CPA seemed to communicate, by its opposition to any immediate elections, a distrust of the likely political leadership the Shia would produce.

Since the Americans, under duress from Sistani, ultimately reversed themselves on the question of transferring sovereignty to a UN-appointed interim government and also speeded up the electoral calendar they had originally envisioned, it seems difficult to defend the United States against the charge that it was doing in autumn 2004 what it ought to have been doing the year previously – namely, playing a supporting role to an appointed but sovereign Iraqi government that enjoyed international recognition and moving as rapidly as possible to nation-wide elections. It is useful to remember, however, that the original rationale of the CPA in wishing to delay the transfer of sovereignty until elections were held under a new constitution was that an appointed government would lack legitimacy. Having changed its mind in the interim, the US government subsequently spoke in an entirely different vein, but its original scepticism was true enough. The Allawi government enjoyed greater legitimacy than the CPA, but that is not to say that it really possessed legitimacy itself. On the contrary, it was profoundly handicapped, as any such government would be, by the circumstance that it could not stand without US assistance but its dependence on such assistance compromised its nationalist credentials in the eyes of the Iraqi public.<sup>48</sup>

In detail, these criticisms of the US course – that it needlessly persecuted the Ba'athists, that it sowed suspicion among the Shia and that it flaunted rather than sought to minimise its leading role in the occupation, even as against its own appointed Governing Council – all have merit. At the same time, the more fundamental truth is that the United States was inevitably thrust into the middle of a bitterly divided society. To find a successful political strategy in these circumstances required the skill of an equilibrist and a substantial amount of sheer good luck; even then, it may simply have been impossible. The proscription of Ba'athists undoubtedly appeared as

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unnecessarily punitive to the Sunni, but to the Shia and the Kurds it was justice delayed but not denied. That is why Ahmed Chalabi, angling for a leading position among the Shia, was in favour of that step. Nor should we exaggerate the significance of the Ba'athist proscription in fostering ill-will among the Sunni toward the US occupation. There was plenty of that created by the invasion itself, by the dislodgement of Sunni elites that it implied, and by the measures pursued to battle the

insurgency. It was a perfectly defensible piece of constitutional engineering that the Kurds were in effect allotted a veto over any new constitution, but the Shia did not accept the justice of this provision of the Transitional Administrative Law and pointed out, in almost Lincolnesque terms, that no majority could consent to being ruled indefinitely by a minority.<sup>49</sup> Ultimately,

the problem was that there was no apparent way to split the difference between groups whose aims were, in the final analysis, irreconcilable.

The January 2005 elections did not overcome these various schisms. The elections were important because they provided the Shia with a sense of political ownership that dulls, for them, the sharp edges of the American occupation. In addition, the new government, even if hobbled by division and threats of breakdown, seems likely to provide a boost to organising Shia military power. But though the election results will enable the Shia, in alliance with the Kurds, to fight a civil war with the Sunni more effectively, they do not ward off the prospect of continuing and endemic violence. That requires a political settlement whose formula still seems elusive. The elections were not considered legitimate by the Sunni, who by and large did not participate and who seem unlikely to submit to their effective disenfranchisement. The confrontation in the North between Kurds who wish to control Kirkuk and the Arabs and Turkmen who wish to see it under the control of the Iraqi state has been delayed by the Kurds' desire not to offend the United States, but it remains likely that ultimately the conflict, pitting irreconcilable claims against one another, will be resolved by arms. Much as we must hope that an Iraqi leader will emerge with the wisdom to reconcile these contradictory aspirations, the historical record is not auspicious. In ethnically heterogeneous countries, democratisation has often been followed by secession and partition. In the depressing but probably accurate formulation of James Kurth, 'one could have an Iraq, but without democracy. Alternatively, one could have democracy, but without an Iraq. But one could not have both.'<sup>50</sup>

### **Lessons**

The principal purpose of this essay has been to cast doubt on the assumption that the United States squandered an historic opportunity to reconstruct the Iraqi state through mind-numbing incompetence. In reviewing the decisions of the Bush administration, to be sure, one can certainly question a good number of them. But if in detail the criticisms make considerable sense, the overall tenor of the argument is very misleading. The basic problems the Bush administration has confronted simply flowed from the enterprise itself and not primarily from mistakes in execution along the way. Even if a larger invading force had had an operational plan sensitive to the likelihood that anarchy would follow rapidly from the decapitation of the Iraqi state, it would still have been extremely difficult to prevent the large-scale looting and rampant criminality that descended on the country. Even had American forces understood that they were likely to face a growing insurgency after the war, it is doubtful that they could have elaborated an effective strategy for eliminating it. Given the extreme pressures that have

been placed on active and reserve forces in maintaining a force of 140,000 troops, retrospective judgements that more forces should have been sent at the beginning and throughout appear unrealistic, as do the oft-heard calls for more international forces from countries that have been keenly looking for a good excuse not to send them to Iraq since the war began. A realistic appreciation of the manifold problems that would arise from the invasion of the country actually pointed to the conclusion that Iraq ought not to have been invaded and 'liberated' at all. As Fallows observes, the most prescient warnings that emerged within the bureaucracy over the hazards entailed by the Iraq invasion did come from those who opposed the enterprise. In the nature of things, this made it very difficult for the architects of the invasion to take such warnings seriously.

However Iraq ends, the lessons drawn from the experience are likely to be very important for the American government. One lesson, and probably the most likely, is that agencies and departments of the US government and military need to be re-cast to fight another such war successfully. We need to beef up our 'nation-building' expertise, perhaps creating an entirely new office charged with 'reconstruction and stabilisation'. The army, having gotten out of the counter-insurgency business after Vietnam, needs to devote far more emphasis to training its forces to conduct those missions. A different conclusion would be to devise a national security strategy in which there is no imperative to fight the kind of war that we have fought in Iraq. Rather than 'do it better next time', the contrary lesson would be on the order of 'don't do it at all'. There is, to be sure, a basic virtue in what political scientist Samuel Huntington has called 'strategic pluralism'. Since threats are unpredictable, it stands to reason that a wide variety of capabilities, including redundancies in various service arms, is a virtue in national security strategy. But there is also wisdom in the counter-argument that developing a wide range of capabilities increases the likelihood that they will be used for unnecessary enterprises.

Another lesson would be to insist on more realism in force-planning projections. We have seen that politically unrealistic assumptions regarding the potential contribution of allied forces entered strongly into the force-planning process during the prelude to the Iraq war. Ironically, OSD's decision to pare the size of the invasion force, though often criticised, had the unforeseen benefit of leaving sufficient reserves in the system to deal with a protracted campaign. Had the United States invaded with the 400,000 forces initially foreseen at the beginning of the military's planning process, US forces would have been placed under severe strain and it is not evident how the challenge would have been met. The pressures placed on Army Reserve and National Guard forces by the Iraq campaign – including

the odious expedient of the 'backdoor draft' – have broken the mobilisation system and necessitate a re-thinking of the entire system for the recruitment and retention of ground forces.

Finally, the military services – including but not limited to the army – must digest again the lesson that 'war is an instrument of policy'. The use of force must be guided by the imperative that it is to serve a political aim. The profound neglect given to 'Phase 4' operations in the army's pre-war planning and the facile assumption that operations critical to the overall success of the campaign were 'somebody else's business' reflect a shallow view of warfare. The American war plan, far from being 'the most brilliant in modern American military history', was in crucial respects not directed at the main political object: ensuring a successful reconstruction. It did not look toward 'the day after' in a way that recognised the most serious problems that would face the United States after the collapse of the Iraqi regime.

This was not simply a failure of 'intelligence' but one of 'strategic culture' – the tendency, that is, for the military to be 'obsessed with stupendous deeds of fire and movement' rather than the political functions that war must serve.<sup>51</sup> That proclivity has many dimensions, from theories of 'shock and awe' in the air force to the aversion to policing and peacekeeping functions in the army. Though the aversion to occupation duties did not and could not survive the encounter with Iraqi realities, the duties were carried out in a fashion – with the imperatives of 'force protection' overriding concern for Iraqi civilian casualties – that risked sacrificing the broader strategic mission of US forces. Like other failures of the US mission in Iraq, this too has an air of inevitability about it. But the armed forces need to ask themselves whether such a bargain is good for the nation and consistent with the professional ethic that soldiers are obligated to obey.

## Notes

- 1 The costs of the war are not easy to ferret out from Pentagon figures. Much of the army's equipment, for example, has been torn up by the stresses of the Iraqi environment, and 'replacement costs' have not been entirely reflected in official figures of the cost of the war and occupation.
- 2 Frederick D. Barton and Bathsheba N. Crocker, *Capturing Iraqi Voices* (Washington DC: CSIS, 2004). See also the Brookings Institution's regularly updated 'Iraq Index: Tracking Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq', <http://www.brookings.edu/iraqindex>.
- 3 Chatham House Briefing Paper, *Iraq in Transition: Vortex or Catalyst* (London: Chatham House, September 2004); Douglas Jehl, 'U.S. Intelligence Shows Pessimism on Iraq's Future', *New York Times*, 16 September 2004.
- 4 'As much as the invasion of Iraq and the rout of Saddam Hussein and his army was a triumph of planning and implementation, the mess that is postwar Iraq is a failure of planning and implementation', David Rieff, 'Blueprint for a Mess', *New York Times*, 2 November 2003. 'In planning for a war to topple Saddam', notes Niall Ferguson, 'Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld did a brilliant job. But in planning for the peace that would follow, he did a dreadful job'. 'Recovering Our Nerve', *The National Interest*, vol. no. 76, summer 2004, p. 52.
- 5 James Fallows, 'Blind into Baghdad', *The Atlantic Monthly* January/February 2004, p. 72.
- 6 Richard Lowry, 'What Went Wrong? The Miscalculations and Missteps that Led to the Current Situation in Iraq', *National Review*, 25 October 2004, pp. 34–44.
- 7 Larry Diamond, quoted in Rajiv Chandrasekaran, 'Mistakes Loom Large as Handover Nears', *Washington Post*, 20 June 2004.
- 8 Larry Diamond, 'What Went Wrong in Iraq', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 83, September/October 2004, p. 34.
- 9 For a suggestive analysis, see Lawrence Freedman, 'Rumsfeld's Legacy: The Iraq Syndrome?', *Washington Post*, 9 January 2005. The argument over Iraq also parallels the argument over Vietnam in certain respects. Conservative writers have been attracted to the proposition that overwhelming strength might have won the war and that failure was the result of civilian leaders tying the hands of the military. Liberal authors, by contrast, stress the incoherence of the war plans developed by US military leaders and emphasise, for example, the importance of population security. Underlying each of these attitudes are contrary theories about how the world works that show real persistence over time.
- 10 James Dobbins, quoted in Robin Wright, 'Series of U.S. Fumbles Blamed for Turmoil in Postwar Iraq', *Washington Post*, 11 April 2004.
- 11 See the incisive analysis of these inter-relationships in Diamond, 'What Went Wrong'.
- 12 George Packer, 'War after the War: What Washington Doesn't See in Iraq', *The New Yorker*, 24 November 2003; see also John Lee Anderson, *The Fall of Baghdad* (New York: Penguin, 2004)
- 13 Quoted in Andrew J. Bacevich, 'Balkan Ghosts: Mistakes of the Clinton Team, Mistakes of the Bush Team', *National Review*, 21 April 2003.
- 14 As of end of January 2005, according to official figures at <http://icasualties.org/oif/>.
- 15 For the significance of this key choice – 'to win or not to lose' – in a variety of conflicts, see Raymond Aron, *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), pp. 30–40.
- 16 Edward Cody, 'In Iraq, Showdown Looms Over Self-Rule for Kurds', *Washington Post*, 11 July 2004. See also George Packer, 'The Next Iraqi War: What Kirkuk's Struggle to Reverse Saddam's Ethnic Cleansing Signals for the Future of Iraq', *The New Yorker*, 4 October 2004.

- <sup>17</sup> On the failures of the CPA's economic reconstruction plan, especially the lack of progress in overcoming high levels of Iraqi unemployment, see John Doe, 'Mismanaging Iraq: The Economics of Insurgency', *The National Interest*, no. 78, winter 2004/05, pp. 108–13. One CPA official noted that the 'primary beneficiaries' of the \$18.6 billion granted by Congress 'will be American companies' who will employ foreign workers instead of Iraqis. Chandrasekaran, 'Mistakes Loom Large as Handover Nears'. Irrational as this was from the standpoint of winning the war, such a focus – dictated by domestic political considerations – may also be considered nearly inevitable.
- <sup>18</sup> Lawrence F. Kaplan, 'The Last Casualty', *The New Republic*, 7 February 2005, pp. 17–21. For an especially poignant example, see Elizabeth Rubin, 'Fern Holland's War', *New York Times*, 19 September 2004.
- <sup>19</sup> Diamond, 'What Went Wrong', pp. 35–6.
- <sup>20</sup> These conclusions were reached in a military briefing prepared before the war for the National Security Council called 'Force Security in Seven Recent Stability Operations'. See Michael R. Gordon, "'Catastrophic Success": The Strategy to Secure Iraq did not Foresee a 2nd War', *New York Times*, 19 October 2004. On historic force-to-population ratios, see also James Dobbins et al., *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2003).
- <sup>21</sup> Fallows, 'Blind into Baghdad', p. 64; Gordon, 'Catastrophic Success'.
- <sup>22</sup> See interview with James Perito, 'Truth, War, and Consequences', *Frontline*, Public Broadcasting System, October 2003, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/truth/interviews/perito.html>
- <sup>23</sup> Farnaz Fassihi, 'For Iraqi Family, A Torturous Search For Detained Kin; Overwhelmed U.S. Military Can't Track Everyone Arrested in Security Raids, Inciting Iraqis' Rage', *Wall Street Journal*, 16 September 2003. See also Robin Wright and Thomas E. Ricks, 'Bremer Criticizes Troop Levels: Ex-Overseer of Iraq Says U.S. Effort Was Hampered Early On', *Washington Post*, 5 October 2004. 'We never had enough troops on the ground', Bremer noted. 'The single most important change – the one thing that would have improved the situation – would have been having more troops in Iraq at the beginning and throughout the occupation.'
- <sup>24</sup> Michael E. O'Hanlon, 'Iraq Without a Plan', *Policy Review*, no. 128, December 2004/January 2005.
- <sup>25</sup> Thomas E. White, then secretary of the army, notes that 'our working budgetary assumption was that 90 days after completion of the operation, we would withdraw the first 50,000 and then every 30 days we'd take out another 50,000 until everybody was back. The view was that whatever was left in Iraq would be de minimis'. Quoted in Gordon, 'Catastrophic Success', 19 October 2004.
- <sup>26</sup> Nelson, quoted in Matthew Hay Brown and Tamara Lytle, 'Questions Mount on whether Iraq is becoming a Quagmire', *Orlando Sentinel*, 7 April 2004. See also Robert E. Hunter, 'The Perfect Army for Iraq: NATO', *New York Times*, 13 September 2003.
- <sup>27</sup> Quoted in John F. Burns, 'The Iraqi Capital: Baghdad Residents Begin a Long Climb to an Ordered City', *New York Times*, 14 April 2003.
- <sup>28</sup> No American official explicitly condoned the looting, which would have violated US responsibilities under the laws of war. Nevertheless, US officials did see the looters as striking at 'the symbols of the regime', in Rumsfeld's words, and professed understanding of their 'pent-up feelings'. Rumsfeld, quoted in Sean Loughlin, 'Rumsfeld on Looting in Iraq', <http://www.cnn.com/2003/US/04/11/sprj.irq.pentagon>. Noting the psychological difficulty of acting against looters, one defense official later commented: 'it's like sending troops into Warsaw Square to arrest people

- for being too unruly in 1989'. Quoted in Lowry, 'What Went Wrong', p. 37.
- <sup>29</sup> Rieff, 'Blueprint for a Mess'.
- <sup>30</sup> Rajiv Chandrasekaran, 'Our Heritage is Finished', *Washington Post*, 13 April 2003; Greg Gugliotta, 'Pentagon was Told of Risk to Museums', *Washington Post*, 14 April 2003; Fallows, 'Blind into Baghdad'; Lowry, 'What Went Wrong'; Rieff, 'Blueprint'.
- <sup>31</sup> Thomas E. Ricks, 'Army Historian Cites Lack of Postwar Plan; Major Calls Effort in Iraq "Mediocre"', *Washington Post*, 25 December 2004, citing an unpublished study of Major Isaiah Wilson III. See also R. Jeffrey Smith, 'Now for Nation Change', *Washington Post*, 13 April 2003, quoting Sandra Mitchell, a veteran of peacekeeping missions in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia: 'What we're seeing is almost an acceptance of the situation – that we're not going to be the cops'.
- <sup>32</sup> As is clearly implied, for instance, by James Fallows, 'Blind into Baghdad', pp. 64–5
- <sup>33</sup> 'As early as January, according to Newsweek, the Iraqi secret police issued an order instructing its forces to "do what's necessary after the fall of the Iraqi leadership to the American–British–Zionist Coalition forces", and setting out eleven steps, among them, "looting and burning all the government institutions that belong to our Directorates and other ones", and sowing chaos in the country by sabotaging power plants and assassinating imams and other public figures'. Mark Danner, 'Iraq: The New War', *The New York Review of Books*, 25 September 2003; Scott Johnson and Evan Thomas, 'Still Fighting Saddam', *Newsweek*, 21 July 2003.
- <sup>34</sup> Lowry, 'What Went Wrong', p. 36, quoting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Richard Myers, who told the Senate Armed Services Committee in June 2004 that 'I would submit we were probably too gracious in our victory in hindsight'.
- <sup>35</sup> The Duelfer Report provides evidence that Saddam Hussein expected and planned for some form of insurgency against the coalition. See Douglas Jehl, 'Inspector's Report Says Hussein Expected Guerilla War', *New York Times*, 7 October 2004.
- <sup>36</sup> Michael E. O'Hanlon, 'Iraq without a Plan', *Policy Review* vol. 128, 2004/05.
- <sup>37</sup> For reports of this practice see e.g. 'When Deadly Force Bumps into Hearts and Minds', *The Economist*, 29 December 2004; Dan Baum, 'Two Soldiers: How the Dead Come Home', *The New Yorker*, 9 August 2004; Patrick Cockburn, 'Despair in Iraq over the Forgotten Victims of US Invasion', *The Independent*, 9 September 2004. See also Sean Rayment, 'US Tactics Condemned by British Officers', *The Telegraph*, 4 November 2004, quoting a senior British army official: 'My view and the view of the British chain of command is that the Americans' use of violence is not proportionate and is over-responsive to the threat they are facing. They don't see the Iraqi people the way we see them. They view them as untermenschen. They are not concerned about the Iraqi loss of life in the way the British are. Their attitude towards the Iraqis is tragic, it's awful. The US troops view things in very simplistic terms. It seems hard for them to reconcile subtleties between who supports what and who doesn't in Iraq. It's easier for their soldiers to group all Iraqis as the bad guys. As far as they are concerned Iraq is bandit country and everybody is out to kill them'. On the civilian toll in Iraq, see Nancy A. Youssef, 'More Iraqi Civilians Killed by U.S. Forces than by Insurgents, Data Shows', *Knight Ridder Newspapers*, 24 September 2004.
- <sup>38</sup> Jim Krane, 'U.S. Faces Complex Insurgency in Iraq', *Duluth News Tribune*, 4 October 2004.
- <sup>39</sup> Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, 'Estimates by U.S. See More Rebels With More Funds', *New York Times*, 22 October 2004; Tom Lasseter and Jonathan S. Landay, 'Iraqi Insurgency Growing Larger, more Effective', 21 January 2005, *Knight Ridder Newspapers*.

- <sup>40</sup> For one example among many press reports, see Jackie Spinner, 'In One Night, Iraqi Turns from Friend to Foe: Man Who Supported U.S. Occupation Calls Americans "the Devil" After Alleged Raid on House', *Washington Post*, 23 January 2005.
- <sup>41</sup> Rajiv Chandrasekaran, 'Key General Criticizes April Attack In Fallujah; Abrupt Withdrawal Called Vacillation', *Washington Post*, 13 September 2004.
- <sup>42</sup> Edward P. Djerejian *et al.*, *Guiding Principles for U.S. Post-Conflict Policy in Iraq* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2003); Conrad C. Crane and W. Andrew Terrill, *Reconstructing Iraq: Insights, Challenges, and Missions for Military Forces in a Post-Conflict Scenario* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Army War College, February 2003).
- <sup>43</sup> For a defense of the move, see L. Paul Bremer, 'The Right Call', *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 January 2005.
- <sup>44</sup> Michael R. Gordon, 'Debate Lingering on Decision to Dissolve the Iraqi Military', *New York Times*, 21 October 2004.
- <sup>45</sup> For a particularly harsh critique, see Anthony H. Cordesman, 'US Policy in Iraq: A "Realist" Approach to its Challenges and Opportunities', Center for Strategic and International Studies, 6 August 2004. See also Bryan Bender, 'Report Paints Bleak Picture of Iraqi Forces', *Boston Globe*, 8 January 2005.
- <sup>46</sup> William Booth and Rajiv Chandrasekaran, 'Occupation Forces Halt Elections Throughout Iraq', *Washington Post*, 28 June 2003.
- <sup>47</sup> Quoted in Associated Press, 'Bush plans U.N. Address', *Daily Herald*, 23 September 2003. As Bush described the anticipated process in 2003: 'The U.N. resolution must promote an orderly transfer of sovereignty to what will be a freely elected government, based upon a constitution ... The constitution must be written, and there will be free elections, and then sovereignty will occur once the Iraqi people are able to express their opinions'. Quoted in 'Bush Plans Personal Appeal on Iraq', MSNBC, 19 September 2003. To similar effect, see the comments of Condoleezza Rice: 'The French plan, which would somehow try to transfer sovereignty to an unelected group of people, just isn't workable', she said at the White House briefing. 'It's a country that needs an orderly process to get to the writing of a constitution ... followed then by elections and then by the transfer of sovereignty.' Quoted in Joseph Curl, 'U.S. says French plan for Iraq Won't Work', *The Washington Times*, 23 September 2003.
- <sup>48</sup> The plan that Jay Garner brought with him as head of the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance – of a national assembly of 300 notables, a sort of Iraqi *loya jirga*, that would agree on an interim but sovereign Iraqi government – was much superior to the course that was actually followed, when L. Paul Bremer rushed in with grandiose plans for re-writing Iraq's legal code, re-wiring its economic system and revolutionising its social order. It is difficult to see what lasting accomplishment the CPA has to its credit, save that it was disbanded sooner than had been originally forecast. Some of its enterprises (like the re-writing of Iraq's traffic code in accordance with Maryland state law) were simply fatuous. See William Langewiesche, 'Welcome to the Green Zone: The American Bubble in Baghdad', *The Atlantic Monthly*, November 2004, pp. 60–88. Its staffing – with lots of fresh-faced Republican Party faithful dabbling in the re-making of a walled-off and alien society – will one day produce a dark comic novel. Its belief that private capital would respond to a newly imposed economic framework – low tariffs, a flat tax – ignored the fact that 'capital is a coward'. The strategy for economic reconstruction (see note 17) was entirely misconceived. Politically, too, the CPA showed itself inept by contrast with the Iraqi exiles who were supposedly its stooges. Allawi's political touch, especially his approach to the

Sunni, was far superior to Bremer's or to US military commanders'. Chalabi, by contrast, gave excellent advice on the handling of Moqtada al-Sadr that, had it been followed, would have avoided the destructive eruptions that occurred in April and August 2004 in Najaf and elsewhere. 'Our real business', as Chalabi noted, 'is to persuade everybody that Sadr is better inside than outside and to provide some measure of comfort to the middle class that he is not going to eat them up'. Quoted in Dexter Filkins, 'Militant Cleric Considers Entry Into Iraqi Politics', *New York Times*, 3 October 2004.

<sup>49</sup> Peter W. Galbraith, 'Iraq: The Bungled Transition', *New York Review of Books*, 23 September 2004.

<sup>50</sup> James Kurth, 'Iraq: Losing the American Way', *The American Conservative*, 15 March 2004, p. 16. See also the suggestive analysis of Amy Chua, *World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability* (New York: Doubleday, 2004)

<sup>51</sup> Eliot A. Cohen, 'A Time for Humility', *Wall Street Journal*, 31 January 2005. To similar effect, see Frederick W. Kagan, 'War and Aftermath', *Policy Review*, vol. 120, August–September 2003.