



Iraq: Models For Transition

What the policy makers failed to take into account.

This paper will deal with some broad issues and attempts to provide some working solutions on how to turn the tide and change many of our failures into successes. This will require a broad refocusing of our efforts in a way that positively affect ordinary Iraqi's daily living. This paper does not have attempt to provide any magic bullets. Rather the author realizes that positive change will only come with a great deal of time, intermittent failures and hard work.



There are several factors that the coalition authorities and US policymakers and think-tanks have failed to take notice of in both their actions and their writing. That is the needs, aspirations and desires of the individual Iraqi as well as those of local

communities. Several factors have contributed to this failure. However, the biggest obstacle to a coherent and successful change in Iraq is the incessant reliance on 'group think' by US authorities to formulate policy. This unfortunate and counterproductive mindset has taken hold of the US administration. This had led to a steadfast refusal to hear solutions that are 'out of the box', original and unconventional. It is clear that



conventional thinking and listening to the usual think tanks and policy institutions has not and will yield solutions that will stabilize Iraq. The individuals who populate these institutions rarely step outside of their McMansions in the suburbs to tackle real issues with real people. Unfortunately, these think tanks know who butters their bread and often must formulate policy papers from a narrow, donor driven mentality. Individuals who stray too far from the parochial DC oriented mentality get ostracized within their organizations or are let go. This is not to say that there have been some great policy papers out there. There have been, to be sure, but each seems to underestimate the human factor in their quest for a solution to the Iraqi conundrum. This paper will look at one way, perhaps the only way Iraq can ever hope to return to the modern world in terms of its government, economy and its basic infrastructure.

Starting At The Wrong End

Policy makers have made one tragic mistake in their quest to form an Iraqi government, that is they have failed to engage ordinary Iraqis in the building of their nation. This is not to say that their efforts have not been at least superficially democratic. They have attempted bring democracy in Iraq with the ballot box, the key foundation of any democracy. This of course is true of any democracy. The problem in Iraq is that the real needs of Iraqis cannot be addressed by a central government that is seen as being set up by Americans (foreign Invaders) and 'technocrats' that refuse to understand many potent realities about Iraq, its culture, tribalism, nationalism and its quest to become politically and economically stable. There will remain a violent underclass of Iraqis who will oppose this until doomsday, and this will be a serious impediment to all the hard work well-meaning Iraqis and Americans are doing. The wind must be taken out of the sails of these groups. However, it must be acknowledged that many have long standing legitimate grievances which will only multiply as the days pass. Acknowledging that one of the primary problems is that US policy makers are trying to make Iraq from the top down rather than from the bottom up will be a constructive first step in solving the Iraq crisis. The top to bottom methodology is probably due to a vast overestimation of our ability to create an effective government as it is to do with America's own domestic time restraints which cannot be completely ignored¹. However, if America is committed to remain in Iraq for the long haul, then it must come up with other policy options that

¹ This author realizes that this conclusion is reached at least partially from hindsight.

will not necessarily be the fastest but will be result oriented and take into account local Iraqi's, local leaders, and the aspirations of the ordinary Iraqi rather than short-term domestically driven political results. This is the real challenge, to fail means that other elements will gain influence such as outmoded and largely discredited and counterproductive political parties (Ba'ath) and movements (Al-Qaeda), neighboring states and radical individuals.

A Lesson

One lesson that must be understood, not just in an academic sense but in a sense that will translate into the cogitations of policy makers is Iraq's history. Having been born out of WWI and consisting of various tribal and ethnic groups, Iraq was a creation that sprung as much from the heroics of T.E. Lawrence, as it did from British expedience, ignorance, and war-weariness. Those of you who saw the movie Lawrence of Arabia may remember that the Prince Faisal had garnered the allegiance of many varying tribes. However, it was the loyalty to the tribe that commanded the greater respect. This tribal mentality is still relevant today and even more so now that the central government has collapsed. Say what you will about Saddam Hussein, while he was an extremely brutal dictator, he did manage, through the skillful use of Arab nationalism, near-perfect propaganda, terror and economic development to create a modern nation-state in which the population understood their fate was tied, not to their particular tribe but to the nation of Iraq. This was no small feat as we are discovering now in Iraq; Shi'ites, Sunni's and Kurd's each divided into their own subgroups and they are creating a nightmare for the inflexible policy makers in Washington. Each group has its needs and its demands,



each group has its gripes and no group is going to join a weak, ineffective central government that does not realistically address their particular issues. This is where US policymakers have failed and will continue to fail until there is a sea change in policy. The key is to get local leaders *at the lowest*



level possible on board step by step, in a painstaking approach to nation building. The old Iraq is gone and attempting to rebuild it using discredited people and organizations will not bring in the folks out in the 'hinterlands' who were terribly abused by the old government, into the fold. These people will never accept the leadership of people who, at best, they do not know or at worst, they despise. Consequently, any new approach must take into account local leaders. What this does not mean and what policy makers must avoid *at all costs* is the perception that we are willing and able to play one tribe, group or region against another. Sadly this perception will be very difficult to dispel completely and the only way to do it is to prove US sincerity with concrete and measurable actions over a long period of time.

Tragically, Iraqis once clearly supported the presence of Coalition troops in rebuilding their nation. Polls taken by the [National Democratic Institute For Democratic Affairs](#), shows how the Iraqis thought about many issues effecting themselves and the US occupation. Conducted in 2003, its conclusions were extremely enlightening. Some of the Key Findings of the polls were these:

1. *Iraqis were glad to be rid of Saddam*
2. *Iraqis had a strong desire for order and governance*
3. *Reactions to freedom and democracy were mixed, though mostly positive. There was little desire to reestablish a monarchy.*
4. *Views were mixed on Islamic rule. Sunnis and Christians for the most part wanted to keep religion out of government, but recoiled at the word 'secular'.*
5. *Iraqis want to keep their state in one piece. No partitioning. This was surprisingly true as well with the Kurds who have long sought after an independent 'Kurdistan'.*
6. *Despite a rather large support for Islam, the idea of Islamic law had little support.*
7. *Iraqis were cynical about their leaders.*
8. *They were skeptical of Political organizations.*
9. *Women faced special challenges to full participation, indeed many Iraqi women did not feel that their place was in the public arena, believing their place was in the home.*
10. *Iraqis know they have a long road ahead of them.*
11. *They know that they are living in a fog of disinformation and most are distrustful of US motives and many believe Oil was the primary motivator for our invasion*

Given this environment it seems that the Iraqi's may not be in love with the American occupation but they are willing to work with it to rebuild the nation. The US has missed a window of opportunity to solve Iraq's leaderless state with little violence and squandered it in a senseless display of macho-man tactics that only serve to alienate Iraqis from the CPA². This has led to chain of events which has

- 1) Significantly increased the level of political violence and street crime
- 2) Destroyed Iraq's basic Infrastructure.
- 3) Created and affirmed (in their minds) that the US was really only after oil and a military base of operations in Iraq from which to threaten Iran and Syria.
- 4) Alienated large segments of the population away from US and western influence and pushed them, reluctantly in the the hands of religious extremists.

Policy makers need to cease relying solely creating new bureaucratic structures and reorganizing their own tottering command structures and remember that what remains in Iraq when we leave must be wholly Iraqi, not American nor can any perception that what we leave behind is a puppet of any present or future US administration or a new cycle of violence will certainly ensue.

Any future transitional authority must (this is critical) take into account the tribal needs and aspirations of Iraqi's and address those needs with concrete actions. The needs of the man on the street cannot be ignored. Today, these needs are basic, simple and given sufficient financial³ and technical investment can be met.

The message coming both from the mounting insurgency and the Iraqi people's reaction to it, is that the political process has failed to create credible institutions and has lacked sufficient input from the Iraqi people. The Coalition has preferred to deal with a handful of selected Iraqi politicians rather than with the necessarily more chaotic and messy reality of society - Iraq's Transition: On A Knife's Edge (ICG)

Briefly summed up, the US was mistaken in the tactics it has used in attempting to bring

2 Coalition provisional Authority.

3 The most important change that must transpire from the present thinking is that Contractors must be given results oriented contracts in which payments will be based not on a set price regardless of outcome, but based on a firm set of measurable, viable and transparent goals. For example if a contractor is given money to build a water facility in a Kurdish village, he only gets he bulk of his pay when the facility is operational. If US contractors will not step up to the plate and take these kinds of contracts because of some unofficial boycott, then (and only then) should the US begin looking at foreign contractors to do the work, preferably from nations with large Arabic speaking populations.

the Iraqi insurgency to heel and in its attempts to build a central government. Rather than constructively engaging ordinary Iraqi's and building relationships built on trust, concrete actions and some semblance of respect for local customs and needs at the local level, the US used what can only be described as a 'shock and awe' approach to nation building. This was doomed to failure from the start. Ordinary Iraqi's are not only well educated, they are extremely astute, politically. They were not going to be bullied by military commanders and US politicians each of whom they viewed with varying degrees of distrust into building a house with rotten foundations. What was need then as now, is a new approach that ceases to attempt to build the nation from the top down.

What Not To Do

The current trends in Iraqi in nation building is a perfect textbook of what not to do. The US from the beginning refused to listen to the voices of reason that explained to US leadership that using tired corrupt Ex patriots (expats) was a big mistake. These men were by and large very corrupt and were viewed by Iraqi's as being much too close to US policy makers to be trusted with their future. Thus using men the likes of which Chalabi is a 'poster child', was a dreadful mistake and exposed two things to Ordinary Iraqi's

1. It exposed the ignorance of US policy makers to Iraqi sensibilities and needs.
2. It exposed a seamy underbelly of graft that seemed to have the tacit, if not express approval of key US policy makers.

Whether #2 above is true is not the issue here, the issue is that this is the clear perception that is ingrained in the minds of Iraqi's and a large body of Americans, both inside and outside policy circles. This is going to a one of the most difficult challenges ahead. How do you stop the graft and corruption and yet keep key players, both Iraqi and US, constructively engaged?

However the other major potential problem for the future is that the US may be tempted to put too much reliance on moderate Mullah's who do have a large following but lack the kind of broad support that is needed in any kind of nation building, even those who come close to matching (now and in the future), [Al Sistani's](#) influence, which has been mostly constructive and probably the broadest, may not be enough to be a significant

enough player in bringing Iraq together into a single nation. Here, once again the top down approach is fraught with significant political difficulties and may not be politically possible for the foreseeable future. *The political difficulties that are evident now are the result of different political and religious forces fighting for power over a non-existent entity, the nation state of Iraq.*

Bottom Up Approach.

Key factors that support this approach is Iraq's various tribes and regional associations that were held together only by Saddam's brutal hand. Bringing together all the different groups in Iraq was no small feat. Nevertheless, his brutality forged a real Iraqi national identity. Thus, the hard part in many respects has already been accomplished. What the US needs to do now is rebuild that identity. This can only be accomplished if local leaders and average everyday Iraqi's honestly feel that they have something real to gain by acknowledging, obeying and eventually paying taxes to a central government. It must also be realized that they will not be used by outsiders in a cynical game of geopolitics, Iraqi's are too sophisticated politically to be fooled by such a maneuvering. Thus, the following musings in this paper will be a cursory look at a completely different way to build the nation of Iraq into a stable state with institutions that are based on local structures and based on fulfilling mutual needs.

Lead locally.

The first step that must be taken is to create a degree of trust between local leaders and the US military commanders and other US personnel on the ground. This must be done not as a salesman would do it, extolling the virtues of a national government via a exquisite slide presentation and a Madison Avenue approach to PR, but rather by addressing the real needs of local Iraqi's. In towns where there is no running water and no electricity, commanders should be able to deal directly with the contractors to build or rebuild the infrastructure that is needed. However, this can only be done with the support of local leaders and to do so without talking to and enlisting that support could prove to be dangerous.

One case study is a town in Iraq where this was done. It was a town in which many insurgents had attacked US personnel. It was a regular occurrence. Some of the US personnel on the ground realized that this could as much be due to a misunderstanding as any deep seated anti-American sentiment and wanted to know what could be done to stop it. After an inordinate amount of bureaucratic wrangling the American ground personnel got permission to actually talk, face to face with the local leader. A specific (and very basic) need was communicated to the US representative and once the order was actually filled, attacks on US military personnel not only decreased, they stopped altogether. To this day coalition troops are not attacked in this area where this particular leader is in control. The needs of the local populace are very basic and in many instances do not require billions of dollars of financial investment. Communicating with local leaders is essential and it is something that Rumsfeld has not only refused to do, in many instances, it is forbidden. How can you ever hope to govern a people that you refuse to communicate with?

Methods for Success

First and foremost military commanders and other ground personnel directly associated with the US government (not contractors) must be retrained to deal with insurgency in this new constructive way. A first run test of about 15 villages of varying size and tribal/religious backgrounds needs to be engaged as testing grounds, this should be done in order to determine the most successful methods of engaging local leaders. It will not be an easy task and even a 30% success rate (villages who actively support the reconstruction of their villages with US help) can be called a success. Even this low rate of cooperation can be used in a positive sense in the medium and long term. Once local leaders realize that US commanders and their interlocutors are there to build and not destroy, to assist and not dictate, these models can be transferred to other locales who may have refused initial offers of assistance. Local leaders will come under increasing pressure to cooperate with US commanders when it is clearly seen that those who work constructively with the Americans have running water, electricity, modern sewage systems rebuilt, new housing under construction, schools run by local teachers, safe streets and a working criminal justice system, Local leaders who refuse help may not be leaders for long. Once again this is bottom up nation building and the needs of the man on the street should have the ***highest priority***.

However, there are dangers, as mentioned before any perception that the US is favoring one group over another must be dispelled at once. This will be a major propaganda problem to overcome, however, one of the most potent propaganda weapons in the arsenal of the Iraqi resistance has been that the US hasn't done anything except destroy Iraq. This will take the wind out of that particular sail. Consequently, once some towns return to some sense of normality, recruitment for insurgents will probably drop accordingly.

Build on your successes

Once numerous towns begin to have the necessary infrastructure to sustain modern living, others will desire to have the same benefits. As mentioned before, leaders who refuse to get on board may not be leaders for very long. Additionally, those individual Iraqis wanting a better life may find that they will have to move to areas where the infrastructure exists, thus further undermining the power of resistant local leaders. The towns cooperating with the US will grow, those who do not will begin to see their population decrease.

One model may be to use British tactics used in the Malaysian emergency of the 1950s as a guide. The UK was quite successful. The question of how the UK succeeded in Malaysia and why the US failed in Vietnam with well over 10 times as many men is one that should be asked now in policy circles. Some have called it the only war the west has actually won against communist insurgents. While that is probably an overstatement, it is instructive that popular insurgencies, borne of mass discontent usually end in failure for western powers. A brief but interesting paper on this uprising can be [found here](#). However, it was only when both military tactics became better and the new military leader Sir Gerald Templer began to address grievances that things began to move in a positive direction. This approach is essential if the US wants to eventually bring its troops home and see Iraq stand on its own. *In any counter insurgency program there is no substitute for addressing grievances in a concrete fashion.*

Iraqi Women.



The plight of Iraqi women is probably one of the most underreported tragedies on post invasion Iraq. Many are abducted to neighboring nations to be used as sex slaves by the rich and powerful. Some become prostitutes. Some observers who travel in the region have personally relayed to me just how bad things are. In one neighboring country the hotels are full of Iraqi women who are prostitutes. Many have been

abducted but some probably come because they feel that as bad as being a hooker is in a foreign land, it is better than living in post-occupation Iraq where many of their family members have been killed, there is little food or water and their shelter is now a old bombed out building. For many Iraqi women, this is the nightmare that is now Iraq.

Iraqi women could be used as a potent force to help rebuild the nation if they are given the support they need by the US. However using them as some kind of propaganda tool or pro-occupation subversion group is not going to solve anything. Women can be used in a variety of positive rebuilding and support functions.

One Example.



If the US could recruit Iraqi women with some medical background to assist in running hospitals this would be an enormous help in more ways than one. First the US could man these new hospitals using Iraqi women as nurses, doctors, administrators. The US could provide the necessary medicines and equipment for use by these women to

assist the local population. There are risks to be sure, any assistance that these women receive from the US could mean death to them by radical Iraqi elements. However, if ground rules could be established between the various elements of the Iraqi resistance that anyone no matter which group a casualty belong to, (resistance fighter, foreign fighter, US personnel or ordinary Iraqi) he or she can receive medical care with *no questions asked*. It would be a powerful deterrent to attacks on these facilities by insurgent groups. Simply put, once insurgents know that they can bring their wounded to be treated, they will be far less likely to attack such a facility. This would preclude two things that have not happened yet. First, the US must begin to talk to the insurgents. These insurgents are, for the most part, not terrorists. They are people who are defending their homes from an invader who has come from 8000 miles away to destroy the basic infrastructure of their nation, reduce whole towns to rubble, abducted ordinary Iraqi's from off the street, tortured many and murdered some⁴. In addition, these invaders have stolen its most valuable economic resource, the nations oil. What is needed at this juncture is a degree of objectivity heretofore lacking in the formulation of US policy towards these fighters. While the US administration seems to refuse to acknowledge these simple facts, the inescapable fact is that this is why many Iraqi's have taken up arms. If an invader came 8000 miles away and did this to Americans what would the people do? This human factor has been absent from military planning and Rumsfeld's 'shock and awe' doctrine for nation building. To make peace you must be willing to talk and this has not happened. A degree of honesty and perhaps a small bit of humility is necessary at this juncture. To believe that the US has all the answers to Iraq's troubles is arrogant and counterproductive. Real constructive engagement is necessary and if the

⁴ Regardless of how US policymakers feel about our invasion, it is the opinions of Iraqi's that matter here.

men will not talk, then perhaps the women can. Women located in these hospitals would be in a unique positions to pass messages to insurgents from US leaders and vice versa. These intermediaries could become valued by both sides especially if real negotiations are not currently underway. Iraqi women have the most to gain from a stable Iraq. They are the ones who have suffered the most. It is this authors estimation that this is a valuable resource that has been at best ignored or at worst, badly misused by the DOD and the CPA⁵. A concerted and tireless effort needs to be made to recruit Iraqi women to help bring bring peace and rebuild the Iraqi nation.

Another Example

Our occupation of Iraq is for the long haul. Political promises by either party in election years notwithstanding. Realizing this, plans for the long term must be made. One way to do this is to take another group of impressionable Iraqi's and educate them, and teach



them tolerance towards other tribal, ethnic and religious groups and to teach them how best to live in a modern society. This impressionable group are the forgotten children and orphans of Iraq. This is a group that could be a potent force in Iraq in 10 years time. The alternative is to let the insurgents and

religious fanatics get hold of them and indoctrinate them. Then, in 10 years time, they will also be a potent force, against a stable Iraq. Schools and living facilities can and should be built for these forgotten children, if only for humanitarian reasons. These things would not require massive fiscal outlays nor require enormous manpower requirements. These are things that could be easily accomplished. They could assist Iraq 10 years from now, and at the very least, these children will be far less likely to join violent resistance movements.

5 On the ground observers have relayed to me personally just how many young, attractive scantily clad Iraqi women are working as horizontal 'special assistants' for top coalition personnel.

A Fundamental Change In The Coalition Bureaucracy

This is essential if our adventure in Iraq is to end. First and foremost US operations must cease to fall under the jurisdiction of the DOD. Either the State Department or a special administrator who is not a military commander and not associated politically or administratively with the DOD needs to be appointed as the leader of the occupation.⁶ He should have both administrative, legal (over military forces as well) and operational command over US forces. This individual must have a broad mandate and get little interference from the White House and none from the Pentagon. A new emphasis must be put on diplomacy, and basic infrastructure and less on building a central government that will be of little use to most Iraqi's. The entire mode of military operations must be revamped in Iraq and it should concentrate on force protection and when asked by locals who can be trusted, restoring law and order⁷. Fears of Iranian and Syrian takeovers of sections of Iraq need to be placed on the back burner for now and building and creating normalcy and prosperity must take priority. Unfortunately, this will not happen with Rumsfeld or his commanders at the helm. The military (under Rumsfeld) is too busy trying to justify a failed military doctrine. They have fallen into a counterproductive pattern of repeating the same mistakes hoping for a better result. Three years have been wasted and with each passing day, the remaining good will of Iraqi's diminishes. It is time to revamp from top to bottom the entire occupation command structure.

The graft and corruption (which are so great, so obvious and so well covered that it will not be discussed here) must stop. This means getting rid of individuals, commanders,

⁶ While the idea may seem somewhat odious to many, including myself, going back to see how Rome administered its provinces may be instructive. There were various types of Roman officials who were sent to various regions of the empire to govern, quell unrest, collect taxes, etc.. While often quite repressive their system worked fairly well for over a thousand years. In Iraq, we do not need to colonize, though that may be the goal of some US policy makers. Rather our goal should be to restore normalcy, reduce sectarian violence and reduce the influence of religious fanatics. The key here is to ensure that local leaders have local control and are able to administer their locale's constructively. US assistance can be given to those leaders who are not supporting anti-US activities and are willing to work with coalition authorities. The Senate (HOR) should not give up its responsibilities to an overly ambitious executive, but rather set up committee's to deal with broad issues and oversee activities in Iraq. When necessary, they should have the power to appoint the governor of Iraq and not the President. This should not be such a constitutional stretch as technically, we are not at war as Congress never declared it (all talk of the 'War Powers Act' aside, it was never put to nor ratified as an amendment to the Constitution which clearly gives that power to congress and congress alone). Once this is accomplished the President will know that he will be measured by results on the ground rather than Gallup polls on TV. Using these ancient models may not seem relevant in today's 21st century world, but man has not changed nor are his basic needs for security sustenance and order.

⁷ This should be done only on a case by case basis as needs and forces dictate.

military personnel, and civilians who engage in it immediately. It also means trying these cases publicly when they happen and recovering the ill gotten gains from those who are responsible *and* from those who received them knowing that its source was illegal. The US cannot hope to gain the trust and confidence of ordinary Iraqi's when our own house is in such disarray. US leadership has not inspired confidence and until the DOD and its current policy makers are swept from the major decision making process in Iraq it is unlikely that any effort made to bring Iraq to a place of normalcy is likely to succeed.

Conclusion.

It is unlikely that any of these things will ever realistically be implemented. Nevertheless a serious attempt should be made by like minded mid-level US policymakers to show a little bureaucratic courage and push forward new solutions to key policymakers. If this does not happen, in ten years we will still be in Iraq, still having our troops killed, still killing Iraqi's but our military itself may very well only be a shadow of what it was when we first invaded.



Iraqi Or American? Death knows no nationality. Unless the two wish to be joined in death, seeking peace becomes imperative. Talking never killed anyone, but it has saved many a life.

An earlier article by Mr. Watson on the subject of Iraq [can be found here](#).

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