

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

NEW REALITIES IN IRAQ AND PERSPECTIVES FOR THE FUTURE

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Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 30 MAR 2007		2. REPORT TYPE Strategy Research Project		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2006 to 00-00-2007	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE New Realities in Iraq and Perspectives in the Future				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Khaled Aboud				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Carlisle, PA, 17013-5050				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT See attached.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 15	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Brigadier General Khaled H. Aboud
TITLE: New Realities in Iraq and Perspectives for the Future
FORMAT: Strategy Research Project
DATE: 25 April 2007 WORD COUNT: 4330 PAGES: 15
KEY TERMS: Sectarianism, reconstruction, militias
CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

This project focuses on the dilemma of political reconstruction and security of Iraq. Due to the sectarian nature of alliances in government, the author recommends major restructuring of political institutions and governing bodies to overcome the weaknesses of the nascent state, and the ongoing sectarian battles.

NEW REALITIES IN IRAQ AND PERSPECTIVES FOR THE FUTURE

Introduction

The purpose of regime change in Iraq was to build a new democracy and a better life for Iraqis. However, the current conflict will not be solved and safety and security will not return unless all Iraqis recapture a spirit of national unity. This Strategic Research Project will describe some of the events and dilemmas that are impeding national unity.

Iraq was called the “land of the sun” for thousands of years, and the cradle of civilization. Mesopotamian culture formed in the Tigris and Euphrates region. Iraq produced the first written laws in the world, the Code of Hammurabi, the first libraries, official documents, official seals, the Hanging Gardens with their own piped water system, and many other famous monuments. In addition to Iraq’s contribution to history, its location was strategically important to world powers, located as it is between the Arabian Gulf, the Caspian Sea, and the Black Sea and near the Mediterranean Sea. Therefore Iraq has been a vital center of the Middle East and constituted a “nation” in a historic and cultural sense. In addition, the three great monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam were nurtured in this heartland of the Middle East.

Throughout history, different empires fought for control over territory in the Middle East and Iraq including the Romans, the Sassanians, the Arabs, the Mongols, the Ottomans and Safavids, and later the British. Now, in the age of the single superpower, the United States wants to protect interests in the Middle East, and in the Arabian Gulf and therefore invaded Iraq to build a new political system.

The situation in Iraq changed radically since 2003 and the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein. Without American intervention it would not have been possible to replace Saddam Hussein and his hideous dictatorship. Then Iraq entered the maze of political chaos and divisions. Throughout the twentieth century, Iraq was plagued by political divisions and partisan conflicts. It suffered dictatorial and repressive regimes since 1958. Now, the national divisions are providing excuses for sectarianism, and liquidating entire sectors of the population, and in some cases, governmental elements are responsible.

Religious and Political divisions

The political vacuum created by the fall of the previous regime was made even more difficult when new groups and parties were structured on the basis of sectarian affiliation, thus changing the nature of political life. Political divisions began to emerge over religious differences and not ideological differences. An example of this negative aspect of sectarianism came with the vote on the proposed constitution of the country in 2005. Without any discussion

of the positive or negative aspects of the constitution, some Shi'a authorities endorsed the Constitution as a whole, while other Sunni authorities rejected it. That division was fundamentally dangerous because Iraqis needed a deep and thoughtful discussion of the Constitution. Today's politicians and religious figures do not understand the real meaning of democracy; that it goes beyond the matter of political representation. They have not learned from historical experiences and are creating only intolerance and incendiary hatred in Iraq which was not prepared for these deep divisions.

In answer to those who claim that religion has always been the highest authority in Iraq, we must state that Iraq was in fact, governed by political leaders, not religious leaders ever since the Ummayyad Empire, and during the Abbasid Empire when Baghdad was the center of the Islamic world. The religious leaders consulted with the ruler and sometimes suffered at the hands of the political leadership, but they were not the source of governance and administration.

Misinformation and Selective Information

Another new reality in Iraq is that each faction is utilizing different and conflicting facts and information, including the multinational forces. This creates a chaotic informational environment in Iraq due to a lack of truly verifiable sources. This has been a continuing problem in Iraq. For example, Iraq used census information from 1977, 1987, and 1997, relying now on the 1977 census which was accurate but is not current. The 1987 information is flawed due to the Iran-Iraq War, and in 1997, there was such a large exile population in addition to the semi-autonomous status of the Kurdish areas that this data is not considered reliable. This causes many legitimate questions concerning the size of population sectors and population transfer in the provinces. In turn this situation is even less accurate due to enforced flight as a result of sectarian conflict.

The number of Iraqi emigrants is as unclear as the internally displaced Iraqis. We do not have clear statistics on the numbers of casualties since 2003, including those Iraqis who are victims of sectarian violence. Further, statistics are collected concerning the volume of oil production and sales, however, the veracity of these statistics is a question, and the Iraqi public lacks access to this information. Many additional questions circulate around the central Iraqi administrative budgets and expenditures.

Ministries have been created and are operating. However, it is not clear what tasks are being accomplished in these ministries and the level of performance within them. Each has a budget, but little transparency exists as to the expenditures of these budgets. Further, professional qualifications should be required in the selection of ministers and other responsible

officials in government and in the military. Yet, we know that many of these lack the necessary credentials, or have forwarded false credentials.

This leads us to the question of sectarian balance. Without accurate statistics, how can all Iraqis trust data that suggests a particular proportion of Shi'i Iraqis as compared to Sunni Iraqis? Since Iraqis were accustomed to a mixed situation under the former regime, in which a lack of information concerning such relevant statistics prevailed as well as the release of other types of statistics. Therefore, Iraqis knew very little about their own country's institutions, demography, services, resources, balance of trade or other economic information, as well as their own civic rights. Some Western analysts and politicians, as well as some Iraqis have actually deceived the public in providing misinformation, or information which is too general in nature. The chaotic Iraqi informational environment exists alongside the ongoing chaotic violence. It also increases risk in official decisions, because whether the decision maker is Iraqi or American, he cannot act or predict rationally and appropriately without accurate information.

The Project of Dividing Iraq

One of the most difficult tasks for any people is to shape and determine its own destiny and plan for its future. How horrible when some of a nation's population come to embrace division as part of a natural democratic process! Iraq today is the product of the post-1958 era, and the negative results of separatist identities, ideologies and slogans that developed due to repression.

The authors of *Iraq's Future Dictatorship, Democracy or Division?*, William Anderson and Gareth Stansfield provide a clear picture of the dividing of Iraq.¹ The authors explain that after the successful military intervention, the formation of a new democratic Iraq proved almost impossible for several reasons. They believed that due to Iraq's mosaic of sects and ethnic groups, the Western mission would not succeed in the formation of unified and democratic Iraq. Sectarian and ethnic rivalries would prevent the success of this project. History has shown that to be true.

This book was published the book in 2004, a year after the war. How could the authors know that we would witness the failure of the democratic experiment in Iraq? Why would the authors want to predict the aborting of the democratic experiment in Iraq at the time of the book's publication? How could democracy be established in Iraq quickly as it emerged from a long dictatorial rule? How could democracy be encouraged under terrible material conditions in Iraq? How can democracy succeed under the shadow of political party leadership beholden to other countries in the region, and when militias were allowed to control the course of events?

Also Peter Galbraith writes that there is no future for Iraq unless it is divided into three states, incurring a Kurdish one in the north, which is loyal to the West, and Shiite state in the south loyal to Iran. The third state would be Sunni Arab in the center of the country. His book is an account of the American involvement in Iraq.² I interviewed Galbraith, and he explained that “the sins of American policy caused Iraq to drift, uncontrollably bleeding, and opened the door to a civil war that the world has not seen before.” He added, “If the price of Iraq's unity is the existence of another dictatorship, it would be an obscenely heavy price.”³

I do not know why Galbraith saw only two possibilities, partition or dictatorship. Iraqis knew the dangers of both options. Partition would cause Iraqis to continue fighting until they divide their homeland between Turkey and Iran due to the historical interests of these two countries in Iraq.

Without dictatorship, Iraq cannot return to its unified condition because the struggle for power has splintered the various interests into many directions. Therefore, my response to Galbraith is that the path toward solving Iraq's problems and reinstating its unity is obstructed because of regional intervention in the internal affairs of Iraq. The task of destroying the terrorists in Iraq and the separation of powers of the civil administration cannot be accomplished through sectarianism. Instead we need institution of a rule of law with justice and to deter anyone, even those in a position of authority, who are damaging Iraq.

It is problematic that there are Iraqi politicians who support partition plans or argue for federalized territories. For example, Mr. Abdul Hakim, chairman of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq Party, which is loyal to Iran, by proposing a partition of nine provinces of the central and southern regions and his public declaration that he has no concern about the other areas of Iraq. With the exception of Karbala and Najaf, the other areas are essentially mixed sect areas. Yet, Abdul Hakim hopes to establish an independent political entity within Iraq which would aggravate the sectarian system in this catastrophic experiment. He would lead the whole country into disaster and Iraq would lose all potential for unification. How can a political leader be concerned solely with one segment of the nation, and ignore its other constituencies?

The Application of Democracy

The definitions of democracy are vastly different when we compare the West and today's Iraq. An aspect of the Western practice of democracy is the expectation of political honesty and transparency. For example, Americans may acknowledge their mistakes via political and media channels. Some initiatives are successful and others are not, and their lack of success

may be acknowledged. Iraqi officials, on the other hand, feel that if they confess their mistakes openly in the media or in political circles, then their social and political standing in society will be in jeopardy. They will be forced to seek forgiveness from those whom they wronged, and this would put them at a disadvantage.

The conflict that we see today is not truly political, but more of an insidious entrenchment of a sectarian conflict. The religious forces actually cause each other to polarize further and further. These religious groupings now identifiable as parties, blocs, trends and political bodies, are the most responsible for the ongoing blood-letting. To date we have not heard the three main religious forces -- the Coalition of Shiite, the Sunni Consensus Party and the Sadrist Current -- speak convincingly or sincerely (nor have they ever) about halting the violence whose primary casualties are innocent people.

The fall of Saddam's regime, the collapse of all state institutions and the foreign military intervention, resulted in a gaping political vacuum. This was addressed hastily by issuing some decisions and policies with serious consequences, such as the dissolution of the Iraqi army, the outlawing of the Ba'ath Party, the abolition of some ministries, the formation of the governing council, the hasty promulgation of the constitution, the holding of elections and voting for party slate system, rather than for nominees. All of the above guided Iraq away from democracy, leading to disastrous changes in the political climate, and rapid escalation of the sectarian conflict and of militia activities along with that. The lack of governmental guidance and the conflict between different political actors meant that the Iraqi street was being controlled by various militias. Therefore, sectarian conflict unfortunately continued with the participation and blessing of some key politicians and parties in power whose true agendas obviously serve powers outside the borders of Iraq.

Religion and Politics

The American intent was to establish governmental control in Iraq under secular parties and leaders, but instead the entrenchment of the religious parties took place, and these parties essentially enacted sectarian policies. I do not know how the Islamic parties who claim they are Islamic could adopt the principle of democracy. The contradiction is inherent. Islam is a religion that has its clear distinct doctrine. Democracy is a political philosophy born in the era of ancient Greece and developed within the West for more than 200 years. The Iraqi Islamic parties have been able to deceive millions of people using the slogan of Islam and democracy, and both have been nonexistent in their practices. And in this they seem to be following the theocracy of Iran. To rid and preserve Iraq from the current disaster, we must respect our religion and keep

it out of the quagmire of politics. The political endeavors of Iraq will not succeed unless a secular doctrine is followed in the state institutions and religious rituals and practice are kept in the personal domain.

Militias and Gangs

Numerous statements of intent to dissolve the militias have been voiced, but not implemented. Thus these statements about the disbanding of militias are just so much hot air. Even if militias are disbanded publicly, they will still operate in secret, just like other groups, gangs, and various organizations operating today underground. Or they would operate wearing official uniforms but holding private allegiances. The highest priority right now is to rid Iraq of weapons, and that task is monumental as Iraq has become a vast arsenal for all types of weapons that have come from neighboring countries as well. The establishment of a strong army should provide protection for the citizens alongside a strong police system under the Ministry of the Interior. When people feel more secure, they will cooperate with weapon collection programs, or those tied to jobs.

So the other problem connected to arms and continuing violence lies with the neighboring countries, as there are foreign parties, bodies and organizations linked to the different power bases inside Iraq. How can a government too weak to play the game of politics cleverly maneuver in Iraq's internal system, within the region and with the rest of the world? How can it deal with the immediate situations that confront it and simultaneously achieve its goals? Will the government's security plans succeed in separating those who are merely defending themselves from those who are intentionally killing innocent Iraqis? It is a predicament which a weak government cannot resolve and it will remain between a rock and a hard place. The survival of this weak government will be at the expense of the Iraqi people, and as always it is the innocent segments of community who ultimately pay that price.

The militias and gangs, which have become organized groups of bandits and murderers, some whom are from the former regime, and some of whom are part of the current regime, should be vigorously prosecuted! And the Iraqi government should begin as soon as possible to control of all the gangs, criminal groups and terrorists hidden throughout Iraq by accurate use of human intelligence in each and every neighborhood. This control may be accomplished by forcing all religious parties to dissolve their own militias or armed organizations. And this must be done through a strong Ministry of the Interior which is totally unbiased toward any party throughout the country. The strength of this ministry will be dependent on a clever, quick and loyal intelligence agency.

No political solution can succeed if sectarian rules and quotas violate the norms of Iraq. No security solution can take place without unequivocal condemnation of murder and sectarian eradication campaigns from both the Sunni and Shiite blocs.

Iraqi Parliament

Democracy is an excellent system. After thirty-five years of a very different type of political system, we would like to see democracy in Iraq. I believe in democracy. However, democracy needs a particular security environment to protect it; institutions should be established on good governance. Elections are the proper means for public representatives to become members of parliament. However, in Iraq, the deputies are entering parliament through the party system rather than through nominations and elections. Therefore, they aren't strong enough to question the government or any minister in it. They are not paying enough attention to the interests and needs of the people. The deputies pay more attention to their personal interests, salaries and privileges, in addition to obtaining the blessing of certain clerics. Their loyalty is to their parties and to certain persons, and not to their homeland Iraq as a whole, moreover they accepted many laws which are not in the nation's best interest, but rather meet their personal needs. For example, in early April they were discussing an increase in representatives' salaries from U.S. \$15,000 to 30,000 while at the same time, the population is suffering economically all over the country.⁴ Most of the representatives are outside the country; normally they are not attending the meetings of the council, and some of them giving cover to the militias' crimes.

Government Status

This current government and the one before has allowed an increase in terrorist actions, militia activities, incidents of sectarian violence, killings and displacements, incidents of kidnapping and assassination. Even worse, some kidnappers are wearing police uniforms and driving police and other official cars, as in the kidnapping of the Higher Education ministry official, and in the kidnapping of the Chairman and the members of the Olympic Committee. This government witnessed the explosion that took place in the mosque of the two Imams in Samarra, and the destruction of the Sarafiyya Bridge. The government has failed to provide services, jobs, and infrastructure and this situation has led to an increase in all types of crimes.

The government should control the security situation through preventing the presence of the militias and terrorists, and through a national conference that should develop a comprehensive national vision with participation of all Iraqis in the nation.

Recommendations

The political process is hostage to the conditions surrounding it. These will cause it to collapse as the situation worsens. The residual support for the militias and also terrorism continues and cancels out any hope of success. The government's support for peace-making or security plans will also fail. A real catastrophe is looming. What can be achieved at this stage? What can be done before even more terrible bombings and the outbreak of an internal war? What can all the different sects and communities in Iraq accomplish? What can we all agree upon and enact cooperatively? Here are some propositions.

1. Reformulate an understanding with the Americans on the basis of a new policy that Iraq is for Iraqis – all Iraqis. All deserve a real role in decision-making that will follow principles of conciliation and cooperation. Iraqis fought for the right to make their own decisions and paid a heavy price in blood.

2. Agree on a schedule for withdrawal of U.S. forces from the cities and towns first and from other areas following that.

3. The Iraqi parliament should replace the current government and form and select the members of a new provisional government made up of different individuals. These should neither be current ministers or members of Parliament, but rather from genuinely independent technocrat not connected to the current political parties. They should also be free of affiliations with any other foreign or external elements.

4. The Head of State should then dissolve the current Iraqi parliament and form a Governing Council of Leaders who controls the temporary interim government until the above-described provisional government is formed. Membership in the Governing Council of Leaders should rest foremost on professional reputation, age, experience and independence.

5. Put a stop to the rampant sectarianism. Create a new law for political parties and their leaders that will restrict their activities solely to political work, and not permit mercantile or other activities. Make all existing parties illegal.

6. Announce the dissolution of all militias and any other armed organizations. Set a designated time and place for the relinquishing of arms. Set severe penalties for non-delivery of these arms.

7. Create new provincial assemblies and appoint an entire set of new governors and administrators in the provinces. They should have no ties with the existing parties as they have been dissolved under recommendation #5. These new assemblies, governors, and administrators should be highly qualified, and seen as honest by their constituencies.

8. Re-establish cooperation between the governments of Iraq's northern territory (Kurdistan) with the central government and discourages separatism. Although this population suffered at the hands of the previous regime, today, the Kurds realize how important a strong Iraq is for Kurdistan, for Iraq as a whole, and the entire region.

9. Establish border controls which should manage security, control the drug traffic, weapons, and the specific pilgrim and corpse traffic to the holy cities. Better intelligence is needed to maintain such controls.

10. Open up the political system, and improve the quality of information in Iraq through the media, radio, and television. Establish an improved Ministry of Information and announce all new policies through the media, so that the public are more aware of all events and their impact.

11. Encourage the religious leaders to refrain from interference in political and administrative affairs and internal and external security. Religion is a really a matter of an individual's personal relationship with God and should therefore be separate from politics.

12. Pass laws that require a bold restructuring of the Iraqi army. Encourage the return of the former professional army leadership, and the maintenance of ethical control over the army. Establish new units which allocate rank on the basis of training and experience, and retire those who obtained their ranks without the proper training or length of service.

13. Establish a new Ministry of Interior made up of bona fide experts. While this process is in place, and the current Ministry is suspended, maintain necessary liaisons between the provincial authorities and the central government.

14. Establish a body of preeminent national specialists to amend the draft Constitution who are unaffiliated with any current political parties or militias. These amendments should be approved by the Governing Council of Leaders until a popular referendum is held.

15. Remove and replace the various electoral commissions and return all physical property, including buildings, to the government. Enforce penalties on those who stole government property or holdings.

16. The Iraqi judiciary should take a leading role in the administrative measures described above, and also oversee elections as well as other corrective measures. Reinforce the status of the courts and respect for their decisions and implementation of their provisions.

Conclusion

The greatest danger to Iraq is in those aspects of the current situation that divide Iraqis. Iraqi unity should be the primary objective. Executive, legislative, and judicial authorities along with the public must strive for unity. The high casualty rates, and devastation of security, if

these conditions continue, will lead to long term civil war and complete devastation, not just for Iraq but also for the region, and the world. This would seriously effect the position and interests of the U.S in the region.

I have offered my recommendations to prevent such a collapse. These recommendations may not be accomplished or implemented, but, at least, suggest that transformation should and could take place. Otherwise, we Iraqis will be victims of violence, kidnapping, and murders. I feel there are a number of Iraqis who actually want the conditions of instability to continue. This will ultimately serve the intent of the terrorists, as Iraqis are displaced or killed according to their ethnicity, or religious background. So long as Iraq is divided and weak, ample opportunity exists for Iraq's neighbors to physically infiltrate and act on their interests in the country. I hope the bloodshed in Iraq will end soon so we may restore our nation and serve the population instead of slipping into civil war.

In order for good governance in Iraq, I believe the political system should be reformed and separated from religious politics, since Iraq has such religious and ethnic diversity. Religion must be respected and the public should be free to enjoy and practice their religion in the social sphere, but not in the political venue, or Iraqi governmental policies. Every Iraqi should realize that if religious or ethnic agenda are used to build the new Iraq, these will mean the total destruction of Iraq and their future because each party will attract only the members of its own sect or ethnic group. This situation will only fuel conflict in Iraq.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the negative lesson of the Iraqi situation may provide a real beginning for a new historic stage. Whatever comes to be in Iraq will be a sign of what will occur in the future, not only in Iraq, but in the entire region, and the world as well. The Iraqi situation has therefore become a trigger for change whether for good or ill, we cannot say at present. However, we should ensure that Iraqis, and their friends and neighbors will realize that the stabilization of Iraq and victory over terrorism will establish their future security.

Iraq needs its own intelligent, patriotic political elite to begin to lead the country. They possess the skills to deal with other nations, especially the United States of America, the strong ally of new Iraq. This national elite is capable of prioritizing Iraq's national interests ahead of partisan and personal interests, and eliciting cooperation from all factions and sects to build a new Iraq.

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Endnotes

¹ William Anderson and Gareth Stansfield. *The Future of Iraq: Dictatorship, Democracy or Division?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

² Peter Galbraith. *The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence Created A War Without End* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006) p. 19.

³ Personal interview with Peter Galbraith, Tufts University, Medford Massachusetts, 21 January 2007.

⁴ *Al-Mada*, 4 April, 2007. <http://www.almadapaper.com/paper.php?source=akbar&mlf=interpage&sid=18555>

