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ESTABLISHING A NEW REGIME IN IRAQ

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I have been asked to address some of the issues the U.S. will face in the aftermath of military action in seeking to establish a new regime in Iraq. Obviously this task will be affected by whatever military action is taken, how successful it has been, and what kind of destruction has ensued. It is also clear that humanitarian efforts will need to be undertaken in the immediate aftermath of the war. These are not my focus. I am assuming here that the US and its allies are in control of Iraq and that such humanitarian efforts are underway.

I would like to point, here, to five fundamental issues/ problems the U.S. will face in the transition period as it attempts to establish a new regime, and make a few suggestions on resolving them.

First, I would make a distinction between two tasks: governance and administration. By governance I mean the political process of selecting leaders, mobilizing public support, adequately representing various elements of the population, and implementing policy. By administration, I mean the daily business of running government and providing services. The first is going to be extremely difficult in Iraq--indeed the most difficult task facing the US; the second should be relatively easy, if all goes well.

Unlike many other developing countries, Iraq does have a functioning bureaucracy capable of running most services in the country. After the US has vetted the top levels of this administration--the political levels--the U.S. should plan to use this bureaucracy, which is the repository of much of Iraq's skilled middle class, to run the country. These Iraqis should constitute the new face of the administration.

Nonetheless, the US needs to be aware of some difficulties in using this bureaucracy. Iraq is over-bureaucratized. In its heyday, possibly a third of the population exclusive of the military, worked for the government, directly or indirectly. In Iraq's command economy, government controlled the education system, much of the media, all large and most medium sized industry as well as providing the usual government services. In addition, there has been a large military and numerous and ubiquitous security services. The four major elements of administration are the Ba'th Party, the military, the various security services, and the bureaucracy.

In the post-Gulf war period under sanctions, these have shrunk. The party cadre, which used to constitute 10 percent of the population is now down to about 2 percent. The military, while still large, has been drastically downsized, from about 1 million in 1990 to about 400,000. So, too has the bureaucracy. Moreover, because of sanctions, the bureaucracy is much less effective than it used to be. Most bureaucrats, on fixed salaries, often work a second or third job to make ends meet, thus giving them less time to do their regular job. For the same reasons, corruption is now rife. There are two additional weaknesses of this bureaucracy worth mentioning. One is that it is highly centralized; there is no tradition of decentralization in Iraq. And, under the Ba'th, it has been thoroughly cowed by the political leadership. It is not used to--possibly not yet capable--of taking much initiative. Second, this bureaucracy does not function in the Kurdish area of the north, which has now developed its own administration.

Governance--the establishment of a representative political system capable of formulating and implementing policy is going to be much more difficult. Iraq had not had such a system for decades. The closest it came to such a system was in the last years of the monarchy and even then the system did not function well and was overthrown. In addition to the absence of democratic practice, the multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian nature of Iraqi society complicates the process. Iraq will need

- The establishment of a rule of law, including a new court system

- A constitution which provides some separation of powers

- Functioning parliament or representative assembly

- The establishment of a responsive executive

- Some sort of local government, possibly under a federal system

The building of such a system must be undertaken by Iraqis; exile Iraqis have already devoted considerable time and effort to this process, but it must now include Iraqis inside Iraq. This will take time and need help from outside, most importantly security and a peaceful environment while the process is being worked out.

Iraq has little experience in local government or decentralization--at the municipal, country or state level. This is an area that could be developed with considerable benefits for all. It would help address the issue of ethnic, sectarian and regional diversity and it would help develop the basis of democratic and representative government at the grass roots. The sooner such local institutions of governance could be established, the better. It would also bring Iraqis into the new administration and give this administration an Iraqi face.

A second issue is finding alternative political leadership at the national level for a transitional period until new constitutional structures can be put in place. There are two options: the inside option and the outside option.

The outside option is well known. It consists mainly of exile Iraqis (with the exception of the Kurds) who have formed a number of political groups with a great diversity of views. Their difficulties are well known. They have had difficulty achieving consensus. And they are outsiders whose support inside is unknown. As outsiders they are likely to be resented by those inside. But they also have some strengths which should

be used. For the most part, they are likely to be pro-Western and more favorably disposed to US aims and goals. They are a known quantity. And they have a better understanding of democratic processes for having lived in the West. A number of them are already in the north building bridges to the new Iraq. The issue is whether they will succeed in that effort and how much support they should be given by the US

The inside option is virtually unknown, since no alternative leadership can emerge in Saddam's Iraq. Once the top layers of Saddam's regime are removed, we will find three "pillars" of the current regime. 1) the kin and clan network on which Saddam has relied. This goes well beyond his family and has penetrated a number of institutions. In the countryside as well, tribal groups have come to hold authority. Clan politics and clan leadership is likely to persist. 2) the institutions of state: the party; the military; the bureaucracy and the education system. These have been thoroughly Ba'thized. Even if the party disappears, its cadre will not. These are the institutions which will be needed to run the state. While few will remain loyal to Saddam or his family, deeply ingrained attitude toward power and authority will persist. So, too, will the strong nationalist attitudes that have been the backbone of Ba'thist ideology. This may be particularly true in the media and education system. Some de-Ba'thization may be necessary if long term U.S. aims are to be achieved, but this will not be an easy task. 3) an economic elite which owes its wealth, in large measure, to state patronage. Indeed, there may be a temptation to rely on this class for economic development and reconstruction since it will be readily at hand. One of the most constructive things the US could do, however, would be to separate this economic class from the state and move to the creation of a true, and more independent, private sector.

It may be easier to support and sustain the development of "inside" leadership which may emerge anyway, but the problem is whether it will represent a real change. Ultimately, there is a need to marry the insiders with the outsiders.

A third issue is the nature of the response to the US/ foreign presence in Iraq. While change will definitely be welcome by virtually all the population in Iraq, the US presence may be less welcome among some sectors of the population than others. In recent years, especially since the rebellion of 1991, regional differences are more pronounced in Iraq.

The south, which is predominantly shi'ah has been neglected. Seen a shrinkage of population, particularly the port city of Basra, once a thriving city and intellectual center. It used to have strong ties with Kuwait and the Gulf. Basra--and other cities and towns of the south, need reconstruction and economic revival. Here a resuscitation of jobs and services is vital. Links with the Gulf--especially Kuwait--should be encouraged to help mend fences with that country and the GCC. The religious shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala will have to be treated with sensitivity. While opposition to the regime is deep here, that may not equate to welcoming a US or Western presence. Iranian ties may be strong as well. Contacts with the clergy will be essential to establish a good working relationship. They will be interested in more religious freedom, a revival of their seminaries, and more pilgrim traffic from which the area derives economic benefit.

In the Center, we will find a mixture. Fifty percent of Iraq's population lives here, some 30 percent in the capital. In Baghdad, a large portion of this population is shi'ah and poor, resentful of the middle and affluent classes, often --but not entirely--sunni. The educated classes are overwhelming concentrated in Baghdad and its environs. They should, for the most part, welcome change. They are looking for a return to normalcy and participation in the new government. In the smaller cities and towns of the sunni triangle--the heartland of the regime --we may meet with resentment and opposition. This region is the one that has benefited from Ba'th rule--it provides the Ba'th support system--and it will find itself dispossessed. It has the most to fear from change. In this area, contact with some of the clan and tribal leaders with support for their regions may help neutralize opposition.

In the north, among the Kurds, we have a known quality. Here we are not going to meet with opposition, but we do face real problems. The Kurds have been governing themselves for a decade in the north, and in recent years, have had more prosperity. Their aspirations for separatism--as expressed in their text books for example--are clear. Their concept of federalism is suspect by others in Iraq as well as the Turks. Working out a formula that is satisfactory to all will be difficult. So, too, will the status of Kirkuk. The Kurds want Kirkuk, with its oil, included in their self-governing area. The US also faces the problem of the radical enclave around Halabja and has escaped the control of the Kurds. And in the end, policing the border, disarming the peshmerga, will also be difficult. Entry of the Turks--and possibly the Iranians--will only complicate matters. While some sort of federalism and a degree of decentralization seems called for, the "ethnic" federalism that some Kurds are insisting on may be enticing initially, but cause difficulties later on.

Fourth, the US will also face a paradox in attitudes in Iraq, especially in the center, but also in the south. Most Iraqis want change and will welcome it by any means, including military action and occupation. they long for a return to normalcy, and some freedom. We will not face opposition to a change of regime, except among Saddam's hard core and the supporters who do not want a change of status. This should give us a "honeymoon" period, if we move smartly to restore services, provide jobs and get the economy moving. But many of these same people will be intensely nationalistic. They have a long tradition of putting a desire for "independence" at the top of their priorities. They will not welcome foreign rule and a foreign presence. For it may not take long-- six months, a year--for that opposition to surface. This presents us with a dilemma and we will have to make trade offs. To get real political and social change--a constitutional regime, for example--will take time. But the longer we stay, the more we risk generating national resentment and opposition. On the other hand, if we turn over to existing elites--the less change we will get, including satisfaction of our interests. We need to be aware of this potential opposition and take measures to neutralize it.

Restoring normalcy/ services

Get Iraqis in the administration/ in leadership positions sooner rather than later

Shift to "indirect rule"--advisors, behind the scenes--as soon as possible

Timing--do more in a shorter period of time

State our intent to turn over to Iraqis in some time frame and outline the direction of policy and stick to it

The British experience is instructive here. They began their occupation during World War I with direct rule. Col. Arnold Wilson, of the India Office school of thought, brought Indians, the rupee. Few Iraqis held posts. This generated the 1920 rebellion which was widespread and costly for the British. The British then shifted to indirect rule. They govern through a treaty, an "elected" monarch, a constitutional system, advisors. They used RAF to keep order and developed an indigenous army. They put Iraqis in government. Even so, they met with constant nationalist opposition, and gave Iraq "independence" in 1932.

Lastly there is the issue of international cooperation in the administration of Iraq. Most of the benefits of this internationalization, such as burden sharing, would accrue to the US. The US will need help in rebuilding Iraq and should try to get it from international community. It is less clear how much this will help with "legitimacy" inside Iraq. UN, or other international cooperation might work better in some areas than others. Certainly this would be true of humanitarian efforts; rebuilding of the economy and providing some services. I don't know how an international force to provide security, prevent retribution, will go down. Local population expects and will respect US force. It wants law and order kept. We will want to avoid something that looks like an international occupation; a new "mandate". The Iraqis are a very proud people. They will resent being put in the category of East Timor or Kosovo. In any case, we should work to keep the neighbors out--except to undertake legitimate economic activity, and to put Iraqis in charge as soon as possible. Iraqis will expect to run their own country, and soon--not hand it over to foreigners.