

## Strategic Insight

### Post-War Iraq: Prospects and Problems

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**February 20, 2003**

The current American discourse on prospective war with Iraq, includes open discussion of military occupation to an uncommon degree. American strategic discourse typically focuses on war fighting and tends to be much less concerned about post-conflict peace building. Wide-spread belief that war with Iraq is a foregone conclusion may account for the unusual willingness of policymakers to discuss what comes after. Or perhaps Americans have come to appreciate the difficulties of post-conflict peace building in the Balkans and elsewhere. The title of a *Washington Post* column seems to sum it up best: "War, Then It Gets Hard."<sup>[1]</sup> Iraq is rich in resources and human resourcefulness and—here is a good start—Iraq is *already a nation*. Still, occupying a nation America has defeated twice and made to suffer through years of sanctions, situated in the midst of a region seething with anti-Americanism, is a problem.

In chapter V of his classic work on political philosophy *The Prince*, Niccolo Machiavelli advises that *free* republics, having been accustomed to their own liberty, are the ones that are difficult to occupy. The vitality of such a republic will not "allow the memory of their former liberty to rest"—and here Machiavelli's advice to his Prince is quite unpleasant—"so that the safest way is to destroy them or to reside there."<sup>[2]</sup> Iraq, a notorious "Republic of Fear," would be for Machiavelli a straight-forward project.<sup>[3]</sup> Those accustomed to the tyranny of one prince, he argued, will just as easily adjust to another:

[T]hey, being on the one hand accustomed to obey and on the other hand not having the old prince, cannot agree in making one from amongst themselves, and they do not know how to govern themselves. For this reason they are very slow to take up arms, and a prince can gain them to himself and secure them much more easily.<sup>[4]</sup>

Three troubling and imperative questions arise from Machiavelli's insights. In a post-Saddam Iraq, will the United States provide that tyranny? Will the people of Iraq be slow to take up arms and unable to agree amongst and govern themselves? And, if occupation is to become liberation, i.e., democratization, how do we get there?

In addressing these questions, I make the following basic arguments: 1) this war will be unlike the previous war America fought with Iraq; 2) despite optimistic talk of a quick draw-down, it is prudent to expect a large military footprint into the post-conflict period; and 3) the Bush administration has declared an ambitious agenda but has yet to demonstrate a commitment to apply the necessary means to achieve that goal.

#### The Tyranny of Transformation

The prospective war with Iraq will be unlike the last one. This war will be more costly because American post-conflict ambitions are vastly greater, and because the support (particularly the

financial backing) of other nations will be vastly less. The last American war with Iraq was about restoration of the status quo ante. The military objective was clear: to force Iraq out of Kuwait. Once victory was in hand in 1991, the first Bush administration balked at taking over the governance of Iraq. In 1992, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney explained why the United States did not go all the way to Baghdad:

If we'd gone to Baghdad and got rid of Saddam Hussein—assuming we could have found him—we'd have had to put a lot of forces in and run him to ground some place.... Then you've got to put a new government in his place and then you're faced with the question of what kind of government are you going to establish in Iraq? Is it going to be a Kurdish government or a Shia government or a Sunni government? How many forces are you going to have to leave there to keep it propped up?<sup>[5]</sup>

This Bush administration has declared its intention to displace Saddam Hussein, but whether the Iraqi people will be slow to take up arms and allow themselves to be secured by American forces remains to be seen. The term *stabilization* would be more appropriate terminology if the goal were to restore the status quo ante (remove weapons but leave the regime).<sup>[6]</sup> Beyond the urgent need to impose order in a post-conflict Iraq, however, the administration has indicated that *change* is needed: Iraq must not only change its policies but its very political order. The Bush administration wants to see a disarmed and peaceful Iraq governed by a regime with broader internal and regional legitimacy. For this reason we should be clear that the Bush agenda is *transformation*.

Military occupation, like war itself, has lately often been practiced but rarely declared. It really is not difficult to identify an occupation, which involves exercising some coercive control over people in a territory other than that recognized as belonging to your state.<sup>[7]</sup> Legal obligations to the civilian population are one reason occupation is rarely declared, but the rules apply even during *de facto* occupations.<sup>[8]</sup> Given that the United States has avoided using the term for decades, it is startling how comfortably these words are used today in discussions about Iraq. In October 2002, Secretary of State Colin Powell conceded that an occupation was part of "contingency planning" for Iraq.<sup>[9]</sup> Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith, in recent Senate testimony, described a plan that would include military and civil administrators reporting to the war fighting commander, General Tommy Franks.<sup>[10]</sup> As it happens, the prospective "senior civilian administrator" currently under discussion is retired Army Lt. Gen. Jay M. Garner.<sup>[11]</sup> A decision to create regime change is effectively a decision to occupy Iraq that adds risk to US military and civilian personnel and adds considerably to US obligations to the Iraqi people.

The estimated cost of the prospective war, according to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), could range from \$44-\$60 billion for a short decisive war to \$100 billion for a protracted war.<sup>[12]</sup> The cost of war, however, is only part of an accounting that ought to include post-conflict expenses. William Nordhaus at Yale has factored these in to arrive at estimates for a short war with a favorable post-war scenario (\$141 billion), and a long war with an unfavorable post-war scenario, which hikes the estimate to \$1.24 trillion.<sup>[13]</sup> Iraq is far larger and more populous than Bosnia, and we know that NATO's 50,000 troops in the mid-1990s cost \$10 billion a year. Post-conflict troop estimates range from 75,000 to 200,000. The CBO estimates a single peacekeeper costs \$250,000 annually. So figuring on at least 75,000 in the first year, Nordhaus estimates \$75 billion for a few years of peacekeeping. Humanitarian aid, again following the Bosnia model, is about \$500 per person. If one to five million of Iraq's 24 million need help, it would cost about a billion dollars. Reconstruction estimates from the World Bank are about \$1,000, per capita, getting us to another \$24 billion rather quickly.

The 1991 war, by way of contrast, is estimated to have cost about \$61.1 billion (\$74 billion in 2002 dollars), and yet the bill to the US taxpayer was only about \$7 billion. Why is that? Shortly after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, officials in the first Bush administration met in the Pentagon office of Henry Rowen to determine how to get resources to the frontline states

(Egypt, Jordan and Turkey). The party in need of assistance, Rowen argued, was overlooked: Uncle Sam. Operation Tin Cup—a diplomatic initiative to finance US participation in the Gulf War, raised \$54 billion.<sup>[14]</sup> The present Bush administration possesses no such tin cup.

And so it is not surprising that oil revenues are fair game to defray the costs of occupation.<sup>[15]</sup> Iraq is sitting on the second largest proven oil reserves in the world. The Bush administration already has made clear that securing those oil fields will be a priority for troops on the ground. We have seen Hussein torch fields before, and we will be concerned to keep them from factional asset grabs (whoever controls the oil controls Iraq), and ensure they provide fuel—pardon the pun—for the reconstruction. The immediate requirement to secure oil fields and borders, if nothing else, assures a large military footprint in the post-conflict.

## From War to Peace

Actual combat makes the post-conflict job more difficult, obviously. A new humanitarian approach to war fighting that makes use of advances in battlefield intelligence, communications and precision munitions, less obviously, might mitigate some post-conflict problems. This approach would avoid attacks on water, sewage and electrical infrastructure to spare civilian attrition and the US taxpayer.

The way in which Saddam Hussein is removed from power will affect the post-conflict environment even if, or ironically, especially if, the regime falls quickly. The regime exerts control through surveillance, patronage and rationing, even exploiting the oil-for-food program for its purposes. The more dependent the civilian population is upon the state for basic needs, the more pressing will be the obligations for occupying forces. The external power will have the prospect of a "golden hour" to make a positive first impression by providing for the short-term survival of the people, and the problem of making good on promises during that critical time.

President Bush has promised "As we and our coalition partners are doing in Afghanistan, we will bring the Iraqi people food and medicines and supplies—and freedom."<sup>[16]</sup> Unfortunately, many Iraqis fear they will receive the same kind of minimal assistance that has been delivered in Afghanistan. There are many, maybe as many as a million, citizens already displaced within Iraq. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) expects 500-600,000 to flee Iraq to neighboring countries in the event of war. It is estimated that 10 million civilians could find themselves in need of immediate assistance for basic survival.<sup>[17]</sup> The United States has to date deployed one hospital ship with 1,000 beds and one medical battalion to the region. Most Iraqi hospitals are already filled to capacity.<sup>[18]</sup> The US military alone is unlikely to be able to meet Iraqi needs, and organizing other agents of post-conflict peace-building is in some ways more difficult in this case than it has been in Bosnia, for example.

Most expectations are that a quick regime collapse will be followed not by a power vacuum but a power grab. The Arab Sunni community comprises less than a third of the population, but controls the machine of repression. There is potential for the Shia majority to make a grab in the south, or the Kurds to attempt independence in the north (an intolerable prospect for Turkey). There is the short-term concern about revenge killings, such as took place in Bosnia and Kosovo. And as in Bosnia, there are interested external powers (Iran, Turkey) watching internal dynamics with proprietary concern.

The various groups within Iraq, in contrast to the factions within Bosnia initially, recognize the need to keep the territorial integrity of the country intact. They just cannot agree about who should—or could—rule it. Divisions within the Kurdish community were graphically demonstrated by a recent political assassination. Nor have any viable opposition groups outside Iraq managed to coalesce. The six main groups recognized by the United States, after concluding a series of meetings in London in December, agreed on a federal blueprint but by and large failed to

overcome their divisions. Thirty or so delegates walked out.[\[19\]](#) In sum, the many and various factions that have a stake in Iraq's future do not seem able to agree about elevating a new prince among themselves, or upon how to govern their country.

### Getting Past Tyranny

It is basic Clausewitz to argue that there will be "no victory in Iraq unless the United States sticks around to ensure that the successor to Hussein is better."[\[20\]](#) Working backward from a viable self-functioning non-aggressive state requires us to plot not just how to get from post-conflict US military leadership to US civilian or international leadership, but how to get to *Iraqi* leadership that is better than what it is replacing. In Senate testimony, Middle East specialist Phebe Marr put forward three fundamental options:

1. Press for internal change;
2. Introduce the outside opposition into leadership;
3. Occupy Iraq.[\[21\]](#)

The first option Marr rejects because, although it is the least expensive option for the United States, it is likely to bring the least change and may ultimately be the most destabilizing. Unfortunately, experts do not see any viable alternative leadership inside Iraq at the moment. The military may be a source of change but hardly offers a democratic solution. Hedging their bets, in the interest of minimal nation-building and maximum self reliance, US Central Command is seeking to identify Iraqi military leaders willing to help in the post-conflict phase, to be participants in, if not initiators of change.[\[22\]](#) The second, external option is difficult and costly. Iraq has in the past failed to accept this type of leadership grafting. Because exiles lack credibility, US forces would be needed to support such a regime, at great expense and for an indefinite period. The third choice, an occupation to provide law and order and the opportunity for a constitutive process, thus emerges as a seemingly viable "middle option."

Although Machiavelli, if he were here today, might see Iraq as an easy prospect for a would-be prince, the United States does not wish to rule Iraq indefinitely as Machiavelli's prince would do. Ultimately, the United States seeks (and the international community will insist upon) an Iraqi government in Iraq, certainly one that is disarmed and ideally one that is democratizing. The United States government alone cannot make that transformation happen; it is a project Iraqis themselves must engage in. Prospective Iraqi military partners notwithstanding, security is but one of a number of fundamentals for post-conflict reconstruction, and must be considered as part of a package of processes that includes economic development, transitional justice and the rule of law, and the infrastructure needed for participatory governance. Iraq's transformation will depend upon assistance from the international community more broadly, including international and non-governmental organizations with material and human resources to contribute. The need for broader support is particularly acute given doubts about American commitment to the long-term welfare of the Iraqi people and given violent anti-American sentiment in the Middle East.

As Iraq transforms, the United States as an external influence will have to make some transitions. Thus it is vital to consider carefully the form of transitional authority to be put in place in post-conflict Iraq. External authority, argues Michael Doyle, must fit the case: the root of the conflict; the capacity for change; international commitment; and the number of factions, their capability and hostility.[\[23\]](#) The Iraqi factions are numerous, incoherent, and mutually hostile, a conflict ecology that calls for executive, even supervisory authority. This post-conflict ecology is dangerous, but given the magnitude of great power interest, as compared to Somalia for example, resources are more likely to be brought to bear to manage it. Unfortunately, divisions among the great powers, including potential competition over post-conflict oil contracts (the spoils of war) make this conflict ecology dangerous in a broader sense even than the war over Kosovo.

Supervisory authority, the kind of transitional authority most obviously implied by the conflict environment, is the most cumbersome, and likely to translate to a lengthy commitment. The question of the moment is who is going to do this supervising and will that party get the international mandate to take it on? Next, what is to be the civil-military mix in the occupation footprint?

Looking at post-conflict operations over time, the United States and other peace-building partners have developed a specialization model that puts a robust military in the lead for combat operations; the UN or an international official along the lines of the High Representative in Bosnia in the lead on political transformation; perhaps national civilian agencies for justice and reconciliation; and a combination of international financial institutions (e.g., World Bank) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the lead for relief, reconstruction and development. This model, however, will not be immediately available in Iraq. Most fundamentally, it seems likely that as long as there are international forces on Iraq, the US military will not hand off lead responsibility. This military footprint is going to shape other aspects of the post-conflict transition as well.

Establishing international legitimacy for a transitional authority in Iraq will be an immediate problem for the United States. The best that might be hoped for is something worked out after a battlefield result is achieved—a peace accord with the belligerents themselves like those that settled World War II and gave the victors the nominal authority to occupy. At a workshop hosted by the Naval Postgraduate School and the National Defense University in November 2002, participants called for an a priori establishment of a legal basis for a transitional government, preferably through a UN Security Council resolution. This notion is politically problematic given the current division in the Security Council over the French and German desire to extend the arms inspection regime. Certainly now such a designation is unlikely to happen until the war is a *fait accompli*. A meeting is scheduled Feb. 15 in Switzerland on the humanitarian consequences of war in Iraq, but Washington—seeking to avoid participation in a forum in which its prospective aggression might be condemned—will not send a representative. Instead, recognizing the need to boost the international capacity to manage post-conflict problems, the Bush administration did announce a \$12 million contribution to the UNHCR to help prepare for war.

Relations between the US military and humanitarian organizations, already strained by the Afghanistan operation, became so tenuous that the InterAction consortium of international humanitarian and development agencies sent an open letter to President Bush December 20 asking that "the responsibility for the administration and implementation of any relief activities carried out or supported by the US government be placed under civilian authorities..." and that "all necessary steps are taken to assign responsibility to the United Nations for the coordination of humanitarian activities in Iraq, as soon as its agencies are prepared to play their usual emergency coordinating role."[\[24\]](#)

Unfortunately, in the short term aid agencies are at a disadvantage. They have been kept out of Iraq under the sanctions regime and will not be able to operate in environments contaminated by chemical or biological weapons. In the longer term, the hand-off from military to civilian leadership is notoriously problematic for the United States. The US military certainly does not want to be bogged-down in civil affairs, but the planning and coordination capacity of civilian agencies in post-conflict environments cannot match military ability to impose order in the short term.

## Conclusion

A disarmed, peaceful, *transformed* Iraq that shines as a light of democracy in the region is an appealing prospect. Until—and unless—that goal is achieved, the Bush administration has the problem of occupation and transition. A large US military footprint in Iraq seems the likely consequence of the ecology of the conflict and the goal of transformation. We return then to the Machiavellian prescription of tyranny with a twist: a liberation agenda. In time, maybe "liberation



theology" will take hold, and the people of Iraq will acquire a thirst for freedom and self-governance. That is a prospect to be hoped for. Let us hope to be well out of the occupation business there when that happens.

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*For related links, see our [Middle East Resources](#).*

## References

1. Sebastian Mallaby, "War, Then It Gets Hard," *Washington Post* Sep. 16, 2002, p. A19.
2. Nicolo Machiavelli, [The Prince](#) c. 1505, published 1515, trans. W. K. Marriott, HTML markup copyright 1994 ILT Digital Classics.
3. The phrase is borrowed from Samir al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989).
4. Nicolo Machiavelli, [The Prince](#).
5. Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney, "The Desert War—A Kind of Victory," BBC Radio 4, February 16, 1992.
6. See the discussion in the forthcoming report on the workshop "Iraq: Looking Beyond Saddam's Rule," sponsored by the Institute of National Strategic Studies and the Naval Postgraduate School, held at the National Defense University in Washington, D.C., Nov. 20-21, 2002.
7. Adam Roberts, "What is a Military Occupation?" *British Yearbook of International Law 1984* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 249-305, especially p. 300. There are various definitions of occupation. The Hague Regulations focused upon belligerent occupation: "[t]erritory is considered occupied when it is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army." The Geneva Conventions in 1949 expanded the definition to apply even when occupation "meets with no armed resistance." The United States Joint Chiefs of Staff describe military occupation as a situation in which "territory is under the effective control of a foreign armed force." U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), *Doctrine for Joint Civil Affairs*, Joint Publication 3-57, 21 June, 1995, GL-7. Eyal Benvenisti defines occupation as "the effective control of a power (be it one or more states or an international organization, such as the United Nations) over a territory to which that power has no sovereign title, without the volition of the sovereign of that territory." Eyal Benvenisti, *The International Law of Occupation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 4.
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10. Jonathan Wright, "US Plans for Two-Year Occupation of Iraq," *Reuters*, Feb. 11, 2003.
11. Michael Hirsh and Melinda Liu, "Imagining the Day After," *Newsweek* Feb. 17, 2003.
12. Michael Dobbs, "US Facing Bigger Bill for Iraq War," *Washington Post* December, 2002, p. 1.
13. The favorable scenario includes \$75 billion in occupation costs and \$21 billion for reconstruction, offset by \$10 billion in oil market benefit. David Wessel, "The Price Tag on Victory Over Iraq will be Steep," *Wall Street Journal* October 24, 2002.
14. According to Henry Rowen, there was some initial disbelief by the representative from the Department of State, but not by the representative from the Department of the Treasury. Secretary of the Treasury Brady and Secretary of State Baker endorsed the idea and set out to collect pledges. The press traveling with them invented the title "Tin Cup." The airplanes on which Brady and Baker traveled were called "Tin Cup #1" and "Tin Cup #2." (Henry Rowen, personal correspondence, Feb. 18, 2003). On the accounting, see OSD/PA&E Briefing to Department of Defense Cost Analysis Symposium (DODCAS) January 30, 2002, "Cost Estimating Methodology for Operation Enduring Freedom and Post-September 11th Counter-Terrorism Force Protection

- and Homeland Security Initiatives." See also Michael Dobbs, "US Facing Bigger Bill for Iraq War," *Washington Post* Dec. 1, 2002, p. 1.
15. Knut Royce, "Plan: Tap Iraq's Oil," *Newsday* January 10, 2003, p. A07 LexisNexis load date Jan. 10, 2003.
  16. President George W. Bush, State of the Union address to the United States Congress, Jan. 28, 2003.
  17. "Humanitarian Agencies Form Consortium to Prepare for Iraq Emergency," Mercy Corps, Feb. 7, 2003, posted on [Relief Web](#) accessed Feb. 8, 2003.
  18. The UN expects 100,000 direct war casualties and 400,000 non-battle deaths. Elaine M. Grossman, "Adviser: Humanitarian Crisis in Iraq Could Fast Undercut War Aims," *Inside the Pentagon* Feb. 6, 2003. Retired Air Force Col. Sam Gardiner is a "former military officer who has informally advised the executive branch over the past month." According to Gardiner, Bush "can't be backed up. The military is not prepared to deal with his promises."
  19. Khaled Yacoub Oweis, "Iraqi Opposition Fails to Overcome Rivalries," [ABCNews.com](#), Dec. 7, 2002 accessed Feb. 10, 2003.
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  21. Phebe Marr, Day Two Panel I, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing, Federal Document News Service August 1, 2002.
  22. Hirsh and Liu, "Imagining the Day After."
  23. Michael W. Doyle, "War Making, Peace Making and the United Nations," in Chester A. Crocker et al., *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2001), pp529-560, especially p. 550.
  24. Mary E. McClymont, President and CEO, *InterAction*, letter to the Honorable George W. Bush, Dec. 20, 2002.