

The testimony of Dr Toby Dodge¹
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Introduction

The current wave of violence that has swept Iraq, killing over 80 US soldiers and hundreds of Iraqis this month, is not merely a one off 'spike' in attacks on the coalition's forces. It is also not the main cause of the coalition's problems in the country. It is instead a symptom of three longer-term dynamics that have dogged the occupation since the liberation of Baghdad on April 9 2003. The first of these problems, the legacy of Saddam Hussein's rule, could have been anticipated but could not have been avoided. The other two problems; the nature of the Coalition Provisional Authority's interaction with Iraqi society and the character of the violence faced by coalition forces are partly the result of decisions taken since the liberation of Baghdad. A different long-term strategy and short-term tactics could have avoided these problems. Overall these three problems, the legacy of Saddam Hussein, the basis of the CPA's interaction with Iraqi society and the violence coalition forces are facing means that the occupation, either on a *de facto* or *de jure* basis, will have to last a great deal longer than June 30. The continued presence of large numbers of foreign troops is essential to the successful creation of order. International oversight is also key to the stability of Iraq; its role would be to manage the Iraqi polity while the Iraqi population negotiates the terms of a national pact. Both these are crucial if the medium-term stability of the country is to be secured.

With this in mind, given the scale of the problems faced, the rising resentment directed at US forces and the US domestic electoral cycle, a rapid internationalization of the occupation is called for. This would involve a transfer of *both* political and military oversight to a multilateral body, preferably the United Nations. This would allow for a rapid increase in the numbers of troops the occupation could deploy while also reducing the visibility of American forces. It would have the advantage of giving the occupation access to a much larger pool of technical expertise in state building. Finally it would go a long way to reducing the alienation and mistrust felt by growing sections of the Iraqi population towards US forces and the Coalition Provisional Authority. It is only by taking this radical step that successful regime change, that is the building of a stable, democratic and sustainable state in Iraq, could be achieved.

The scale of the problems faced: the legacy of Saddam Hussein

No civil society

Any attempt to understand the problems faced by the Coalition Provisional Authority today and any future government of Iraq has to understand the legacy of Saddam Hussein that they are striving to overcome. The country that the coalition is struggling to pacify and reform is in many ways politically distinct, even amongst the states of the Middle East. Before the liberation of Baghdad last year it was impossible to talk about civil society in Iraq. The regime had reshaped or broken all intermediate institutions between the population and the state.

Iraqi regimes, because of their perceived vulnerability, domestically, regionally and internationally, have sought to maximize their autonomy from society, with varying degrees of success. This autonomy was first supplied in the 1920s and 1930s by British government aid and since 1958 by increasing oil revenue. This means that Iraqi regimes have never had to raise large amounts of tax from or become beholden to domestic interest groups. This in turn has given the government increasing autonomy to control and reshape society.

The Baathist regime built under Hasan al Bakr and then consolidated by Saddam Hussein represented the apex of this process. It set about using oil revenues to build a set of powerful state institutions through the 1970s and 1980s. These managed to reshape society, breaking resistance and atomizing the population. Since seizing power in 1968 the Baath regime efficiently used extreme levels of violence and the powers of patronage to co-opt or break any independent vestiges of civil society. Autonomous collective societal structures beyond the control of the Baathist state did not survive. In their place society came to be dominated by aspects of the 'shadow state'², flexible networks of patronage and violence that were used to reshape Iraqi society in the image of Saddam Hussein and his regime.

The atomization of society and the dependence of individuals upon the state increased dramatically after the 1990-91. It was the government rationing system that provided food for the majority of the population in the south and center of the country. Under United Nations resolution 986, agreed to by Iraq in May 1996, Iraq was allowed to import and distribute humanitarian aid under UN supervision. The food was distributed through 53,000 neighborhood grocery stores and regulated through a government controlled ration card.³ Applications to receive a ration card gave the government crucial information about every household under its control. The restrictions placed on ration cards meant individuals could not travel between different areas of the country and had to pick up their food in the same region each month. The rationing system became an additional way in which the regime secured

loyalty from and domination over the population. 60 per cent of the populations depended on these handouts for their day-to-day survival.⁴

The weakening of state institutions after 1990

However, the nature of the state's domination of society was transformed under the thirteen years of sanctions that Iraq faced in the aftermath of the 1990 invasion of Kuwait. The visible institutions of the state were greatly weakened and ultimately transformed. The rapid ending of imports and exports after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait drove annual inflation to levels as high as 500%. The middle class was devastated to the extent that it became hard to detect as a category. A UN survey for example, estimated that 63% of professionals were, in the late 1990s, engaged in menial labor. In the early 1990s import levels fell to well below countries such as Zaire and Sudan.⁵

For at least the first seven years of their imposition the sanctions regime imposed on Iraq proved to be extremely efficient in that it denied the government in Baghdad access to large or regular amounts of money. From 1990 government economic policy was largely reactive, dominated by the short-term goal of staying in power. With the economy placed under a comprehensive and debilitating siege, the government sector was largely reduced to a welfare system distributing limited rations to the population. The rapid decline in government income not only forced the drastic reduction of state welfare provision, it also marginalized its role in the economy.

The result was that under the pressure of sanctions, the official institutions of the state, with the exception of the rationing system, retreated from society during the 1990s, especially in the areas of welfare and education. As part of the regime's strategy for survival resources were drained from government ministries. Civil servants, teachers and medical staff had to manage as best they could; extracting resources from the impoverished population that depended on their services. Over the 1990s many professionals left public service either to take their chances in the private sector or flee into exile.

The legacy faced by the CPA

The legacy of Saddam Hussein's rule has made the task of the CPA that much harder. The institutions of the Iraqi state that the US had hoped to inherit in April 2003 were by that time on the verge of collapse. During March they were targeted by the third war in twenty years. This, in addition to thirteen years of sanctions specifically designed to weaken them and three weeks of looting in the aftermath of liberation, resulted in their disintegration. What had been planned as regime change and then the speedy reform of state institutions was now going to be something much

more costly and long-term. The legacy of Baathist rule, thirteen years of sanctions and twenty years of war means that today the CPA is engaged in an unforeseen process of building a new Iraqi state from the ground up. By its very nature, this will take much more time, effort and expertise than was anticipated in the run up to invasion.

However, the negative legacy of Saddam Hussein's rule on the Iraqi population, is if anything, even more troublesome. For the Iraqi population, politics only began on April 9 last year. The Iraqi political organizations that the CPA are trying to liaise with have either been in existence for little over a year or have been imported into the country in the aftermath of regime change. This means that they have had a very short period of time to gain the attention of the population and more importantly win their trust or allegiance. With no indigenous civil society organizations surviving Saddam's rule, Iraqi politics are today extremely fluid. The population was largely atomized by thirty-five years of Baathist rule. Liberation has certainly led to political mobilization but at the present juncture this process is tentative, unstable and highly fractured. No one individual or party has managed to rally any significant amount of support from the population. This was starkly born out by the largest opinion poll ever conducted in Iraq. In February 2004 Oxford Research International interviewed 2737 people across Iraq. Although some of the results were broadly positive for the CPA, others highlighted distinct problems for the medium-term political stability of the country. When asked which organization they would vote for in a national election, the Shia party, Al-Dawa, received the highest polling figure. But the support Al Dawa registered was extremely low at only 10% of those questioned. Other parties that also claim a national base registered even lower polling figures. The largest percentage of those polled, 39.2%, answered that they did not know whom they would vote for. This was closely followed 34.5% who refused to answer the question. A similar very low response resulted from the question: 'Which national leader in Iraq, if any, do you trust the most?' Again Al Dawa's leader Ibrahim Jaaferi got the highest rating but that was only 7.7% of those questioned. The more indicative results were 21.1% of those questioned who answered 'none' and the 36.7% of those who did not answer or were not sure.

In Iraq today the CPA faces a highly mobilized but largely atomized society that is unrestrained by effective state institutions or by political parties. Nationwide democratic elections, both at a local, regional and national level could result in the structured political mobilization of the population. This would channel the hopes and aspirations but also the alienation and anger of the Iraqi people into the political process. It would tie the population in a transparent and consensual way to political parties who would be forced to develop a national network but also a national platform. Political parties, in order to prosper, would be forced to both be responsive to Iraqi public opinion but would also, to some extent, be responsible

for shaping it. This process would also link the population, through the parties, to state institutions. Without such a process, discussions about handing sovereignty back to the Iraqi people are extremely problematic. As the Oxford Research International opinion poll indicated, 'the Iraqi people' have not yet given their allegiance to any individual or party. They feel unrepresented at a national level. They have little or no affinity with the parties who claim to speak for Iraq. With this in mind handing sovereignty back to Iraqis would be dangerous and could, if anything, further increase the alienation of the Iraqi population from the CPA and the governing structures it is trying to build.

The Coalition Provisional Authority's interaction with the Iraqi people

The problems

Against a background of increased violence and insecurity plans for rebuilding the political and administrative structures in Iraq appear to have become largely reactive. As policy has moved to meet a series of challenges it appears that little attention has been paid to the long-term consequences of each new initiative. The key problem damaging the occupation and hindering state building is the difficulty in communication between the American civil servants stationed in the green zone in downtown Baghdad and the mass majority of the Iraqi population. It is this inability to have meaningful interaction with Iraqi society that is the core problem facing the US. The CPA's relations with Iraqi society have been undermined by three factors. Firstly from April 2003 onwards the CPA has not had enough Arabic speakers on its staff. The occupation for many Baghdadis is now painfully personified by the daily scenes at the green zone's main gate in the centre of Baghdad. Here hundreds of Iraqis queue up to petition Ambassador Bremer whose office actually lies three miles beyond the initial security cordon. Rolls of barbed wire manned by worried American soldiers confront those who come to seek information from the CPA or try to explain their grievances. With no Arabic and understandably fearful for their own safety, these young men invariably control the Iraqis at the gate by shouting at them in English, cursing and threatening to use force. The result is frequent and bitter clashes between a population and their liberators, with both sides failing to communicate the reasons for their anger and alienation.

The second problem hampering the occupation is the CPA's continuing lack of expert knowledge about the country they are trying to control. Within the CPA's headquarters there are very few experts on Iraqi society, politics or economy. Those experts who have been posted to Baghdad have tended to be a small number of British civil servants, usually on six-month postings. Even this small handful of specialists has had difficulty influencing the making and implementation of policy.

With this limited expertise on Iraq the coalition became worryingly dependent upon the small group of Iraqi exiles it brought back to Baghdad in the aftermath of liberation. They were meant to provide several functions. First, they would become the main channel of communication between the wider Iraqi population and US forces. They would also, in spite of being absent from the country for many years, become the chief source of information and guidance for the American administrators struggling to understand and rebuild the country. Finally, and most importantly, they were set to become the basis of the new political elite. It was the exiles that were to form the core of Iraq's new governing classes. However, this reliance has brought with it distinct problems. The formerly exiled political parties, dominated by the Iraqi National Congress, have brought with them a very distinctive view of Iraqi society. This describes Iraq as irrevocably divided between sectarian and religious groupings mobilised by deep communal hatreds. This 'primordialization' of Iraq bears little resemblance to Iraqi society in 2004, but appears to be very influential in the political planning that has gone on since April 9 2003.⁶

The heavy reliance on organisations like the Iraqi National Accord (INA) and the Iraqi National Congress (INC) has further exacerbated the divide between Iraqi society and US forces. Despite setting up numerous offices around Baghdad, publishing party newspapers and spending large sums of money, the two main exile groups, the INC and INA have so far failed to put substantial roots into society. In a series of interviews with a cross section of Iraqis in Baghdad in May 2003, rich and poor, religious or secular, I found at best indifference and more usually anger towards the returned exiles, especially the avowedly secular INC and INA.⁷ This included one Baghdadi who under Saddam's rule had worked secretly for one of the exile groups. He was arrested and sentenced to death, a fate he only avoided, after nine months on death row in the notorious Abu Ghraib prison, because the regime collapsed. When I asked about the party he nearly lost his life for he replied: "I would have done anything to see the back of Saddam. But since the exiles have returned I have been disappointed, I do not trust them". Off the record many of the more candid formerly exiled politicians will admit that they themselves have been surprised by the difficulties they have faced since returning. Instead of being welcomed they have found a sullen and suspicious population who have largely refused to offer political loyalty to the newly returned parties.

The results

The inability of the exiled parties to develop significant constituencies within Iraq has not stopped the CPA from using them as the cornerstone of the new governing structures. This policy appears to have gone through four distinct phases. Firstly, once Baghdad had been taken, the ex-general Jay Garner expressed a desire to

move quickly to an interim government run by the formerly exiled politicians who came back to the capital with the US military. However the movement towards creating a representative body was hasty and rather ramshackle in nature. The first two meetings, at Ur near Nassariyah, on March 15 and then in Baghdad, on April 28 2003, were designed to draw together Iraqis in some form of assembly. The meeting at Ur was notable for those who chose not to attend and the large demonstration against the meeting outside. This highlighted the small number of delegates (80) and the veracity of their claims to be representative of little more than themselves. Although the turnout in Baghdad was larger at 300, it did not reach the 2000-3000 predicted in advance. The organisers refused to indicate how many had been invited but did concede that the meeting was “not sufficiently representative to establish an interim authority”.⁸

The second phase of US approaches to rebuilding Iraq was marked by one of Ambassador Paul Bremer’s first decisions upon arriving in Baghdad. He decided to put Jay Garner’s plans on hold and delay delegating power to a leadership council mainly composed of the formerly exiled parties. Given the fluidity of the situation and the difficulties of engaging the Iraqi population in a political process in the aftermath of conflict, this appeared to have been a very astute decision. However, this cautious and incremental approach was set aside with the advent of the third plan for building governmental structures. This was heralded by the CPA, in conjunction with the United Nations, setting up the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) in July 2003. This body, picked by Paul Bremer after extended negotiations between the CPA, the UN and seven dominant parties, was trumpeted by the CPA as “the most representative body in Iraq’s history”. The representative nature of the IGC does not come from the method of its formation but instead from the supposedly ‘balanced’ nature of its membership. The politicians were chosen to approximate the ethnic make up of Iraq, with 13 members being technically Shia, five Sunnis, with a Turkoman and a Christian thrown in for good measure. The nature of this arrangement becomes apparent when it is realised that Hamid Majid Mousa, the Iraqi Communist Party’s representative and indeed the avowedly secular Ahmed Chalabi himself are included within the ‘Shia block’ of thirteen. Is the Marxist Mr Mousa meant to represent that section of the Shia community with leftist or secular leanings or is the CPA’s designation of him as a Shia more indicative of the rather strange nature of the ethnic mathematics used to form the IGC? This sectarian mathematics was also why the number of cabinet portfolios was increased to 25, so that the spoils of office could be divided up in a similar fashion.

The confessional basis to choosing the IGC caused much heated debate in Iraqi political circles and across the newly liberated press in Baghdad. Arguments focused on the way members were chosen, for their sectarian affiliation not their technical skills, and the dangers of introducing divisive confessional dynamics

into the highest level of Iraqi politics. To quote Rend Rahim Francke, the Iraqi Ambassador-in-waiting to Washington DC:

“... a quota system based on sect and ethnicity undermines the hope of forging a common Iraqi citizenship by stressing communitarian identity and allegiance at the expense of Iraqi identity ... anyone who wishes to be involved in the political process must first advertise an ethnic, sectarian or at least tribal identity, and play the ethnic and sectarian card. Proclaiming one's ‘Iraqiness’ is no longer sufficient: one has to ‘declare’ for a communal identity. This puts Iraq well on the road to Lebanonization ...”⁹

By mid-November 2003 the shortcomings of the IGC had become apparent to decision makers in both London and Washington. A fourth change in policy was trailed by a series of well sourced leaks in the media originating from both Baghdad and Washington highlighting the inefficiencies of the IGC. The fact that on average 17 of its 25 members had been out of Iraq since its formation was used to paint the governing council as ineffective. This press campaign reached its peak with the recall of Ambassador Bremer for consultations in Washington. This resulted in a new plan, a new timetable and the proposal for a new institution through which Iraqis were to govern themselves.

Pressured by the oncoming electoral cycle in America and increasing casualties in Iraq, the US government has sought to radically reduce the length and nature of its political commitment to Iraq. The new plan endorsed by the IGC on November 15 2003 called for the drafting of a ‘fundamental law’ to be followed by the creation of a transitional assembly of anything between 200 to 500 delegates. It is this assembly that was to select a cabinet and leader for Iraq and guide the country to democratic elections. Problematically, although the proposed transitional assembly was to play such a pivotal role in Iraq’s future it was not to be directly elected. Instead a system of indirect elections and caucuses were to be held, with town and city leaders ‘electing’ delegates to the assembly in a series of countrywide town hall meetings.

This rather rough and ready approach to representation was not been greeted with universal approval in Iraq. Most importantly, the senior Shia cleric Marja Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani publically set himself against the ‘caucusing’ approach, re-stating his long held and very public position that a constitutional assembly must be elected by universal suffrage. The Ayatollah’s position had been clearly articulated weeks before Paul Bremer’s departure for Washington in November. The fact that his opposition and its ramifications were underestimated, points to the continuing difficulties that the CPA is having in comprehending the dynamics of Iraqi politics.

The lack of communication between the American civil servants and military personnel, their handpicked allies on IGC and the wider population of Iraq is one of the key problems that has undermined the occupation and the CPA's attempts at state building. From this inability to interact with Iraqi society springs the core problems facing the US and those who will inherit Iraq after June 30. Intelligence gathering is proving to be difficult because many Iraqis feel alienated from the CPA. The small number of Arabic speakers on its staff has undermined the CPA's interaction with Iraqi society. This has contributed to the CPA's lack of knowledge about the country they are trying to control. With almost no experts on Iraq on its staff the coalition became worryingly dependent upon the small group of Iraqi exiles it brought back to Baghdad with them. It is from amongst this group that the majority of the 25 members IGC were selected. However, this reliance has brought with it distinct problems. Firstly the formerly exiled politicians have proved to be unpopular. This means that the ICG, the most likely core of a new government, post June 30, is detached from the very people it is meant to represent. This gap between the political structures left by the departing CPA and the population does not bode well either for the growth of democracy or for the vanquishing of the insurgency.

Possible solutions

The whole process of building institutional and governmental links between the CPA and Iraqi society has been plagued by the fact that many Iraqis, aware of the increasing unpopularity of the US presence in their country, and believing it to be temporary, are still sitting on their hands, eschewing involvement in government institutions, political and administrative, until the situation becomes clearer and the risks of political involvement fewer. Overcoming this problem is the chief concern of Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN envoy to Iraq, who began his new mission on April 5. Early indications suggest that Brahimi may well be trying to reproduce an Afghan model. This would involve a caretaker government made up of a prime minister, president and two vice presidents. Before elections, scheduled for late 2004 or early 2005, this ruling triumvirate would gain legitimacy from a national conference, to be convened a short time after June 30.

It is unclear how this plan would overcome the problems that have undermined the various approaches of the CPA. Firstly where is Mr Brahimi going to pick the president and prime minister? It seems very likely that he will be forced to choose from the core of the ICG, that has to date formed the revolving presidency of the council. If he does succumb to this temptation then all the problems that dogged the IGC, its lack of legitimacy, its inability to forge meaningful links with the population and criticisms of it being appointed and not elected will resurface.

Secondly because Mr Brahimi, like his predecessor, Sergio Viera de Mello, is working under the auspices of the CPA he runs the distinct danger of being perceived of as merely an appendage to the occupation. With the current poor security situation the proposed national conference may find it very difficult attracting a large and representative sample of the Iraqi population. If this were the case it would be very difficult for it to fulfil its dual roles as a forum for national consultation and a source of legitimacy for the new caretaker government. The failure of a national conference to gather momentum and bring together a broad cross section of the population would leave the caretaker government proposed by Mr Brahimi dangerously exposed and open to similar criticisms and suspicions as those which have been levelled at the ICG since its formation.

The only way to avoid such pitfalls would be to internationalise the creation of governing institutions and democratic structures. This would not mean a partial or token role for the United Nations, organising national conferences or overseeing election. Instead it would involve bringing the whole occupation and state building under United Nations management. This would reduce the suspicion felt towards the CPA by sections of the Iraqi population. The organisation overseeing the move towards the creation of a new state would then not be the United States but the international community. Accusations of double standards or nefarious intent would be much harder to sustain. Arguments about the occupier's willingness to relinquish power would also be negated. It would be the Security Council in New York not the US government in Washington that would have ultimate responsibility for Iraq's transition. This would result in many more Iraqis viewing the whole exercise with a great deal more legitimacy. The UN could then utilise expertise and troops from across the international community. Those involved in reconstruction, both Iraqis and international civil servants, would then not run the danger of being labelled collaborators.

Order and violence

The rising unpopularity of a sustained US presence in Iraq is closely linked to the nature of the order they have been able to impose on the country since the taking of Baghdad. For military occupation to be successful the population has to be overawed by both the scale but also the commitment of the occupiers. The speed with which US forces removed Saddam Hussein's regime certainly impressed the Iraqi population. In the immediate aftermath of April 9 there was little doubt that US military superiority appeared absolute. But the inability of American forces to control the looting that swept Baghdad and the continued lawlessness that haunts the lives of ordinary Iraqis has done a great deal to undermine that initial impression of American omnipotence.

Troop numbers and tactics have hampered the nature and quality of the law and order that American troops have been able to enforce in the aftermath of the cease-fire. In the run up to war Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki in a Senate hearing called for 'hundreds of thousands' of troops to guarantee order. Michael O'Hanlon, of the Brookings Institute, based on his experience in the Balkans, took the figure of 150,000 as a minimum with at least 100,000 staying in the country for several years.¹⁰ At the moment there are only 137,000 US troops attempting to impose order on the country, this is clearly not enough to achieve the type of sustainable order state building requires

The understandable tactics adopted by US troops, a combination of heavily armed motorised patrols and large fortified bases, means that the military presence became detached and largely remote from the Iraqi population. As the daily toll of US casualties' mounts American forces are increasingly perceived of as weak and their presence in and commitment to the country as temporary. This general impression helps to explain why Baath loyalists began to reorganise in the spring of 2003 and why the remnants of Saddam's security services, sensing an opportunity to take advantage of US force vulnerability, began launching hit and run attacks with increasing frequency and skill.

Understanding the insurgency

A homogeneity of viewpoint in explaining the causes of both the insurgency and the large-scale terrorist attacks in Iraq appears to have developed amongst senior staffers in the US administration. General Richard Myers, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, has been keen to stress that resistance is neither monolithic nor nationwide. He argues that 90 percent of the incidents are in the so-called 'Sunni triangle' of northwest Iraq, running from Baghdad north to Mosul and west to the Jordanian border.¹¹ Washington has been keen to portray the violence as the work of regime 'hold-outs', die-hard Saddam loyalists who may have formed utilitarian alliances with radical Islamists from across the Middle East.¹² The logic of this argument is that the violence is highly unrepresentative of Iraqi popular opinion, geographically located in a comparatively small area of the country and politically limited to those fanatical enough or unintelligent enough not to realise that the old regime is dead and buried and that opposition to the new, US sponsored, world is futile.

However, the violence dogging the occupation springs from three separate sources with a host of causes beyond the 'fanatical hold-outs' of the old regime. The first group undermining law and order are 'industrial scale' criminal gangs operating in the urban centres of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul. It is organised crime that makes the everyday lives of Iraqi city dwellers so precarious. These groups, born in the mid-1990s when Saddam's grip on society was at its weakest, have been

revitalised by the lawlessness of present day Iraq. Capitalising on readily available weapons, the weaknesses of a new and hastily trained police force and the CPA's shortage of intelligence about Iraqi society, they prey on middle class Iraqis, car jacking, housebreaking, murdering and kidnapping. It is groups like these that make the roads surrounding Baghdad so dangerous, regularly attacking foreign workers.

The second group involved in violence is, as the CPA argues, the remnants of the Baath regime's security services. Sensing the vulnerability of occupation forces they began launching hit and run attacks on US troops in May and have increased the frequency, skill and geographic scope with which they are carried out. Two things must be understood about the genesis of the insurgency. First, the likelihood of a 'hidden hand' coordinating and funding it from its outset is very doubtful. Research I carried out in Iraq at the outset of the insurgency paints a much more fractured if not organic picture of the forces arrayed against the US. The networks and personnel now pursuing the insurgency appear to have been reconstituted through personal, family and geographic ties in the months after April 9 not in response to a master plan developed in the run up to the invasion. Paul Bremer's decision, upon his arrival in Baghdad, to dissolve the army on May 23 and embark on root and branch de-Baathification on May 16 2003, contributed to the personal organisation of the insurgency. Baathists in late May felt under attack and vulnerable. The CPA edicts in conjunction with a spate of assassinations by radical Shia groups gave them the motivation to re-organise. It was only by the spring of 2004 that evidence began to emerge that a national organisation was beginning to coordinate the actions of the disparate groups involved in the insurgency.

The second factor supporting the insurgency is the coherence of the security networks that guaranteed Saddam's survival in power for so long. The 'Sunni triangle' is often talked about as a homogenous block of insurgency supporters, offering material and ideological comfort to the fighters. What is not understood is that the 'shadow state', the flexible networks of patronage and violence that were used to reshape Iraqi society in the image of Saddam Hussein and his regime, is still functioning coherently in the north west of Iraq.¹³ The same individuals who intimidated and demobilised Iraqi society in the north west under the Baath regime are still there today and can be expected to be carrying out their allotted function.

The result of these two factors is the insurgency today. The weaknesses of intelligence on the US side means American forces have a partial understanding of who is killing them, who is organising the insurgency and what its relations with the wider community are. The repeated large-scale swoops through north west Iraq by US troops, Operation Peninsula Strike, Operation Sidewinder and

Operation Soda Mountain, may have resulted in the capture of large amounts of munitions, but they have also been accompanied by the deployment of large numbers of troops, mass arrests and widespread house searches. This has done little to stem the tide of violence. Without accurate, time sensitive intelligence and local knowledge such raids do, slowly, locate the remaining key players of Saddam's ruling elite. But in the process they also alienate large sections of the population in the targeted areas. Large numbers of arrests and detentions are bound to fuel resentment and swell the ranks of the violently disaffected.

The final source of violence is certainly the most worrying for the CPA and the hardest to deal with. This can be usefully characterised as Iraqi Islamism, with both Sunni and Shia variations. Fuelled by both nationalism and religion it is certainly not going to go away and provides an insight into the mobilising dynamics of future Iraqi politics. An early indication of the cause and effect of this phenomenon can be seen in the town of Falluja, thirty-five miles west of Baghdad. In spite of assertions to the contrary, Iraqis did not regard Falluja, prior to the war, as a 'hotbed of Baathist activity'.¹⁴ On the contrary, Falluja had a reputation in Iraq as a deeply conservative town, famed for the number of its mosques and its adherence to Sunni Islam.¹⁵ In the immediate aftermath of regime change Iraqi troops and Baath Party leaders left the town. Imams from the local mosques stepped into the socio-political vacuum, bringing an end to the looting, even managing to return some of the stolen property.¹⁶

The fact that this town became a centre of violent opposition to US occupation so soon after liberation is explained by Iraqis I interviewed as a result of heavy-handed searches carried out by US troops in the hunt for leading members of the old regime. Resentment escalated when two local Imam's were arrested.¹⁷ Events reached a climax when US troops broke up a demonstration with gunfire resulting in reports of seventeen Iraq fatalities and seventy wounded.

The repeated violation of the private sphere of Iraqi domestic life by US troops searching for weapons and fugitives has caused recurring resentment across Iraq, especially when combined with the seizure of weapons and money. It has to be remembered that as brutal as Saddam's regime was, it never sought to disarm the Iraqi population. The deaths of six British soldiers in June 2003 in the southern town of Majar al Kabir, although almost certainly carried out by Shias, can also be explained in a similar fashion. It was preceded by a British army operation designed to recover weapons by searching houses. The resentment this caused erupted when a heavy deployment of British troops was replaced by a small number of lightly armed military police.

The insurgency changes tactics

The explosions in Baghdad and Karbala that greeted the signing of Transitional Administrative law in the first week of March 2004 marked a new phase in the insurgency. This was a response to the CPA's plans to hand over the provision of security to the nascent Iraqi army and police force. This new and destabilising phase of violence is designed to make Iraq ungovernable either by the US or a new Iraqi government. Terrorism is now being deployed with the twin aims of exacerbating sectarian tensions whilst at the same time seeking to stop the growth in indigenous governing structures designed to replace the occupation.

As US troops took a less public role and began to be redeployed to more secure bases, the insurgents have sought out more accessible target. The embryonic institutions and personnel of the new Iraqi state provided these. This change in tactics was heralded by the attack on three police stations in Baghdad on the same day in October last year. Since then this method has been extended in its geographical scope and ferocity, using car bombs to target police stations in Khalidiyah in western Iraq, Mosul in the north and Iskandariya and Hillah south of Baghdad. These attacks, along with a devastating car bomb assault on an army-recruiting centre in Baghdad that killed 53 people in February, are designed not only to discourage Iraqis from working for the new state but also to stop the growth of its institutions. They undermine attempts to deliver to the Iraqi population what they have been demanding since the fall of the Baath regime: law and order.

However the second tactic adopted by insurgents has the potential to be even more damaging to Iraq's long-term stability. By targeting the large crowds that gathered to commemorate the Shia festival of Ashura in Baghdad and Karbala, the perpetrators of the attacks on March 2 were attempting to trigger a civil war between Iraq's different communities. This approach first became apparent on August 29, 2003 with the car bomb at the Imam Ali mosque in Najaf. In February 2004 this tactic was extended to the Kurdish areas of Iraq when two suicide bombers killed 101 people in Irbil at the offices of the Kurdish Democratic Party and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

Prominent Iraqi politicians were keen to blame the rise in car bombing, civilian casualties and the resulting sectarian tension on outside forces. But there is a danger that they have tended to overstate their case. The efficiency of these attacks, their regularity and the speed with which they were organised in the aftermath of Saddam's fall all point to a large amount of Iraqi involvement. The shadowy organisation behind these sectarian attacks is much more likely to be a hybrid, with elements of the old regime acting in alliance with indigenous Islamic radicals and a small number of foreign fighters. This potent mix has allowed mid-ranking members of the old regime to deploy their training and weapons stockpiles. They have sought to ally themselves with a new brand of Islamic

nationalism, seeking to mobilise Sunni fears of Shia and Kurdish domination and a growing resentment at foreign occupation. Although the use of indiscriminate violence has alienated the vast majority of Iraqi public opinion across all sections of society the carnage it has produced has been a major set back for state building and stability.

The results of insecurity

The inability of the CPA to impose law and order on Iraq has created a security vacuum across the whole of the country. This has given rise to another destabilising and very worrying dynamic that may come to dominate post-occupation Iraqi politics. Militias have stepped into the security vacuum further adding to instability and insecurity. In a country where automatic weapons are widely available and most men have had military training and many have seen active service, the organisation of militias is comparatively straight forward. The months since liberation has seen a plethora of armed groups taking to the streets, increasingly organised along sectarian lines. The inconsistent application of CPA disarmament edicts, allowing Kurdish militias to retain their arms while demanding that certain Shia ones cannot, has led to the militias filling the social space formally occupied by central government. Although these militias enjoy little popular support their very existence is testament to the inability of the CPA to guarantee the personal safety of the Iraqi population.

Clearly the establishment of countrywide order is essential for the successful creation of a stable state. It is also evident that more troops and policemen are needed for this to happen. What the events of the last two weeks have highlighted is that the nascent forces of the newly formed Iraqi army and police force are unable or unwilling to impose order. With the speed with which these forces were created it was perhaps overly optimistic to put such a large burden upon them with such haste. However, it is clear that US forces have also become a target of resentment and nationalist mobilisation. More troops are needed but of a different type. If the occupation were internationalised, a UN force, would not be such a potent target of anger and suspicion. They could provide the numbers of troops on the ground needed for the provision of order.

Conclusions

It is hard to over-estimate what is at stake in Iraq today. The removal of Saddam Hussein has proved to be the beginning not the culmination of a long and very uncertain process of occupation and state building. The lawlessness and looting that greeted the liberation of Baghdad on April 9 2003 has evolved into a self-sustaining dynamic that combines violence, instability and profound uncertainty. US troops now face an insurgency that has managed to extend its geographic

impact, while increasing the level of violence and the capacity for destruction and instability.

Against this background the failure of American attempts to replace Saddam Hussein's regime with a stable, sustainable and hopefully liberal government would have major consequences far beyond Iraq, the region or indeed the United States itself. The failure of regime consolidation in Iraq for the Middle East would be very problematic. The importance of Iraq to the geo-political stability of the Gulf and the wider Middle East area can hardly be overestimated. Geographically it sits on the eastern flank of the Arab Middle East with Turkey and Iran as neighbours. Although its population is considerably smaller than both of its non-Arab neighbours, it is larger than any of the bordering Arab states. With oil reserves second only to Saudi Arabia its economic importance is clearly global. If the present domestic situation does not stabilise then violence and political unrest would be expected to spread across Iraq's long and porous borders. A violently unstable Iraq, bridging the *mashreq* and the Gulf would further weaken the already fragile domestic and regional stability of the surrounding states and the wider region beyond. Iraq's role as a magnet for radical Islamists from across the Muslim world, eager to fight US troops on Middle Eastern soil, would increase. In addition there is a distinct danger that neighbouring states would be sucked into the country, competing for influence, using Iraqi proxies to violently further their own regime's interests.

With this in mind and given the social and political legacy of Saddam Hussein's rule it is unfair but also unrealistic to ask one country to bear the major burden of rebuilding the state. No one country, even the world's sole remaining super power, has the resources and expertise to finish the job at hand alone. The rebuilding of Iraq is an international problem and should be given to the international community to handle.

¹ Dr Toby Dodge is Consulting Senior Fellow for the Middle East at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London. He is also Senior Research Fellow, at the ESRC Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation, University of Warwick, UK. He has recently published *Inventing Iraq: the failure of nation building and a history denied*, (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 2003), *Iraq at the Crossroads: State and Society in the Shadow of Regime Change*, (edited with Steven Simon) (London and Oxford: IISS and Oxford University Press, 2003), *Globalisation and the Middle East, Islam, Economics, Culture and Politics*, (edited with Richard Higgott) (London and Washington: Royal Institute of International Affairs and the Brookings Institution, 2002), and 'US intervention and possible Iraqi futures', *Survival*, Vol. 45, No. 3, August 2003.

² See Charles Tripp, 'After Saddam', *Survival*, Vol. 44, No. 4, Winter 2002-2003, p. 26.

³ Amatzia Baram, *Building Towards Crisis: Saddam Husayn's Strategy for Survival*, Policy Paper No. 47, (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East policy, 1998), p. 73.

⁴ Frederick D. Barton and Bathsheba Croker, 'Winning the Peace in Iraq, *The Washington Quarterly*, Spring 2003, Vol. 26, No. 2, p. 10.

⁵ See Peter Boone, Haris Gazdar and Athar Hussain, 'Sanctions against Iraq: Costs of Failure', a paper given at 'Frustrated Development: the Iraqi Economy in War and in Peace,' conference, University of Exeter, Centre for Gulf Studies in collaboration with the Iraqi Economic Forum, July 1997, p. 10. {PRIVATE }

⁶ See Isam al Khafaji, 'A Few Days After: State and Society in a Post-Saddam Iraq', in *Iraq at the Crossroads: State and Society in the Shadow of Regime Change*, (edited by Toby Dodge and Steven Simon) (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies and Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁷ This finding is supported by the opinion poll conducted during February 2004 by Oxford Research International. Ahmed Chalabi and Ayad Alawi both respectively registered 0.2% of those questioned when asked 'Which national leader in Iraq, if any, do you trust the most?' Another opinion poll carried out on June 2003 by the Iraq Centre for Research and Strategic Studies found "that only 15.1% of Iraqis polled in Baghdad said that the political parties in Iraq represented their interests. Approximately 63% of those surveyed preferred a technocratic government, rather than one based upon political parties." See Puneet Talwar and Andrew Parasiliti, 108th Congress, 1st Session, Committee print, 'Iraq: meeting the challenge, sharing the burden, staying the course, A trip report to members of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate', p. 9.

⁸ Jonathan Steele, 'Delegates agree new talks on government', *The Guardian*, April 29, 2003.

⁹ Rend Rahim Francke, 'Iraq Democracy Watch: on the Situation in Iraq', September 2003 . (http://www.iraqfoundation.org/news/2003/isept/26_democracy_watch.html).

¹⁰ See the unedited transcript, 'The day after: planning for a post-Saddam Iraq', The American Enterprise Institute, Washington DC, October 3, 2002.

¹¹ See transcription of Fox News, July 6, 2003, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,91170,00.html>.

¹² George W. Bush, 'President Addresses the Nation', Address of the President to the Nation, The Cabinet Room, September 7, 2003, and Testimony as Delivered by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, and Director, Office of Management and Budget, Joshua Bolten, and Acting Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, General John Keane, Tuesday, July 29, 2003.

¹³ For more information on this see Toby Dodge, 'US intervention and possible Iraqi futures', *Survival*, Vol. 45, No. 3, August 2003.

¹⁴ See Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defence, General Peter Pace, USMC, Vice Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff, Alan Larson, Assistant Secretary of State for Economics, Business and Agricultural Affairs, testimony before the Senate Foreign Committee, 2:35, pm, Thursday May 22, 2003.

¹⁵ This is based on interviews carried out by the author in Baghdad in late May last year.

¹⁶ See Jonathan Steele, *The Guardian*, May 6, 2003

¹⁷ See Jonathan Steele reporting from Falluja, *The Guardian*, April 30, 2003.