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<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9950184x>

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Publication Date

2004-11-16

A Report from Baghdad

How the Occupation Created Enemies

Mark Juergensmeyer

“We had expected so much,” a professor at Baghdad University told me with bitterness in her voice. “But the U.S. occupation has only made the situation worse.”

This statement from an articulate Western-educated Iraqi was indicative of a deeply troubling anti-American attitude that I encountered in my recent trip to Baghdad. In conversations with dozens of Iraqi intellectuals, students, professionals, political leaders, Sunni and Shi’a clergy, and humanitarian activists, many expressed discontent—not with the ousting of Saddam, but with what has come afterwards and the way that the U.S. occupation has been conducted.¹

I could find no one who would admit to having liked Saddam. Most were glad to see him gone. But at the same time they felt betrayed by an occupying power that often alienated its potential allies. What I discovered was that many of Iraq’s problems were avoidable—they were created in large part by the U.S. Coalition’s own mistakes in the post-invasion period of occupation. Not only have these policies stoked the fires of anti-U.S. hostilities, they have left demoralization, humiliation, and a weak security and economic infrastructure in their wake. More ominous still, they have set the conditions for the possibility that Iraq’s emerging new government may end up presiding over a failed state.

In the perception of many Iraqis, the United States has taken on the ugly aura of a Saddam-like dictatorship. One Sunni cleric with whom I spoke regarded the fight against American occupation in Fallouja to be a vicarious struggle against the regime of Saddam. In his reasoning, the CIA had created Saddam and propped him up over the years and the United States removed him only because they sensed that he had

become weak and was no longer useful for America's policy purposes. The cleric told me that he thought the CIA had known that there would soon be an Islamic rebellion against Saddam in Iraq, and so the United States invaded and occupied the country in order to co-opt this potential Islamic revolution. By fighting the American occupation, therefore, Iraqis like him thought they were participating in a war of liberation against what they considered to be a Saddam/U.S. regime.

This perception of American influence in Iraq politics means that any taint of U.S. meddling is mistrusted. With this in mind, the former CIA backing of Prime Minister Iyad Allawi is not one of his strongest assets. To his credit, Allawi has attempted to demonstrate his independence. At the same time, he and President Ghazi al-Yawar—who has already shown his ability to take an anti-American stance in describing the U.S. military's actions in Fallouja as "genocide"—need to placate the American authorities in order to continue to receive their military and economic support. This will not be an easy dance, especially since they also need to dismantle some of the military, administrative, and economic policies that the U.S. Coalition administration has set in place.

HOW THE UNITED STATES BECAME THE ENEMY

The opposition to the U.S. occupation is not solely from former Ba'ath Party officials or from outside Jihadists. The protests would be easy to subdue if this were the case. Instead, however, I found that the opposition to the occupation was pervasive, even among the religious enthusiasts who were mistreated by Saddam and among intellectuals and urban professionals who share America's modern secular values. Though few supported the violence of the anti-American extremists, they shared the sense of resentment that has led to these vicious acts. In a curious way, hatred towards American occupation has united Iraq's diverse population.

One sign of the popular attitude towards the U.S. occupation was illustrated by the curious Iraqi response to the pictures of U.S. soldiers mistreating prisoners at Abu Ghraib. I was in Baghdad shortly after the news broke, and although the pictures were recycled endlessly in my hotel room on al Jazeera television—the channel that is virtually the only source of televised news in Baghdad—I was puzzled to find that the images did not surprise most Iraqis. Although they were disgusted at what was portrayed, rumors of these prison atrocities had

been circulating around Baghdad for months, and most Iraqis with whom I spoke expected such behavior of what many of them regarded as a brutal occupying force.

This absence of surprise spoke volumes about the way Iraqis have come to look at the U.S. military—a year ago they were considered liberators, and now they are seen as occupiers. Some Iraqis described the United States as a continuation of the kind of oppression they had experienced under Saddam. A few thought it was even worse.

“Saddam tortured and punished us physically,” one middle-class Iraqi said in quite fluent English. “But he did not try to humiliate us.”

At a seminar held in Saddam’s old international affairs think tank, Bayt al-Hikma (“The House of Wisdom”), an articulate English-speaking professor of political science at Baghdad University began her comments following my talk on the global rise of religious violence with some pointed remarks about how the inability of the U.S. military to seal Iraq’s borders had made it possible for radical Islamic activists from outside to enter the country. With her voice rising, the smartly dressed professor with a modern hairstyle began cataloguing the other problems created by American troops, ending with the accusation that the U.S. was responsible for most of the insurrection and religious violence occurring in the last year. The United States is acting “like the terrorists” that it despises, she said.

Iraq is, of course, an occupied country. So it is understandable that most Iraqis would dislike the occupying troops and would be eager to see them leave. Still, U.S. forces were in Germany and Japan for years after World War II and most Germans and Japanese endured the occupation with sullen resentment at worst and deep appreciation at best. Some U.S. soldiers married local women and brought their wives home. It is unlikely, however, that there will be any war brides from Baghdad.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq went quickly, and for most Iraqis the experience of war has been more severe after the fall of Saddam than before. As rigid and dictatorial as Saddam’s regime may have been, these new problems—the insecurity of public order, the looting, the bombings, and the constant reminders of foreign military presence—are all features of life after Saddam. The U.S. military incursion into Fallouja and the shelling of Najaf in pursuit of Muqtada al-Sadr’s militia were jarring enactments of a war that most Iraqis had not previously experienced. In that sense it is understandable that many

Iraqis would not regard the entry of American troops as signaling the end of armed hostilities, but in a curious way its beginning. They are now waiting for that war to end.

Moreover, many Iraqis are still in shock that Saddam is gone. "We could have gotten rid of him ourselves," one former government official complained, explaining that the United States was mesmerized by what he called the "myth of Saddam's power." In his view Saddam Hussein wanted the world—and especially the Iraqi people—to believe that he had weapons of mass destruction in order to scare them. In fact, the former government official said, Saddam was quite vulnerable, as the quick victory by American troops suggested. The former official seemed almost embarrassed that Saddam's army was toppled so easily. He was even more ashamed that he and the Iraqi people were not involved in Iraq's liberation.

This former official, Mowfaq al-Taey, was not only excluded from the fall of Saddam but also from the rebuilding of Iraq—and this latter exclusion affected him more deeply than the former one. In the old regime he was one of Saddam's chief architects, responsible for the design of many of Saddam's palaces, mosques, and other imposing public buildings. He still takes pride in his craft, though al-Taey blames Saddam for some of the architectural flourishes added to his creations—such as the minarets shaped like rocket launchers that were added to his design for the imposing Mother of All Battles Mosque, meant to commemorate Iraq's alleged victory against America in the first Gulf War. Today al-Taey still maintains his roomy apartment near what used to be a presidential palace in what is now the "green zone"—the secure area occupied by Coalition forces that houses the headquarters of the Governing Council. Since he never consented to join Saddam's Ba'ath Party, "they can't kick me out," he says, though he claims the Americans would love to use his quarters to house Coalition dignitaries. Every day he makes his way through the military checkpoints out into the ordinary Baghdad streets, walking to the headquarters of an Iraqi human rights organization where serves as a volunteer. But his talents as an architect have not been tapped for the reconstruction of Iraq. Instead, foreign contractors have been employed for the task.

The experience of this Iraqi architect is paradigmatic of the problems created not just by the occupation itself, but also by the specific policies that have been adopted by the United States in

administering the reconstruction of Iraq in this past year. Some of these policies have come from an ignorance of Iraqi society; others are due to the ideological bias of the U.S. administrators. They are, nonetheless, catastrophic mistakes that have led not only to a sense of frustration and humiliation among the Iraqi people but also to dangerous situations regarding security, administration, and the economy that will burden the new Iraqi government in the coming months, and perhaps for years to come.

SECURITY MISTAKES

One of the first mistakes was the U.S. policy of dissolving the former Iraq army and refusing to utilize it in the new security forces that were created to replace it. Although low-level soldiers in non-elite forces were allowed to re-apply for the new army and civil defense forces, only a fraction of Saddam's 400,000 troops have been re-integrated into them and even these soldiers were required to be retrained. Needless to say, it takes a long time to find capable applicants and to hire and train a new army and civil defense corps, and after a year the task has only just begun. This policy has had two dire consequences: the ubiquitous presence of the U.S. military on the streets of Baghdad and other Iraqi cities and the emergence of private security forces—often manned by former Iraqi army personnel. Some of the former troops joined the independent militia retained by political parties, businesses, and private citizens. Saddam's old army was not only well trained but remarkably diverse—it integrated various Sunni, Shi'i, and Kurdish groups. But these troops were passed over in the attempt to create new armed forces from scratch, and in the meantime the Coalition authority has had to rely on American troops to maintain the country's security.

As soon as one arrives at Baghdad International Airport, one is confronted with the sight of the ubiquitous tanks and humvees that have come to symbolize the U.S. military presence. It is a feature of modern Iraqi life that increases the closer one comes to the epicenter of American power in Baghdad: the "green zone." Our group stayed in a small hotel outside the heavily fortified zone where most American and other Coalition officials lived and worked, but on one occasion we arranged to meet with officials related to the Coalition Provisional Authority and the Governing Council and had reason to work our way inside.

Americans and other foreigners who worked in the green zone seldom ventured outside, and when we tried to enter we had to pass through several gauntlets of military checkpoints. All were manned by U.S. troops. On our way to the zone we were stopped in the street by convoys of U.S. soldiers looking for insurgents who were said to be driving a car that looked much like one of ours, and more American soldiers were standing at the entrance to the green zone to check our passports and gear. As the young soldiers checked our cameras and had us delete pictures from our digital cameras that showed scenes of the checkpoint itself, we talked about what conditions were like for them. The soldiers had been in the National Guard in Seattle and Riverside, California, and were sleeping at night in the convention center inside the green zone, having to roll up their belongings every morning so that their collective bedroom could be utilized in the daytime for meetings. They showed us their heavy gear—some sixty pounds of bulletproof material—and they expressed apprehension about the months to come, with its scorching summer heat. They had been due to return home the month before we talked with them, but their term had been suddenly extended, a fact they bitterly resented. Moreover, they were aware that they were vulnerable targets, standing at the outskirts of the green zone at checkpoints that are frequently targeted by both mortar fire and car bombs. Only the day before there had been a huge explosion at a gate adjacent to the green zone, a suicide car bomb attack that had killed six Iraqis, including the driver. On this occasion, however, no American soldiers had perished. But the soldiers knew how vulnerable they were. They said they could “feel the hate” from the eyes of Iraqis who looked at their convoys as the soldiers drove their humvees down the center of Baghdad’s streets, their fingers on the triggers of machine guns. They felt as if they had bull’s-eyes painted on their backs.

Inside the green zone we made arrangements to meet the Governing Council’s Minister of Defense. Although the whole area was supposedly secure, there was a military guard at the entrance to the modern temporary office building that housed the Ministry of Defense. These guards were members of the new Iraqi Civil Defense Corps. They wore neat, clean uniforms and snappy blue berets, and they cheerfully waved us past as we entered the building. I pointed out the incongruity of this arrangement to the Minister of Defense, Ali Allawi—a relative of Iyad Allawi. Like Iyad, Ali Allawi had been an

expatriate Iraqi, a businessman based in London, before returning to Baghdad and being appointed to the Governing Council. Why, I asked him, was his private office in the secure green zone guarded by the new Iraqi troops when American soldiers were put in the provocative position of conducting street patrols and maintaining checkpoints?

Allawi said the new defense corps was not yet ready for street patrol. When pressed, he claimed that there was a sizable number of Iraqi troops—as many as 30,000—then in training that would be ready to be deployed in about three months. Most observers, however, put the number of active fully trained Iraqi security forces (combined border patrol, defense corps, and army) at mid- 2004 to be around 6,000, with several thousand more in training. According to *The New York Times*, half of the army resigned mid-year in protest against low salaries and dangerous conditions. Although there is now a significant number of Iraqi police in training—as many as 20,000, according to a March 2004 Pentagon report—there are far fewer military-trained forces. Clearly the task of locating, training, and retaining troops is daunting and will take longer than was initially foreseen. Although he defended the principle of dissolving the old Iraqi army, Allawi did admit that the current difficulty in providing security in the country was the result of “a certain security theory that did not pan out.” Moreover, he said that some of the old troops could have been reformed into new security forces in a matter of months.

That did not happen, however, and for the past year the United States and other Coalition troops were the primary means of providing public security. Baghdad is not a very safe city these days, given the widespread looting, theft, kidnapping, and sniping and bombing from insurgents. It is understandable that Coalition authorities would want to give an assurance of security in a way that would also dissuade those who might be tempted to disrupt public order. Yet some of their methods of providing symbols of security seem to have had the opposite effect.

I was startled, for instance, to see what appeared to be continuous convoys of three or more armed humvees roaming the busy streets of downtown Baghdad. Our plain unmarked and unguarded car was pushed to the side of the road along with all the rest of the street’s busy traffic as these menacing convoys rumbled past. Poking up from the metal roof of each humvee was a mounted machine gun manned by a very nervous young American whose only protection seemed to

be his helmet as he scanned the traffic jam. I quickly put down my camera with the fear that it might be mistaken for a gun, yet my heart went out to that vulnerable young soldier who reminded me of the many students of his age in my California classrooms. At the same time I sensed the humiliation that Iraqis must feel in living in what appeared to be an armed camp. I could sense that humiliation easily, since I felt it keenly myself.

The convoys seemed to be ubiquitous; and in addition there were also foot patrols. Late one night I saw a group of twenty or so American soldiers stalking the middle of the street directly beneath my hotel window, and for a brief moment I felt as if I were part of the enemy. It was a feeling enhanced by the many checkpoints where young Americans who do not speak Arabic checked the passports of foreigners like myself and the identity cards of Iraqi citizens. Often the soldiers nervously shouted orders in English at the Iraqi drivers as if the sheer volume of their voices would convey meaning. It was easy to see how many Iraqis could feel that they had become prisoners in their own country.

The U.S. incursion into Fallouja in April 2004 was therefore seen by many Iraqis not as a justified attempt to root out a few anti-American insurgents but as an extension of the iron-fisted American military control that Iraqis had already experienced in their daily lives. The American media presented the Fallouja incursion as a response to the hideous act of killing four American private security officers and dismembering their bodies. As most Iraqis knew, however, the angry mob that had set upon the American security detail's vehicle was incensed because of several itchy-fingered American soldiers who had fired on a crowd that was protesting the Israeli government's killing of the Palestinian leader, Sheik Ahmed Yassin. So although few Iraqis approved of the savage way that the American contract security men were killed, they were even less approving of the full-scale American military assault on the city that it triggered.

The Fallouja insurgents were widely supported within the Sunni area, and several Sunni clergy tried to help us understand why they too defended the insurgents in their anti-American stance. They were members of the Iraq Council of Sunni Clergy, and they had agreed to receive us in the opulent Baghdad mosque designed by the architect I had met, Mowfaq al-Taey—the mosque constructed by Saddam Hussein to celebrate the Iraqi “victory” over the United States in the

Mother of All Battles, the first Gulf War. The mosque continued to be a symbol of the political power of Sunni Islam and a center of anti-American resistance. Two weeks before our visit, for instance, it was the venue for a rally of 200,000 Iraqis against the American occupation. The clergy with whom we met compared the insurgents' defense of Fallouja to a homeowner defending his house against a thief.

In the view of the Sunni clergy, the Americans were the outsiders breaking in. Although much has been made in the U.S. media about Islamists from other Arab countries—including Jordan's Musab al-Zarqawi and followers of Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda—the Sunni clergy regarded these foreigners as outsiders who have preyed upon Iraq's weakness. Their actions, they said, were like opportunistic infections that had invaded the ravaged body of Iraq. The Sunni clergy blamed the United States for these radical Islamists' assaults: the United States had not maintained Iraq's borders sufficiently to keep them out, they claimed, and had created the conditions of hostility in Iraq that encouraged them to act violently. Whatever role they may have played in the Fallouja rebellion was therefore of America's own making. Rather than giving Iraqis a sense of security, then, the U.S. military assault on Fallouja, as described by the Sunni clergy, was seen as an extension of America's Iraq war—a war that many Iraqis increasingly saw as one waged not just against Saddam's regime but against Iraqis themselves.

For this reason the U.S. attempts to bring to justice the renegade Shi'ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr were also widely condemned throughout Iraq. Not that al-Sadr was widely supported: he had only a small but vociferous following. His newspaper, which the Coalition administration banned—thereby precipitating the confrontation between al-Sadr's militia and the U.S. military that backs the Coalition—had a circulation of only 2,000 readers. And although he came from a celebrated Shi'ite family (his uncle was a founder of the Shi'i Da'awa Party), Muqtada was widely regarded as a brash upstart at best and at worst a rogue thug. Most Iraqis with whom I spoke believed that he was capable of the crimes of which he was accused, including orchestrating the murders of his Shi'i opponents. Nonetheless, they did not approve of the American military's assault on al-Sadr and his militia.

I discussed the case with Jalal al-Mashda, the editor of the newspaper supported by the Iraqi Independent Democratic Party led

by Adnan Pachachi. (Pachachi, former foreign minister of Iraq and a foe of Saddam, allegedly was offered the presidency of the new interim Iraqi government but is reported to have declined.) Al-Mashda is an urbane, well-educated, and secular political observer who is a keen supporter of an independent democratic Iraq. He had no use for al-Sadr and his militant extremists, but he did not endorse the U.S. military assault on him, especially when it involved incursions into the sacred Shi'i cities of Karbala and Najaf. "Why," the editor asked rhetorically, "doesn't the US wait for the new Iraqi government to be established and let them deal with issues of law and order?" It troubled al-Mashda, as it did most other Iraqis with whom I spoke, that the U.S. military was becoming so deeply involved in matters of public security and justice that should be in the domain of independent Iraqi authorities.

The reason that the U.S. military was so deeply involved in everyday matters of security and law and order was that there was no one else to do the job. Virtually every political party, every business of a significant size, and every large-scale organization operating in Iraq has created its own security force. In the case of the political parties, these forces often have a fierce loyalty to their own religious and political ideology, as the U.S. military discovered in confronting the militia of Muqtada al-Sadr. The militias are a new phenomenon—Saddam would never have allowed such miniature armies to challenge his own monopoly of force—but now, because of the U.S. Coalition policy of not quickly reconstituting an Iraqi army of sufficient strength to provide for domestic security, the country has been peppered with them. The country is ripe for a Somalia or Afghan-style conflagration of mini-wars between contending warlords.

It is significant that one of the first pronouncements made by Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, shortly after taking office in May, was related to the militia problem. He announced that the militias of nine major political parties would disband and join the government's security forces by January 2005.

In the meantime, U.S. troops continue to patrol the streets. Their very presence angers the population and prolongs the date when new Iraqi forces will be able to take their place. Yet they cannot suddenly leave, since a rapid deflation of power at the center will precipitate a holocaust of militarized anarchy propelled by a plethora of independent militia.

ADMINISTRATIVE MISTAKES

Another set of mistakes fostered by Coalition policies in Iraq was similar to those concerning security, in that just as U.S. forces took on the role of military defense in the country, the United States also took over the role of government administration. These policies have had the effect of undercutting the status of many members of the middle class and excluding them from a role in the reconstruction of Iraq. The most problematic of these policies was the decision soon after Paul Bremer's assignment as chief administrator in Iraq not to employ any members of Saddam's old Ba'ath Party—even lower-echelon functionaries—in the new government offices. A related and equally problematic policy has been the heavy reliance on outside contractors to train Iraqis and mold a new governmental structure consistent with an American concept of governmental organization.

Our visit to the green zone in Baghdad revealed aspects of both of these problems. The offices of the Coalition Provisional Authority and the ministries of the Governing Council are both located in this secure area—the part of central Iraq that formerly housed one of Saddam's presidential palaces, the homes of many other high-ranking Ba'ath Party officials, the high-rise al Rashid Hotel, and most of the central offices of the Iraq administration. It was the site of the “shock and awe” attacks seen vividly by viewers around the world from CNN and other network cameras that were perched in the towering Palestine Hotel, located directly across the Tigris river in downtown Baghdad. Today the green zone is a heavily fortified area of weed-choked gardens, bombed-out office buildings, and empty boulevards populated by Coalition soldiers and administrators from the United States and its principal ally, Great Britain, who have set up shop in temporary office structures and live in trailers surrounded by sand-bagged bunkers.

In the old days of Saddam, everything of importance happened in this central space. Alas, this is still the case.

For all practical purposes, the Coalition Provisional Authority had been the sole administrative structure in Iraq since April 2003. Although each of the ministries of government was headed by an Iraqi member of the Governing Council, each ministry was also served by an advisor—usually an American or British administrator. Ultimately the buck stopped at the desk of the head Coalition administrator, Paul

Bremer. Our host in Baghdad, Hanaa Edwards, the head of the Iraqi al-Amal human rights organization, told us about an audience that she and other Iraqi women concerned about women's rights had with Bremer. She said that he was quite gracious until they pressed him about practical matters regarding women's salaries and divorce rights. He seemed exasperated that he would be held accountable for such details—a response that he was alleged to have given to other Iraqis who complained to him about electricity blackouts and the slow pace of reconstruction efforts. Yet, Hanaa asked rhetorically, if he is not in charge, who else is?

To enter the green zone is to enter into a realm of power, but it is palpably an American power. As I mentioned, American military personnel guard the checkpoints that are at the pedestrian entries to the zone. Because of the frequency of car bombs, very few automobiles are allowed inside. At the same time, very few of the vehicles inside are allowed out. The driver of our car let us off on the busy street in front of one of the entrances as we nervously looked around to make sure that we were not in the crosshairs of a sniper's sight. We then carefully picked our way through barbed-wire fences and sandbag bunkers and were searched by young American soldiers who checked our passports and examined our bags.

On the other side we were greeted by our host, Paul Sholte, a British diplomat who was serving as the Coalition advisor to the Ministry of Defense. We clambered aboard his white pickup truck, which essentially served as a glorified golf cart since it was not allowed to leave the green zone. Neither was Sholte, as we found out. He told us with a certain poignancy in his voice that we had seen more of Baghdad than he had in his six months on duty in Iraq. He was not encouraged to leave the zone, he said, and if he wanted to do so he would have to receive written permission and be accompanied by a convoy of military defense. By contrast, we drove everywhere throughout the city in unmarked cars with no security except for the street savvy of our Iraqi drivers.

I had met Sholte several months before my Baghdad trip when we were both part of a NATO seminar on terrorism that met in Prague. I knew him to be a thoughtful and sensible person, and wondered how he got along with his American counterparts in the Coalition advisory team. It was frustrating, he said quietly, in a tone that suggested that there were many stories behind that simple phrase. The U.S. defense

bureaucracy was not in the habit of discussing matters, he said, but rather took without question whatever directives were handed down from Washington. Moreover, he said, information did not flow easily from Baghdad back through the conduits of command.

The green zone had a definite American flavor. Though there was a smattering of Brits with their cheerful berets, and Aussies with their trademark turned-up bush hats, most of the military and civilians we encountered in the green zone were Americans. They seemed to hail especially from the American South—from states such as Virginia, Louisiana, and Texas. There were very few Iraqis. The green zone boasted a kind of ad hoc convenience store and a car wash for military vehicles. The signs were entirely in English and the messages were clearly meant for American viewers. One of the most frequent signs carried a motivational message: “What have you done today for the Iraqi people?” An Iraqi in our group, Yahia Said, posed somberly beside one of the signs as I took his picture.

We met for a time with Ali Allawi, who served as Minister of Trade as well as Minister of Defense. Having lived for some thirty years in London, he spoke with a clipped British accent. In addition to commenting on security issues, he expressed an air of impatience about the slow pace of reconstruction in the country. Though willing to concede that Coalition policies in the year since liberation might not always have been appropriate, he seemed to lay the bulk of the blame on the Iraqi population. It had been stultified under Saddam, bullied by intimidation, and was somewhat apprehensive about change. Iraqi society, he said, was dominated by “the politics of fear, not the politics of hope.”

After the session with Allawi, we met with several Americans who were contracted by the Coalition authorities to train new administrators in the Ministry of Defense. Their job was, in a sense, to indoctrinate the new Iraqi recruits into the “politics of hope.” They also imparted practical training in how to operate a modern, efficient defense department bureaucracy in the American way. Since Saddam’s old government had an enormous defense apparatus that supported an army of some 400,000 soldiers, it seemed reasonable to me that at least some aspects of the old structure could be rehabilitated. Would any of the former employees and their offices be utilized? No, I was told, the old administrative structure was to be totally abandoned; they were starting from the ground up. Like old buildings in American

cities, the administrative edifice was regarded as too costly to rehabilitate. It would have to be torn down and replaced anew.

The Americans who were charged with the responsibility of creating this new administrative edifice seemed quite confident that they could meet the task. After all, they had done it many times before in various parts of the world. They were professional consultants associated with Military Professional Resources International (MPRI), an American company consisting largely of former U.S. military personnel who contract themselves out as advisors for security and defense matters around the world. Often, as in the case of Iraq, their work in other countries is arranged by U.S. government agencies.

MPRI often provides advice on security and military training, but in this case their task was to train new administrators who would be forming the Iraqi Ministry of Defense. The MPRI instructors whom we met in the green zone included two former U.S. army officers. Sue Dueitt, a cheerful blonde from Virginia, might have been a stewardess or a nurse in a former life, but in this one she had served in the army, rising to the rank of brigadier general before retiring early and joining MPRI. Her colleague, Ronald Alcala, originally from Southern California, was also retired military—in his case, he was, I believe, a tank commander. Despite their former military stature, they encouraged us to call them Sue and Ron.

Their classroom was a bright, well-lit temporary building with gleaming tile floors, white walls, and metal tables arranged in a U-shape facing a wall of white magic-marker boards and flip charts. It also included a screen for the PowerPoint displays they used in the instruction seminars. Sue and Ron showed us copies of the textbooks that the trainees were given, printed in English with an accompanying Arabic translation. The manual appeared to consist of reprints of the text from the PowerPoint presentations made during the instruction sessions. Much of the text was arrayed in bullet-point format, with lines connecting boxes of text to one another. In addition to these training sessions in Baghdad, trainees were taken to the Defense Department in Washington, DC and to special training sessions in Jordan.

Sue and Ron felt confident that they had a surefire product in these training sessions, since they had given it in many countries before—including Bosnia, Columbia, Romania, Angola, and Afghanistan. We described the courses as “Ministry of Defense in a box.” Sue and Ron

accepted the term in good humor, admitting that their training course was somewhat like a kit, but one that they thought was universally applicable. There was no need, they said, to adapt it to different circumstances. That could be done later by the trainees themselves. The job of MPRI was to train them in the basics that applied to defense organizations everywhere. At a couple of points in the conversation, Sue inadvertently referred to Iraq as "Iran," and she seemed to have difficulty in identifying the neighboring countries.

Sue felt that she had a good understanding about what was wrong with Saddam Hussein's old defense structure, however, from the comments that were given by some of the new recruits. These new applicants were often nominated by members of the Governing Council and the names vetted by the Coalition advisor, but some applicants simply came in off the street, offering their résumés with the hope of getting a job. Many took great personal risks in being willing to work with the American-led coalition, Sue and Ron said, and a few had been the targets of assassination attempts. In general, they tried to avoid retraining anyone who had been in Saddam's old defense system.

The problem with the old system, Sue and Ron said, was that it was too top-heavy. Saddam had some 13,000 generals. It was a system fed by patronage and personal rewards, and it created a "sense of entitlement" among the officer class. In general the Iraqi style was too authoritarian for Sue and Ron's tastes, and one of their tasks was to try to get the Iraqis to accept the idea of having open discussion before decisions were made. They said they had difficulty in getting the Iraqis to understand the concept of policy and the necessity of separating the military and civilian functions of defense. Among the more extreme peculiarities of some of the Iraqi trainees, Sue said, was a certain appreciation for Hitler, the belief that Kuwait was indeed a part of Iraq, and the lack of regret over the Iran-Iraq war.

In general, Sue thought that Iraqis were good learners but reticent about speaking in public, especially if they thought their comments might elicit disapproval. She had written some comments on the board from the class that morning when she had solicited feedback from the session, and the group's comments included such remarks as "good class, but could have included more specifics," and "hard to relate theory and practice." As our conversation came to a close, Sue made what she thought was a nice gesture to the Iraqis that comprised half

of our group. Though one was a research scholar at the London School of Economics and another was the head of the international human rights organization that hosted our trip, and both had actively participated in the discussion, Sue turned to me and the British professor from London in our group, and thanked us for “bringing our Iraqi friends” to the discussion.

Though we appreciated the enthusiasm with which Sue and Ron approached their task, we regarded their patronizing training sessions as symptomatic of what was wrong with the Coalition’s efforts to rebuild Iraq’s administrative infrastructure. In deliberately avoiding what was there before, the Coalition administrators saddled themselves with the task of maintaining the system during the transition period. They also missed the opportunities of retaining valuable aspects of the previous organization, and most important the management abilities of thousands of administrative workers who after the fall of Saddam were suddenly deprived of their jobs and their careers. In many cases these were middle-management workers who might have been affiliated with the Ba’ath Party but had no use for Saddam. They were prevented, however, from being part of the new Iraq. These were the very people who should have been the allies of the new government, but who were humiliated and excluded from it.

Moreover, there was a problem with the American model that many Iraqis felt was being forced on them. Though it might be true that there are some universal truths to all administrative organizations, the way that these truths have been presented seem to imply that America’s way of doing things is best. Iraqis understandably felt that they had something to contribute conceptually to the rebuilding of their institutions. The modern, well-dressed professor at Saddam’s old foreign policy think tank put it this way, in her eloquent English: Coalition policies were “forcing American values on Iraqis” and did not allow them to “treasure and enjoy” their own values.

ECONOMIC MISTAKES

Many Coalition policies were aimed at rebuilding Iraq’s economic infrastructure, but here too the policies created as many difficulties as they solved. The main problem was policies driven by the neo-liberal economic model of privatization. While the posture of small government and wide license for independent economic entrepreneurs might work well in some parts of the developed West, in Iraq it is an

invitation for economic opportunism, corruption, and exploitation. Moreover, since many of the contracts for rebuilding the country were given to foreign companies, especially large U.S. corporations such as Bechtel and Halliburton, Iraqi businesses were excluded from the economic benefits of rebuilding their own country.

Superficially, the economy of the country appeared to be booming. Shops were open, and with the ending of the embargo, consumer goods abounded in the stores. The streets were crowded with automobiles, many of them fairly recent models. At the time we were in Baghdad, air conditioners were the big-ticket item. It seemed as if stores could not keep them on their shelves. USAID officials with whom we spoke were concerned about the energy consequences of so many new air conditioners being turned on during peak energy periods in the hot summer months. "They just assume that when they flick the switch the machines will work," one of them told Yahia Said. The official shook his head in wonder as to whether this would actually be the case.

One of the reasons that business is doing well is that some salaries improved considerably after the fall of Saddam. Funds from U.S. taxpayers that were funneled through the Coalition government were used to increase the salaries of Iraq government workers from roughly thirty dollars a month to approximately one hundred and fifty dollars. Since half of the population was supported in some way by government funds, this was an enormous infusion of additional consumer purchasing power. The government salaries affected especially women, who constituted over half of the government workforce in positions such as teachers and office workers.

So although there were signs of life in the consumer sector of the economy, there were also signs of stagnation on the large-scale reconstruction efforts. Everywhere in Baghdad were the bombed-out shells and burned and looted remains of former government buildings. Even in the green zone, very few of these buildings were repaired. Massive construction projects begun during Saddam's regime were halted mid-course. The enormous cranes overlooking the unfinished edifices seemed almost like markers for the graves of the abandoned visions of Saddam. Less visible but equally as significant, the electricity system only recently returned to the on-again-off-again level of functioning that had existed during the old regime. Oil is beginning to trickle through the pipelines, and this is crucial to the country's

economy. Oil is one commodity that has not been privatized. The production is supervised by a government commission and the revenues supplement the massive aid from America that keeps the government offices functioning and provides for the increased salaries of government workers.

Occasionally one hears a certain bitterness in Baghdad that the devastated buildings and other aspects of Iraq's broken infrastructure were not repaired. America has been blamed not only because the United States is in charge of the occupation government but also because it was often American companies that received the huge contracts to repair the bombed and looted infrastructure. The situation was complicated by security concerns—the cost of private security for the American experts brought in to work on the Iraq reconstruction projects could amount to a third of the cost of the project itself. Added to the problems was the fact that many of the old factories were originally built with Soviet support, and the Russian reluctance to join the Coalition of the Willing deterred the United States from giving Russia the contracts to rebuild factories or supply spare parts.

Stories abounded in Baghdad about the inefficiency of many of these American contract companies. According to one account that we heard, a U.S. company received a \$15 million contract to rebuild a hospital looted after the fall of the regime. The company was unable to follow through on the project, however, due to security concerns. An Iraqi company was then granted the reconstruction project, which they were able to do in a few months at a cost of only \$80,000.

Some Iraqi companies benefited from being the subcontractors that actually did much of the work of reconstruction required to fulfill the huge contracts given to U.S. companies. But since many of the profits from the contract were retained by the American middlemen, the Iraqis resented the fact that the reconstruction of their country contributed to Americans' wealth. Some Iraqi businessmen believed that the US-style reconstruction was bad for their business and supported the insurrection. According to a journalist, Patrick Graham, writing in *Harper's Magazine* on his experience in Fallouja during the April insurgency, the uprising there and elsewhere in Iraq was funded in part by Sunni businessmen. They were angry about the competition from foreign companies, the increased government wages that put pressure on Iraqi businesses to increase their salaries, and the new foreign investment laws that allowed American companies to purchase

Iraq factories cheaply. From their point of view, support for the insurrection at Fallouja and elsewhere was a way of undercutting U.S. economic competition and made good business sense.

The presence of U.S. contractors in Baghdad was almost as abrasive as the constant specter of U.S. military patrols and checkpoints. Part of the reason for this is that for security reasons U.S. contractors were surrounded by small militias of armed guards, and their cars moved in convoys protected by trucks mounted with machine guns.

In the small hotel in which we were staying, our mixed Iraqi-American-British group was initially the only one that included foreigners. So for a while the American presence in our hotel was quite inconspicuous. On the second day of our stay, however, we were joined by two U.S. contractors and their eight Iraqi bodyguards, who took over the entire third floor of the hotel. One of the contractors was a fellow named Hank, a burly, athletic fellow in his early thirties from a small town in Texas, who worked as an electricity grid consultant and who sought out missions in such dangerous places as Somalia and Kosovo. He had persuaded his best friend from high school, who still went by his old nickname, Scooter, to join him on this assignment. Scooter was also an electricity grid consultant and this trip to Baghdad was his first excursion outside the US. On the evening we joined them they had set up the public lounge on the third floor of the hotel as their party room. Their security detail, which was on paid loan from the large militia maintained by Ahmed Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress, had gone to sleep early, having suffered the effects of the party of the previous evening. The parties were enhanced by the guards' access to imported beer and videotapes that allowed them to replace the endless stream of talk shows from al Jazeera TV with American porn.

When Hank and Scooter traveled around town, they took their eight bodyguards with them in a three-car armed convoy. In general, they told us, their drivers tried to avoid being caught in traffic jams in which they could be ambushed. If they saw a roadblock or a traffic jam ahead, they would abruptly make a U-turn in the middle of the street, even if it required them to drive over a curb or rumble over a traffic median. If they were stuck in traffic, they said, several of the guards would hop outside, brandishing their AK-47 rifles and machine guns to ward off any possibility of a spontaneous attack.

I knew how frightening such security convoys could appear to ordinary Iraqis, since I had encountered one of them myself the day

before. Our group was in our modest unmarked car on our way to the offices of al Amal, when suddenly the barrel of an AK-47 was thrust into the open back window of the car next to where I was sitting. I shouted "gun, gun," and dove to the floor as if somehow this prone position would make me more secure. Fortunately for my sake, the gun was part of a security detail in a three-car convoy trying to make its way around the edge of the traffic jam. At the center of the convoy of large Chevy Suburban SUVs was a dignitary of some sort—I imagined him or her to be a U.S. contractor or administrator en route to a business meeting. To me, however—and most likely to most Iraqis who found themselves in similar circumstances—it was another indication of the privilege of the foreign occupiers and the insecurity of public order.

Daily life in Baghdad was quite comfortable for those Iraqis who were in league with the U.S. contractors and for those Iraqi political and religious leaders who publicly supported the occupation. After a seminar in our hotel in which Professor Mary Kaldor and I gave presentations about war and religious violence in the changing global society, we were invited to the home of one of the religious leaders who came to the seminar, Sheik Ayad Jamaluddin. The sheik was born into a line of Shi'i religious leaders in Najaf, but has been living as an expatriate in Dubai since 1979. He does not seem to have a following in Iraq, but he does have friends in Washington. He is a firm believer in the separation of religion and politics and is an outspoken proponent of the American occupation of Iraq. According to an article about the sheik by Jon Lee Anderson in *The New Yorker*, American government officials approached him several years before the fall of Iraq to try to persuade him to take part in the reconstruction of the country. He was flown back to Baghdad after the war. Apparently other Shi'a clergy distrusted him sufficiently to prevent him from serving on the Governing Council, but he was allowed to take up residence in one of the former palaces of Saddam's vice president, an opulent mansion on the banks of the Tigris River, where the sheik amused himself by dynamiting the river to kill fish.

The evening we visited Sheik Jamaluddin, we were ushered into a Sumerian-style reed house that he had constructed in the backyard beside the riverbank. There he sank into the pillows on the carpeted floor, smoked a Cuban cigar, and waxed eloquently about the virtues of the neo-conservative political philosophy of Donald Rumsfeld and

Paul Wolfowitz. His family continued to live in Dubai, so he said that he was essentially “baching” in the mansion, living alone along with his assistant and a house staff of some forty to fifty servants. Later in the evening, when we expressed some concern about our security in returning to our hotel late at night, the sheik graciously offered us the use of the former vice president’s Bentley, which he said came with the house. It was outfitted with three-inch-thick glass that was not only bulletproof but could withstand the assaults of rocket-propelled mortar fire. Fortunately we experienced neither on our return to our thirty-five-dollar hotel rooms.

It is said that Saddam ruled through a combination of fear and patronage. That night we experienced the continuation of both of those unhappy features of Iraqi public life. The constant roadblocks, bombings, and security patrols extend the climate of fear from the old regime. In the case of Sheik Jamaluddin, as in many other cases that are widely reported around the country, we saw the reemergence of the pattern of privilege granted to the sycophants of those in power. Sadly, under Coalition occupation, Saddam’s pattern of fear and patronage persists.

WHAT LIES AHEAD

The naming of a new interim government in May 2004 initially gave, a sense of stability and hope to a situation that seemed to have been spiraling downwards, out of control. The preceding weeks in April had been a disaster. When we arrived in May we were told that for the first time since the fall of Saddam people on the street questioned whether civil order in the country would survive. The double insurgencies—Sunni townfolk in Fallouja rising up in rebellion against an intrusive barrage of U.S. Marines and Shi’i supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr erupting in battle against Coalition troops in Baghdad and Najaf—seemed likely to unravel into a general insurrection against U.S. occupation. This situation of chaos certainly would have led to even greater involvement of American troops and an alliance of armed Iraqi militia against the occupation forces.

In Fallouja during the April rebellion, local young men who had previously not been involved politically were whipped into a frenzy of hatred against the invading U.S. Marines. We talked with a French humanitarian aid worker who was in Fallouja at the time, who said that the insurgents were not simply a few Ba’ath loyalists and foreign

activists, but that “the whole city rose up in resistance.” According to journalist Patrick Graham, who was also in Fallouja during the uprising, the quest to kill American soldiers was carried out with a mix of religious passion and self-defense. On the other side, the U.S. soldiers were also spurred on with the spirit of an all-out, do-or-die battle. According to *Los Angeles Times* reports by journalist Tony Perry, who was embedded with the U.S. Marine battalion in Fallouja in April, the U.S. soldiers were filled with the fever of fight. They dubbed the battle of Fallouja the “Sunni Superbowl,” and some seemed disappointed when in the heat of battle the conflict was suddenly terminated and the U.S. troops were withdrawn.

The abrupt withdrawal of U.S. troops from Fallouja in April quelled the rebellion. It was most likely due to two factors. One was the realization by Coalition authorities that Fallouja was not easily winnable and that Iraq was spinning out of control. The other factor was the willingness of Iraqi religious and military leadership to get involved as mediators. A council of Sunni clergy was formed in Fallouja that not only gave voice to the feelings of oppression from the city’s citizenry but also provided a conduit for negotiations, some of which led to the release of foreign hostages. At the same time, generals in the former Republican Guard stepped forward to offer their services in leading contingents of former Iraqi soldiers into a peacekeeping force that would replace the U.S. Marines when they withdrew.

Later in the year the Fallouja Brigade was disbanded. In November 2004 the U.S. military and a small number of Iraqi national soldiers again entered the city in a larger and more decisive military undertaking. Most of the residents of the city had fled long before the fighting started, and the relatively light skirmishes within the city indicated that most of the resistance fighters had fled to other parts of Iraq. The victory in Fallouja, therefore, may be a hollow one if the battle continues in other parts of the country.

It is a pity that the earlier solution did not work, and that the erstwhile Fallouja Brigade was abandoned. The defusion of the April crisis in Fallouja might have become a model for the country as a whole. If some of the old military leadership could have been redeployed to lead a new Iraq Civil Defense Corps and local leadership could have been recruited to oversee civic order, the necessity for a strong and intrusive U.S. military presence would have been reduced. Both of the new leaders in the interim government, Iyad

Allawi and Sheik Ghazi al-Yawar, have given vocal support for these kinds of developments. Allawi allowed some of the militia associated with his own political organization, the Iraqi National Accord, to be utilized in the creation of an inter-militia task force in December 2003. This coalition of militia forces under the Coalition Provisional Authority's command included Kurdish, Shi'ite, and former Ba'athist Sunni members. Although the political groups retained control over their own soldiers, this was a tentative first step to a unified security force, and it was presumably this group, under the command of Republican Guard generals, that maintained order in Fallouja after the April 2004 uprising.

Leaders of political parties with whom we talked—including the Shi'a Da'awa Party and the Sunni Iraq Islamic Party—indicated that Iraqi loyalties were as great or greater than specific religious and ethnic political affiliations. They expressed a willingness to lend their own militias to a reintegrated Iraqi security force and to work with other parties across the alleged Shi'a-Sunni divide. In fact, several Iraqis talked about the myth of the Shi'a-Sunni-Kurd tripartite differences and alleged that there were many examples of inter-religious and inter-ethnic cooperation in Iraq society, including inter-religious marriages, the integration of troops in the old Iraqi army, the inclusion of some fifteen percent Sunni supporters in the Shi'i Da'awa Party, and the existence of a plethora of political parties and civil associations that had no specific religious or ethnic identity. The tribe of Sheik Ghazi al-Yawar is both Sunni and Shi'a.

The Sunni clergy with whom we spoke said that the idea that the Sunni triangle north and west of Baghdad was somehow privileged under Saddam was a myth. One of the Sunni intellectuals with whom we spoke said that Saddam was a great equalizer of the Iraqi people in that "under him all groups suffered equally." The intellectual pointed out that the American occupation of Iraq had the same unintentional result. Whether or not that was the case, it was clear that the spirit of Iraqi nationalism is today alive and well, and continues to be a powerful antidote to particular religious, ethnic, and tribal allegiances and affiliations.

So there is some light at the end of Iraq's currently chaotic tunnel. This optimistic scenario—that Iraq's security will be maintained by an effective integration of existing militia and old Iraq army forces—depends in part on a democratically supported government that will

be able to rule with the legitimate support of the Iraqi people. The planned 2005 elections will provide that legitimacy, if indeed the elections are conducted and accepted as credible throughout the country. Although it was the original scheme of UN envoy Lakhdar Brahimi to create an interim government of technocrats who would have no interest in serving in the 2005 elected government (and therefore could not be accused of manipulating the election in their favor), his initial choices—the scientist Hussain al-Shahristani and the old diplomat Adnan Pachachi—were said to have been rejected by the Governing Council in favor of two of their own. Allawi and al-Yawar will likely be campaigning to retain their positions of power in the 2005 elections, if they survive—politically and physically—until that time.

There is, unfortunately, another possible scenario for Iraq's immediate political future, a more dismal one. This is the specter of Fallouja in April, which was replicated, in a sense, in November. It is the prospect that the center will not hold, and that the country will unravel. A variety of things could precipitate this downward spiral—a political assassination, allegations of rigged elections, a military incursion, or a power play by one faction or another. Or it could simply be a sad degeneration of public authority and civic identity, a morose shifting from public demoralization to widespread personal despair. The result might be a Somalia-like contestation of warlords in a battlefield of civic anarchy.

The role of Coalition forces can affect these possibilities, especially the latter. One could argue that it is not just the policies of the U.S. Coalition that have been so crippling—the reliance on the U.S. military and private militia for security, the refusal to allow former Ba'ath and middle-class administrators a role in the rebuilding of their country, and the importation of private contractors to develop Iraq's economic infrastructure—but also the attitude with which they have conducted the occupation.

The abiding paternalism of the U.S. posture has been both mistrustful and humiliating. I kept thinking of the woman who vented her frustrations with the American occupation at the foreign policy think tank on my last day in Baghdad. She was exactly the sort of person who the United States should be relying on to help build the new Iraq. And yet she was deeply disillusioned and virulently

opposed to the U.S. presence. “We expected that things would be better,” she said.

Her bitterness was the voice of an Iraq that feels that it is being used in some sort of global political manipulation engineered by the U.S. defense and foreign policy apparatus. Few Iraqis think that the United States toppled Saddam for Iraq’s sake. President George W. Bush’s frequent reminder that Iraq is the “front line” on the “war against terror” is, to Iraqis, an indication of this wider agenda. The “war on terrorism” is seen as an American fantasy, an imagined global war that pits the forces of good against evil, right against wrong. Most Iraqis think that in this neo-conservative image of global confrontation, the whole of the Islamic world is seen as the enemy. In a perverse way, this neo-con vision is seen as a variation of Osama bin Laden’s view of the black-and-white world of cosmic war—and few Iraqis support that al Qaeda view of global conflict either.

The effect of this we/they, “clash of civilizations” way of thinking is that it creates a moral and social dichotomy in which all Iraqis feel that they are potentially the enemy. To many Iraqis, especially those who are middle-class and well educated, this is not only off-putting, it is insulting. Many Americans are surprised to see such anti-Americanism from Iraqis who otherwise seem like them. One of the curious revelations of the Fallouja uprising is the support that it garnered from businessmen and members of the well-educated Westernized elite, who were angered by what they regarded as the brutality and insensitivity of the U.S. occupation in general and the incursion into Fallouja in particular. As I found in my comparative study of religious terrorism, the experience of humiliation is a powerful emotion and is perhaps the main engine behind the force of many violent acts. In a peculiar way, U.S. policies in Iraq that were experienced as humiliation have been resented most by those who might otherwise have been sympathetic to a Western point of view.

What is happening in Iraq is a litmus test for the new foreign policy trajectory of the Bush administration. The “war on terror” approach to global conflict and the “preemptive strike” policy of military engagement both signal a kind of imperial vision of what America’s role should be in the post-Cold War globalized world. Iraq is a test of the flexibility of that vision. It has become clear that Iraq cannot easily be molded into a little America. Whatever ideas may have been dancing in the heads of Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, and other neo-

conservative strategists about Iraq becoming the bulwark of a new democratic and pro-American Middle East have been shown to be delusions. Iraq may indeed emerge, awkwardly and tentatively, as a proudly independent democratic society. But it will not be pro-American. The legacies of disastrous U.S. security, administrative, and economic policies during the first year of Coalition occupation will continue to be obstacles to the effectiveness of any new Iraqi government for some time to come. Moreover, the disdain engendered by Iraqis against America for the attitudes conveyed through that occupation will also persist, at least for a time. When global war is one's way of thinking, this paradigm of thought has the ability to make enemies out of a whole society, at least some of whom should have been one's friends.

Notes

¹ I was part of a small study group in Baghdad May 5–10, 2004. The group was organized by Mary Kaldor and Yahia Said of the Center for Global Governance at the London School of Economics. The purpose was to assess the causes of religious violence in Iraq and the role of humanitarian organizations in the country's reconstruction. In addition to myself, Kaldor, and Said, the group included Hanaa Edwards and Shirouk al-Abayaji of the Iraqi al-Amal human rights organization, and Will Thomas, research assistant and videographer from the University of California, Santa Barbara.