

My Prescription for Success in Iraq

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Introduction

Let's be honest and state without equivocation that the intent of the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq was never about WMB or links to al Qaeda terrorism and certainly was not about bringing democracy to the region. Quite the contrary. It was about a feeble attempt at some sort of Neoconservative imperialism, a puppet dictatorship, and an attempt to monopolize Middle East oil for American petroleum companies and their support groups like Halliburton. Does it not otherwise stretch credulity to the limit that the so called Neocons led by Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney and Paul Wolfowitz were writing papers about invading Iraq upwards of a decade ago? Was it just coincidence that high level Bush cabinet officials Paul O'Neill and Richard Clarke both stated on the record that invading Iraq was being discussed in the first few weeks of Bush taking office?

Even if this obvious predisposition for "preemptive" war was not present and George Bush was truly concerned about democracy in the Middle East, why wouldn't he start with the likes of Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia whose dictatorial regimes are not only our "friends" but are greatly dependent on the US for their very survival. Few places on earth are less democratic than Saudi Arabia yet their flaunting of anything resembling pluralistic values seems to go unnoticed in Washington as long as their petro-dollars are greasing our politicians' palms.

The Bush administration felt naively and arrogantly that they could easily depose Saddam and install a puppet dictator in the person of Ahmed Chalabi. This puppet would then afford our government the ability to place military bases in the region in order to ride roughshod over the other dictators in the area including those in central Asia. In the meantime, this "democratic" Iraqi government would hand out all sorts of primo concessions to American petrochemical and construction firms who could then keep America addicted to foreign oil as an energy source while controlling supplies to much of the industrialized world. It should probably not come as any surprise, therefore, that the international community, even our own allies, have not been thrilled about cooperating with us to realize George Bush's definition of "success" in Iraq. The current democratically elected parliament in Iraq, while admirable, only came as a last resort.

So much for this morally bankrupt, ill conceived and poorly executed plan--a plan that has fulfilled Osama Bin Laden's prediction of America coming to Iraq to "occupy a former capital of Islam, loot Muslim's of their wealth, and install an agent government....." Thus the invasion and all the bugling therein served as a fantastic recruiting tool for zealots who were trying to convince the Islamic world who already

viewed America with skepticism and fear, that America was only concerned with expropriating their oil. The invasion reinforced these perceptions and as a result has contributed to a further radicalization of the region, making us more likely to be hit again by an ever growing legion of Jihadists who are absolutely convinced that America will go to any length to exploit what they view as Muslim resources. Ironically, in light of the mess that is now Iraq, the invasion and occupation has made the likelihood of much needed reforms in neighboring countries a much greater challenge. Even the oppressed citizens of police states like Egypt and Syria would have to be terrified of Donald Rumsfeld's version of "freedom."

We had two strikes against us going into Iraq as a function of our history with the region in general and Iraq in particular. Let's not forget that while Saddam was building luxurious palaces for the previous ten years there were 500,000 to 1,000,000 Iraqis who died as a function of two wars with America and most devastatingly, the sanctions we enforced. It perhaps should have come as little surprise that there would be some rather angry folks show up when the perceived perpetrators arrived on their soil to "liberate them." This was the genesis of the resentment that fuels the insurgency today. So even with the best of planning, it was going to be an enormous task for our military to bring some semblance of security to Iraq. Yet, as is now well chronicled, the Chaney/Rumsfeld/Wolfowitz invasion "plan" included:

- Too few military personnel to maintain security--The administration ignored the Generals and State Department plan to "do it right" (which got General Shinseki fired). This lack of available resources not only resulted in wholesale looting that inflicted grievous harm to an already devastated infrastructure, but had the psychological affect of sending the message to militants and law abiding citizens alike that rather than martial law, it would be the law of the jungle to which they should obey; crippling our credibility from the beginning.
- No UN endorsement or real international invasion force--This invasion exacerbated the credibility issue and reinforced the argument made by Bin Laden and Company—that this was just a power grab by the Bush administration.
- Disbanding what was once a formidable army--Ending the careers of experienced officers and a few hundred thousand young men who left with guns in hand, a big chip on their shoulder and no means of supporting their families. This is about as foolish and irresponsible as it gets.
- Purging all the Ba'athists in the bureaucracy--This included most high ranking officials in the government as one needed to be a party member to hold most government offices à la the old Soviet Union and the Communist Party. We not only purged the bureaucracy of the people who knew how to run things (most of whom were Sunnis), but we set them against us as a result. A high percentage of them have undoubtedly aided and abetted the insurgents.

The US military was unfairly asked to perform in a situation made many times more hostile as a function of the hubris and incompetent planning of the politicians and the civilian leadership (including not providing our military personnel with the proper equipment to keep them safe in a guerilla warfare environment). As the situation spirals ever closer to civil war, many of the former generals are now questioning the responsibility of the military's command structure, the motives of the administration and the competence of the civilian leadership under Secretary Rumsfeld. To quote Marine Lieut. General Greg Newbold:

“Those are men who know the hard consequences of war but, with few exceptions, acted timidly when their voices urgently needed to be heard. When they knew the plan was flawed, saw intelligence distorted to justify a rationale for war, or witnessed arrogant micromanagement that at times crippled the military's effectiveness, many leaders who wore the uniform chose inaction. A few of the most senior officers actually supported the logic for war. Others were simply intimidated, while still others must have believed that the principle of obedience does not allow for respectful dissent. The consequence of the military's quiescence was that a fundamentally flawed plan was executed for an invented war, while pursuing the real enemy, al-Qaeda, became a secondary effort. (Time Magazine, April 9, 2006)

Incompetent planning aside, it was inevitable that the foreign Jihadists and Iraqi insurgents, whatever their motivation, would work to undermine American objectives and that was most easily accomplished by fomenting sectarian strife in the country and which now has the very real possibility of spilling over into the region at large. The end result is that we as a nation and the world at large are in very serious trouble as a function of Bush administration policies in Iraq. The increasing instability of the region not only puts the sources of our economic life blood, petroleum, in jeopardy, but it is also fueling more radicalism in the area that will ultimately translate into terrorism against American targets, interests and friends.

Diplomacy and International Unity to Deal with a Highly Complex Environment

In addition to the many factions within the country that have different agendas, there are also Iraq's neighbors (Iran, Syria, Turkey, Saudi Arabia) and the world's "mini-powers" (Russia, China, Japan and the EU) who are all trying to serve their own interests, primarily as it relates to oil supplies. Even some of our closest allies have taken a very skeptical view of Bush administration motives and as a result, we do not enjoy the cooperation let alone the material support of many who are in a position to help us. Ultimately, this is the key in stabilizing the country and the region. It cannot be an American only effort but must be a truly international effort with America taking control as in the director of a play, but not being seen on stage as an actor.

I will argue in the policy paper that follows that the existing Bush "plan" has little chance of success in Iraq and will only continue to cost precious American lives, continue to drain our already depleted treasury, and exacerbate radicalization of the region. Because they show no sign of changing, it will take Congress to actually start

doing its job and begin to provide oversight and leadership on these issues instead of being a rubber stamp for our wayward president.

What follows in my prescription for what it will take to set American policy on the proper course. It will need to be managed by experts at the State Department and elsewhere, not political hacks with an ideological bent who do not understand the region or warfare. (The vast majority of whom did whatever was possible to avoid military service during the Vietnam era and now seemingly prescribe a state constant warfare for our current generation of service men and women.) Simply stated, our government must lead in a manner befitting the values that we as a nation are founded upon: liberty, justice, fairness and free market economics.

Success in Iraq based on an Exit Strategy

I submit my prescription for success in Iraq as being based on a military exit by the end of their first quarter, 2007. I hold such convictions because I believe that due to the circumstances that we now find ourselves, our physical presence is more of a hindrance to “success” than it is a contributor. Of course my definition of success is probably very different than George Bush’s: very simply, a stable, democratic Iraq.

In identifying an exit strategy that will facilitate this success, it is important to realize that the so-called insurgency is not any sort of homogeneous group with a single-minded agenda. It is, in actuality, a hodgepodge of groups whose only bond is a common hatred of the United States and who would otherwise be on opposite sides of the ideological spectrum. George Bush was correct when he said in December that there are three general tiers to the insurgency, though I would use slightly different terminology. I would call them Sunni rejectionists, former Ba’athists, and Jihadists.

They all feel hatred and resentment toward the US for various, sometimes different reasons but are currently united in their enmity and are therefore motivated to see us fail. It is our presence on their land that motivates them. If we can convince the mainstream Iraqis that we are really leaving in one year with a trained security force, workable constitution and representative government in place, then the insurgency will have its proverbial carpet pulled out from under it. The following is why.

The insurgents can be viewed as a pyramid with the Bin Laden type Jihadists at the top; mostly foreign Islamists who have an intense hatred of America for reasons that would take a book to explain, primarily as a function of what they see as American attempts to exploit Middle Eastern resources.¹ They are the tip of the sword representing maybe 10% of the insurgency and the ones most prone to extreme violence like suicide bombings. These individuals hold a pathological hatred for the US and our interests. Nothing that is said or done will change this. They will be

¹ Suggest Readings - Michael Scheuer, Imperial Hubris, 2004 Brassey’s Inc
Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, The Next Attack, 2005 Times Books

emboldened by a US withdrawal but they may well be the only ones. Accordingly, they will need to be eradicated one way or another, but this will ultimately fall into the hands of the Iraqi security forces. It will require a highly competent Iraqi intelligence service spear headed by Sunnis to penetrate their operations, identify their sources of arms and money, and capture or kill their leaders.

The second group are the former Ba'athist bureaucrats, officer corps and military intelligence personnel who are not zealot Jihadists but feel contempt for America primarily because they lost their upper middle class status when they were purged after the invasion. They went from the top of the heap to the bottom in a matter of a few months and now feel they have little more to lose. They may represent perhaps 20% – 30% of the insurgency and while not necessarily willing to die for the cause, they are certainly willing to provide material, tactical, and logistical support. They also know where the weapons and munitions are hidden and/or how to get more.

The final group is the disgruntled Sunni rejectionists who are the largest part of the insurgency. This pyramid base represents the remaining 60% - 70% of the insurgents--middle class people who may have less intense feelings than the other two groups but support the insurgency in at least a passive manner. Providing nothing more than food, shelter, and money, their main support may be simply that they allow fighters to do what they want to do unencumbered. Their feelings of antipathy are also associated with a loss of status but added to that may be just the perception that while the US did rid them of a tyrant, it has also brought about, in their once prosperous country (at least for them), catastrophic destruction and suffering.

It is worth noting that the support provided the insurgency from both the former Ba'athists and the Sunni rejectionists could have been prevented in large measure had we gone about the invasion properly. As discussed in the introduction, had we sufficient troop strength and had we not purged the army and the Ba'ath party, we could have prevented the majority of these influential people, from going over to the other side.

So there you have it. An insurgency of twenty, thirty or forty thousand individuals depending on who you ask and what may have transpired that week. (Pictures from Abu Ghraib are undoubtedly good for Al Qaeda recruiting.) This number seems like a lot, but the key to success is undercutting the Jihadists by removing their base. Success is dependent on winning over the vast majority of the Sunni rejectionists and most of the former Ba'athist. The pacification process is less about battling insurgents than it is about winning over the hearts and minds of the people in the communities who to one degree or another support the rebels.

The key to ending the insurgency therefore, is to convince the Sunni population at large that it is more in their interest to cooperate in the political process than it is to rely on violence to achieve their goals. When the logistical support dries up, the vast majority of the remaining insurgents will recognize it is a lost cause and turn in their guns. The anarchists that remain will be reduced to the status of common criminals.

The simple answer is to stop whatever it is we are doing (occupying their country) that has created the hatred and distrust and begin to embrace options which foster trust and goodwill. Once accomplished, the Sunni community will no longer provide sanctuary to the fighters, and the bonds that united these disparate groups will begin to dissolve - unity for the insurgency will crumble. This is not only true for Iraq but the general “Islamic insurgency” at large. This is no easy task but strong and sincere leadership can make it happen. How do we do it?

Set a specific time frame for total withdrawal.

Setting such a date would send a powerful message to the insurgency, the population at large, and all Muslims that we are serious about our pledge to leave Iraq and that we have no designs--economic, military or otherwise--on their country. This would also establish a time table for the Iraqi military to get ready while providing the psychological incentive for them to stop depending on the US military to do their fighting for them (primarily the Shia and Kurds having the US fight the Sunni insurgency). Iraq under Saddam had a formidable military of almost a million battle-hardened soldiers. How is it that after three years we can't seem to put together even a few battalions?

A set time table for withdrawal would provide the necessary impetus. It would also provide the incentive for the politicians to reach compromises to the satisfaction of all parties, foremost of which is fixing the Constitution. The last thing Iraqi movers and shakers of any stripe want, is anarchy that would jeopardize their ascendancy to powerful statesmen.

As much as the Shia and Kurds may want their own autonomous regions, the pressure of an American withdrawal would have the effect of “forcing” them to compromise on political issues. They realize that the alternative would be an endless cycle of violence with the Sunnis that would have the very real potential of undermining Shia/Kurdish goals. This threat would be taken very seriously in light of the fact that the vast majority of the Muslim world is also Sunni and finding support for their cause would be relatively easy from the likes of al-Qaeda and others.

Conversely, if the stated intent of our military is to stay on indefinitely, this would reinforce the message of the insurgency that we are only there to exploit their oil and as such, exacerbate the distrust held by all. (The apparent construction of a dozen or so military bases would seem to reinforce this notion.) It would also discredit the notion that the US is supporting a puppet regime that exists to do our bidding à la what we did in Vietnam, Iran under the Shah and what we continue to do in much of the Arab world. By withdrawing, the Iraqi government would finally emerge as independent leaders solely in control of their own country.

Establishing a rigid time table seems like a fairly easy prescription; unfortunately, we (and the Iraqi people) have good reason to suspect that the Bush administration has

no intentions of leaving. By all indications the reason the Bush crew does not want to set a time table to get out of Iraq is because it was never their intent to do so. As stated earlier, the point of this war was in fact to secure oil concessions for American companies and have military bases from which to control the region. Our policy makers felt that they could not only control the flow of oil to keep America addicted to Exxon's pumps, but could effectively control the world supply.

I have little doubt that Bush/Chaney/Rumsfeld still hope that things may eventually improve sufficiently to keep the spoils of this war for their cronies in the energy industry and the military industrial complex. A low level insurgency in fact, provides the perfect pretense to maintain US troops and bases there indefinitely – for without such an American presence, they would argue, things could spiral out of control.

Make sure the Sunnis are represented in any future government

Once we set a date for total withdrawal we must use our influence to ensure the establishment of a wholly non-sectarian constitution and a truly legitimate government inclusive of Sunnis, not only in Parliament but in key cabinet positions. If the constitution has a hint of sectarian bias (like the proposed federalism that effectively partitions the country) it will be a recipe for disaster. Accordingly, if there is not a large majority of Sunnis "bought-in" to the political process, Iraq will never function as a secure state. Sunni participation will ultimately facilitate a more nationalistic view of the world. This will take generations, but it starts with political compromise and a solid constitution to establish the foundation of a stable state, just as occurred in our country 225 years ago.

To further the impetus for unity we must make it clear that former Ba'athists are welcome in the government and society at large. (The exceptions being those with blood on their hands.) In addition, we must make it very clear to the Kurds and Shia that it is in their long term interest to have a representative government as codified in the constitution. This of course is also in our long term interest because if the Kurds and Shia come to dominate or try to marginalize the Sunnis, it portends not only a civil conflict but also regional instability with the potential of pitting the Iranian backed Shia against the Arab backed Sunnis. The Kurds would then attempt to stealthily bow out of the Iraq compact all together raising the ire of the Turks (and Iranians). The fact that the Bush team allowed the "constitutional convention" to initially draft such an inherently divisive document is further testament to their incompetence.

Mend Fences with our allies

It is not said in public but the Bush policies of arrogance and aggression have greatly alienated some of our closest allies in the world. The French, the Germans, the Russians, the Japanese and even the Chinese are very wary of what we are doing in Iraq. Outside of the US, these are the most powerful countries in the world and the ones in the best position to help us in Iraq if they so choose. But they are not dumb.

They clearly understand the implications of defacto US hegemony in Iraq and as such, have not been keen to lend assistance. As suggested above, were US oil companies to dominate the resources of Iraq and by default the rest of Arab oil, these countries would become extremely vulnerable to American whims and at a strategic disadvantage for decades to come.

Therefore, we must also make it clear to these, the other major military and industrialized powers of the world, that it is not the intention of the US government to maintain a stranglehold on Iraqi resources or the prospective reconstruction bonanza. That business in Iraq will be of the free market variety, available to all who help in the effort to realize the goal of a peaceful, democratic and stable Iraq.

Internationalize the peace keeping effort

Once we have accomplished the goal of getting buy-in from our allies and friends, we need to internationalize the stabilization effort which may include NATO, Russia, Japan, China, and the neighbors of Iraq. This does not necessarily mean sending troops, as this can be provocative and self defeating, but it does mean providing political, financial, logistical, and humanitarian support.² A security contingent in the “Sunni triangle” from Arabic speaking, Sunni Egypt, Jordan or Morocco, for example, would be much less expensive and would be viewed with infinitely less suspicion than an American force. This is what we did in the first Gulf War to great success.

Secondly, all altruism aside, there must be a political and economic upside for others to get involved. For all, this means having them able to participate in the “spoils” of Iraq. As alluded to above, it means allowing them take part in the rebuilding effort and allowing them to invest in the country including the petroleum sector. We can then work behind the scenes to make sure that such an effort is funded by providing cash and cajoling others to help fund the international force. It would cost a lot less than the \$8 billion a month it costs now and the international force would not be fueling the insurgency.

Finally, it is also paramount that Iraq’s neighbors get involved in the effort which includes Turkey, Iran and Syria. We must encourage them to work with us, not against us.

Getting Syria on a Stable Path

Syria is a dictatorship only slightly more benign than that which existed in Iraq under Saddam. Unlike Iraq it is predominately Sunni--over 70%. Its government is controlled by the not so popular Alawi, a sect of Shia Islam, headed by the Assad family. While the government is guilty of all sorts of nefarious deeds including meddling in Lebanese affairs, causing the premature overthrow of the Alawi government portends the very serious possibility that a much more radical, Sunni led

² Russia and China are both fighting Islamic rebels with ruthless abandon and are also viewed as imperial powers, albeit, much less so than then the US.

government would come to power which could have disastrous consequences for the minorities in the country and the region at large. Al-Qaeda's brothers-in-arms are the Sunni Akhwan, who have been trying to bring down the Alawi-Syrian government for 30 years. As contemptible as the Assads are, they are certainly the lesser of the evils. It makes absolutely no sense, therefore, to destabilize this regime with war talk. Do we want another 1990s Afghanistan on our hands where a Taliban like government comes to power?

Sanctions or like policies will only have the effect they have had elsewhere in history; entrench the regime and turn the populace against us--the opposite of what our goal is. Instead, let's use diplomacy to help Syria reform (which their beleaguered government would embrace) and encourage them to help us in Iraq, Lebanon and with the Israeli –Palestinian conflict, not working to undermine us. Once accomplished, we can help nurture them toward economic and democratic reforms while bringing moderate Sunnis into the government.

Direct Talks with Iran

Whether we like it or not, Iran is going to be a major power broker in Iraq and the region at large for the indefinite future. It is the most powerful Middle Eastern Muslim state by far. It is three times the size of Iraq with significant oil supplies, a burgeoning population, a formidable military and it will undoubtedly have enormous influence in Iraq (and Afghanistan). Iran and Iraq, while ethnically and linguistically different, are both predominantly Shia and as the minority religious sect in the region, they will stick together to a great degree. Those who doubt this need look no further than the fact that the Grand Ayatollah of Iraq, Ali al-Sistani, is an ethnic Iranian.

Thus even if we are "successful" in Iraq and depart in a year, democratized and free, it will only be a matter of time before its Shia led government would form some form of alliance with Iran. If this Iran is hostile to the US, then we face the very real possibility that all of our blood, sweat, and tears in Iraq will have been shed in vein. We will have contributed to the formation of an alliance between the two great Shia powers of the world which may well be hostile to US goals in the region not to mention collectively sitting atop 20% of the planet's oil reserves.

As is now apparently being discussed, maybe Bush and the Neocons have an invasion or some level of destruction planned for Iran. Such foolhardiness would galvanize nationalist pride against us even among the very large portion of the Iranian population that currently respects the US, making the Iraq conflict seem like a picnic in comparison. It would also totally undermine the enormous effort we have put forth to establish a semblance of stability in Iraq. A besieged Iran could with little effort, undermine all of our work in Iraq and Afghanistan. So we not only face the very real possibility of "losing" Iraq" but we create another front on the "war on terrorism" as we alienate a hundred million Shia. For those who know anything about Shia Islam, they know that martyrdom is an even more basic tenant of the faith than that of the Al Qaeda Sunnis.

We have wronged Iran and they have wronged us. It is time to grow up and bury the hatchet. We do not have the luxury to carry on such petty grudges any more. Our belligerent posture must change not only as it relates to any eventual success in Iraq but in terms of our overall policy for the region. The current path will only ensure that we end up with another Cuba-like state where anti-American leadership has been in power for 45 years--leadership that would be dedicated to undermining our interests in Iraq and elsewhere.

As much as we may hate to admit it, Iran is a pseudo-democracy and instead of encouraging it in ways that it could help it evolve toward moderation, the Bush administration continually rattles the American saber virtually guaranteeing that hard liners like Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will prevail at the ballot box. (Let us not forget that the president of Iran has very limited power and ultimately it is the more pragmatic clerics who determine policy.) Working with our Shia friends in Iraq to facilitate the dialogue would greatly expedite the process and enable us to reestablish the pragmatic ties that once existed between our two countries.

Once accomplished, Iran could more easily be convinced to reverse its pursuit of nuclear arms and help us in combating radicalism in the Middle East. On this front we have common ground since most of this radicalism today is Sunni based and often times anti-Shia. Regime change is inevitable in Iran; when it happens and in which direction, is to a great extent, dependent on expert US diplomacy, not politically motivated tough talk to win points with the hawks at home – our hawks or theirs.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that Iran is undoubtedly being courted by our rivals; the Russians, Chinese, Indians, western Europeans and the Japanese. As alluded to earlier, these powers fear a US domination of Middle Eastern oil resources, so they see good relations with Iran as a hedge against such a possibility (and also why they have not been terribly helpful in Iraq). If we don't start building bridges, we risk having our rivals do so at our expense. We need them, they need us, let's get on with doing whatever is necessary to establish a meaningful dialogue. This will resonate with the vast majority of the Iranian populace and lead to constructive relations and much more moderate leadership.

Economic Revitalization through reconstruction

The security situation on the ground has undoubtedly made it difficult for contractors to get much done in terms of reconstruction projects. There is actually less electricity and less oil being produced today than before the invasion. This lack of tangible progress has greatly alienated the citizenry, and the resulting unemployment of so many Iraqi men has fueled the insurgency. Success in Iraq is dependent on moving forward with these proposed projects and employing the Iraqi populace. If it takes bringing in an extra 100,000 "security personnel" from Egypt, Jordan or the UN as suggested above, then that is what must be done. As alluded to earlier, however,

there must be economic opportunities made available to all countries if they are going to place their own citizenry at risk. We must simply be willing to share the pie. Once this is demonstrated, there will be foreign direct investment in Iraq and most of the disgruntled Iraqis will turn in their guns for shovels, computers and a much needed paycheck.

Summary

The Neocon “strategy” of pre-emptive war as exhibited in Iraq has contributed to friend and foe alike digging in their heels and behaving in a defensive manner. This provocative and threatening posture is not only un-American but a prescription for terrorism, an unending arms race and nuclear proliferation – issues that jeopardize the very stability of our world. All of which is playing out right before our eyes.

As is now quite evident, we need help in Iraq, lots of help. Going it alone has proved disastrous in terms of lives lost, money spent, the fueling of the insurgency and our standing in the international community. Current policies are destabilizing the region and further inflaming Muslim attitudes. We must reverse this trend by diplomatic engagement of all the relevant players and use our enormous carrot and stick resources of influence. America must lead within the parameters of our values, not be perceived as a self-serving bully.

We must make it known to one and all, through our actions, that we will be leaving Iraq on a given date and that all nations of the world are welcome to assist in the security effort. The reward for their effort will be access to the economic boom that will undoubtedly take place once things stabilize. The decisions on how it is done and who will be involved are, of course, in the hands of the legitimate and duly elected Iraqi government. This is called national sovereignty, representative government and free market economics. Isn't this what should have been our objective all along?