

Iraqi Perceptions of UK and American Policy in Post-Saddam Iraq

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ¹

In the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq War, the US faced the difficult task of shifting from a military operation to a campaign to win the trust of the Iraqi populace. This campaign, which occurred after the formal conflict, was disappointing for the US as American troops were not welcomed as liberators, and an insurgency soon erupted against its forces in Iraq. In this context, studying Iraqi perceptions of American actions in Iraq becomes imperative. Increasing negative perceptions of the US, in the run-up to Iraq's elections in January 30, 2005, are slowly uniting disparate communities in Iraq which now are forming a collective animosity towards the occupation. The enthusiasm for the elections in Iraq has less to do with the novelty of the nation's first democratic process, but rather for expediting the American withdrawal. Examining actions taken by the US and the Iraqi reactions to them since the end of the 2003 Iraq war can help determine what fuels the violence plaguing this country.

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ISSUE IN FOCUS

Iraqi perceptions of the US took decades in the making. During the period of Ba'ath Party control in Iraq, public discourse was dominated by state-owned news agencies and broadcast media. Iraqi state propaganda played a central role in forming Iraqi perceptions of the US. In the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq War, the restrictions placed by the government on public discourse disappeared overnight, but it seemed that many Iraqis had either internalized the anti-American views of their government, or formed their own negative perceptions of the US, regardless of the state-owned media. Iraqis of all political, ethnic and religious persuasions were able to express criticism of the US, in the absence of the Saddam Hussein regime, indicating their negative views are dependent on other factors and circumstances.

Iraqi perceptions of the US were affected by certain events that were shared by other Arabs who hold critical views of American foreign policy. The first factor is American support for Israel, which became US policy after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and continues to the present. Iraqis seem to express almost equal hostility towards Israel and the US support for this country. The second factor that formed Iraqi perceptions of the US was the 1991 Gulf war. Regardless of whether or not the Iraqi masses agreed with Hussein's decision to invade Kuwait, most Iraqis hoped for a negotiated settlement to avoid war, and they formed critical opinions of the US when it did launch a war which devastated their nation yet kept their dictator intact. Lastly, whether Iraqis supported the Hussein regime or not, they universally suffered under UN imposed sanctions. During this period, many Iraqis blamed America for perpetuating these sanctions that hurt the Iraqi people and did nothing to their regime.

Examining these factors, can explain why in the immediate aftermath of the 2003 Iraq war, numerous independent Iraqi media and civil society organizations, began to criticize the US in the absence of the looming threat of the Saddam Hussein regime. In

addition to past grievances against the US, the Iraqis were also critical of insecurity in the country and America's failure to reestablish jobs and basic services and utilities.

Therefore, whatever positive perception of the US that existed in Iraq from removing the despotic regime of Saddam Hussein in April 2003 was immediately lost as a result of several American actions inside Iraq. The perceptions of the US became increasingly negative due to the fact that the US forces in Iraq failed to prevent post-war looting and the subsequently disbanded the Iraqi Army, the nation's last symbol of sovereignty. This action left Iraq without forces to maintain internal security, and compounded with a lack of basic facilities and unemployment, the hostility towards the Americans increased. The sieges of Falluja and Najaf in April 2004, and the attack against Falluja in November 2004, combined with the release of the scandalous photos from the Abu Ghraib prison, as well as the footage of an American soldier killing an unarmed Iraqi in a Falluja mosque has forged an almost universal sense of outrage against the US in Iraq.

The ramifications of such a study are significant in explaining Iraqi hostility to the US after April 2003, as well as understanding the base of support for the insurgency in Iraq. By ascertaining how Iraqis are learning to think and feel about the US after years of Ba'athist control and monopoly of the media and political organization, policy makers can understand what American policies in Iraq need to be addressed and changed. Military operations against insurgents will not bring peace to Iraq in the long run. On the other hand, understanding and rectifying the grievances that fuels the insurgency could bring long term stability to the country in the aftermath of its January elections.

MOST RECENT EVENTS

- January 30, 2005-Tentative dates for nationwide and provincial elections in Iraq marking a transition for the interim Iraqi authority.
- November, 2004- US and Iraqi security forces launch an operation against the Iraqi town of Falluja, in a effort to secure one of the insurgent's bases.
- July, 2004- UN Resolution
- June 28, 2004- The US hands over sovereignty to an interim Iraqi government. Ali Allawi is appointed as interim Prime Minister and Ghazi Ujayl al-Yawir as acting vice-president.
- April 2004- US forces conduct attacks against the towns of Falluja and Najaf.
- July, 2003- Iraqi Governing Council formed
- May, 2003- Beginning of Coalition Provisional Authority of Paul Bremer
- May 1, 2003- Military campaign of Operation Iraqi Freedom is declared over.
- April 28, 2003 – Iraqi-US decisions to begin building Iraqi government and to put it in power within a month
- March 19, 2003 – The US officially began the war with Operation Iraqi Freedom
- March 16, 2003 – The US delivers and ultimatum to Saddam Hussein that he leave in 48 hours or face an attack
- November 2002- UN Resolution for new arms inspections in Iraq

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

- *Iraqi State Perceptions of the US*

Much of the public discourse in Iraqi circles from the 1920s to 1958, displayed hostility towards British control over Iraq's destiny. However this hostility was slowly redirected towards the Americans after 1967 Six-Day War, between Israel and its Arab neighbors. After Israel's lightning victory, the US began to side with this country as a natural ally to confront radical Arab states supported by the USSR. As a result, Iraq broke off diplomatic ties with the US in 1967.² Just one year after this war, on July 30, 1968, a second Ba'ath coup brought the General Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr to power. He presided as President of Iraq, and his cousin, Saddam Hussein al-Tikriti served as Vice-President.³

The anger of the Ba'athists towards the US became more pronounced after the 1973 October War, where Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack against Israel in an attempt to regain lands they lost in the 1967 War, but lost to an Israeli counterattack. Many Arabs, including the Iraqis perceived their failure during the war as a direct result of military supplies airlifted by the US to Israel. Thereafter, Israeli actions became synonymous with colluding with American "imperialism".⁴

The official Iraqi discourse in the 70's became more pronounced in its criticisms of the alleged "Zionist conspiracy" to control American foreign policy, in addition to domestic American politics.⁵ In the aftermath of the 1973 October War, the Arab oil producing nations imposed an oil embargo to punish the US and the West for its support of Israel. The Iraqis believed that the US was looking for a base in the Middle

² Bruce W. Jentleson, *With Friends Like These: Reagan, Bush and Saddam 1982-1990* (New and London: WW Norton and Company, 1994), p. 32.

³ Efraim Karsh and Inari Rautsi, *Saddam Hussein: A Political Biography* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), p. 32.

⁴ *Iraq Today*, June 16-30, 1976, p. 6.

⁵ Medhat Magar, "Six Years in Two," *Iraq Today*, June 16-30, 1976, p. 25.

East to attack Arab oil countries for their embargo.⁶ American attempts to mediate the Arab-Israeli conflict in the 70's were considered by the Iraqis as a cover so that US could control the regions' oil resources.⁷

The critical tone towards the US continued after Saddam Hussein officially became president in July 1979 officially.⁸ On September 22, 1980, Iraqi aircraft attacked bases near the Iranian capital of Teheran, marking the first day of the Iran-Iraq War.⁹ At first, Iraqis feared that the US would re-establish its ties to Iran, even under Khomeini's government. In reality, the US feared that an Iranian victory would result in the spread of Khomeini's revolution through the oil-rich Gulf states and tilted their policies towards Iraq during this conflict. The official Iraqi perceptions of the US however quickly deteriorated. In the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War from 1980-88, Saddam grew convinced that the US, in collaboration with Israel, was attempting to undermine Iraq's emergence as a regional power. In his view, the invasion of Kuwait was not an offensive operation but rather, but rather a pre-emptive maneuver to prevent this American scheme from succeeding.

- *Iraqi Perceptions of the US post-1991*

In 1991, President Bush Sr. asked the Iraqis to revolt against Saddam Hussein. When the Shias revolted in the south and the Kurds in the north, Bush withdrew his offer of support allowing many Iraqis to be massacred by Saddam's army. The US had declared a cease-fire before Iraq's Republican Guards were destroyed, the key element that suppressed the twin uprisings that shook the country in the aftermath of the 1991 War. The US failed to intervene on behalf of the Kurdish and Shi'a rebels, out of fears that their success would lead to collapse of the Iraqi government and the dismemberment of Iraq. Many Iraqis accused the US of supporting Saddam Hussein's attempts to quell the rebellions by allowing the Republican Guards to move across territory held by the Americans, as well as blame US troops for preventing the poorly-equipped insurgents from acquiring arms from Iraqi arms depots. Kurds expressed the opinion that America's inaction was simply

⁶ M. Salama, "Diego Garcia" *Iraq Today*, May 16-31 1977, pp. 14-5.

⁷ Kamal Butti, "One Way Out," *Iraq Today*, October 1-15, 1976, p. 25.

⁸ Bulloch and Morris, p. 27.

⁹ Chaim Herzog, "A Military-Strategic Overview," in Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War: Impact and Implications* (London: Macmillan, 1987) p. 259.

a repeat of its abandoning the Kurds, just as it withdrew support for the Kurdish rebellion in 1975.

When US forces concluded Operation Desert Storm on April 11, 1991, the war against Iraq did not completely end. Instead a low intensity conflict began, which included sanctions, UN weapons inspections, covert CIA support for the Iraqi opposition and failed coup attempts and numerous air raids against Iraqi radar stations, intelligence headquarters and missile sites. Other Iraqis argued that the US desire to keep the Ba'athist regime in power sans Saddam Hussein, proved America had no desire for democracy to take root in Iraq. Such perceptions during this period would further convince Iraqis after Operation Iraqi Freedom that the US was not genuine in its calls for a democratic Iraq.

The most damaging perception of the US was as a result of the sanctions regime imposed on Iraq to pressure the Saddam government to dismantle its weapons of mass destruction program. Saddam blamed the US for the suffering of the Iraqi people as a result of the sanctions. While the sanctions were placed under a United Nations resolution most Iraqis placed the blame on the US for continuing their perpetuation. This blame was part of a serious belief among Iraqis, even educated Iraqis that during this period Hussein was kept in power by the US and the sanctions were a ploy so that he could strengthen his grip over the nation by distributing rations.

A day after the attacks of September 11, 2001, Baghdad Republic of Iraq Television praised the attacks, the only country in the Middle East to do so. As the US began justifying the case for war against Iraq, Muhammad Sa'id al-Sahhaf, the former Iraqi Minister of Information, represented the American actions as those of "infidels" (*kuffar*) and that such "infidels" could not defeat an Iraqi nation of Muslim "believers." During the 2003 conflict, the US and the UK were also referred to as "colonialists" or "imperialists" while the defenders of the Iraqi nation were defined as "fighters," "the masses" and "the heroic sons of the Iraqi tribes."

The official perception of "Saddam's" Iraq of the US remained prevalent in Iraqi society even when his state collapsed, demonstrating that elements in Iraqi society had internalized the discourse of the Ba'athist regime. The themes used by many anti-Ba'athist Iraqis today who are critical of the US sound very similar to Saddam's anti-

American discourse. While Saddam may have not been popular with all segments of Iraqi society, the themes extrapolated in his speeches obviously struck a chord among many Iraqis. The language and tactics used during the current insurgency demonstrate that many discursive remnants from the former regime continue to resonate in Iraq today.

- *Failures in Liberating the Iraqis*

The American policy prior to the war on Iraq in March 2003 was to depict the military operation as a “liberation” of the Iraqi people. In other words efforts were made to stress that the war was specifically against the Saddam Hussein regime and not the Iraqi masses. Such a public diplomacy campaign failed to take in to account the immediate animosity that would erupt towards an American occupation,. The average Iraqi remembers that it was part of US foreign policy during the Iran-Iraq war that kept Saddam Hussein in power. Because of this American policy, many Iraqis believed that Saddam was a creation of the US. Therefore, many Iraqis had no reason to thank the US for removing Saddam, as in their minds it was the US that created him.

Many US foreign policy makers mistakenly classified the Iraqis into two camps; pro-Saddam or anti-Saddam factions, and thus once the Saddam government was vanquished, the anti-Saddam tendencies in Iraq would rally behind the US. While many Iraqis would be happy to see Saddam Hussein leave, they did not necessarily welcome an American occupation.

On May 1, US President George W. Bush landed aboard a US aircraft carrier and announced the end of major battle operations in Iraq. Little did he know that the hardest battle was about to begin: winning the “hearts and minds” of the Iraqis. In May 2003, Iraq was governed by an American military commander, General Jay Garner as head of the Organization for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA). However, failures of ORHA in restoring order proved to be the American’s first mistake. By the beginning of the summer of 2003, Iraq was administered by the revamped Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) led by Paul Bremer, a former State Department Diplomat.

- *Roots of the Insurgency*

After the collapse of the Hussein government, events occurred that would define Iraqi-American relations in the post-Saddam era. On April 29, 2003 as many as 13 Iraqis, protesting the US military presence in Falluja were killed as elements of the US Army fired on the crowd. On the following day the US army fired on another crowd of a 1,000 protesters demonstrating over the 13 civilian deaths. The events hinted at what would be later termed the “Iraqi insurgency,” centered in Falluja. For the citizens of Falluja, they were most upset over the fact that American soldiers made no attempts to apologize for the deaths in the crowds. This led to a deep rooted sense of revenge among the Fallujans that continues to this day and has made this small resort town a focal point of Iraqi discontent to the US.

The second policy failure in Washington was not implementing an immediate plan in post-Saddam Iraq. The policy in the aftermath of the war was indicative of day-to-day planning rather than a long term strategy. The US administration had given an expanded role for Iraqi opposition. The wrong emphasis; the US had justified a lengthy military presence in order to find and destroy Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction. However, in the post-Saddam Iraq there was no planning for the challenges of lootings, waves of revenge killings, humanitarian crises, and the reconstruction of facilities and the educational infrastructure. They failed to immediately deal with the emergence of warlordism, independent militias, Iraqis fragmenting into tribal allegiances, land grabs, interventions by neighbors such as Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia and finally dealing with the touchy issue of the “de-Ba’thification” of Iraq.

While the Iraqis were critical of the US for all the aforementioned failings, they were most critical of the American’s inability to restore security in Iraq. The US administration’s failures to restore security and the reconstruction in Iraq have led many Iraqis to look to their tribes, Shi’a clerics or militia leaders for support and to provide services when the interim Iraqi state has failed to do so. Ironically, some Iraqis have called for a ruthless dictator to bring security back to Iraq, contrasting with the US’ stated goal of installing a liberal “elected” leader. Some Iraqis wonder why the US, with its technological advancements, has proceeded slowly, yet the Iraqis after the eight-year Iran-Iraq war and the 1991 Gulf war quickly and capably rebuilt their country. Many Iraqis state that despite UN imposed sanctions, Saddam Hussein rebuilt his country after

1991 at a quicker pace than the US Coalition Provisional Authority, hence the desire for the return of another dictator.

The incidents in Falluja and the disbanding of the Iraqi military had long-term ramifications for Iraqi perceptions of the US. The US has blamed the violence in Iraq on “the insurgency” suggesting that there is only one group responsible for the fomenting internal disturbances. However, there are multiple “insurgencies” raging throughout Iraq, with various actors who have separate agendas. Some insurgents are former Saddam Hussein loyalists, while other insurgents are Iraqis who loathed Saddam but loathe the Americans even more.

The third mistake made by the US in the mind of the Iraqis was when the Coalition Provisional Authority, led by Paul Bremer disbanded the Iraqi Army. Not only were the amount of US troops inadequate, but he dissolved the last symbol of a sovereign nation. What began after this action is what is perceived by many Iraqis as a colonial humiliation reminiscent of the British rule. Disbanding the Iraqi army, one of the largest employers of the Iraqis sent many disgruntled men, with combat training into the ranks of the Iraqi insurgency. Even Saddam Hussein realized he could not disband the Iraqi military after the Iran-Iraq War for doing so, would send bands of restless warriors into the streets and possibly in the direction of the Presidential Palace. In this case, Bremer could have learned a few lessons from the detested dictator.

The insurgency in Iraq continued unabated, and on March 31, 2004 in the town of Falluja, four US civilians were killed in an insurgent ambush, where upon their charred bodies were hung from a bridge. Such actions are not just barbaric acts of mutilation but the insurgent’s tactics to use a potent image to force the American public to call for an end to the occupation of Iraq.

- *Roots of the Sadr Uprising*

At first, the US administration in Iraq could rely on the relative stability of the Shia Arab south of Iraq, opposed to the Arab Sunni heartland, where guerrilla attacks occurred on a nearly daily basis. While many Iraqi Shi’a held critical perspectives of US policy in Iraq, these criticisms never turned into violence. The conflict between Muqtada al-Sadr and US forces, signaled the spread of anti-American perceptions fueling a violent uprising in

the south of Iraq. Muqtada Sadr is a 30-year-old cleric who inherited his father's credentials as a prominent cleric opposing the Saddam Hussein government. After years of hiding, Muqtada Sadr reappeared in Najaf when the American military captured the city. On 10 October 2003, al-Sadr called for the establishment of a rival government to challenge the US Coalition-sponsored Iraqi Governing Council. His declaration was the first organized Shia response from a community that had for the most part acquiesced to the American presence. However, the CPA was posed with a dilemma over how to handle the growing power of al-Sadr. While it claimed that al-Sadr had little following among Iraq's Shia, especially among secular minded members of that community, his followers were motivated and disciplined.

- *The Abu Ghraib Scandal*

The decision of the US military to imprison Iraqis in the Abu Ghraib prison was perhaps one of its greatest blunders in alienating the Iraqi populace. The facility was synonymous for the tortures and executions that symbolized the Hussein regime. The US after all had promised that the vestiges of Saddam Iraq would end. However, the pictures released in April 2004 of US military interrogators torturing and humiliating naked Iraqi prisoners will symbolize the failings of their "liberators." The Abu Ghraib incident was made worse in June 2004. General Janis Karpinski was suspended from command of the 800th Military Police Brigade after she was blamed for actions that occurred at the prison. She said during a BBC Radio interview that she met a man who told her he was Israeli during a visit to a Baghdad intelligence center with another US general. Such Iraqi views of an "Israeli-American conspiracy" to undermine Iraq were only strengthened after Karpinski's comments.

What did such an admission mean to the average Iraqi? Many people in the Iraqi public expressed the view that the US occupied Iraq to destroy the strongest Arab military threat to Israel, and that the US will plunder Iraq's oil resources and provide them to Israel. Many Iraqis were upset when the US forced the interim Iraqi administration to end the nation's trade boycott on Israel. This supported the theory among many Iraqis that the war was launched to serve Israeli interests. Second, Iraqis became increasingly alarmed about rumors that the US was awarding reconstruction

contracts to Israeli firms. Reports of Israeli agents operating in the Kurdish areas of Iraq convinced many Iraqis that the Israelis were “conspiring” in the break up of the nation. Many Arab newspapers spread rumors that “Jewish organisations” were buying land and real estate in Iraq, just as they did in Ottoman Palestine in the beginning of the 20th Century. Some reports suggested that they even attempted to buy Jewish religious sites in Iraq. Karpinski’s remarks were part of a steady stream of actions that will further convince the Iraqis that the Israelis are trying to penetrate their nation.

- *Transfer of Sovereignty to Iraq*

On June 30, 2004 the US declared that it would hand over sovereignty to Iraq. The fact that the handover occurred on June 28 instead of the scheduled June 30 date demonstrated that even the US had acknowledged the strength of the insurgents, and had to adjust their schedule accordingly. While the US has transferred sovereignty to the Iraqis many see it as a way to merely *formally* end the U.S. occupation of Iraq, but the problem is it does just that. It *formally* ends the occupation but what will this mean for the Iraqi on the ground? As long as the everyday Iraqi sees American troops patrolling their streets, as the every day Iraqi has to wait in long lines for gasoline, suffering in the Iraqi summer due to a lack of electricity for the air conditioning, while failing to find work and witnessing car bombs on a weekly if not daily basis, a new handover of power will mean little. While international observers of the Iraqi situation may believe that elections in January 2005 will lead to more legitimacy, can elections be held in the face of a growing insurgency? The handover of power is directed towards the wrong constituencies. It was directed so that the world community and American public opinion would accept the occupation of Iraq has ended, but many Iraqis perceive it as a continuation of the US presence under a different guise, while perpetuating the violence already plaguing their nation. The US has some policy options in order to address these questions and to insure stability in Iraq after the January 30 elections.

Policy Context Section

For many various reasons, the Iraqis have a negative perception of the US. This is a large problem as the US attempts to restore sovereignty to the Iraqi nation. The negative perception has led Iraqis of multiple ethnicities, religions and classes to revolt against what they view as the US occupation of their country. Unfortunately, the US will not and cannot withdraw until the internal situation in Iraq is stable. It is apparent that this is a downward spiral, as the US waits in Iraq for a calming of the nation, its mere presence causes more and more violence and instability in the region. The longer the US waits for stability, the larger the insurgency against the US becomes and hence the more unstable the country becomes and the longer the US must stay. Due to this viscous cycle, one of the US's policy aims must be to improve the negative perceptions of Iraqis while restoring their sovereignty.

It is a fairly apparent goal that the US restore sovereignty to the Iraqi nation. However, there are many factors that make the way in which this goal is sought controversial. Some of the questions which should be raised by US policy makers include when the US should withdraw, who should be left in power and how will they have come to power, how much should the UN be involved, how much will the UN be willing to be involved. All the questions are directly related to the issue of Iraqis' negative perception of the US, since the US will not withdraw until some sort of stability is reached but the Iraqi's continue to fight the US and create instability within the

country. Therefore, the US must also have the goal of changing the Iraqi's perception of the US so that Iraq can be a stable enough to leave, forming independent and functioning country.

There are many challenges to changing the Iraqi perception of the US. For many years, since the 1967 war, Iraqi's have viewed the US as in collusion with Israel in a Zionist conspiracy and hence have disliked America. They also tend to believe that like the British early in the century, the US only enters the region to protect its oil suppliers or to gain valuable oil resources. Along with the negative US rhetoric voiced by the Bathist regime; and the belief that Sadaam was merely an agent of the US whose sanctions (be them actually UN) only hurt Iraqi people and strengthened Sadaam's power over them--how is the US to convince the Iraqis that they really want to help the Iraqis create a free and independent Iraq? If the US were to have restored peace and stability immediately to the region after the war, the US may have been able to gain legitimacy. However, with the multiple US mistakes, and increasing violence and instability in Iraq, the US is losing legitimacy the longer it stays.

The US must somehow correct or make-up for "history" and its past recent mistakes as well as work towards a stable Iraq currently and prove to people that it truly wants Iraq to be its own functioning country, not a puppet of the US. It is unlikely that the US will be able to do anything about the memories that Iraqis have of the US devastating its country during the gulf war and denying the rhetoric fed to them by the Bath'ist regime. But what can the US due to reconcile its recent mistakes such as the Abu Gharib Prison scandal? The US can apologize even more than it has tried to do and it can attempt to cease all policies reminiscent of the past dictatorial regime. This

includes ceasing the use of torture and unwarranted arrests and restoring basic utilities and infrastructure to the country. The faster the US can restore a sense of normalcy to the region and unlink itself from the past regime, the sooner the Iraqis may start to believe the US's goal of creating a stable country and hence work with them in order to have them leave.

Negative perceptions of the US will never entirely change while the US is still occupying Iraq and military operations are not what will bring peace to the country nor legitimacy to the US plan in Iraq. The US must though begin to change the negative perceptions in order to restore Iraq to a free and independent nation.

POLICY OPTIONS

The US has several options to guarantee political stability in Iraq after the January 30 elections. The necessity of choosing the right option will determine how the American presence will be perceived by the various political factions in Iraq and whether the negative impressions mentioned in the aforementioned sections can be changed. If the US can adopt a policy that can change the Iraqi perceptions, perhaps this can also change perceptions in the Arab and Muslim world, as well as repair damages with America's allies in Europe. It is necessary to select the best policy option, which would guarantee Iraq's post-war stability, and which could ultimately guarantee a stable Middle East. This policy would then also have a bearing on the war on terrorism and America's role in restarting the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. The US has four options that it could pursue in Iraq, ranging from directly manipulating Iraq's future to withdrawing completely from the nation.

- *Policy Option One –Direct Control*

The first policy of direct control of Iraq's future would ultimately guarantee that Iraq is rebuilt in a fashion to suits America's interests in the Middle East. Those policy makers who would justify such an opinion could argue that the US "Operation Iraqi Freedom" rid Iraq of the brutal rule of Saddam Hussein and removed the threat of his bellicose nature to the region. The advocates of such an option would believe that America had no choice but to go to war in order to preempt the threat posed by a tyrant like Hussein. According to this argument, since this was an American led and financed war, it is the US that has earned the right to ensure that post-Saddam Iraq emerges in a fashion that secures its national interests. Thus, since the international community has been apprehensive of involvement in Iraq, the US should be primarily responsible for its future and establishing the peace. Therefore, the US will have to stay in Iraq until it can create a stable leadership that can protect American interests in the region.

Since this war was launched in order to restore stability and spread democratic ideals in the Middle East, this crucial national security concern has to be addressed by maintaining an American presence in Iraq for the long term. The success in rebuilding Iraq into a stable state will guarantee the emergence of a regional state that shares America's interests in the region.

Those who would advocate direct control would argue that Iraq's post war chaos continues in Iraq despite the actions taken by the interim Iraqi administration. Such failures would prove that if the Iraqis are not able to control the country, the burden of establishing security rests with US military force. Therefore, rather than decreasing the number of American troops in Iraq, reinforcements should increase. Proponents of such a policy do not argue that American troops will be responsible for Iraq's security indefinitely, rather they call for direct US control in developing and training the country's security forces. In the meantime, since this process will take years, it is America's burden to quell the Iraqi insurgency.

Direct control means that the US would continue to rebuild Iraq's damaged infrastructure and thus, it will continue to grant contracts for these project to American

companies. According to this policy, repairing Iraq's oil industry would be the priority in order to finance the reconstruction effort and maintain its oil flow to the world's markets. The US would also maintain control over restoring Iraq's utilities, such as water and electricity.

In order to maintain this policy, the US is required to undertake several actions. The first is to maintain and increase US troop numbers in Iraq. Increasing the number of US troops will allow the insurgence to be defeated militarily. Second, restoring the infrastructure is a necessity and awarding contracts to American firms will guarantee that US technology and expertise will ensure this task is done properly. In order to finance this process, Iraq's oil industry will have to receive priority in the reconstruction effort and thus be defended from insurgent attacks. The US should encourage the United Nations to give support to America's policies, but only to rebuild and administer Iraq as the US determines necessary to its goals. Third, in order to establish these goals, the US would need to locate Iraqi leaders who could be trust to ensure a democratic Iraq that does not threaten its neighbors. Such leaders would thus be provided support, especially in the upcoming elections.

The advantages of this policy ensure a stable Iraq that could protect US economic, and strategic interests in the Middle East. It would be an American demonstration to Iran and Syria that their policies of pursuing weapons of mass destruction would not be tolerated, and an Iraqi democracy could spread to both of these countries. Finally, such a policy would protect key American allies in the region such as Israel and Jordan.

However, the disadvantages of such a policy outweigh the advantages. American insistence of dominating the reconstruction of Iraq proves the US will continue the unilateralist policy that it had adopted since the April 2003 Iraq war. Such a policy would not only enrage the Iraqis, weary of a return to its colonial past, but also in the Middle East and the world. The US cannot afford to lose more allies if it wants to pursue an effective policy on the war on terrorism. Many Iraqis resent American domination over the reconstruction process, especially since many of their local businesses find it difficult to compete for sub-contracts. These grievances have only continued to instill anger among many Iraqis that they are under an occupation-for-profit. It is these perceptions that have made many Iraqis skeptical of US goals, thus fueling the

insurgency which has ultimately undermined American efforts to create a stable and democratic nation. This will create the sense of America as a neo-imperialist power in Iraq and the region, detracting from the US' ability to negotiate and Arab-Israeli peace. Finally, bringing in more American troops into Iraq to ensure stability will guarantee more American troops to be killed in Iraq.

- *Policy Option Two – Hand Iraq Over to the UN*

Another option for the US to ensure stability in Iraq is to allow the UN to take over the rebuilding process, with American support. Since Saddam Hussein has been removed, and the Iraqis are beginning to managing their own affairs, the US can claim that its mission is accomplished. Allowing the UN to take over in Iraq could bring order to the country, as there are less negative “imperialist” impressions of this international body. As the previous sections demonstrated, the Iraqis may have been opposed to the Hussein regime, but they are skeptical of America’s interference in domestic affairs. If the UN were to be involved, it could bestow international legitimacy on the reconstruction process in both Iraq and the region.

If the UN were to take over the task of rebuilding Iraq, the US would still need to provide military and financial resources to support this effort. At the same time, the US would have to handover the leadership and control of this process to the UN. American troops would have to be placed under the authority of United Nations, thus they would assume the role of UN peacekeepers. If American forces were to take part in a multinational peacekeeping force, they could be seen less as an occupying force by the Iraqis. But at the same time, they would lose important tactical control of their own military campaigns against the Iraqi insurgents. On a broader level, such an option would also require the US to cooperate with the UN in making future policy about Iraq.

The advantages of this option are that the US would no longer be labeled as an “occupier,” strengthening America’s position in the Middle East, demonstrating to the Iraqi and Arab world that the Iraqis, under UN guidance will be able to determine the destiny of their nation. Such a policy would undo the alienation caused by Policy One, and reduce tensions with other powers in the region such as Syria and Iran, who view the American presence in Iraq as a latent threat. Such a decision could also repair the damage caused by the unilateral nature of the 2003 Iraq war, upsetting key international players in the UN, such as France, Germany and Russia.

A test of future UN involvement in Iraq will begin in the run-up to Iraq’s elections that are scheduled for January 2005. The UN will be sending election supervisors to Iraq in the upcoming months to monitor its first electoral process. The

UN's role in bolstering the legitimacy upon these elections is crucial to the country's stability and could pave the way for further involvement.

The disadvantages of such an option would be that the US would be contributing most of its resources to an international administration of Iraq that may not make decisions that always put American interests first. Detractors of the UN option would argue that this body could be slow in reacting to military or security threats that emerge in Iraq. Other critics of such an option would argue that Russia and France, who opposed the war effort, would now have an unfair say in determining Iraq's future. Finally, for the US to hand over Iraq to the UN, the body itself has to be willing to take on this responsibility. There are indications that the UN has been reluctant to get involved in Iraq after the bombing of its headquarters in Baghdad in August 2003. It is also questionable how many member nations of the UN would contribute their military forces to the volatile situation in Iraq. While involving the UN may be welcome by some Iraqis, its forces and workers could still be the target of foreign fighters in Iraq who are opposed to establishing order and security in Iraq. Many of these fighters have the goal of establishing an Islamic state in Iraq, and would continue their attacks regardless of the fact if the Americans or the UN were in charge. The bombing of the UN headquarters was conducted by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian national who aims to establish such a Taliban-like state in Iraq. Additionally, elements of Saddam's government also have condemned any future Iraqi government different from their former Ba'athist regime. They would also perpetuate the chaos in Iraq regardless of whether the UN or the US was responsible for administering Iraq's affairs.

- *Policy Option Three– Hold Iraqi Elections*

The current American policy has been to cooperate with the interim Iraqi government until it can successfully hold elections. If this plan succeeds, then the US has proved that it can establish a democracy in the heart of the region. However, holding elections by January 30, 2005 could prove difficult, yet the US has committed itself to aid the Iraqi people in transitioning to a democracy. The challenges are that Iraq's political arena is comprised of competing ethnic and sectarian parties with no grass roots support that transcends these lines. Many of the leaders of these parties were Iraqi exiles and have had little time to establish ties with the Iraqi masses. Civil society in Iraq has just begun to emerge in a state where all political and social life was dominated by Hussein's Ba'ath Party. Finally, Iraq lacks any history of democracy, with the exceptions of elections held during Iraq's monarchy that usually brought in pro-British candidates to determine Iraq's future.

It is incumbent upon the US to stand behind the interim government as the elections approach. Proponents of this plan argue that American successes in post World War Two Japan and Germany demonstrates that the US plan could prevail. How this policy would differ from Policy One is that the US should learn to let the democratic process run its course and not to obstruct leaders who may be critical of America's policy. In this case, the Iraqi interim administration is a partner, whose views may not always coincide with America's views.

Regardless of whether the elections occur on January 30th or at a later date, the US will still need to provide economic and military assistance to the interim Iraqi government, and eventually an elected one. Rather than direct control, this option stresses instructing the Iraqis about democracy, rather than imposing it. Such actions include aiding the Iraqis in writing a constitution, developing civil society, a police force that respects the rule of law, as well as designing media campaigns and school curricula to instruct the Iraqis about democracy.

In order to gain respect from the Iraqi people, ostensible efforts have to be made to prove that the Iraqi leaders are running their own affairs. This includes proving that the Iraqis are in control of their oil resources by strengthening the role of Iraq ministries

in distributing these sources. The Iraqi security forces have to be given a more visible role in military operations. The attack on insurgents in Falluja in November 2004 was supposed to be a joint US-Iraqi operation, but the Iraqis for the most part watched US Marines attack the city on their television screens.

The advantage of pushing for an Iraqi election is that it demonstrates America has delivered on its promise to establish a democracy for the Iraqi people. According to supporters of this option, a successful democracy in Iraq could spread throughout the Middle East on its own, without US military intervention in the future. Finally, a successful election could take pressure away from the US as an “occupier” of Iraq.

Opponents of holding elections in Iraq argue that it is too soon for Iraq to attempt this when it has had no history of democracy, suffers from sectarian and ethnic differences, and lacks the security and stability necessary for such a process. Some Iraqi critics argue that the election process itself will guarantee Shi’a and Kurdish control of the country. The Sunni Arab Muslims have opted to boycott the elections after the aforementioned attack on Falluja, where they predominate. For the Sunnis, they will continue to view the US as occupiers and the post-election government as collaborators with the occupation. For this reason, many of the insurgents will attack those who go to the ballots, threatening other voters away from taking part.

- *Policy Option Four- Withdrawal*

Some would argue that US has entangled itself in an Iraqi quagmire with no clear exit strategy. The US has incurred over a thousand casualties and the Iraqi losses exceed tens of thousands since the war began. The US presence has attracted fighters from all over the Islamic world to take part in a new jihad, as well as increased the hatred in the Arab and Muslim world for American policies. Proponent of this policy would call for returning all American soldiers from Iraq and cut US losses from its continuing commitment to Iraq. Others would argue that the involvement in Iraq has detracted from America's war on terror and the pursuit of Usama bin Ladin and al-Qa'ida. Begin procedures to bring troops home from Iraq and surrounding countries.

The advantage of such a policy would be that in reducing Iraqi and Islamic hostility to the US. However, the disadvantages clearly outnumber the advantages. If the US were to withdraw leaving a weak Iraqi administration in control, would only breed violence and terrorism in Iraq that could spill over into neighboring countries. The interim Iraqi government has demonstrated that it cannot fight the insurgency by itself. Iran, Saudi Arabia and Syria would intervene in the political vacuum in Iraq to support its own factions, exacerbating political tensions. Without US pressure, the Kurds in the north of Iraq may secede as they have threatened to do on numerous occasions. The possibility of civil war erupting between various Iraqi sects and ethnicities remains a possibility without American forces to prevent such a scenario. Those Islamist elements in Iraq that desire establishing a state similar to the Taliban's in Afghanistan could succeed. America's desire to establish a democracy in the Arab world would have failed. This would also prove to be a political defeat for the US, bolstering the terrorist's belief that their actions could even force a superpower to withdraw from the region. Finally, chaos would reign in the Persian Gulf, threatening the world's oil markets.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The question of how the Iraqi political factions perceive the US and as well as how they will organize themselves in terms of the upcoming elections still remains in flux, at the time of writing this report. Different views have been expressed by Iraq's Shi'as, Sunnis and Kurds. While Iraq's political scene is convoluted and should not be examined by simple sectarian or ethnic divisions, these communities show common tendencies with regards to Iraq's future and the US. Thus, the options the US chooses after the elections will demonstrate whether America can overcome the negative perceptions formed in Iraq during the last several decades.

When the US entered Baghdad and took down the statue of Saddam Hussein in the center of the city on April 9, 2003, it declared to its inhabitants that they were "liberated" from years of "Saddam's tyranny." However, it was obvious to many Iraqis that "liberation" meant "occupation." When the Americans began to hand over authority to the Iraqi leaders, critics argued the US was creating a local authority sympathetic to its wishes.

Saddam's image of the US permeated to the Iraqi military and the Iraqi masses. Some of residue of Saddam's thinking, and his image of the US and its intentions in the Middle East, remain vibrant in Iraqi society today. The Iraqi masses are convinced that the US presence is analogous to the British role in Iraq during the 1920's. The British entered Iraq ostensibly to exploit its oil resources, and the Americans have demonstrated that their aims are relatively similar. The Iraqi response to the British presence in the 1920's led to a national revolt, which was only suppressed after inflicting heavy Iraqi casualties. The image of the US as a neo-colonialist power has already led to agitation among many in Iraq calling for an American withdrawal.

The failure to understand Iraq's history and politics lead to many miscalculations of how the "Operation Iraqi Freedom" would evolve, and how the Iraqi people would react to the American presence. Additional miscalculations could have disastrous results, hence the importance of such a study. As US finds it entangled in the post-war reconstruction of Iraq, America's affair with nation will continue. How this affair should continue was the purpose of examining options for the US and Iraq.

The best option for the US to maintain stability in Iraq and the Middle East is to make immediate, concrete steps to devolve power into the hands of the Iraqis, as it is trying to do with the upcoming elections. The purpose of outlining Options One and Two, in other words the two extremes of the spectra of US policy options was to demonstrate that chaos in Iraq could continue, if not get worse if American colonized Iraq or abandoned completely. Option Three, which is essentially the current course has also demonstrated that it has failed to bring order and security to Iraq. A successful option could be a middle ground between Options Two and Three. Giving an enhanced role to the UN can give the impression to the Iraqi people that the US is not trying to colonize Iraq, and letting this body cooperate in holding the elections will demonstrate their expanded role in a future Iraq.