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Planning for a Self-Inflicted Wound:

US Policy to Reshape a Post-Saddam Iraq

Rough Draft for Comment

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Revision Three: December 31, 2002

The hardest part of war is often the peace, and this is particularly likely to be the case if the US goes to war with Iraq. It is not that the US is not planning for such contingencies; it is the quality of such planning that is at issue. Unless it sharply improves, it may well become a self-inflicted wound based on a series of "syndromes" that grow out of ignorance, indifference to Iraq's real needs, and ethnocentricity.

The US does not have to suffer from "Iraq War Peace Syndrome." Some good studies and planning efforts are emerging, but they are the exception and not the norm, in an uncoordinated and faltering effort. Far too often, we are rushing our planning efforts without making adequate efforts to make up for our lack of knowledge. As a result, planners both outside and inside the US government may end up doing more harm than good, and in laying the groundwork for serious postwar friction and problems. In fact, a pattern of Iraq war peace syndromes has begun to emerge that is deeply disturbing.

1. **The "We Know What We're Doing Syndrome"**

One of the most important things we need to do is to admit our level of ignorance and uncertainty. Far too many "experts" who are now working on postwar planning have (a) never been in Iraq to the point of having practical knowledge of the country, and (b) have concentrated on the threat so long that they have little intelligence data on the workings of its government, civil society, and economy.

More generally, the US government does not have much of the data it needs to formulate a detailed peace plan. Looking back over the last 10 years, we generally failed to seriously examine what was happening inside Iraq in social and economic terms, and to collect and honestly analyze much of the data on social change, the economy, and the way the government functioned.

We should be actively pulling together all the information that exiles, friendly businessmen and others working in Iraq, the UN, NGOs, and others know about the day-to-day functioning of given national, regional, and local government activities in Iraq. We should be examining existing Iraqi structures and institutions in detail to know what needs changing and what we can build upon. We should be looking at the Iraqi constitution and legal system to see what could be a valid base for change.

More important, we should have teams ready to survey the situation in each area, town, and governate as we advance. We should have teams ready to work with key local and then governate leaders. We should have teams ready to work with the ministries in Iraq's government once we get to Baghdad. We should admit that we really do not know what we are doing, and cannot know until the war unfolds. We should be flexible, and emphasize surveying Iraq's postwar needs in partnership with Iraqis in Iraq at the local, regional, and national level; making minimal changes in working civil structures.

2. The "US as Liberator Syndrome"

We may or may not be perceived as liberators. We are dealing with a very sophisticated and long-established tyranny, and we really don't know how an intensely nationalistic people with deep internal divisions will react, and how the impact of the fighting will affect the people. We don't know how long any support will last by a given group or faction the moment we become involved in trade-offs between them.

We may well face a much more hostile population than in Afghanistan. We badly need to consider the Lebanon model: Hero to enemy in less than a year. We also need to consider the Bosnia/Kosovo model where internal divisions leave no options other than stay and police or leave and watch civil conflict emerge.

A little self-honesty about our past mistakes in nation building and occupation would help; especially when we perpetuate the myth we did so splendidly in Germany and Japan. Things eventually worked out in Germany and Japan because we enforced minimum change and took advantage of existing institutions. We only adopted this approach under duress, however, and because the Cold War forced us to reverse many of our initial plans and policies. Economic recovery took five years. For the first year, people died for lack of medical attention, starved, and suffered. We could get away with because most of the world was suffering and because of the legacy of anger towards Germany and Japan coming out of the war. We cannot possibly expect such tolerance today.

Couple this to an unpredictable but inevitable level of collateral damage and civilian casualties, to what the word "occupation" means in the Arab world because of Israel, to the historical memory of the British mandate and US ties to the Shah, to Shi'ite tensions over US relations with Iran and the Axis of Evil, and to factional tensions in Iraq, and we are almost certain to face serious problems with at least some major blocs of Iraqis.

No study or plan that does not deal at length with these risks, or prepare for them on a contingency basis, can do more good than harm. We should focus on giving Iraqis what they want, and not on giving Iraqis what we feel they need. Our actions should be based on partnership and a high degree of humility, not on occupation and arrogance.

3. The "We Lead and They Will Follow" or "Coalition of the Willing Syndrome"

Our coalition of the willing may well be much smaller than the coalition of the unwilling. We need to understand just how deeply hostile the Arab world is because of the Second Intifada and our ties to Israel. Surveys show around 80% of Arabs, and high percentages of other Islamic nations, see the Palestinians as the key issue in politics and express anger at the US over ties to Israel. We also need to understand that in the Gulf, many Arabs also see the US as responsible for the suffering of the Iraqi people under sanctions.

The UN debate shows we face a largely doubtful and antiwar world. In practical terms, we will be subject to relentless Arab, regional, and global examination and criticism from

D-Day on. We cannot hope to get an Iraqi, regional, or world mandate to act as occupiers. In fact, if we act in this way, we are certain to encounter massive problems.

Any humanitarian failures at any point will come back to haunt us. So will any mistakes in dealing with Iraqi factions, any delays in transferring power, and any deals with the outside that the Iraqis and Arab world see as being at Iraqi expense.

We need to base our peace plans on the reality that we will be judged by their success for years to come, and that any failures can have explosive regional impacts. This time we virtually must succeed and we must be prepared to make the necessary commitment in spite of the potential cost. We must prove that we are committed to securing a successful peace in Iraq which will benefit the region as a whole. At the same time, we need to understand just how firm and enduring the linkage will be to our success in dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Second Intifada. We may have the luxury of fighting one war at a time, but we do not have the luxury of focusing on a single peace.

4. **The "Best Case War Syndrome"**

Far too often, we now base our postwar plans only on fighting a best-case war. We have no justification for such planning. We may get serious urban fighting. We may see the use of WMD. We may have to sharply escalate and inflict serious collateral damage. We may see factional struggles and warlords emerge, and already we are caught up in a messy struggle between the Kurds and exile groups like the INC.

No plan is worth considering that does not explicitly examine what can go wrong in the fighting and how it will impact on the post-fighting outcome.

5. **The "Rebuilding Effort Begins After the War Ends Syndrome"**

Our rebuilding effort in Iraq must begin on D-Day, not after the war. Everything we do from bombing to the first ground contact with Iraqis will be conducted in a media fishbowl, with the world observing and often searching for any fault or flaw. We cannot be perfect, but we can be prepared and act with the knowledge that even seemingly trivial actions during the war can have powerful global effect and shape postwar attitudes.

We must realize that one day after our forces enter any area, the world will hold us to blame for every bit of Iraqi suffering that follows, as well as for much of Saddam's legacy of economic mistakes and neglect. *The first minute of the war is the beginning of the peace*, and any plan that does not explicitly recognize this is dangerous.

6. **The "Let's Ignore the Iraqi Media and Information Issue Syndrome"**

It seems incredible, but a number of studies ignore the need to provide detailed media coverage to the Iraqi public the moment we go to war, and then to immediately take control of the Iraqi media and Ministry of Information and change them to become legitimate sources of information. Even some good studies of psywar efforts to deal with

the Iraqi military treat the problem as one of dealing with the career military and not the Iraqi people and the different factions within it.

We are already engaged in a battle for hearts and minds yet to date we have done little to win the support of the people of the region. We will confront a desperate dictatorship in combat, and what we say over radio and TV, and to the Iraqi people as we advance may be critical in limiting or avoiding urban warfare and prolonged resistance. We also have to be able to talk to the different factions in Iraq and reassure those we plan to work with. The Ministry of Information, the state controlled radio and TV, and the press need to be reshaped the moment we have access to them. The Ministry of Information, in particular, is one of the worst single instruments of repression in Iraq and needs to be abolished or restructured the moment we can do so.

7. **The "Overthrow the Regime is Enough of a US Policy Goal Syndrome"**

Our failure to clearly define our postwar policy goals for Iraq is another area where we need early action. In fact, the Bush Administration has already faltered badly. There is serious confusion and hostility in the Arab world and much of the rest of the world over our objectives in going to war.

We face an Arab world where many see us as going to war to seize Iraq's oil, barter deals with the Russians and French, create a new military base to dominate the region, and/or serve Israel's interest. Our lack of clear policy statements has encouraged virtually every negative conspiracy theory possible.

In short, our ultimate intentions in Iraq are already a major issue that vague words cannot deal with. There a is a critical need to clarify our intentions in enough detail to show we really will act in the interest of the Iraqi people, to refute the major conspiracy theories that have already developed, and prove we are not a "neo-imperialist" or "occupier. In fact, we need to act as soon as possible.

8. **The "UN and the World Doesn't Matter in Shaping the Peace Syndrome"**

We face a massive legal problem that many US studies currently ignore. A range of UN resolutions already govern what can and should be done in Iraq, of which the "oil-for-food" program is only the most obvious. In the real world, we have only the following options: (a) reject the primacy of the UN and the UNSCRs dealing with oil-for-food, call for democracy and human rights in Iraq and create our own plans and structure; (b) rely on the UN to do what it is clearly prepared to do and act for us; and (c) rely on the unpredictable mix of US, UN, and NGO institutions that are available to build on when, and if, war comes.

All of these options are bad, but (c) is best and we need to face this fact. We also need to face the fact that we cannot pass our problems on to a non-existent international community that is willing to sweep up after our military parade. We may well get UN

and international cooperation but only if we lead and contribute actively. We have to stay as long as it takes, or at least until we can hand a mission over to the Iraqis.

9. The "Democracy Solves Everything Syndrome"

Broad generalizations about democracy suddenly solving Iraq's problems are mindlessly stupid. Iraq will benefit from added pluralism of the kind already called for in UN resolutions. Moreover, Iraq already has provision for such steps in its existing and draft constitutions. However, the practice in Iraq has been strong men and dictators for nearly half a century. Iraq no has no viable political parties, no exile or internal leaders with proven popular legitimacy, and deep ethnic, religious, and tribal/clan divisions.

We also must deal with the different goals and priorities of Iraq's neighbors and the UN. Turkey and Iran will be real constraints on how a future government deals with the Kurds and Shiites. This means we already have "non-democratic" priorities. We virtually must enforce territorial integrity, and limit Kurdish autonomy. There will be no valid self-determination or democratic solutions to these issues.

Iraq is not going to become a model government or democracy for years. It faces too many problems in internal power sharing, dealing with regional issues, and developing political parties that can look beyond selfish interests. It faces too many other challenges in terms of developing a rule of law, protecting human rights, and dealing with urgent economic and security issues.

If we try to impose too much of our political system, we will also face growing problems with both Iraqis and the Arab world the moment we try to tell Iraqis how they should govern rather than help them find better solutions. Rather than catalyze other Arab nations to become democratic, we will catalyze Pan-Arab hostility and give the Arab world the impression that we have joined Israel as "occupiers."

10. The "Limited Presence and Peacemaking Syndrome"

There are US war plans that call for an early US military presence in Kirkuk to ensure that the Kurds do not attempt to seize it and to deter any Turkish movements. It is less clear that the US has clearly tailored plans to occupy Shi'ite areas in ways that would block Iranian adventures and halt uprisings or efforts at control by Shi'ite factions. There also are some who strongly oppose executing such efforts because of the risk or cost, and who want to avoid a major US military peacekeeping role regardless of the risks.

Some form of clear peacemaking/peacekeeping strategy is vital and past wars provide the lesson that the earlier the US forces are present, the easier the task and the smaller the presence required. In the case of Iraq, this is needed to prevent civil war, halt warlordism, and provide the security needed to rebuild the nation. If it is not done, the alternatives will either be to come in later with much larger resources, or fail in key aspects of shaping the peace.

The US must be prepared from the start to deal with the broader territorial issues - authority over the city of Kirkuk and its environs, shaping their ethnic mix, and control of its key nodes of oil production and distribution. The US must also be prepared to help the Iraqis dcal with the constitutional issue - what mix between devolution and centralization will be acceptable to the Arabs and the Kurds alike? (The last time, the issue went to arbitration under the League of Nations mandate, took years and years to resolve, and eventually had to be enforced by the RAF using poison gas. Scarcely the best precedent!)

11. "**The Zero-Based Approach to Restructuring Iraq's Government Syndrome"**

Iraq cannot be treated as an intellectual playground for political scientists or ideologues, and must not be treated as if its people were a collection of white rats that could be pushed through a democratic maze by a bunch of benevolent US soldiers and NGOs. Iraq is a country of 24 million people with a history of more than 80 years. It has a constitution and a draft constitution. It has an existing National Assembly structure, relatively modern legal system, and a history of past autonomy agreements with the Kurds.

Iraq has a strong central structure based on a highly urbanized society. It is critically dependent on food imports and allocating the revenue from oil exports. It has some 23 existing ministries. Some are now tools of repression and must be dismantled or totally rebuilt, but most are vital to running the country. Many of its urban centers and complexes and governates are tailored to local needs. A standardized, cookie cutter approach to local or regional government would fail dismally anywhere in the world. It is a recipe for disaster in Iraq.

There is no Iraqi exile with real-world experience in governing the country and no group of exiles that can deal with the countless technical areas vital to the needs of some 24 million people other than the existing structure of government. The courts, the legal system, the lawyers have many flaws, but they are also Iraqi. The rule of law and human rights, and security for the individual, are actually far more important than democracy and they too must be built on the existing Iraqi structure of government.

Yes, we need to work with Iraqis at every level to clean up the existing system. We have to destroy the one existing political party, the Baath, and "de-Saddamize" the existing government while establishing a modern rule of law and reforming the economy. We need to give exiles a role, and not simply exile groups like the INC that have more strength inside the beltway in Washington than anywhere in the borders of Iraq. *But*, nothing can be zero-based.

12. **The "Let's All Form Another Giant Discussion Group Syndrome"**

Iraq's mix of internal and external tensions make any slow, bottom-up, or discussion group-oriented approach to restructuring power in Iraq a near certain recipe for failure. We don't have time for time-consuming efforts to create consensus. Cosmetic assemblies and advisory bodies are certain to produce a major backlash.

We may well have to push Iraqis into some new form of power structure within weeks of the end of the fighting. We certainly have no more than months. We don't have time for long dialogue, although that can be used to adjust the initial arrangements.

We need to take a hard look at Iraq's existing constitution and draft constitution, and the idea of a constitutional convention and referendum creating a follow-on system has worked elsewhere. This may also allow us to deal with the realities of power struggles by changing Iraq's current constitution to deal with a tailored form of republic or federalism plus some form of Kurdish-minority rights.

But, we don't have months in which to get started or more than a year in which to get a new system working. Any peace plan that does not include clear and specific goals from the start, and takes more than six months to get all of the key power sharing arrangements in place, is a failure from the start.

We must find ways to produce rapid power sharing and to reallocate oil wealth and do in ways that emphasize political stability rather than democracy per se. This is not only a Kurdish issue, it is a who will lead the Shi'ites issue, and almost any postwar arrangement will inevitably penalize today's ruling Sunni elite.

13. The "Let's All Ignore the State's Present Role in the Economy Syndrome"

More is also involved than governance and human rights. The National Iraqi Oil Company is only the most critical of the many state entities that have to be used to reshape and develop the economy. We need to work with Iraqi officials immediately to clean up the NIOC and other economic institutions that affect development, free up the private sector as much as possible, create an honest Iraqi-based structure for international investment, and put Iraq back on the track to development as soon as possible.

The economic reform issue is as important as the governance issue. There must be explicit plans to deal with state industry, with a key focus on energy. The issues of freeing up the private sector, encouraging honest foreign investment, dealing with agricultural reform, and creating a body of commercial law are critical.

14. The "Dismantle the Army and Police Force Syndrome"

The Revolutionary Guards, the secret police, and other Saddam loyalists are contemptible, but the idea we disband the entire army and security forces and start over with training and ground up new groups is impractical and dangerous.

Many elements of the regular army are nationalist, not pro-Saddam. We don't want 400,000 nationalists in the streets and hostile. We don't want to leave a weak army in service and an angry army in the streets. Germany after World War I showed the impact that can have. By all means clean the army up, clean up the officer corps, provide political training, etc., but leave the professional and competent elements in tact. Leave Iraq with some dignity and coopt the army rather than destroy it.

Leaving the police in place, after the same purging, is even more important. The first priorities are food and security and then jobs and security. Trying to bring in inexperience mixes of outsiders, training a new police force from the ground up, and recreate a police-legal system interface from the ground up is almost mission impossible in terms of manpower, cost, and timeliness. Cleaning up the existing force is not.

15. The "Debt and Reparations, Weimar Republic and Let's Make a Deal Syndrome"

We need to be extremely careful about even a hint that we are bartering away Iraq's post-Saddam future to get political support, and saddling a new regime with hundreds of billions of dollars in debt, reparations, and contingency contracts that will cripple it, just as we once crippled the Weimar Republic.

We should decide on some policy calling for debt and reparations forgiveness, and the voiding of contingency contracts by the new regime.

16. The "Oil Income Floats All Boats Syndrome"

Time for a reality check. The DOE estimates that Iraqi oil export revenues were all of $14.1 billion in 2001 (including smuggling), out of total exports of all of $15.8 billion and an economy worth $28.2 billion in market terms. The GDP is less than one-third of what it was in 1989, and there are two decades of war and sanctions to make up for.

Oil revenues cannot possibly solve all of Iraq's development problems. Real oil wealth per capita will be under $1/10^{th}$ of its 1980 peak given the rise in population and the drop in oil prices. Oil can still pay for a lot, but not for both rebuilding and development. Consider the following points about Iraq:

- Steady decline in relative wealth since 1982, not 1991; 70% cut in GDP per capita before Gulf War.

- Massive population growth: 9.1 million in 1970, 22.7 million in 2000 and 36.9 million in 2020. 40% under 15. Unemployment in excess of 25%.

- No longer has oil wealth in relative terms. A little over $700 per capita today versus over $6,000 in 1980. See much worse in constant dollars. Around $23,820 for Saudi in 1980 versus $2,563 in 2001.

- Dependent on oil for food and "black" sector to operate. Heavily dependent on food imports since late 1970s. Some estimate a 70% dependence on food imports once the economy recovers.

- Medical and educational crisis.

- Many artifacts of a command economy that has been centered around a dictatorship for three decades. Some solid economic institutions but no real market system in terms of distribution, banking, uniform commercial code, insurance, interest.

- Industrial development is weak and has a poor history.

- Oil revenue and development issue is critical, as is sharing revenue, but NIOC has its thugs and killers. Saybolt indicates waterflooding and overpumping; 24 of 73 fields working, and 20-40% of wells at risk.

Yes, money will be a serious problem, particularly if debt and reparations are not forgiven.

17. The Disarmament is Quick and Lasting Syndrome

We need a clear policy towards Iraq's military industry and dual use facilities from the start, and we need to understand that a postwar Iraq will exist in a still threatening and proliferating region. Moreover, whatever we get rid of, the human talent and major dual use facilities will remain. Getting rid of nukes also can just push Iraq towards a reliance on biological warfare.

We need both a short-term and long-term plan to disarm Iraq. The long-term plan must include some ways to use a combination of UNSCR and national action to limit any risk of future proliferation and possibly some form of US security guarantees to limit the incentive to future regimes to proliferate.

18. The "No Exit Strategy Syndrome"

Every past peacemaking effort has shown that an explicit exit strategy is vital. The key in this case is an entry strategy that makes a real peace possible, setting modest and achievable objectives, treating the Iraqis as partners, and leaving when they either want us to leave or are ready to have us leave. It is to avoid any chance of civil war, clearly act in Iraq's benefit, and plan to leave early rather than late.

Curing the "Iraq War Peace Syndrome(s)"

The first step in curing a complex disease like the Iraq War Peace Syndrome(s) is to recognize the nature of the disease. As the previous list shows, this often suggests the

cure. The fact remains, however, that we face at least a decade of further instability in the Gulf Region, whether or not we go to war with Iraq, and no matter how well the war goes. Getting rid of Saddam and Iraq's weapons of mass destruction is an important set of goals if the war goals well. No war, however, can do more than provide a basis for making Iraq somewhat better and then giving the Iraqis control over their own destiny. No outcome of the war can reshape the Gulf or the Middle East.

The idea of instant democratization coming out of the war and spreading throughout the region denies the laws of cause and effect and is ridiculous. So is the idea we know enough about national building to create an Iraqi United States.

The best we can do is minimize our mistakes and the effect of the law of unintended consequences. To do this requires both realism and commitment. If we rely on miracles and good intentions, or act as occupiers rather than partners, we are almost certain to be far more unhappy on the tenth anniversary of the next war as we were on the tenth anniversary of the Gulf War.