

Divide & Leave

A blueprint for building the new Iraq

By John C. Hulsman and William L.T. Schirano

IN THIS SEASON of conflict, the United States once again finds itself rebuilding a failed state, a process that has occurred with disturbing regularity since the end of the Cold War. In spite of the declaration that “major combat operations” have ended, it is clear that the struggle in Iraq will not be over for some time. Since the president triumphantly spoke to the nation onboard the USS Abraham Lincoln, 132 additional American soldiers have lost their lives.

Nearly two weeks ago, 17 people were killed by a car bomb at the Jordanian embassy, and riots broke out around Basra over fuel shortages. This is just an example of another bad week in a series of bad months for the U.S. administrators of the country. The recent bombing of the UN compound in Baghdad, which killed 20 and wounded 100, has awakened much of the world to the reality that the current top-down state building approach is doomed. Whether terror originates from Ansar al Islam, the local branch of al-Qaeda, or disgruntled members of the Ba’ath Party, these murderous groups will continue to flourish until the Iraqi people are made true stakeholders in their future. The writing has been on the wall, and until the U.S. reads it, expect horrific episodes like this to dominate the front pages.

Ambassador L. Paul Bremer said in a recent news conference, “Freedom matters, it is important to remember this ... and remind ourselves of the range of rights that Iraqis enjoy today because of

the coalition’s military victory.” What Bremer fails to recognize is that while the Iraqi people are free, they do not own their newfound freedom.

If we are to salvage this increasingly dire situation, the administration must not succumb to the tired pattern of state building pursued by both the first Bush and the Clinton administrations following the failure of central government in Somalia, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia. In every case, Washington tried to re-impose central control without assessing why there was a collapse of top-down authority. Instead, the Bush administration must pursue a model that recognizes the unique political realities in the country—realities that call for a looser governmental structure.

Rhetoric and Reality

On Feb. 26, 2003, President Bush said,

The United States has no intention of determining the precise form of Iraq’s new government. That choice belongs to the Iraqi people. Yet, we will ensure that one brutal dictator is not replaced by another. All Iraqis must have a voice in the new government, and all citizens must have their rights protected.

The administration should continue to seek an optimal political outcome, but it must allow the Iraqi people to reach their own political decisions. Ignoring this reality risks the classic “imperial trap” that succeeds only in cre-

ating illegitimate winners and vengeful losers. For if the U.S. is seen to impose a political solution on the Iraqis, any subsequent government would be viewed as an American puppet. We would then be faced with two very unpalatable policy options: staying indefinitely to bolster an unpopular government or leaving and watching the imposed regime be replaced by a radical nationalist intent on developing nuclear weapons. Empire or failure: an autocratic approach will yield one or the other.

There are those who argue that Iraq’s U.S.-appointed Governing Council is the first step in this complex evolution. Its recent progress in the creation of a constitutional committee has come to the delight of many in the administration, but it has moved at far too slow a pace in turning over genuine political power to Iraqis. For at the end of the day, it is not the administration that will be living in Iraq. The able servant Mr. Bremer has acknowledged the importance of self-governance, but actions have yet to match rhetoric. Washington’s anointing of 22 men and women as Iraq’s “representatives” in the Governing Council damages the credibility of the process and places the onus on any future government to prove its independence from the United States.

The best hope for sustainability is the immediate pursuit of a decentralized confederal system. With Iraq’s streets still unsafe, unemployment mounting, a black market thriving, and basic services lacking, restoring order—much less a viable self-sustaining government—remains a difficult proposition. But we are obliged to attempt it, and under the circumstances, a decentralized confederal system is the most plausible blueprint for Iraq’s future.

A Workable Model: The Confederal System

Iraq, which the Ottoman Empire divided into three provinces based on the regional primacies of the Kurds, Sunnis, and Shi'ites, was united into a state in the interest of British bureaucratic simplicity. It is not a cohesive nation in the Western sense. The Sunni Arab elite has historically treated the more numerous Shi'ites and Kurds as second-class citizens, enriching themselves at the majority's expense. The challenge is to establish a system that offers the leaders of each group a large degree of local autonomy and a fair share in the country's resources.

To ensure that power is devolved to the lowest possible level and that centralized power is diluted in recognition of the primacy of the regions, the Iraqi people should develop their own version of America's Great Compromise. Struck during the Constitutional Convention of 1787, this agreement called for representation based on both the number of states—the Senate—and overall population—the House of Representatives—so that larger states enjoy political strength and smaller states have an effective check over their more populous neighbors.

THE IRAQI PEOPLE SHOULD DEVELOP THEIR OWN VERSION OF AMERICA'S GREAT COMPROMISE.

Such a solution suits the conditions in Iraq. The legislature should have an upper chamber in which power is evenly distributed among the three regions, with representatives of the chamber parceled out equally by sub-national grouping; the lower chamber's members should be elected based on overall population.

The administration should persuade the leaders of Iraq's Sunni Arabs, Shi'ite Arabs, and Kurds that this confederal system is the best means of assuring local

autonomy, protecting against the return of a tyrannical central government, and assuring them an equitable share in the disbursement of Iraq's oil and tax revenues. Rebuilding the country along decentralized lines would leave fewer opportunities for the central government to finance and undertake a threatening military buildup and menace its neighbors. At the same time, such a system would be cohesive and legitimate enough to guarantee Iraq's territorial integrity. Each of Iraq's major groups wants something different from a post-Saddam political settlement. The good news is that a loose confederation can accommodate their most essential interests.

Benefits for the Kurds

The traditional homeland of the Kurds, who constitute around 20 percent of the total population of Iraq, contains about 15 percent of the country's proven oil reserves. But under Saddam, the Kurds shared proportionately little of Iraq's immense oil wealth. A confederal system would give them a greater share of oil revenues, as well as a constitutional guarantee of regional self-government and a voice in the national government.

Such benefits would prove far more attractive than the temporary, and tenuous, economic gains they had received as the middlemen in the smuggling trade between Baghdad and Turkey.

Using Iraq's 2001 total revenue on oil products of \$21.16 billion, for example, and splitting revenues from an 8 percent overall tax on petroleum products so that 30 percent goes to the national government and 70 percent to the three major ethnic groups, would mean the Kurds

would receive \$462 million, which they could use to reconstruct their ravaged region. The United States must impress upon the Kurdish leaders that this mammoth economic consideration, which suits both their interests and those of the United States, is theirs to gain by advocating a decentralized confederal system.

In return for these monetary benefits, the Bush administration should insist that the Kurds abandon their dreams of an independent Kurdistan. Such a separatist state would destabilize postwar Iraq and could serve as a powerful magnet, polarizing many of Turkey's 10 million Kurds and possibly re-igniting a bloody separatist war in eastern Turkey. Thus, an independent Kurdistan would also undermine America's most important ally in the region.

Benefits for the Sunni Arabs

Iraq's Sunni Arab minority has long dominated the state and controlled its disbursement of oil revenues, even though the predominantly Sunni central region accounts for little of Iraq's oil reserves. As Saddam and much of his power elite come from the region near his home village, Tikrit, which is located in the center of the country, the Sunni Arabs are the most pro-Saddam and the least amenable to a new postwar government.

Nevertheless, the administration should stress the tangible rewards that the Sunnis would receive for agreeing to a new political settlement. First, the United States would help them rebuild Baghdad, where the new government would take up residence. Second, in a loose confederation, with taxation of oil revenue occurring at the national as well as regional levels, the Sunnis will guarantee themselves economic stability, despite their own relative lack of oil reserves. Third, by acquiescing in such a settlement, the Sunnis can hasten the end of the occupation of Iraq.

Benefits for the Shi'ite Arabs

The Shi'ite Arabs probably have the most to gain from this post-Saddam political settlement. Although they account for the majority of the population of Iraq and form the predominant group in the southern oil fields that provide the bulk of Iraq's oil production, the Shi'ites have had almost no say in how Iraq is governed or in the distribution of oil revenues.

Unlike the Kurds who gained considerable autonomy, the Shi'ites continued to suffer under Saddam's repressive rule. Iran's brand of radical Islamic revolution has considerably less appeal for Shi'ites in Iraq, who see the growing political, economic, and social problems that the aging ayatollahs are unwilling or unable to address in Iran. For example, Iraqi Shi'ites spurned the calls of Iran's Shi'ite ayatollahs to rise up against Saddam during the Iran-Iraq war, even when the Iranians appeared to be winning the conflict. Washington has an opportunity to anchor the Shi'ites within a revived post-Saddam Iraq by stressing the political inducements and economic benefits that a decentralized system could bring the south. By embracing a confederal solution for Iraq, the Shi'ites will for the first time gain genuine political representation in Baghdad, receive a large economic boost from the income generated by local taxation of their oil reserves, and enjoy a large degree of local autonomy.

Representation for the Stakeholders

A loose confederal approach based on the Great Compromise model has the advantage of making each of Iraq's major sub-national groups stakeholders in the final constitutional settlement. All three will find themselves with local political autonomy but without the threat of repression from the central government; each region within this confederal system would receive an

equitable distribution of Iraq's immense oil reserves, sufficient to reconstruct its geographical stronghold. And each group will be part of Iraqi national decision-making. This newfound stability will enable Iraq to provide security for its people without threatening its neighbors. But in the end, it will be up to the Iraqis themselves to establish their government. They must take ownership of the constitutional outcomes for their respective polities rather than hide behind the notion of an American or UN *diktat*, as so often happened under the vague nation building policies of the Clinton administration.

In fact, the approach recommended in this article differs dramatically from the cookie-cutter approach that is commonly known as nation building. While

there are many moral and practical flaws to that approach, perhaps its greatest failing is that it ignores the facts on the ground. The world is a diverse place, and local political, economic, ethnic, religious, and cultural conditions can vary so greatly that a simplistic Western-imposed edict that ignores these realities will be doomed to failure. It is imperative the Bush administration remember this as it grapples with the difficult days ahead. ■

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Mission Aborted

The failed Dutch invasion of Poland

By Michael S. Rose

FEW WILL FIND this surprising, but not everyone is applauding Poland's recent admission to the European Union, which will take effect next year. One commentator posed this provocative question on a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) Sunday morning religion program: what will the Dutch do when thousands of Poles, "every one of them more Catholic than the Pope," reach the shores of the promised lowlands looking for work? The question was ironic given that just a few days later the Dutch invaded the shores of Poland. Allow me to explain.

For the first half of this year (and well before) Poland was engaged in a spirited debate about the desirability of joining the European Union. Some conservative Poles, led by the influential Radio Marya, campaigned against EU membership, fearing that Brussels would impose on Poland regulations concerning moral and religious issues, including mandatory liberalization of Poland's abortion restrictions. Though the Euroskeptics were often dismissed as paranoid on this issue, the European parliament did in fact float a resolution last year calling on all member states entering in 2004 fully to legalize abortion.

Poland, at the urging of the Catholic Church in the former Soviet-bloc country, successfully lobbied for a special provision, similar to one granted to Ireland, that safeguards the country's abortion laws against interference from Brussels—at least for the immediate future. But that's not all that's made Poles skep-

tical about assimilating into Europa. There's another proposal now drifting through the European parliament that's making Euroskeptic Poles seasick. This one promises to provide aid via the UN Population Fund to bring free abortions to women of developing nations, the latest form of western imperialism—in short, exporting the culture of death.

Critics from veteran EU countries, for their part, have been busy questioning Poland's "suitability" to join its privileged ranks but not so much on economic grounds. Rather, they were wary of the country's traditional leanings on moral issues. During Poland's Soviet era, abortion was available on demand and, in effect, used as a means of birth control. In 1993, Poland banned abortion, though it allows for certain exceptions such as in cases where the mother's life is endangered or when pregnancy is a result of rape or incest.

Above all, Poland's critics accuse the country—both its government and its culture—of being too much under the influence of traditional Christianity, primarily via the Catholic Church. Consider this telling comment from Clare Murphy of London's BBC: "Here [in Poland], the Catholic Church, which had stood as a symbol of opposition under communism, rose high on a wave of popularity in the early 1990s and managed to push its aggressively anti-abortion, anti-contraception stance onto the mainstream political agenda." Critics like Murphy would much prefer to see the homeland of John Paul II evolve into a liberal, secu-

lar state adrift in a moral morass like, say, the United Kingdom or the Netherlands.

Enter Women on Waves. The Dutch abortion advocacy group operates the world's only floating abortion clinic. Run out of a converted East German tugboat called the *Langenort*, the abortion ship's millennium ministry seeks to spread its doctrine of "free abortions" throughout Europe. According to Dr. Rebecca Gomperts, a former Greenpeace activist who heads the group of seafaring abortion campaigners, Women on Waves performs its missionary function by sailing to countries where abortion is illegal in order to offer "early medical abortions."

This summer, just two weeks after the Polish referendum sent the country sailing Brussels-bound, Women on Waves sent forth the *Langenort* to proselytize the Poles by dropping anchor at the Baltic seaport of Wladyslawowo. Some astute observers commented that sending the abortion ship to the shores of Poland smacked of patronizing neo-colonialism.

The Dutch abortion ship, staffed with a female crew and captain, was designed to circumnavigate Polish law by enticing pregnant mothers to book passage on what Women on Waves calls a "sexual workshop cruise." Even after weeks of intense recruitment by the Dutch liberators, only 11 Polish women answered the call. (Women on Waves claimed that Polish women were just dying to abort their children.) The Polish women were taken 12 miles out to sea into international waters where Dutch law then took