

# Fallujah Redux

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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## A reformed Iraqi constitution focused on pragmatic politics rather than political theory will provide a surer basis for stability.

**W**hen I departed Fallujah, Iraq in October 2007 after a six-month deployment with the U.S. Navy as a tribal and political engagement officer, I left a city that appeared to have turned its back on Islamic radicalism and was focused on peacefully participating in the national life and politics of a post-Saddam Iraq.

All across Al-Anbar province and throughout the Sunni Arab community, the tide of the al-Qaida insurgency had receded as Iraqis rejected the Islamist movement's harsh Sharia rule, raw brutality and false promise of a better future. Together with a city-wide pacification plan implemented by the U.S. Marines, Iraqi police and the Iraqi army, and help from area tribes, I witnessed Fallujah go from roughly 750 security incidents in the month of March to less than 80 in October as the Anbar Awakening surged over western Iraq. As political struggles replaced Fallujah's violence, I saw a rebirth in community life: The city council reasserted itself, the mayor exercised his political authority, and local tribes increasingly worked with the Iraqi government.

Today, as I watch this edifice of order shatter all over Iraq, I wonder, as a veteran, whether it was all worth it. I also wonder why it happened.

However much Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is responsible for the problems of Iraq, his rise and governing style took place within a constitutional system largely imposed on the Iraqis by Coalition Forces. In essence, the Iraqi political system was unable to address its own problems because its structure, form and design facilitated the development of coalitions of conflict rather than a constitutional consensus around Iraq's challenges. In this key respect, the U.S. and Coalition Forces share the most blame.

Constitutional design matters, and the irony is that at the moment the Iraqi constitution was being drafted, the U.S. knew the least about the country it invaded and was most susceptible to political pressure from groups that had been out of power and were least willing to be magnanimous. Subsequently, the constitutional structure's weaknesses

permeate the government's actions and are exacerbated by a zero-sum politics heavily influenced by exile groups seeking to settle scores rather than build a new future. Many of these fault lines were not as readily apparent during the war because the military, political and diplomatic pressure of the U.S. mitigated these problems. When the U.S. finally left Iraq, and it became a normal diplomatic posting, the structural fault lines of the constitutional system broke apart, leading to groups seeking to remove themselves from the system rather than reform it.

Fallujah rejected the al-Qaida insurgency because tribal groups and security forces worked together, and the U.S. played the role of coordinator and facilitator: cajoling where needed, pressuring where required, and being an honest broker -- in essence, performing the role of a government. Other assistance helped this cooperation, but it was the vital role of the U.S. leading from the front that made the Iraqi political system work and eased the continuing transition of Iraqi life from a society damaged by dictatorship to one focused on the future.

As President Obama cites the relatively peaceful political transition of Yemen and suggests it may serve as a model for Iraq, it is useful to know that Yemen had a process in which a deeply divided society discussed its problems as part of a National Dialogue Conference which then led to a process of redrafting Yemen's constitution. However beneficial removing Prime Minister Maliki might be in addressing some aspects of the current crisis in Iraq, a return to examining the fundamentals of Iraq's political system are in order. Radical Islam won't be defeated by military action alone; a reformed Iraqi constitution focused on pragmatic politics rather than political theory will provide a surer basis for stability in the region.

The U.S. must rise to its responsibility and not surrender to cynicism in Iraq, and recognize that the blood expended by U.S. troops on behalf of the U.S. and the Iraqi people requires a serious commitment to Iraq's future.

*Daniel Green is a defense fellow at The Washington Institute and coauthor of the upcoming study Fallujah Redux: The Anbar Awakening and the Struggle with al-Qaeda (U.S. Naval Institute Press).* ❖

*Baltimore Sun*

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