

# Now Who Is Brave Enough to Say 'We Must Finish the Job'?

by [Simon Henderson \(/experts/simon-henderson\)](#)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



### [Simon Henderson \(/experts/simon-henderson\)](#)

Simon Henderson is the Baker fellow and director of the Bernstein Program on Gulf and Energy Policy at The Washington Institute, specializing in energy matters and the conservative Arab states of the Persian Gulf.

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**T**he fiery death of the leader of Iraq's governing council in a car-bomb explosion in Baghdad was a ghastly reminder of the problems facing the country.

It's dangerous. We don't know who is causing the violence. And we don't know much about the political leadership that the US occupation forces, with some British help, is trying to nurture.

The man who died yesterday -- Ezzedine Salim, a Shia Muslim writer from the coastal city of Basra -- represented the Islamic Dawa party in the 25-member governing council. He has been replaced by a Sunni, Ghazi Ajil al-Yawar, from the northern city of Mosul.

Mr. al-Yawar was next in line in the rotation system devised by the US pro-consul, Paul Bremer. If he can survive, Mr. al-Yawar will have six weeks in the job rather than the usual month. He will be there until 30 June when sovereignty is theoretically handed over.

At that time it looks as though the United Nations envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, will prefer a system of technocrats to 'govern' Iraq until elections can be held. Such an arrangement will provide some political cover for George Bush in the run-up to the November presidential election.

But will it work? In many ways the governing council did not work. It devised and signed an interim constitution two months ago but in the chaos of increasing violence, it was frequently powerless.

Its curious structure created one of the few political jokes in Iraq. 'What is the telephone number of the governing council?' Answer: 13 5 5 1 1 (the council's ethnic division, in ratio of the divisions in the population: Arab Shia, Arab Sunni, Kurd, Turkoman, Assyrian).

We in the outside world see Iraq through the lens of a photo-journalist catching a Shia militant posing with a grenade launcher. We don't see much of the rest.

The people of Iraq see or hear some of the violence but rarely see a coalition soldier. Their instinctive nationalism causes them to be suspicious even of their liberators. But what bothers most of them more than anything is a lack of law and order.

The Iraqi police and militia of the civil defence corps performed abysmally in the recent bouts of unrest. They are

largely distrusted by the Americans and considered feckless by ordinary Iraqis.


In the minds of Iraqis a dreadful choice is opening up. They want to put their trust either in their own ethnic militias or in someone who will provide strong government. The Kurds and Shias already have militias. Many Sunnis are armed, even if not formally so. If militias replace the role of the nascent Iraqi police service, civil war looms. The short-hand description of the ethnic divide is Kurds in the north, Sunnis in the middle and Shias in the south. In reality the divisions are far from clear-cut.

While the Kurds prefer quasi-independence and the Shias an Islamic state, the Sunnis would prefer a strongman to emerge, preferably a Sunni.

There are many Sunni Iraqis who would prefer Saddam back. Sitting in his isolation, Saddam, asking to be referred to as Mr. President, believes that too.

Events in Iraq are serious business, not for making minor political points in the US presidential election or in shenanigans about Tony Blair's future in London.

It is too simple to argue 'we should never have gone in' or 'we should pull out now'. This only increases the despair of ordinary, decent Iraqis and detracts from the efforts of those Americans, Britons and others who are trying to get it right. But who is brave enough to say, loudly: 'We must finish the job'?

Simon Henderson, a biographer of Saddam Hussein, is an associate of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.   
Evening Standard (London)

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