

Toward Building a New Iraq:

Reports from Baghdad

Sep 19, 2003



In-Depth Reports

Songul Capuk, Iraqi Governing Council: In the name of God, most compassionate and merciful, I offer my thanks on behalf of the Iraqi Governing Council for the honor and appreciation this conference has shown to us. God willing, we will meet the world's best expectations.

I make this statement on behalf of the Republic of Iraq. Iraq was the cradle of civilization and the seat of Hammurabi's kingdom, which gave humanity its first code of laws. It was home to one of the Seven Wonders of the World, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Fate made Iraq the second-richest country in the world in terms of oil reserves. Fate made Iraq rich in figs, olives, and palm trees; and prosperous with its two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, and with lush plains, majestic mountains, and fresh air.

But Iraq's great people were destined to be victims of their rulers. Fate made Iraq the site of invasions and wars, and the homeland of many civilizations that ruled and then vanished. In the last generation, Iraqis have known grief and sadness at the hands of their reckless rulers with their treason and foolish decisions. Destructive wars and a ruthless dictator ruined the country for more than three decades.

Iraq's children lamented in their cradles and died of hunger and disease. Their fathers died at the hands of a ruthless tyrant. Some fled the country in search of sustenance, only to be lost in the maze of the world. The elders stayed home waiting for their time to pass away, weeping over the destruction of their homeland and the deaths of their loved ones.

Iraqis lost the pleasant taste of freedom and knew only the bitterness of oppression. We suffered until finally the regime collapsed. Then we caught the scent of freedom and saw hope for our future, God willing. We breathed a sigh of relief at the coming democracy, of which we were deprived for long decades in the second half of the twentieth century at the hands of those who called themselves revolutionaries.

Today, in spite of the security problems, unemployment, and looting -- particularly in Baghdad -- Ambassador Paul Bremer and his competent advisors in the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) work day and night to rebuild Iraq, help its citizens, bring happiness to its children, and ease women's weariness.

The coalition formed the Iraqi Governing Council on July 13, 2003, on which I sit as a permanent member. The Governing Council appointed new cabinet ministers, who may be considered the best cabinet in the contemporary history of Iraq. It will pave the way for Iraq to rejoin its fellow Arab countries and its friends in the region and around the world. Together, we will rebuild Iraq and lead it into the future in well thought-out steps.

Friends, we need your help to build a new Iraq, an Iraq of freedom and peace. Extend hands of help to us and do not hold back. We need you. The first thing we need is security and stability. Help us protect our borders from saboteurs and mercenaries. Help us maintain our infrastructure with the strength of our youths and the will of our people.

Help us enjoy freedom, for which we are thirsty. Help us purify our drinking water; help us get rid of contamination

and radioactive waste. Help us provide needful medicine to our children, pregnant women, and elders. Help us provide food, shelter, roads, communications, and books to a people who have gone without for so long.

Know this: we need everything. The wars and destruction of the recent past sent our country back to the Middle Ages.

Peace be upon you.

Wael Abdulatif, Iraqi Governing Council: In the name of God, most compassionate and merciful, I hope that my statement does not conflict with my colleague's statement. You are accustomed to hearing one person speak on behalf of Iraq, and now here are two of us.

It gives me a great pleasure to participate in a conference titled "Between Hope and Challenge," because this title coincides with the situation in Iraq after its liberation from a tyrant dictator who ruled Iraq with an iron fist for forty years. It also gives me pleasure to speak to you from Virginia, the state that gave eight presidents to the United States.

The story of Saddam Husayn is a long one. It started in 1963 when he dedicated himself to seizing control of Iraq. After he solidified control in July 1968, he began to subject the citizens of the country to his own personal ideology. He subjected everything to his tyranny, including the wealth of the country, and committed the most brutal crimes against Iraqis and the international community. He violated human rights and international treaties until he became the tyrant of our time.

The country did not possess an army under Saddam; the army possessed the country. Saddam was the sole leader in control of all legal and constitutional authorities. To complete the image of the total tyrant, Saddam started a nuclear-weapons program. He spent money on weapons. He spent money on wars. He squandered the wealth of Iraq on his family, his followers, and his propaganda machine.

The American people, represented by Congress and President George W. Bush, bravely decided to confront terrorism. Osama bin Laden and Saddam Husayn are two sides of the same coin in this regard. The joy of Iraqis was overwhelming on April 9, 2003, when they celebrated the fall of Saddam as an ideology, a government, and a leader. It was predicted that the people of Iraq would welcome the American and British armies and their allies with flowers. No flowers were left in Iraq to give, yet the emotions were genuine and heartfelt. When an Iraqi woman welcomed an American soldier, she had two feelings. The first was remembrance of the son that was buried in one of the mass graves, or was executed in one of the fields, or was languishing in prison. The other feeling was a sense of justice. She prayed that this American soldier might return to his family safely.

The ambitions of the people of Iraq are great but the challenges they face are greater. Their ambition for freedom and democracy is countered by the challenge of terrorism. Their ambition for progress and prosperity is countered by the challenges of outdated infrastructure, burdensome debts, and Iraq's long isolation during Saddam's rule.

President Bush defined the American strategy for Iraq with three objectives: (1) eradicate terrorism, (2) gather support from other nations for a free Iraq, and (3) help Iraqis assume responsibility for defending themselves and their future. In these objectives, Iraq's ambitions and challenges are raised up before the international community and the people of the free world. Iraq desperately needs international support. It needs the world to stand by it and help it to overcome the difficult economic, social, and psychological problems that the regime of Saddam Husayn created.

Iraq is rich with financial and human resources despite all the wars and oppression. People around the world acknowledge the expertise and the bravery of Iraqis and their commitment to work toward freedom and democracy. The governments and the peoples of the United States, Britain, and other peace- and freedom-loving countries

facilitated these conditions.

Iraq has now begun to make its first strides toward democracy, the rule of law, and economic transformation. Iraq is now moving toward prosperity in the shadow of freedom. We cannot have political democracy without economic democracy. The people of Iraq feel enormous gratitude to the United States for its contribution with the blood of its sons who came thousands of kilometers to liberate Iraq and end its calamity. We are grateful to America for its enormous financial and humanitarian aid in rebuilding Iraq.

Moreover, on this occasion I would like to affirm the determination of Iraqis to confront all the terrorists attempting to destabilize Iraq. They are coming from outside with no connection to the Iraqi people. They are driven by the desire to return to Saddam's regime and its cruelty. But the wheel of time will never turn back. Iraq will go on to live in freedom and to be a friend to all peace- and freedom-loving peoples of the world.

Rend Rahim Francke, Iraq Foundation: I apologize if I cannot match the eloquence of the members of the Governing Council, and I also apologize if I introduce a slight note of discord in my statement.

The cup in Iraq is both half full and half empty. I have been traveling back and forth to the country since April 2003. I returned from my last trip about four weeks ago and can safely say that the cup certainly is half full. There have been many changes for the better. But the cup is also half empty. The situation is not as bad as it has been portrayed, but it is far from being very good.

It has already been mentioned that the Bush administration's goal for Iraq was not just to remove Saddam Husayn but to create a free and democratic Iraq. I recently completed the first in a planned series of reports called the Iraq Democracy Watch, a diagnostic report. In writing the report, I looked at how we are measuring up to President Bush's goal. Are we, in fact, creating a free and democratic Iraq?

In my report, I addressed a number of shortcomings, but before I describe them, I would like to mention some of the good things that have happened, so that I am not branded as totally pessimistic. The best result by far is that Saddam is gone. I can assure you that 99.99 percent of Iraqis are infinitely relieved and grateful to the United States for having gotten rid of him. Iraqis recognize that this could not have happened without the help of America, and they also recognize that the United States is the guarantor of Iraq's security and stability. The press quotes Iraqis as calling for U.S. troops to leave Iraq. Do not believe it. The overwhelming majority of Iraqis want to see the United States stay because they feel that the American presence is the ultimate, indeed the only, guarantee of Iraq's security.

I use something I call the Freedom Index in my report, and this index is very high for Iraq. When I left the country recently, there were more than 167 periodicals -- newspapers, weeklies, and so on -- being published. There are human rights groups. There are nongovernmental organizations. There are demonstrations, for heaven's sake. There are all sorts of visible manifestations of the freedom to express and associate.

Money is beginning to circulate again, and it is beginning to filter down. The reconstruction dollars that American taxpayers have input are beginning to make an impact. People are finding jobs. Hotels are full. Salaries have risen, and a lot of consumer goods can be found in the market. Food is plentiful. People are buying satellite dishes as fast as they can, as well as refrigerators, microwave ovens, and so on. Certainly, the consumer economy is alive and well.

The Governing Council has also been appointed, and it in turn has appointed ministers. This is an important step forward. Previously, Iraq had an executive vacuum. Active local councils have been elected, and they are behaving in a responsible manner. They are carrying out business and they are working closely with the military forces in the provinces.

When you go to Iraq, you feel a dynamism. It is a country where people are on the move, doing things. Someone has

said that Iraq is a "happening place." You do feel a certain type of energy. Some is good, some is bad, but things are percolating.

Set against these positive items, there are many not-so-good observations, many of them having to do with decisions made by the CPA in the way it has conducted the affairs of the country. I want to concentrate on two long-term problems -- political and economic -- that will have an impact on Iraq long after the security situation has been resolved and the electricity has been restored.

The CPA appointed the Governing Council. There were no elections, so the CPA had a great deal of freedom in appointing the council's members. By and large, the CPA took care to make the council representative and to cover the spectrum of the Iraqi social makeup. But the result is that the Governing Council is built on a paradigm of ethnicity and sectarianism. The divisions in the council amount to identity politics. The Governing Council is, in a sense, fragmented into a Sunni bloc, a Shi'i block, and a Kurdish bloc, with representatives from the Turkmen and Christian communities as well.

Some would suggest that I am overstating the situation since Iraq has political parties. Indeed, there is political representation, but issues in the Governing Council have fallen out not on the basis of politics, but on the basis of sect and ethnicity. A quota system has clearly been established for the council. It consists of 50 percent plus one seat for the Shi'is, 20 percent for the Kurds, 20 percent for the Sunnis, plus a certain smaller percentage for the Turkmen and Christian representatives. This quota system has replicated itself in the ministries, whereby the Shi'is have 50 percent plus one; the Sunnis have a certain percentage; the Kurds have a certain percentage; and the other groups have one representative each.

The Governing Council has also appointed a Constitutional Preparatory Committee, that is, a committee that will prepare a process to select or elect a Constituent Assembly. The sectarian/ethnic quota system has been mirrored in the creation of this committee. In fact, I can see this quota system beginning to take effect throughout the executive down into every rank of government, until you get absurd allocations in some of the lowest tiers.

Two results could emerge from this quota system. One is that the interests of Iraq, as a whole, will be lost in the interests of communitarian identity. People tend to represent their parochial interests rather than the interests of the country at large. Another emergent problem is that the Sunni bloc on the Governing Council is perceived to be the country's repository of liberal democratic demands. This does not mean that there are no Shi'is or Kurds on the Governing Council who are liberal democrats, but the bottom line is that the Sunni bloc has become the most outspoken proponent of secular liberal democracy. There are accusations by other political groups that the Sunni bloc has become the exponent of these values for self-serving reasons -- because they want to protect themselves, not because they believe in such values. This is dangerous because, in fact, the Sunnis are not the only liberal democrats in the country.

The second consequence I see is the dangerous prospect of Lebanonizing Iraq's political process. That is, if communitarian interests override national interests, there will be a fragmentation of society in which people owe their primary allegiance to their individual sects rather than to the state. As the concept of citizenship recedes, allegiance to sect or ethnicity grows. Thankfully, this has not yet happened; Iraq is still in the early phases of its political development. But the indicators point in this direction, and it is important to try and redress the trend now. Lebanonization is something many Iraqis have warned against. We in the expatriate community have always said that Iraq's fragmentation into ethnicities and sects was a deliberate policy by Saddam Husayn that needs to be reversed. We need to create an Iraqi identity, a sense of citizenship, an allegiance to the nation that supersedes parochial allegiances.

Unfortunately, the CPA used those divisions as the primary set of guidelines rather than a national or partisan

blueprint. This is not an indictment of the quality of the Governing Council members. But the constitutional process is about to begin in Iraq, and this is the moment to look at the political paradigm that has been created, to see where it will lead us if it carries over into the constitutional process. If such a development does occur, then Iraq will have further fragmentation of the body politic. That road will lead to the same end as in Lebanon: communitarian conflict.

For example, Iraq's most senior Shi'i cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali Husayn al-Sistani, has called for the direct election of the Constituent Assembly. Many see such an election as impractical and time consuming, and they would rather use another approach. The problem with elections now is that they would be based on regional, sectarian, and ethnic interests, and there would be no unifying forces that represent overarching Iraqi interests.

Amid the conflicting and hazardous political currents in Iraq, the two forces that are most able to organize and mobilize are the Islamists, both Shi'i and Sunni, and the neo- Ba'athists. Only those two movements have the infrastructure, the institutions, and the networks that would give them clout in a future political process. The democratic middle, which I believe is the majority, has neither the institutions nor the tools to contribute significantly. This is another emerging danger on the political scene.

The other long-term problem I would like to discuss is the absence of economic de-Ba'athification. There has been a lot of talk about political de-Ba'athification, which means getting those people associated with the old regime out of politics. But there was such a thing as Ba'athist capitalism in Iraq during the Saddam era, and very little attention has been paid to economic de-Ba'athification.

From the mid- to late 1980s, Iraq's economy began a rapid decline. As the war with Iran depleted Iraq's financial resources and Baghdad was forced to borrow more and more from the international community, the regime's policy of guns and butter could not be sustained. By the late 1980s Iraq was essentially bankrupt. This may have been one of the reasons Iraq invaded Kuwait. Then with the imposition of UN sanctions in 1990, Iraq's economy was wiped out. The decline was precipitous and dramatic.

Prior to this decline, there had been a small but burgeoning private sector involved in industry, manufacturing, and trade. Its progress was stopped at certain points by socialism, but private enterprise was basically evolving in Iraq from the 1960s. Iraq's economic decline meant that the private sector was deprived of resources and stripped of its ability to participate in the economy. The ever-shrinking pie was doled out by Saddam to a small number of businessmen and companies who were willing to work with the Ba'ath regime and to take on some of the regime's senior members as partners.

Since the latest war, the companies that flourished under Saddam, that became rich from the sanctions and from the oil-for-food program, were the ones with the economic capacity -- the capital, the equipment, and the expertise -- to bid for and win contracts from the CPA and its contractors. The CPA, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and contractors like Bechtel Corporation have used an extremely opaque system of informing Iraqis about the availability of local contracts. The companies that worked with the Ba'ath Party are masters at working the system. They have weaseled their way in in such a manner that they are the only ones that have been able to get the contracts.

We will have a process of economic privatization in Iraq. When privatization occurs, these same companies will be the only ones with the funds and the capital to buy newly privatized enterprises. The continuing dominance of Ba'athist businessmen is contrary to the economic democratization that Governor Abdulatif mentioned, and it goes hand-in-hand with the dangers inherent in the absence of political democratization.

Patrick Clawson, The Washington Institute: I traveled 700 miles in Iraq last week, and the poverty I saw in Basra was an extraordinary contrast to the situation in Baghdad. Much of that destruction and poverty was the consequence not of the recent conflict, but of Saddam Husayn's longstanding policies. In Baghdad I saw many new palaces. I saw

the construction cranes for Saddam's magnificent homes. Yet in Basra, I saw the neglected state of the water and sewage systems. The only two bridges across the Shatt al-Arab River were both destroyed more than thirteen years ago, and neither of them had ever been rebuilt. Saddam did not care about the south.

You might get the impression from newspapers that Iraq is everywhere torn by violence. But I came across exactly five checkpoints, all of them manned by Iraqis. That was fewer checkpoints than I came across in Kuwait, on my way to the border. There is a lot of concern about crime in Baghdad. But in no place outside of Baghdad did I see any guards in the streets or any protection barriers placed, except those immediately in front of Governor Abdulatif's office. And the worst violence I witnessed was an overturned truck that had spilled watermelons across the road.

I saw a lively political debate in Iraq. When I returned, I was concerned that perhaps this was just my anecdotal experience, so I was pleased to see that John Zogby had conducted a poll, finding that 60 percent of Iraqis oppose a religious government. That percentage was even higher among the Shi'i community. When Zogby asked Iraqis if they thought the United States would help or hurt Iraq over the next five years, he found that one-third said it would help; one-half said it would hurt; and the rest did not know. Now, these results might not sound very positive unless you remember the polls Zogby and others have conducted in neighboring countries. They found that these populations -- including American allies like Turks, Jordanians, Kuwaitis, and Saudi Arabians -- held even less positive opinions of the United States. Based on these results we can conclude that the most pro-American citizens in that area are the Iraqis.

I would like to ask our Iraqi guests what role they believe the United States will play in the medium term, over the next two or three years, in Iraq, and what role they believe it will play in the long term, over the next seven to ten years.

Abdulatif: The United States has already taken major steps to help Iraq in the medium term. However, Ms. Francke did not mention some important things in her report. The CPA has begun paying salaries to employees. The new salaries are twice to ten times more than what a teacher, retiree, or soldier was formerly paid. There have also been major achievements in the rehabilitation of police, courts, and various state agencies. And considerable amounts of money were spent on those efforts. Iraqis have started to feel economic improvement. In addition, we have a committee working to pave the way for foreign investment.

All that Iraqis want now is to transfer the responsibility for security from the coalition back to Iraqis. We have a saying in Iraq, "The people of Mecca are more knowledgeable of its alleys." We know where the suspects live. We know what they do, how they plan. We know how to arrest them because we know them. We have lived with them and they have lived with us. The problem is in making the qualitative transition in the security realm so that we can move toward reconstruction. After the first steps toward security are taken, a great leap will follow.

In my analysis, Saddam's loyalists, in cooperation with terrorists from al-Qaeda and other such groups, want to prevent the coalition from taking the next steps in the transfer of authority. Why? For them, moving to the next step will signal the end of terrorism, with Iraq living under democracy and a revived economy.

In the area of democracy, the constitutional committee will finish its work by the end of this month, but not on a sectarian basis. Not all matters are handled on the basis of sectarian considerations. I am a Shi'i judge and I nominated a Sunni judge for membership on the constitutional committee. Dr. Adnan Pachachi, who is Sunni, nominated a Shi'i judge to the committee. Samir Shakir Mahmoud al-Sumaidy is a Sunni member of the Governing Council, and he nominated a Shi'i judge to the committee. Yes, we belong to different faiths and sects. Nevertheless, we are not limited by those narrow considerations.

Capuk: I would like to add to what Judge Abdulatif said regarding the Governing Council. The council was established on the basis of Iraq being made up of several ethnic and sectarian groups. Saddam Husayn prevented

these nationalities and sects from exercising their rights as peoples. The council has rectified that wrong. It is true that there are specific percentages of Shi'is, Sunnis, Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmens represented on the council. However, we do not say that these are the only groups among the Iraqi people. Indeed, many Iraqi sects are not represented. We promised them that in the future, when there is a permanent government, they would have a voice and would not be prevented from exercising their rights.

As far as the coalition forces are concerned, they are doing a good job. They are helping Iraqis. We have no army, and we badly need security and stability now because our police were corrupt. We need to build a strong, new Iraq. We cannot do that alone. We need help, and the coalition forces are helping both the Governing Council and the Iraqi people.

The current phase is a difficult one. We have already taken several steps forward. However, we have yet to take the most important steps; that is, to form a constitution, carry out a census, and hold an election. The people of Iraq will determine the type of government Iraq will have.

Clawson: I cannot resist commenting on the delicious irony that one of the few governments in the world that still has communists in power is Iraq, where an American has appointed a communist as the minister of culture.

Dennis Ross, The Washington Institute: Rend, you did a very good job of diagnosing the problem, but you did not offer much in terms of a remedy. How can Iraq deal with the political and economic problems you identified?

Francke: We have to change the way we look at politics in Iraq, and this is one of the reasons I would hate to see the constitutional process or elections rushed. Iraq still needs time to build political, as opposed to ethnic or sectarian, institutions. As for economic de-Ba'athification, it is obvious that a very small class of people and companies who benefited enormously under Saddam are still benefiting. There should be legal mechanisms to identify them and at least curtail their monopolies.

Ross: Governor Abdulatif, you said that it is important to turn security responsibilities over to Iraqis. But at this point Iraq does not have an army and it does not have police. You need our help right now. How quickly will you be able to develop the capabilities to deal successfully with terror on your own?

Abdulatif: After April 9, 2003, the CPA began the rehabilitation process for the Iraqi police, border patrol, customs agents, the Shatt al-Arab protection forces in Basra, and Iraq's many local police forces, which are in charge of criminal investigations. The work was moving forward in the southern governorates, which were run, to a certain degree, by the British forces, as were the central governorates. The north has been stable since 1991 due to the presence of a Kurdish government.

The problem in Iraq is now twofold. First, the security situation cannot be resolved until we are able to rely on the Iraqi police. A civil defense corps was recently established to support the police. We also began training the new Iraqi army. I believe that we will soon see the completion of this building process.

The second problem is a difficult one. Some of the security formations will need more financial resources. According to early estimates, Iraq's total budget does not exceed \$13 billion. This is not even sufficient to cover the cost of repairing the water system. Fixing that system will cost \$18 billion. Repairing the power grid will cost another \$16 billion. Without support from donor countries, Iraq will not make any progress toward taking responsibility for its own security.

Roger Hertog, The Washington Institute: I have three questions for Governor Abdulatif and Ms. Capuk as individuals, not necessarily speaking for the Governing Council. First, do you believe Israel has the right to exist? Second, will Iraq establish diplomatic relations with Israel? Third, for generations, there was a small but vibrant Jewish minority in Iraq. If they chose to return, would they be welcomed back?

Abdulatif: As an individual, I do not believe in the elimination of Israel. Iraq's diplomatic relations are a matter for the Governing Council, not for me individually. Through the citizenship law, we allowed those who lost their citizenship in 1950 to obtain Iraqi citizenship. We now have Jews living in Basra.

Ralph Begleiter, University of Delaware: I also have a question for the two members of the Governing Council. Almost daily, the American press shows scenes of anti-American demonstrations and activities taking place in Iraq. Does this concern you? If so, what steps can the Governing Council and other Iraqis take to rectify the situation?

Capuk: The impression of the current chaos and the idea that Iraqis are anti-American is exaggerated. The media focuses on the terrorists to prove that Iraqis do not want the Americans here. This contradicts what we ourselves see in Iraq. We live there. The people of Iraq love the American soldiers because they liberated the people from Saddam Husayn. The chaos that you see now will end. It is the result of our open borders. Those who come in and kill coalition soldiers are not Iraqis. Once the borders are under control, the chaos will end.

Abdulatif: Most of the demonstrations that have taken place in Iraq have been peaceful ones. The demonstrators have made basic demands. In fact, they are not demands; they are rights every citizen should have. Iraqis are demonstrating for electricity, water, sewage services, gasoline, and cooking fuel in their households. Do citizens have the right to demonstrate or not? We live in an era of democracy now.

Some peaceful demonstrations have been exploited by Saddam loyalists. At one demonstration, for example, armed persons began shouting slogans, calling for a return to the past. We identified those elements. Then an agreement restricting demonstrations was reached among religious elements, political parties, clerics, and tribal leaders.

Demonstrations continue to take place. They are expressions of popular demand. Iraq's problems are many and are certainly in need of solutions. The current circumstances require an acceleration of decisionmaking. But no single, quick decision can rectify the problems developed over the course of forty years. The demonstrators' demands are largely financial in nature. They originate from the Military Industrialization Agency, the dissolved army, the dissolved National Council, the dissolved executive agencies, and the intelligence and security apparatus. They say, "We want salaries. We want wages. We want to support our families."

The Shi'i religious authorities in Najaf, the Kurds, the other religious and political parties -- not one of them calls for violence against coalition forces. The perpetrators of these acts are definitely Saddam loyalists. And, because of the border situation, they have been joined by al-Qaeda elements and other extremists that have found a safe haven in Iraq. These elements do not belong to the Iraqi people.

Clawson: Is there a need for more coalition troops in Iraq? There are discussions at the United Nations about a new Security Council resolution placing a UN flag over the coalition forces. How much difference would a UN flag make to the security situation?

Also, would the proposal to replace large numbers of U.S. troops in Iraq with forces from other countries have a positive impact on security?

Abdulatif: Saddam Husayn ruled Iraq with seventeen different security forces. After April 9, none of these authorities remained. All the authorities that previously existed under Saddam, such as the army, intelligence agencies, police forces, border patrols, and customs, were dissolved on that date. The only authorities left were the coalition forces. But they were military forces, not police.

How, then, is it possible to restore Iraqi security as it was before? Iraq needs international help. It has no army, and no Iraqi police force is ready to function independently. The rebuilding of the various police forces -- traffic police, criminal investigators, border patrol, and so on -- is in progress.

Given this situation, no wise person would ask the coalition forces to leave. I have not heard such a viewpoint from

anyone in Iraq. Not from the Shi'i religious authorities in Najaf. Not from Sunnis. Not from the Kurds. Not from Arabs. On the contrary, the presence of the coalition is welcome until the transition to democracy is complete. We welcome international forces. As a judge who deals with security matters, I believe that Iraq will need no more than three months to acquire the stability that is needed to begin the great process of reconstruction.

Capuk: The presence of other forces led by the United States would help us greatly. The school year is about to begin and we need security in order to send our children to school. People need to go to work. Iraqi women also need security. So keep us in your thoughts, friends of Iraq. Iraq will transcend its difficulties with your help. We welcome friendly nations that will participate in maintaining the security and stability of Iraq.

Robert Satloff, The Washington Institute: Are things in Iraq on the right track? Do Iraqis think that tomorrow will be better than today? If you could recommend one change in the way the CPA is governing, what would it be?

Abdulatif: Yes, Iraq is on the right track. The formation of the Constitutional Preparatory Committee is an expression of that success. That committee visited Iraq's various governorates and met with tribal leaders, clerics, and technocrats. The goal was to hear what they each want in the constitution. The constitution will not represent one individual, class, or sect. It will represent 26 million Iraqis. This is a right that all Iraqis have.

Capuk: I would like the CPA to create job opportunities quickly. Iraq has widespread unemployment. Creating jobs would give many families the chance to make a living. We need to have our workers working instead of sitting idle. The Governing Council established a committee toward this objective and we are in continuous discussion about it with the coalition.

We took the first step by employing 300,000 workers to clean up the debris and destruction all over Iraq. We have also employed the largest possible number in the new ministries and agencies. We are trying to reinstate Iraqi officials to their civil-service jobs in order to benefit from their expertise, as long as they were not associated with Saddam Husayn's regime. In this regard, we have a committee for uprooting the Ba'ath called the National De-Ba'athification Agency. It will root out Saddam supporters who have remained in various governmental departments. We are trying to get them out of the new Iraqi government so that, God willing, we can have a truly democratic Iraq.

Satloff: Governor Abdulatif, you come from one of the largest Shi'i cities in the world. Could you tell us whether there is a legitimate fear of creating another Iran in Iraq? This fear animates a lot of the discussion in America about what we are doing there.

Abdulatif: There is no such idea that Iraq will become a country like Iran. Despite the presence of a Shi'i majority in Iraq, I have never heard this issue raised by a Shi'i. The Iraqi people have a clear opinion concerning democratic institutions that, I believe, will be subject to referendum. But there is also a view that the constitutional council must be elected. This is the opinion of the Shi'i religious authorities in Najaf in general and of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in particular. Kurds and Sunnis also share this opinion.

Each one of us claims to represent this percentage or that percentage of the people. The only way to make a decisive determination is to carry out a general census to discover the number of Shi'is and the number of Sunnis. Most of Iraq's official records have been damaged or destroyed. The Governing Council has formed a committee to carry out a census in cooperation with the United Nations and international experts.

We will not be transformed into another Lebanon. In 1,400 years of Iraqi history, the Shi'is never made it into government. Shi'is have lived peacefully with their Sunni brothers. But the time has come for Sunnis to say, "Let us come together to build a new system of government on a proportional basis. You have this percentage of the population, so you will have this many representatives in government; we have this percentage, so we will have this many representatives."

Alan Makovsky, House Committee on International Relations: Are Turkish troops, or troops from other Arab countries, welcome in Iraq as peacekeepers?

Abdulatif: The preponderant opinion in Iraq is that we do not want forces from Iran, Kuwait, Turkey, Syria, Jordan, or Saudi Arabia. Iraqis will welcome forces other than those of neighboring countries.

Capuk: We will welcome the forces that are there to help all Iraqis. Regarding the neighboring countries, whether Arab or Turkish, if they want what Iraqis want, if they want to help Iraqis maintain security, then a UN Security Council resolution authorizing the entry of such forces would be accepted, God willing.

Francke: Iraqis are very sensitive about troops from regional countries. Another problem is that the Polish military controls certain areas in central Iraq, and under the Poles are troops from several other countries, such as Mongolia and Fiji. These troops have never trained together. They have no common language. None of them speak Arabic. They do not have common rules of engagement or a common military doctrine. I wonder how the Poles can forge a unified force out of the troops under their command.

I do not see how UN-mandated troops would be any different. If we were talking about NATO troops, it would be a different matter. But we are talking about a hodgepodge of troops who have nothing in common. The answer, as Governor Abdulatif said, is to strengthen the capacity of the Iraqi security forces. The only thing I want out of the UN is money, election monitors, and so forth.

Makovsky: Rend, earlier you offered a provocative analysis. But I want to clarify one point. You said that there is currently very little Iraqi national identity, that it needs time to incubate and develop. Are you saying that there is an Iraqi identity that has been stifled by the way the Governing Council was set up, an identity that yearns to breathe free? If so, could you suggest an alternative way the Governing Council might have been established?

Francke: The sad thing is that Iraqi national identity is alive and well. The question of identity politics, whether sectarian, ethnic, or even regional, is something that political organizations and politicians use as an easy platform to send a simple message that the masses can rally around. I have met many Iraqis who are dead set against this type of factionalism. But a combination of the CPA, political forces, and prominent voices are making it a reality.

A lot of people are intimidated in Iraq. They are afraid to speak up. That worries me. People are afraid to say, "I do not want to be chosen on the basis of being a Shi'i or a Sunni. I want to be chosen on the basis of what I believe." At present, they do not have that option. There is a level of intimidation. It is very subtle, but people are being required to toe the line, and that is dangerous.

Hayet Laouani, Tunisian National Federation of Transport: Are you considering granting any kind of amnesty to members of the former regime, as in South Africa?

Capuk: The fifty-five persons "wanted" by the coalition represented a very small number relative to all of Saddam's supporters. We, as a Governing Council, will not make determinations on punishment. The people of Iraq will decide what to do with them.

At the same time, there are people who belonged to the Ba'ath party simply in order to make a living. We are trying to find a way to distinguish those who harmed the Iraqi people from the ones who did not. ❖

RECOMMENDED

BRIEF ANALYSIS

Unpacking the UAE F-35 Negotiations

Feb 15, 2022



Grant Rumley

(/policy-analysis/unpacking-uae-f-35-negotiations)



ARTICLES & TESTIMONY

How to Make Russia Pay in Ukraine: Study Syria

Feb 15, 2022



Anna Borshchevskaya

(/policy-analysis/how-make-russia-pay-ukraine-study-syria)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Bennett's Bahrain Visit Further Invigorates Israel-Gulf Diplomacy

Feb 14, 2022



Simon Henderson

(/policy-analysis/bennetts-bahrain-visit-further-invigorates-israel-gulf-diplomacy)

TOPICS

Terrorism (/policy-analysis/terrorism)

U.S. Policy (/policy-analysis/us-policy)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

Iraq (/policy-analysis/iraq)