

Postwar Iraq: Strategic Challenges

By

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An Introduction to the Problem

Since the day of Ba'athist regime's fall in 2003, the US led grand alliance has been fighting a potential kind of violence. This violence may be termed as a religious war, hidden war, civil war, or a proxy war allegedly substantiated by Tehran, the situation inside Iraq remains to be a challenge. The abstruse postwar Iraq, as I personally like to call it, is a strategic challenge for the whole world of today. In fact, it is the unscrupulous Iraq surge that has distanced Muslims from the West, especially from the United States of America. The peace and integrity of the world as a global civilization is, although partially, linked to the solidarity, integrity and peace of Iraq. This challenge is by no means a monolithic threat, but a multifaceted problem having diametrically opposite spheres of orientation. There is no doubt, however, that the centrality of all problems necessarily belongs to the same nature of affairs. Besides peace, financial stability, for instance, is another hot issue relating postwar Iraq's stabilization as an independent democratic state. Iraq has been under a long dictatorial regime, therefore, only a nominal civil society exists in Iraq even today with no clear-cut agenda. Infrastructure is, too, lacking as the war has ruined almost everything. Moreover, the empowerment of democratic and civil institutions would be another daunting task.

In fact, the above listed problems are only a few major dimensions where work is desperately needed. There is a plethora of minor problems that automatically emerged as a byproduct of the war. However, the good news about all such problems is that when once the major problems are gotten over, the minor ones will no longer exist on their own.

We have three hot issues to discuss in the present instance. Indubitably, all of the three are intertwined topics also having independent existence. Let us have a look at them below:

1. Postwar Reconstruction in Iraq
2. Economic Crisis
3. US Grand Forces Exit Strategy

The reconstruction of Iraq is one of the major needs-cum-demands of the Iraqis. And of course, the coalition, especially the US, is under a moral obligation to undertake the mega project of reconstruction. Intense US-Iraq war succeeded by a domestic violence has rendered Iraq as a ruinous country, and it is why the present Iraq is deficient in the ability to stand by the world to keep pace with development. Of course, Iraqis' inability to hold their own has a direct linkage with the economic crisis which actually emerged in Iraq half decade prior to the moment the world sustained its initial effect. Lastly, the strategy of coalition forces' exit from Iraq needs a critical examination to see if it is feasible as described. Let us now consider these issues one by one.

Postwar Reconstruction in Iraq

The act of reconstruction in Iraq embarks on with the building of infrastructure in the war-torn country. Historically speaking, once, the Iraqi society came almost to a halt during and immediately after the war with no vistas of hope. They were, in fact, ensnared between hope and fear regarding their own existence on the very land of their own. The Iraqis, however, courageously responded to the call of the hour and forged a way to a bright future through the extant consternation and chaos. Critically, US only added to the problems of the Iraqis instead of fixing them. Since we have to deal in the current thesis only with the present destruction and reconstruction in Iraq, we will not pay a visit to the past problems of the Iraqis inflicted by the superpower in 90s.

Coalition air force started a massive campaign of bombing Iraq on March 20, 2003. Although, the US and British aircrafts never wholeheartedly respected Iraq's sovereign borders even before war and violated several hundred times her independence creating no-fly-zones inside Iraq, the 20 March bombing had a different effect being an aftermath of the declaration of formal war. This first carpeted bombardment came about against the backdrop of the announcement of an all-out war participated by all three i.e. land, aerial and naval forces. Destruction was, thus, anticipatable. Hence, it is interesting to note that the plan of Iraq's reconstruction was conceived and formulated sometimes before

the outbreak of war in Iraq.¹ The assignee of the reconstruction task was the US Agency for Internal Development (USAID), whereas the project was to be carried out under the surveillance of Defense Department.

USAID has been working for the reconstruction of Iraq in conjunction with UN, World Bank, IMF, Coalition Partners, and international and local NGOs. There are four major ends to be achieved by the USAID in regard to the reconstruction of war-torn Iraq.

- a. Restoration of Essential Infrastructure
- b. Supporting Essential Health and Education
- c. Expanding Economic Opportunity
- d. Improving Efficiency and Accountability of Government²

Although it has been claimed by certain US resources that the influx of refugees spilling over into the neighboring Kuwait, Jordan and Syria did not transpire, for no ‘acute humanitarian crisis’ materialized as speculated before, the ground facts remained somewhat different. Although no ‘acute humanitarian crisis’ rose, a humanitarian crisis of considerable intensity did emerge to invite international community’s attention. Indeed the situation darkened due to extensive military campaign and resulted into humanitarian crisis due to mass movement of population and rising humanitarian needs. The situation of Iraqis during the war period invariably resembled Jewish Diaspora, though Iraqis were quickly able to return their homes.

From May 2003 to June 2004, Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) under Paul Bremer was the UN-recognized body responsible for governing, directing, and mediating the state of affairs in Iraq. The work of reconstruction, therefore, continued under the direction of CPA until it transferred the power to an interim sovereign Iraqi government on 28 June, 2004. CPA was then officially dissolved and, thus, the transitional period of Iraq began. According to Global Security’s official website, “Under Iraq’s transitional law, the transitional period included the completion of a draft constitution in October 2005 and two subsequent elections—a referendum on the constitution and an election for a permanent government.”³

¹ http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq_recon_intro.htm

² http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq_recon_intro.htm

³ http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq_recon_intro.htm

After the dissolution of CPA, Department of State is directly responsible for all reconstruction activities in Iraq. Iraq Reconstruction and Management Office (IRMO) represents State Department in Iraq. IRMO has been assigned the duty to plan and prioritize the logistic requirements for reconstruction in addition to coordinate with military and monitor spending. This representative body is further assisted in its activities of reconstruction by the American Army Corps of Engineers.

A major phase in the reconstruction of Iraq was the creation of an 18 member Constitutional Drafting Committee to formulate an interim constitution for the country. This constitution consists of 64 articles, which enshrine freedom of speech, economic and religious freedom, and allows civilians to control military. It was this constitution that served as the baseline for a future constitution as well as a timeline for January 2005 elections.

An interesting step in the appendage of Iraq's reconstruction was the inclusion of women in the government machinery—from a town council to the national parliament. She was first time ever assigned the duty to actively participate in the reconstruction and development of her country. As expected, it was viewed as a milestone in Iraq's history. Wilson Center's Conflict Prevention Project and Middle East Program has thoroughly focused on the employment of Iraqi woman and her progressive role during the period of Iraq's reconstruction.⁴ The world welcomed such rapid change in the definition of Iraqi woman's role from a homebound woman to a competing sociable lady.

Economic Crisis and Its Influences on Iraq

The economy of Iraq heavily suffered due to the war waged on the Iraqis. As I have already stated, the economy in Iraq sank in crisis almost half a decade ahead of the time when rest of the world witnessed economic recession. Immediately after the war, for instance, the Iraqi Dinar witnessed the worst plummeting of its history. The exchange rate between a US\$ and ID was 1 = 1950; thus, so grave was the crisis of the economy of a country in the possession of rich oil resources. The second Iraq war (i.e. 2003) does not, however, wholly account for the decline of Iraqi economy. The UN sanctions after Gulf War and almost a whole lost decade are some other intriguing factors at work in the suffering of Iraq's national economy, which thence boiled down to the doom of *per capita* economy.

⁴ http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=news.item&news_id=62480

The worst form of Iraqis' suffering struck them during recent international economic crisis. Since US is actively managing and monitoring Iraq's affairs, and since the employees were paid in the US\$, the plummeting of Dollar seriously struck the Iraqis. Iraq's national economy although gained strength from the rise in ID's value, *per capita* economy grievously suffered. For instance, those getting paid in US\$ were initially able to secure a good much of Iraqi Dinars when converting the currency at the rate of 1 = 1950; however, the situation in recent years changed and the rate came as low as 1 = 1400. This situation shows that the Iraqis, although apparently getting the same amount from the government, had lesser amount in their own currency, whereas due to the global economic crisis they had to pay twice as much amount for their daily necessities.

On the other hand, it was observed by the world that the economic recession began in the United States of America.⁵ It was indeed the worst recession of last hundred years after the "Great Recession" of 1930s. Although the situation of economic crisis began to develop in 2007, it abruptly trammled the world in 2008. The crash of the US stock markets and default of internationally reputed banks shrank the US economy plaguing directly the economies linked with US\$ in trade and indirectly to the non-US\$-based economies, especially those of Europe. Critically evaluating, the storm of economic crisis rose from the house mortgage in the US. In addition to the house mortgage, as almost everything in the US is mortgaged, automobiles and other expensive facilities of life i.e. luxuries also contributed in the recession. Those banks that were previously earning huge profits in mortgages were rendered defaulters when they were unable to recover even the originally invested/loaned amount. The property that was mortgaged lost its value going down the real price of an item mortgaged. Thus, the banks had a real disadvantage in the situation when the lenders let the mortgaged properties go to auctions in banks' custody and enjoyed a more beneficial transaction. The mass indifference of US public to pay the loan and no care for the mortgage doomed the world economy. Indubitably, Iraq being a US colony came under a direct influence of this loss. Thus, Iraq sustained the double loss, i.e. destruction of war and a subsequent economic crisis. Moreover, the expanses of Iraq War were met by the US government, which did not have in it a good deal of things for the Iraqi population. Although US was ready to pay for the war, there was no real

⁵ It must be born in mind that 'recession' is a state exactly opposite to 'inflation'. The modern crisis can in no way be termed as 'economic inflation', for the money did not unscrupulously abound but shrank.

compensation for the Iraqis suffered. Hence, it was necessary for the Iraqis to face the situation courageously.

The economy of Iraq, nevertheless, soon afterwards began to stabilize as it was seen in the imminent period that Iraqi Dinar began to gain value against US\$. Economy seems to gain the very momentum in recent times that is peculiar to an oil-rich emirate's economy. The unemployment level has radically gone down and people not only have better jobs today, but a much improved *per capita* economy. Today's Iraqi society is open for competition to everyone, for the basis of it has been redefined by the US as a more 'equitable' capitalism. Of course, such an economic liberty could not be witnessed in Saddam regime. His was an authoritarian rule, which did not and could not assure any fundamental rights to any of his citizens. Even the very citizenship of an Iraqi was exposed to several dangers under Saddam Hussein. Economy was a mix up of capitalism and socialism. Hostility with neighboring Islamic countries, especially with Iran, was another eminent feature of Iraq's foreign policy, which did not pay homage to Iraq's sacred past. Moreover, the volatile nature of Saddam regime had nothing really to ensure either to his own masses or to international community. However, in spite of this plethora of evils, we cannot legitimize Iraq War in the civilized world of today.

Insofar as the evidence goes, the present situation is very encouraging—especially when the Iraqi economy is in question. Unemployment has reasonably been overcome; industry restituted; small businesses grown, to name a few developments. We can on good grounds hope that Iraq will continue to flourish in the coming phase of her history.

US Grand Forces Exit Strategy

Multi National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) is the epithet employed for the multinational alliance led by the US in fighting insurrectionists after the main Iraq War. The US media, however, employs a different phrase namely, 'US-led Coalition', to describe the same force. MNF-I replaced the central fighting force Combined Joint Task Force 7, the veterans of the war.⁶ NATO Training Mission and United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq are other independent military entities that are primarily concerned with military training and humanitarian services. The embattling forces were hugely reinforced during the 2007 Iraq War Troop Surge.

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multinational_force_in_Iraq

The MNF objectives were expressed by the then Secretary of State Colin Powell in his letter to UN Security Council.

“The MNF under unified command is prepared to continue to contribute to the maintenance of security in Iraq, including by preventing and deterring terrorism and protecting the territory of Iraq. The goal of the MNF will be to help Iraqi people to complete the political transition and will permit the United Nations and the international community to work to facilitate Iraq’s reconstruction.”⁷

A total of 40 nations from different continents mustered their forces under the US-led coalition for Iraq invasion. The number of troops mounted to 290,000 on the occasion of invasion. However, 37 nations have withdrawn their troops during the four year span from 2003 to 2007, while only three nations, USA, Romania and Australia, are currently maintaining their presence in Iraq. United Kingdom was the last to withdraw her troops from Iraq.

An official statement was issued by the British Defense Ministry on the eve of the withdrawal of troops from Iraq, saying: “The role of British ground forces is finished. Today’s Iraq is a success story.”⁸ Although not true *in toto*, the statement does contain positive signs for the future of Iraq setting a path for the withdrawal of US ground troops. Gordon Brown also appreciated British ground forces’ role in Iraq declaring it an “unforgettable legacy”. In a like fashion, US President Barack Obama’s Camp Victory announcement in Baghdad also gives an inside view of the Obama Administration’s mindset concerning Iraq issue. Obama’s 7 April announcement is viewed by the international think tank circles as a roadmap to the Middle East’s future and a strategy for the US ground forces’ exit from Iraq. The timetable shows that, apart from the US military trainers, the last ground forces personnel will leave Iraqi soil before 1st January, 2011. This will certainly lead to a brighter future of Iraq.

There is no doubt that, unlike former US President George Bush, Obama has taken a very clear stance. The issue of Iraq seems in the preference list of Obama that he quickly wants to finish up. There is no delay of ground forces on the part of Obama, nor does he plan to defer his agenda. The victory has already been achieved; reconstruction has been completed; transition of power is almost done; therefore, no more efforts are required on the part of the US to

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multinational_force_in_Iraq

⁸ <http://www.newser.com/tag/25085/1/iraq-exit-strategy.html>

farther Iraqi issues. Obama's roadmap is, thus, a good hit in a good time. Since his candidacy was based on the same slogan he is trying to materialize, Obama will be the happiest man on earth if he succeeds in his plan of withdrawing US troops from Iraq. Obama has reiterated his strategy for the exit of troops from Iraq, which displays his determination on the issue despite severe opposition and criticism. This very determination will make him into a hero of Iraqis as well as many Americans. Further, the US should also take care of the matter that no peace forces under the banner of UNO be deployed in Iraq, for there would be no practical use of it. Iraqis need their own army with their own Arabic speaking personnel. Thus, a quick training program should be meted out and Iraq's own army be established on strong infrastructure. In addition to a strong army, an effective command and control structure will be the second incumbent requirement of the country to avoid any future *coup d'état*. If all these issues are addressed, this will indeed make the exit of the US forces into a successful completion of the mission.