

# Middle East in Transition

## LESSON 2: THE PERSIAN GULF WAR AND ITS CONTINUING AFTERMATH

As discussed in *The Middle East in Transition*, throughout the 1990s, Iraqi relations with the UN and the United States were difficult, with recurrent crises. Then, soon after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, Iraq became a focus in the U.S.-led “war on terrorism.” This update focuses on events since the beginning of the second war in Iraq.

### THE SECOND WAR IN IRAQ

On March 20, 2003, the United States led a “coalition of the willing” in a war to overthrow Saddam Hussein. The United States stated that Saddam’s pursuit of WMD and alleged connections with al Qaeda constituted an imminent threat to the U.S. and global security (see the update for Lesson 1, “U.S. Interests in the Middle East,” for more on this issue). The coalition, comprised mainly of U.S. and British forces, moved through the country with lightning speed. British forces quickly controlled the southern port of Basra; U.S. forces raced on to Baghdad. In less than a month, allied forces had captured Tikrit, the last stronghold of Saddam’s regime. By mid-April, the United States had installed an administration in Baghdad, later named the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). The CPA was to oversee the transition to an interim Iraqi government.

The job of restoring stability to Iraq has been much more difficult than defeating Saddam’s army. In the immediate aftermath of the overthrow, rioting was widespread. The U.S. forces were unprepared to serve as policemen. They watched as looters ransacked government buildings, businesses, utility companies, warehouses, hospitals, and even museums. For many Iraqis, awe at the ease with which the U.S. defeated Iraq’s military quickly turned to anger over its inability to provide security or restore order.

### REBUILDING IRAQ

The CPA had to maintain a delicate balancing act. It wanted to transfer power and authority to Iraqis as quickly as possible. At the same time, it wanted to maintain security and set the groundwork for democracy and economic development.

**Politics.** In July 2003, the CPA, under the leadership of U.S. Administrator Paul Bremmer, appointed a twenty-five-member Iraqi Governing Council (IGC). Bremmer argued that appointing the IGC was the best way to bring Iraqis into government leadership positions as soon as possible. Importantly, the CPA took care to make sure the IGC reflected the country’s different groups. It included thirteen Shias, five Sunnis, five Kurds, one Assyrian Christian, and one Turkmen. Nine of those appointed to the IGC were Iraqis who had been living outside the country. Several of these emigrant Iraqis had advised the Bush administration before the U.S. invasion.

Originally, the IGC was established simply as an advisory council. However, over time it acquired some power. Still, the IGC was undermined by the competing ideas the country’s different groups had about what a democratic Iraq should look like. Key questions surrounded

the amount of regional autonomy, the role of religion in state affairs, control over oil resources, and how the constitutional process should move forward.

In early 2004, after difficult political negotiations and increasing attacks against American troops, the CPA and IGC drafted an interim constitution. This interim constitution was called the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL). In addition to containing a bill of rights, the TAL created a road map for Iraq's transition to democracy. But the TAL had several controversial provisions. It also did not resolve any of the key questions facing the country.

On June 28, 2004, sovereignty was formally transferred from the CPA to an interim Iraqi government led by Prime Minister Iyad Allawi. Having been appointed by the UN and the United States, rather than elected, this interim government had to convince Iraqis that it was not simply a puppet of the United States. In August, a National Council Conference of about 1,000 delegates was held to select a 100-member interim parliament. This parliament was chosen to help hold the interim government accountable for its actions. Even though the process was criticized for not being entirely democratic, it allowed the country's various groups to use the political process rather than violence to voice their grievances.

The interim government's main task was to prepare the country for national elections. These elections would determine the makeup of the transitional government. This transitional government would in turn be charged with drafting a permanent constitution. The permanent constitution would pave the way for national elections and a permanent government.

The first phase of the plan was completed on January 30, 2005, when elections were held for a transitional National Assembly, provincial councils, and a Kurdish regional assembly. Turnout was high in Shia and Kurdish areas. It was low in Sunni areas because of insurgent activity and opposition to the process. As a result, the Shiites and Kurds were the main winners, and Sunnis were significantly underrepresented in the transitional government.

After much debate, the Shiites and Kurds came to an agreement in which Shiite leader Ibrahim al-Jaafari became prime minister. The transitional government was not fully installed until mid-May 2005, leaving it only three months to write a constitution before the August 15 deadline set out in the TAL. Even more, the constitutional process was slowed by efforts to increase Sunni involvement. While they were not well represented in the national assembly, their support was seen as necessary to complete a legitimate constitution.

At the end of August 2005, nearly two weeks after the deadline, the government completed a draft constitution. This draft was endorsed by Shiite and Kurdish negotiators, but not by Sunni representatives. However, days before the referendum was held on October 15, a compromise was reached. This compromise allowed for amendments to the constitution to be offered within the first four months of the new parliament. It won the approval of some Sunni factions. The country's new constitution was approved in the referendum, mostly through support from Shiites and Kurds.

Elections for a full-term parliament then took place on December 15, 2005. There was little violence on election day. Participation was high for all of Iraq's different groups. Iraq's Shiite

parties won the most seats, but other groups won enough seats to counter Shiite power. For several months after the election, the country faced a sharp increase in violence, as talks on forming the new government stagnated. Then, in April 2006, Jawad al-Maliki was named Iraqi prime minister.

The Maliki government has faced tremendous challenges as it has tried to bring stability to the troubled country. These challenges include: slowing the country's unrelenting and multifaceted violence (which many have termed a civil war); holding together a diverse coalition government; finding a path to reconciliation with Sunni insurgent forces and former members of Saddam's Baath Party; reining in the country's Shiite militias, some of whom have infiltrated Iraqi police and security forces; rebuilding Iraqi police and security forces; working with an unpopular American occupation; engaging Iraq's neighbors, such as Iran, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, some of whom have been accused of meddling in Iraqi affairs and helping to foster the violence; adopting a plan which distributes the country's oil wealth among its key factions; curbing widespread corruption and bringing legitimacy to Iraq's nascent political institutions; and improving public services and prospects for economic development.

**Economics.** When the CPA and Iraqi Governing Council took power in mid-2003, they inherited an economy that was severely damaged by war, a decade of international sanctions, and years of mismanagement by Saddam Hussein. In the four-plus years since Saddam's overthrow, there have been both progress and setbacks in the critical task of Iraqi reconstruction.

Between 2003 and 2006, the U.S. Congress authorized over \$34 billion to rebuild Iraq. Other countries have pledged over \$14 billion. As of August 2006, \$15.5 billion of the U.S. assistance had been spent, while only \$3.5 billion of the assistance promised by other international donors had been distributed.<sup>1</sup> Iraqi leaders complain that the failure of international donors to provide promised funds in a timely manner is hurting the reconstruction process.

The high level of insecurity found in many parts of the country has also slowed the rebuilding process. This was initially made clear in the August 2003 bombings of the UN's Baghdad headquarters. These bombings caused the UN and many nongovernmental organizations to pull out of Iraq. The Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR) estimates that between January 2004 and March 2006, the country lost more than \$16 billion in export revenues, in large part due to sabotage of the oil infrastructure.<sup>2</sup> Widespread violence, rampant crime, and a weak legal system greatly discourage both local economic development and foreign investment. Another challenge is that the need to respond to this lack of security is estimated to cost a significant portion of the funds earmarked for reconstruction.

Still, progress has been made. Roads, schools, health clinics, railways, ports, oil fields, and sewage, irrigation, and communications systems have been built or rebuilt. While up to half the workforce remains unemployed,<sup>3</sup> those who can find work, especially those in the civil service sector, earn more than their prewar wages.<sup>4</sup> Water and electricity supplies, while still erratic, are approaching prewar levels.<sup>5</sup>

The task of rebuilding Iraq's infrastructure is monumental. Reconstruction costs through 2007 are estimated to be at least \$55 billion.<sup>6</sup> While progress has been made, it will be a long time before reconstruction is complete. Most of the financial burden falls on the United States.

**Security.** The success of reconstruction efforts in Iraq will depend on the ability to reestablish security. Indeed, the United States and its allies have achieved some successes on the security front. This success is particularly true in their attempts to stamp out the remnants of Saddam Hussein's regime. Saddam himself was captured in December 2003, and was put on trial for crimes against humanity. He was convicted, and hanged on December 30, 2006.

Steps have also been taken to rebuild Iraq's security forces. By April 2007, nearly 330,000 Iraqis had been trained.<sup>7</sup> However, many are incapable of fighting on their own. Other problems have included attacks on Iraqi security forces, and the infiltration of the security forces by insurgents. Nevertheless, the police and army continue to attract recruits. This recruitment is in part because many Iraqis want to defend their country. It is also because the security forces earn good pay.

Despite their achievements, the United States, Iraqis, and coalition allies still struggle to restore order. They have had to contend with widespread attacks, fighting among rival Iraqi factions, acts of sabotage, rampant crime, and clashes between coalition forces and Iraqi citizens who have become disillusioned with the occupation. A significant increase in factional fighting throughout 2006 and into 2007 led many to believe the country had entered a civil war. By the spring of 2007, between 50,000 and 500,000 Iraqis had lost their lives.<sup>8</sup> Over 3,300 American troops had been killed.<sup>9</sup> The United States had spent almost \$400 billion on the second Iraq war.<sup>10</sup>

The organization and composition of the Iraqi insurgency is unclear. Some are Sunni nationalists, who fear a Shiite-led government. Sunni nationalists include former members of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party. Upon taking power, the CPA stripped thousands of former Baath Party members of their jobs and worked to block them from participating in reconstruction efforts. The CPA also disbanded the Iraqi military. These steps are thought to have undermined reconciliation and provided recruitment for Sunni nationalist insurgents.

In addition, Shiite radicals, such as Moqtada al-Sadr, have variously fought and spoken out against the occupation. Al-Sadr's militia battled with coalition forces in 2004; he later joined the political process, and then pulled his ministers out of the government in April 2007. There has also been popular discontent with coalition military actions, such as the accidental killing of civilians, humiliating searches and detentions, and criminal activity, such as the prisoner abuse scandal at Abu Graibe prison and several murder charges. This discontent has helped generate resistance among ordinary Iraqis who were not previously against the occupation.

In addition to the Iraqi opposition, the occupation of Iraq has drawn radical Islamists from across the world to the country. These militants seek to carry out a war against the West and its Middle Eastern allies. Importantly, many Iraqi insurgents, particularly those tied to Saddam's regime, used to view Islamist militants as adversaries. However, the two groups have found some common cause in trying to disrupt coalition efforts, though the extent to which they collaborate is unclear. Indeed, in 2007 a growing rift emerged between the two sides, tied to al Qaeda's

efforts to unite insurgent groups fighting the U.S. occupation, and Sunni insurgents' anger at the brutal tactics used by al Qaeda. It is estimated that up to 3,500 of the roughly 25,000 insurgents in Iraq are foreign fighters.<sup>11</sup>

Because of the declining security situation in Iraq, and in the face of the growing unpopularity of the war in the United States, in 2007 President Bush unveiled a new strategy to send more than 20,000 additional U.S. troops to Iraq. The primary goal of the new strategy is to establish security, especially in Baghdad. The administration hopes that by providing security in the capital, the troop surge will give the country the "breathing space" needed to bring down the violence, strengthen Iraqi security forces, and make political and economic progress.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Curt Tarnoff, "Iraq: Recent Developments in Reconstruction Assistance," Congressional Research Service Report for Congress (Library of Congress: August 29, 2006), [http://digital.library.unt.edu/govdocs/crs//data/2006/upl-meta-crs-9546/RL31833\\_2006Aug29.pdf](http://digital.library.unt.edu/govdocs/crs//data/2006/upl-meta-crs-9546/RL31833_2006Aug29.pdf) (accessed April 4, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, "Unclassified Summary of SIGIR's Review of Efforts to Increase Iraq's Capability to Protect Its Energy Infrastructure," Report SIGIR-06-038, September 27, 2006, <http://www.sigir.mil/reports/pdf/audits/06-038.pdf> (accessed April 4, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Michael E. O'Hanlon and Jason H. Campbell, "Iraq Index," The Brookings Institution, April 26, 2007, <http://www.brookings.edu/fp/saban/iraq/index.pdf> (accessed April 30, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Sabrina Tarvermise, "Amid Iraqi Chaos, Schools Fill After Long Decline," *New York Times*, June 26, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Michael E. O'Hanlon and Jason H. Campbell, "Iraq Index," op cit.

<sup>6</sup> Curt Tarnoff, "Iraq: Recent Developments in Reconstruction Assistance," op cit.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Iraq Weekly Status Report," March 28, 2007, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/82522.pdf> (accessed April 4, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Online Newshour, "President Bush Seeks Patience as Iraq War Enters Fifth Year," Transcript, March 19, 2007, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle\\_east/jan-june07/iraqwar\\_03-19.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/middle_east/jan-june07/iraqwar_03-19.html) (accessed April 30, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Michael E. O'Hanlon and Jason H. Campbell, "Iraq Index," op cit.

<sup>10</sup> Amy Belasco, "The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11," Congressional Research Service Report for Congress (Library of Congress: March 14, 2007), <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/82502.pdf> (accessed April 30, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth Katzman, "Iraq: Post-Saddam Governance and Security," Congressional Research Service Report for Congress (Library of Congress: March 27, 2007), <http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/82467.pdf> (accessed April 4, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> George W. Bush, "President's Address to the Nation," Transcript, January 10, 2007, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/01/print/20070110-7.html> (accessed April 30, 2007).