



Agitate

Volume 1 Number 1 June 2007

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US MILITARY CANNOT STABILIZE IRAQ

The US war in Iraq has now lasted longer than American involvement in World War II. Whereas no one would argue that the removal of Saddam Hussein is a bad thing, the question arises, "what do we do now?" Should the US military remain in Iraq in the hopes of fulfilling some nebulous mission of establishing a democracy in the Middle East? Or should our soldiers be withdrawn, allowing Iraqis themselves to decide their fate. And if the US should withdraw militarily, should we also withdraw from our responsibilities to a society that we have destroyed for our own foreign policy initiatives.

The elimination of the tyranny of Saddam Hussein has created a range of other problems. Notably, it has created a power vacuum, which the dominant cultures in Iraq are vying to fill. The predictable, and predicted, result is a civil war between competing factions, with the US military caught in the crossfire. According to the Washington Post last year "by any definition, Iraq is in a state of civil war." Is there a military solution to this civil war?

The answer is no. American military intervention is a major cause of the social instability that defines Iraq today. This is not the fault of the military, as the function of any military institution is to win wars. Effective militaries do this by destroying infrastructure and eliminating power structures; in other words, the function of the military is to **create** social instability. In this regard the American military is extraordinarily successful.

The sociological effects of razed infrastructure are exemplified in Iraq. According to the Council of Foreign Relations, the Human Development Index in Iraq, the established measure of the health of a society, has decreased dramatically. Higher infant mortality, lower life expectancy and limited access to resources such as water and power are defining features of Iraqi society today due to lack of infrastructure as well as continued violence, social upheaval and corporate exploitation. (Meacher, *The London Times*, 8/12/05; handsoffiraqoil.org) Even development of Iraq's vaunted oil resources has stalled due to lack of infrastructure.

The human scale of the war in Iraq is nothing short of catastrophic. According to the Brookings Institute over 76,000 Iraqis, mostly civilians, have been killed. Research conducted by Johns Hopkins University as far back as 2004 estimates as many as 600,000 deaths (Though these results are controversial). Amnesty International reports as many as 1.8 million refugees in Iraq and as many as 2 million Iraqis who've emigrated. Among the émigrés are the former professional classes who could be instrumental in re-establishing stability to Iraq. According to Doctors Without Borders, there is a profound shortage of doctors in Iraq at a time when the need for medical professionals is critical.

So what can maintaining a military presence in Iraq accomplish? There are some functions of the military that can be of benefit. Military institutions are adept at moving large amounts of resources and personnel. The military is also capable of building a certain amount of temporary infrastructure that can become the basis of more permanent resources. A military entity may also be necessary to provide protection for those involved in the rebuilding process.

However, the military itself is inadequate for the task of rebuilding a society. A military presence can only incite animosity as a form of resistance to perceived oppression. An armed force in a foreign country represents and encourages violence. And the very existence of a nation's military tends to perpetuate the pursuit of military solutions over more peaceful options. Other institutions, Iraqi as well as international, governmental as well as private, must be involved in the process.

Iraq is in need of hospitals, schools, waste disposal, water treatment, roads, bridges and power, as well as other necessities. To organize this massive rebuilding effort Iraq needs a legitimate central authority; and it is in this arena that a military presence is most detrimental. With the cultural divisions present in Iraq, legitimacy is problematic. Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds fear that they will not be adequately represented, especially if any two groups create a coalition that may disenfranchise the third. Each group also has a desire to perpetuate its own self interests. (cfr.org) The ensuing civil war perpetuates instability.

The American military cannot satisfy the requirement of establishing a legitimate central authority. A military entity must first serve the interests of its nation of origin, therefore, the legitimacy of any government established in the midst of a military occupation is, understandably, suspect. In all nations the citizens must accept the legitimacy of their government. They must be convinced that their government represents their interests, not the interests of a foreign power. However, almost 60% of Iraqis believe that the United States controls what happens in Iraq. (ABC Survey 2007)

This further disenfranchises Iraqis by decreasing their sense of investment in their own society. Many in Iraq perceive that the US military is there to protect American business interests. Contracts to rebuild Iraq go to private American corporations whose primary goal is profit. These contracts are not necessarily awarded based on competence, but rather loyalty to the Bush Administration according to the Washington Post (9/17/06) and the New York Times. (4/29/07) Often, American subcontractors hire—and exploit—foreign labor for their projects instead of using Iraqis. (Chicago Tribune 10/9/05; New York Times 5/7/04) American business practices contribute to declining

Durkheim and Social Stability

Sociologist Emile Durkheim described the consequences of rapid social change when individuals are left without a sense of belonging, or social cohesion within their society. The term he used was *anomie*, or a state of normlessness. In such a condition, individuals are unable to adapt to their own social environments. Such is the condition of post-war Iraq. Individuals experiencing anomie may act outside the normal boundaries of social expectation by turning to drugs, militancy and even suicide. (In fairness, a lack of social change can also create a state of anomie. Such lack of social change can be the result of tyrannical oppression). Durkheim performed an extensive study on suicide to demonstrate that those who are less integrated in their society (or those who are unreasonable integrated) are more likely to commit suicide. I was unable to find adequate suicide statistics among Iraqis, though, interestingly, according to MSNBC.com the suicide rate among American troops had increased in 2005. What is required to alleviate a state of anomie? According to Talcott Parsons, a legitimate governing authority must be established that can organize the society's institutions and create a state of *homeostasis*, or a state in which institutions can fulfill their functions in the face of social change. Such institutions must find ways for individuals to achieve the desired goals of the society through legitimate means. A governing authority that has been established by a foreign power may lack such legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens.



wages and labor disputes. (Foreign Policy in Focus July 2008) This reinforces the idea that Iraq is no longer for Iraqis, but rather for foreign investors.

An American military presence can also serve as a locus of resistance. If there's one unifying factor among Iraqis from all different quarters it is a disdain for the American military presence. This locus of resistance may translate into resistance to the established government. This is especially true when the government drafts laws that benefit the interests of the occupying power. Recently, the Iraqi government drafted a law that opened vast oil resources to Coalition privateers, a move that is clearly not in Iraq's best interests. (handsoffiraqoil.org) Here the military has the appearance of a foreign enforcer, not a source of beneficence. A growing number of Iraqis are opposed to a US military presence in Iraq and over 50% believe that violence against US forces is acceptable. (ABC Survey 2007)

Stability in Iraq must come, first and foremost, by the Iraqi people. International intervention must come through diplomacy, without the perception of military coercion. With investment from many institutions the Iraqi people can develop a culturally pluralistic society in which all major groups share proportionate and balanced representation at the national level. Cooperation among the varied cultural groups in Iraq must be cultivated if Iraq is to remain a single political unit, as 58% of Iraqis surveyed still preferred—Down from 70% in 2005. (ABC Survey 2007)

This process will not be easy. Ameliorating the animosities between these factions will require considerable diplomatic skill. The Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds must come to realize their mutual interests. It must be worth while for them to surrender some power, or the desire for power, in the interest of peace and stability. Peace and stability must be seen as beneficial to all involved. The diplomatic resolve required is nothing short of epic, but it is the responsibility of the United States, Coalition forces, and any other just society, to mitigate the damage done from a decade of sanctions and four years of military occupation.

A military presence, however, is not suited to the task. A military presence fosters animosity, resistance and retaliatory violence, and discourages cooperation. It is a technology of power and control, not of construction and democracy. An occupational force causes the diversion of resources necessary for reconstruction to continued destructive clashes between competing forces. If a stable democracy in Iraq really is the goal of the Bush Administration, a goal supported by 74% of Iraqis (BBC National Survey of Iraq 2005), then other, more constructive, institutions must be mobilized toward that end.

Of course, democracy is not the goal. It can't be the goal. What is elaborated in this small newsletter is not some new and profound insight. It is sound social theory that is well understood by experts working for the Administration. That a military course of action is being pursued rather than sensible civilian and diplomatic alternatives indicates a more malignant design.

This Just In!
The Office of the Surgeon General of the US Army Medical Command has released a report regarding the mistreatment of Iraqi noncombatants by US troops. As reported by Winslow Wheeler (www.alternet.org) the report indicates that only a minority of soldiers believe that noncombatants should be treated with dignity and respect. About 28% of soldiers have admitted to cursing at or insulting Iraqi citizens, about 10% reported damaging and destroying property when it was not necessary, and between 4% and 7% reported hitting and kicking innocent Iraqi non-combatants when it was not necessary. The study indicates a causal relationship between the mental health of a soldier and their probably of unethical and abusive behavior. Soldiers experiencing anxiety, depression or acute stress were twice as likely to engage in such behavior. What causes this anxiety, depression and stress? According to the report, such mental states can be traced to extended deployments, high combat involvement and lack of down-time and time with families. The Bush Administration's new Surge policy, developed after this study was completed, exacerbates the very conditions that lead to mental health problems among soldiers. Bush proposes extending deployments, reducing time spent with family and increasing the probability of high combat involvement. This can only lead to increased abuse of Iraqi civilians and, consequently, the potential for increased resistance to an American presence. Policy should be guided by science and reason. This policy is not just irrational, but immoral.

Take Action!

Contact your legislators: www.congress.org

Get Involved

www.unitedforpeace.org

www.amnesty.org

www.paxchristiusa.org

www.vaiw.org: Veterans Against the Iraq War

www.ivaw.net: Iraq Veterans Against the War

And many, many others. A quick google check will uncover scores of organizations that could use your help for bringing the soldiers home.

