



## “Iraq”— Exit from a Quagmire

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*“In this regard and with my heart filled with sadness, I have to say that it is my belief that there is no Iraqi people inside Iraq. There are only diverse groups with no national sentiments.”*

— Faisal I, first King of Iraq, 1932

### Background

IT IS NO SURPRISE that the regional conference on Iraq held in Egypt last week failed to stop the bloodshed. No one can find a “solution” for Iraq without starting at the beginning of the story. Sadly, the beginning of the story is that there really never was a nation called “Iraq.” It never existed. It still doesn’t exist. It is not likely ever to exist.

Some years ago, purportedly on Winston Churchill’s instructions, a British map maker drew a few lines on a piece of paper and conjured up the illusion of “Iraq” as a convenient way of administering a Middle East region potentially rich in oil. With unrestrained brutality, Saddam Hussein kept that illusion alive by subjugating three very different groups of people, the Sunni, the Shi’a, and the Kurds. No national glue held those three captured peoples together. Now that Hussein’s iron hand is gone, buried anger from centuries of ethnic and religious conflicts and rivalries has erupted. These internal conflicts have been inflamed by a host of external factors, including intervention by the American armed forces (and to a lesser extent the British), incursions by Muslim fundamentalists from other parts of the Middle East, Saudi financing, and Iranian meddling. The civil war that erupted from all of those interactions rages on with a vengeance.

As time went by, the Bush Administration offered an ever-changing series of justifications for invading “Iraq.” It is beyond the scope of this paper to decide whether those reasons were legitimate, or, as the international

community now has overwhelmingly concluded, illegitimate. All political groups within the U.S., the vast majority of people in "Iraq," and the vast majority of people around the globe have concluded that the U.S. bears a tremendous responsibility for what has happened in "Iraq." All sides believe that the U.S. has been hitting a hornet's nest with a stick and doesn't know how to stop.

Almost 4,000 U.S. soldiers have died and more than 15,000 have been wounded or maimed. These numbers do not include mercenary contractors. At least 100,000 Iraqis have died, and the UN thinks the true Iraqi death total is closer to 350,000. New life has been breathed into Al Qaeda, and an entirely new generation of Muslim youth has been radicalized. The physical infrastructure of "Iraq" has been destroyed and there is no hope of its repair in less than a decade or two. "Iraq" has gone from being an exporter to an importer of oil and it pumps less oil today than when the war began. Medical and civil society support systems in Syria and other neighboring countries are being overrun by millions of refugees. Iran has been handed control of the largest, most oil-rich portion of "Iraq" — without firing a single bullet — after fighting an eight-year war with Hussein to a draw for a fraction of the territory it now controls. And the most far-reaching consequence of all is that the balance of power among Sunni and Shi'a countries in the Middle East has been dramatically altered for the first time in centuries (see Vali Nasr's *The Shia Revival* for an excellent review of the massive implications of this for instability in the Middle East).

There is no question that a full-blown civil war is now raging and that the U.S. is going to leave "Iraq," whether it likes it or not. It appears that Americans are going to force an end to the war to stop the loss of life and the unending drain on the U.S. treasury. If this drain continues, it could seriously impair the world financial markets. Americans must ask how they can extricate themselves given their moral responsibility to the people in "Iraq," the Middle East, and the entire industrial world that runs on oil. What can the U.S. do in the course of getting out that limits further harm from the U.S. invasion and occupation?

## **An Important History Lesson**

We often look to both the living and the dead for help in solving great moral dilemmas. In 1947, Mahatma Gandhi struggled with the seemingly intractable divide between Hindus and Muslims living in the recently freed state of India. As India's Founding Father, he did everything he could to keep his nation together. As he demonstrated numerous times and in numerous ways, he was willing to personally die for that cause. He hunger-fasted to the point of death in his attempt to reconcile Hindus and Muslims. Eventually, he realized that there was no way to keep the two civil war factions forcibly locked in the same national system and that there would be far less bloodshed if he gave up that dream. To achieve the greater good, he allowed Pakistan and India to be partitioned. It was, he eventually concluded, the only practical alternative. Like Gandhi in his time, we must recognize that, today, partition is the only practical alternative for "Iraq."

## **Who Is Gone, Who Is Left**

Whoever the “moderate” Iraqis were, they seem to be in scarce supply today. Those who are in “Iraq” today have been radicalized. Yet it is these very same people whom we must try to help create a stable society that will reject further radicalism and repel a resurgent Taliban movement.

Most of the upper classes and the well-educated have long since fled “Iraq.” Those who remain are the poorest and the least educated. More ominously, those who remain are, increasingly, the religious fundamentalists. The very poor have no option but to risk their lives and struggle with the daily random violence, deplorable living conditions, and chaotic breakdown of civil society. A recent poll showed that 77% of Iraqis preferred Saddam’s rule to the current situation. As the U.S. extricates itself, it has a moral obligation to do its best to protect this civilian population from further death and destruction. Protecting that population is also a practical necessity if we want to increase the chance of regional stability in the coming decades. The “right” thing to do is also the wisest thing to do even as the U.S. prepares to pull its military out of “Iraq.”

## **An Outcome: Facilitating Relocation and “Homeland Security” For Three New Nations**

We propose that the U.S. convene a regional peace conference and immediately declare that it favors creating a new nation for each of the three major population groups. The borders should be based upon the three groups’ present geographical distribution. “Iraq” should be partitioned into a Shi’a nation in the midsection down to the southern section; a Sunni nation from the midsection up to the north as far as the Kurdish homeland, and west to the edge of the present “Iraq” border; and a Kurdish nation with borders tracing the informal borders of the Iraqi Kurdistan that already exists and already operates much like a separate country. All U.S. troops should be used to enforce the integrity of these borders — a far simpler and more achievable task for the troops than attempting to continue their occupation of the entire country.

Within these new borders, there will be pockets of Shi’a within Sunni neighborhoods and pockets of Sunni within Shi’a neighborhoods. The U.S. should encourage the relocation of the minority population in each neighborhood by purchasing the houses of Sunnis in Shi’a neighborhoods who agree to move to a Sunni neighborhood, and the houses of Shi’a in Sunni neighborhoods who agree to move to a Shi’a neighborhood. This will leave each of these two warring factions with their own “homeland” to secure and preserve. The house payments will enable those who relocate to purchase new dwellings of comparable value in the homeland of their respective religious factions. The houses left empty in the two homelands will provide the housing authorities there with housing stock for families whose homes were destroyed earlier in the war who need a place to live in their respective homelands.

## A Timetable

The U.S. should declare at the peace conference that it will pull its military forces out of "Iraq" within 180 days from the start of the conference, leaving each homeland in charge of its own internal security and border defense. This 180-day period would be broken into Phase I and II, each lasting 90 days.

During Phase I, the U.S. should make the payments for home relocation with no strings attached. Phase I is designed to provide enough time for the existing inhabitants of the most violent mixed neighborhoods to elect to move to a safe homeland that would be composed of their principal religious faction. During this first phase, the U.S. would station troops on the borders of the three new homelands to ensure that no invaders or "outsiders" cross into them. The U.S. military would essentially provide border security services — a far simpler task than its current mission, and undoubtedly less costly in terms of human life.

During Phase I, the U.S. would work with the military and police forces of the three homelands to prepare them to assume joint responsibility for border security and true internal security for their respective homelands. The separation of the various factions will greatly reduce if not eliminate the ability of any faction's death squads to attack another faction.

Phase II begins at the end of Phase I with each homeland's military and police forces joining the U.S. military on its borders. During Phase II, each homeland would assume 100% responsibility for its internal security, and the homelands would jointly man their borders from their respective sides in conjunction with U.S. troops on both sides of each border. This would teach each homeland how to maintain border security after the U.S. military departs. In all cases, the border troops of each homeland would serve alongside U.S. troops who would be stationed on both sides of each border to guarantee border security and protect each border from a rampage by any side. Maintaining this border security is far less dangerous for the Americans, and far less expensive, than attempting to maintain control over Baghdad and other major cities. This is the way a timetable can be set without creating more chaos in an already chaotic situation. As such, it is what American politicians are looking for and a plan that the military can execute without unnecessary losses of military or civilian lives.

After the end of Phase II, the U.S. would leave and each homeland would be responsible for defending itself as every country in the Middle East currently does irrespective of whether it is Sunni or Shi'a. It should be assumed that Iran would continue to try to run the Shi'a homeland and, along with other Shi'a nations, would assist that new nation financially and militarily. It should also be assumed that the Saudis and other Sunni nations would continue to arm and financially support the Sunni homeland. The Kurds appear to be strong enough by themselves to provide for their own defense after the 180-day period has run, and would be supported by their oil wealth together with U.S. and UN reconstruction aid.

Following the last withdrawal of U.S. forces, the U.S. should supply adequate aid and development funds to assist with the reconstruction of the three homelands. The U.S. should also attempt to bring the United Nations, the

European Union, the World Bank, and International Monetary Fund into the funding cycle so that reconstruction and development of the homelands can be accomplished with all deliberate speed. This would bring greater stability to those unfortunate people whose lives have been so badly disrupted, while simultaneously bringing greater volumes of crude oil to world markets and reducing tensions in the Middle East. Reconstruction and development funds should be allocated to the homelands that sustained the greatest damage from the invasion and occupation provided: (a) the recipient homeland continues to conduct itself as a non-threatening party with respect to the other homelands and other border states, and (b) refrains from offering sanctuary to any militant, fundamentalist training camps. These funds will add to the stability of the homelands while they rebuild their civil societies.

There is no reason to require the three homelands to be part of one federated state. There is no hope of success from the loose federation proposed by others such as Peter Galbraith, Leslie Gelb, and Ralph Peters who recognize, as Galbraith succinctly put it, that "Iraq is not salvageable as a unitary state." An imposed, weak federated state would be likely to collapse, creating even more obstacles to peace. A federation is not necessary to achieve the legitimate goals of U.S. policy for the Middle East, so it should not be a precondition for moving forward. It is clearly impossible to achieve on any lasting basis. As we often say in the Academy, we must avoid letting the "perfect" solution be the enemy of the "good" solution. Partition without federation could be achieved in 180 days. It would create a platform which virtually all U.S. politicians could support, and would begin the process of stabilizing the Middle East. It would also provide a formula for ending a crisis that is radicalizing more Muslim fundamentalists each day that we continue on the present course. An attempt to create a federal state will only prolong the agony of "Iraq" and further add fuel to an already destabilized Middle East.

As noted above, Gandhi's solution for India and Pakistan is the model for "Iraq." It is not what anyone wanted when this entire misadventure began, but it is the most humane and wisest solution given where we are.

## **A Thought about Sunni Oil**

Commentators who have objected to the partition of "Iraq" often raise the issue that a Sunni homeland would not have access to the oil that the Shi'a homeland would possess. This is true. It is also a red herring. No one guaranteed that there would be oil in any other country in the world, so why should the Sunni homeland be an exception? Furthermore, the Sunni homeland will be well supported by Sunni states who will want to maintain a regional balance of power with the Shi'a homeland. The Sunni states of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Dubai, and the United Arab Emirates all have ample oil and oil revenues that they can share if they like. The world should let the Sunnis themselves decide how Sunni oil revenues should be divided among themselves.

External Sunni support will not be the Sunni homeland's only resource. The Sunni homeland will also have refineries. The Shi'a neighbors, and perhaps the Kurds as well, may want their oil refined there. More importantly, the split between Shi'a and Sunni began approximately 1,400 years ago on the death



of the Prophet Mohammed. During the following centuries, they learned to live in adjoining countries with a balance of power that they knew how to modulate and regulate. Their recent fierce bloodletting is the result of members of one sect feeling doomed to be governed and dominated by the other sect in a homeland they want for themselves. We can see this in modern day "Iraq" where the violence is greatest in mixed neighborhoods in which a sect is trying to "cleanse" the area of the opposite sect. Hence the need to create separate, independently maintained homelands if the war is to end. On a countrywide basis, those areas where the population is overwhelmingly dominated by a particular sect now experience far less sectarian bloodshed.

Under this partition plan, Sunnis, Shi'a, and Kurds will decide for themselves how best to govern their homelands. The U.S. will extricate itself while preserving the possibility of more stability in the future and less sectarian slaughter in the present.

*"Good fences make good neighbors."*  
- Robert Frost

## **Homelands versus Fenced Neighborhoods**

One current "strategy" for reducing violence in Baghdad is to create compounds by building "fences" or, more accurately, concrete barriers around selected neighborhoods. This strategy is doomed to failure. This is partly because the sectarian group outside the barrier need only watch individuals or vehicles leave the compound and then ambush them later in some other unprotected part of town. The new compounds are merely walled-off neighborhoods which fall far short of the complete systems for economic and social independence that homelands would create. Within the walls of the compounds, residents will be protected from violence and marauding bands of death squads, but the compounds will fail in their essential objective of bringing city-wide peace to Baghdad. The walled-off neighborhoods show how "fences" can be used to separate the warring factions, but this is not enough. The U.S. must go "all the way" with partition to enable the people living behind the fences to form a self-governing economic, social, and political system within their homeland.

The U.S. is capable of exiting "Iraq" with honor if it acknowledges the quagmire that it has stumbled into, accepts responsibility for separating and restoring order among the warring factions, and adopts the foregoing plan for partition. This first step on the road to Middle East peace will bring a positive, time-certain end to hostilities. It will also begin the process of repairing Americans' tattered reputation around the world. The whole world sees that the U.S. is trapped in "Iraq" with no idea of how to get out — and the world also sees that the U.S. will be leaving sooner rather than later. Adopting this partition plan would begin the process of extricating American forces according to a timeline that the entire U.S. population can support. Once completed, it also would begin the healing process in the Middle East. It would free the U.S. to concentrate on the resurgent Taliban forces in Afghanistan, and to fully engage in the Middle East peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. It would

also begin the process of stabilizing the entire region by stabilizing relations between the Sunni and the Shi'a.

Since Mahatma Gandhi was the inspiration for the partition plan, it is only fitting we recall what was inscribed over his tomb: "Think of the poorest person you have ever seen and ask whether your next act will be of any use."

The citizens of that place we so cavalierly called "Iraq" are poor in financial terms and absolutely destitute in terms of hope for a positive future. If our next "act" is to go on patrol one more time in Baghdad, it will be an act of no conceivable "use." If the U.S. government unilaterally calls for another peace conference to end its occupation of "Iraq," that "act" will be an act of supreme intelligence and compassion. Aren't intelligence and compassion what the U.S. is really all about? Isn't that why, in better times, we were the light of freedom that shone throughout the world?

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### **About the World Business Academy**

The process of finding a solution to the "Iraq" quagmire can benefit from the clarity and efficiency that business brings to apparently intractable social problems. Iraq has become such a political football that it cannot be solved without leadership from the business community.

Founded in 1987, the World Business Academy is an international business association dedicated to the belief that, as the most powerful institution on the planet, business must take responsibility for the well-being of the whole of society. To fulfill this mission, we offer this pragmatic proposal for a lasting peace based on a business-like assessment of the steps necessary to: (a) complete an honorable withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq within a prudent timeframe; and (b) reorganize the religious and ethnic groups living in "Iraq" to minimize future harm to Iraqi civilians and infrastructure.