



# The U.S. in Iraq: Scenarios for the Next Four Years

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### **The Questions I am asked to forecast:**

1. What are the intentions of the Bush Administration for the new term? Will there be a concerted reconstruction effort or implementation of an exit strategy?
2. What are the possible outcomes in Iraq in terms of governance?
3. To what degree is the US still in control of events inside Iraq or have events preceded to such a degree that the US is mainly a reactive participant?
4. What are the dangers of a failed US policy in Iraq for the GCC states?
5. What can the GCC states do to mitigate the negative consequences from the Iraq crisis? What are some of alternatives available to the GCC countries to assist in influencing the future direction of the Iraq state?

These are all good questions and very important ones for the U.S. and Iraq's neighbors to ponder. Before I deal with the questions, however, I want to examine some possible longer-term scenarios for Iraq and consider where it may be headed. Then, I will offer some answers, which will be scenario based. To do this, I think we need to look at several key issues or criteria that impact on political participation and regional cooperation.

- **Identity: What is Iraq and who is an Iraqi?** Is Iraq a real state or an artificial entity created by Winston Churchill? Are the UK, Italy, Russia, France or Spain real states or entities created by war and repression of ethnic and religious minorities? Is an Iraqi nationalism possible? How does it mesh with our insistence on "Democracy by the Numbers" – Shi'a Arab versus Sunni Arab versus Kurd with the other minorities ignored. Is it possible that



Iraqis are playing on this in their negotiations for democracy and against elections?

- **Democracy: What is it and what might it mean in Iraq?** I think we all understand that democracy is a process and not an event—even the Bush Administration knows this. Can we guarantee that elections are fair and a visible proof of democracy? Does election plus democracy produce a secular and pro-U.S. government? Does election plus Shi'a majority equal clerical governance and pro-Iranian government? The answer to both equations /questions is a resounding no.
- **Relations with the U.S.: Can you have ties to the U.S. and be independent of the U.S.?** U.S. relations are a burden in the current political impasse—damned if you have them and damned if you do not! It will be a critical measure of the current IIG and the one elected on 30 January to be perceived as a partner and not a client of the U.S., one that is able to tell the Americans when to back off and when to proceed. And, it is an American worry that the new IIG may actually tell it something it does not want to hear. What happens if the new IIG asks the U.S. to set a timeline for withdrawal?
- **Self-view: Who are we and why are we weak?** This refers to how Iraqis see themselves interacting with their neighbors in the Gulf. And here, we must take a hard and honest look at what the Iraqis assume and what the Gulf states fear. When Iraqis put the



political squabbling behind them—and they will—and when they have a government that is more firmly grounded and on a more equal footing with the neighbors—and they will—then, then I believe 2 developments are inevitable:

- a. Iraqis will see themselves as first among equals in the Gulf and entitled to a dominant role in political, security and strategic issues.
- b. Iraqis will see the acquisition of WMD—especially nuclear capability—as necessary to their security, sovereignty, and national well-being. This will be especially true if Iran continues on its present course towards nuclear arms and long-range missiles and even if it does not.

**Now, let me offer some scenarios for Iraq after January 30, 2005 or 2006:**

**Scenario 1: Iraq muddles through the election and the central government, though weak, manages to impose a moderate degree of control over country.**

Admittedly, this is the most optimistic scenario. There is violence and some Sunni militant factions boycott the elections. Voting is minimal in Sunni Arab-dominated areas of central Iraq and in Mosul, but heavy in southern areas dominated by Shi'a and Sunni tribes, in the shrine cities of Najaf, Karbala, Kufah, in Baghdad, and in Kurdistan, where voters also "elect" a new Kurdish regional assembly (111 members; first election since 1992). The line-up of the



new interim government resembles that of first interim government—Shi'a of many different flavors from secular to religious militant with some Kurds and a sprinkling of very nervous Sunnis. The election solves few problems—a minority who identify with Sunni militants are unreconciled to the new forms of governance while the majority is too afraid to voice an opinion. The National Assembly falls to squabbling over who gets what position, what the role of shariah law should be, what are federal versus provincial powers and other issues; and, they cannot finish a constitution in time for the August deadline. Central government in Baghdad is weak but backed by the presence of U.S. and UK coalition forces. Alternate sources of power—the religious institutions of the Sunni and Shi'a communities, tribes, rising political parties—are also weak. The good news? Iraqis are learning power politics and the art of negotiation and compromise that makes democracy sordid but effective. The bad news? Iraqis are learning power politics and the art of negotiation and compromise that makes democracy sordid but effective. Sunni and Shi'a militants conduct terrorist operations against each other, making Iraq an even more dangerous and increasingly isolated country, but secular Arabs and those who are moderate Islamists (follow Sistani and Najaf *hausa* and moderate Sunni clerics) show signs of increasing cooperation. We all hold our breath while Iraq sorts itself out.

For most Iraqis, I think, this is the anticipated scenario. It says that we know democracy is not pretty and we know we are inexperienced in any kind of open society political venture. We also known that many complain about how the lists were drawn up, who was able to bargain their way onto a list, and accusations of fraud abound. There was intimidation of course, this is Iraq and



local interests—tribal, sectarian, ethnic—are strong. Some say too many exiles were elected, others that too few Shi`a were chosen.

Some issues we and the IIG will need to confront in this scenario:

- **This election is not “the solution” to Iraq’s political woes.** It will not make the IIG any more legitimate or credible in the eyes of Iraqis, although it will make it easier for the neighbors to accept the new government. The only real barometer of strength and survivability will be the new government’s ability to quell the violence, end the insurgent attacks, and provide personal security, jobs, and petrol.
- **Violence will persist.** Acts meant to frighten away voters will now return to acts to frighten Iraqis from supporting/joining/collaborating with the new government and with the U.S.
- **Foreign meddling will continue in the form of pressure on the new NA to favor some one’s agenda.** Iran, for example, will continue to try to cultivate any influential or potentially influential Iraqi government, party, or person it sees as helpful to its interests. Syria and Saudi Arabia will continue to turn their heads away when insurgents/ terrorists cross the border or are sent assistance, and try to influence their favorite groups in Iraq.
- **Charges of corruption and favoritism will abound.** If elections are postponed or a number of seats are withheld for Sunni Arabs who boycotted the election, then the Shi’a and Kurdish factions will turn



against the electoral process and accuse the U.S. and Allawi or his successor of being manipulative and of being willing to be held hostage by the demands of a few despite the wishes of the many. Iraq's Shi'a, remembering the consequences of their voluntary withdrawal from political life in 1920, after the failed revolt, will say that the fault lies with the Sunni and if they boycott the election and the formation of a new national assembly, then they will be shut out of its activities, including the writing of a new and binding constitution. That is justice.

- **It will be hard for some prominent effendis to accept political defeat.** They will challenge the process, the winners, the distribution of power, everything. Their criticism will not make the election any less valid. It will be considered a success if fighting does not break out when results are announced and no one shoots the winner(s). I have hope but lack faith that this will happen.
- **Which means that Iraq will continue to need the presence of U.S. forces while it builds a new security force.** To quote Yogi Berra, it's not over til it's over.

**One note here: If the voting were rescheduled amid security concerns:** Iraq's Shi'a will see the Allawi government and the U.S. as hostage to minority whim; some Shi'a factions could move for retaliation against Sunni Arabs by threatening their clerics and shrines. Delay will not win over Sunni supporters in short-term—fear of retribution, loathing of American occupation and illegitimate IIG, and the success of their delay ploy will embolden them to resist central government.



**Scenario 2: Iraq muddles through the election but central government is weak and unstable, and alternative and divisive sources of power grow stronger.**

The new government and the U.S. are totally distracted by the continuing insurgencies, which are morphing into fewer but deadlier groups operationally. As a result of elections for the Kurdish Regional Parliament, held the same day as the national assembly election, the KRG has amazingly come out with equal representation among the Kurdish tribe-like factions—the KDP and PUK with a few token Assyrians and Turkmen. Sensing weakness in Baghdad, Iraq’s Kurds declare their 3 predominantly Kurdish provinces plus Greater Kirkuk to be virtually independent—not quite separate from the Iraqi state but not part of it either. Ankara remains silent. Mosul is a major flashpoint, as Arabs are determined not to concede it to anyone’s control, so the Kurds look to expand east and south of Kirkuk, while they bargain away Mosul. Shi’a elements in the south take a lesson from the Kurds and create 2 southern provinces: Basrah-Amarah-Nasiriyah and Najaf-Karbala-Hillah-Kufah. The Sunnis living in the so-called Center are left with the decision to do the same or fight on, or both. Shi’a and Kurd now see a use for the clause in the TAL allowing 3 provinces the right to veto a new constitution or law that they do not approve. Determined to teach the Kurds and anyone else who want to change the map of Iraq, Sunni and Shi’a Arabs band together to rout Kurds from Mosul, Kirkuk, and any other vulnerable position. We all hold our breath while Iraq sorts itself out.



**There are two possible endings for this scenario:**

**First, a successfully-held election will not resolve tensions between ethnically or sectarian or tribally based groups.** All politics is local. Violence and insecurity prevail. Some more specific reactions could include:

- **Iraq's mainstream/moderate Sunni Arabs will still feel disenfranchised** or, at minimum, uncertain of what comes next. Those who want to participate in the new government will do so reluctantly (or feign reluctance) and with fear for their safety and the well-being of their families. Unless there is a primary threat to the Iraqi community/nation's survival or territorial integrity, their local community interests and family-tribal networks will remain important. Two threats could bring them together with secular Sunni Arabs and Shi'a Arabs:
  1. Kurdish outright occupation of Kirkuk and ethnic Arab cleansing on a larger scale than currently ongoing;
  2. A move by Iran or Turkey to take advantage of a weak state and decentralized government to take territory or deploy troops.
- **Iraq's Sunni Arab extremists** probably represent the most dangerous "trend"—they will continue to fuel insurgencies and may find their positions strengthened by an election that places Shi'a Arabs and Kurds in control of political and policing authorities. Attacks on Shi'a shrines and clerics from the Shi'a and moderate Sunni camps will



continue in an effort to spark civil war. The Sunni extremists bond with nationalist extremists, and not with moderate Sunnis whom they despise for weakness, or Shi'a extremists who are, after all, heretics and apostates.

- **Iraq's Shia**—especially Ayatollah Sistani—could wake up on 31 January to find that only 40 percent of the elected representatives are moderate to very religious Shi'a. The split in the elusive Shi'a bloc meant that secular Shi'a voted for mixed tickets and/or made common cause with secular Sunnis and Kurds, probably the exile-led factions.

**Second, the election will help to resolve tensions between ethnically or sectarian or tribally based groups.** Iraqis in Iraq identify themselves as Iraqi nationalists and representatives of all sectors of the population emerge in the new government: Ghazi al-Yawar emerges as the symbol of the New Iraq; he is a Sunni Arab nationalist from a prominent tribe with Sunni and Shi'a constituents who dresses in the past but looks to the future. Efforts by prominent exiles like Ahmad Chalabi fail to unite a ticket or win support—if he is 'elected' like many others he will play a marginalized role. The groups learn that politics Chicago-style is a legal and permissible model—"The Shi'a" do not emerge as the power bloc everyone has feared. Sistani, the hausa, and leaders of the SCIRI, Dawa, and Iraqi Hizballah opt for working within the system to be able to shape the constitution and design the framework for what they assume will be an Islamic government enshrined by shariah law. The Kurds wake up to the fact that no one will support their vision of a Greater Kurdistan and work to install their people in Baghdad.



**Two additional words here:**

- 1. On federalism:** Do not assume this means dividing Iraq into 3 separate national states. The divisions here would represent 3-4 provinces (which we call states) as federal states within the State of Iraq. It is a refined version of what the Kurds have advanced as their preferred solution—Kurds and everyone else. In my version, Shi'a tribal and political leaders see a benefit in copying what the Kurds have done without breaking Iraq up into separate states or enclaves.
- 2. The difference between scenarios 1 and 2 is more tone than substance.** Issues under one scenario could happen in the other.

**Scenario 3: the Chaos Scenario – Iraq dissolves into civil war.**

Efforts by the Sunni Arab extremists finally succeed and Shi'a armed groups begin serious attacks on Sunni villages, mosques, and religious sites and figures. The Kurds see an opportunity and declare their independence as a separate nation-state. Violence is everywhere, as is CNN and Al-Jazeera. The Arab Street and Muslim militants blame the U.S. for everything and attack western embassies and nationals caught in Iraq, the Gulf, Turkey, and Pakistan. I could go on, but I don't think it is necessary to paint this picture more dramatically. I also do not think this is likely to happen. I believe that the only way to end the terror by extremists, be they religiously motivated or driven by national pride or hatred, is ultimately to have Iraqis end it. Outsiders—be they the most well-meaning or benign of occupiers or the most despotic—cannot do



this; their efforts are bound to create more recruits for and more anger in the extremists using terror to achieve their vague and indeterminate ends.

**Now we can return to the remaining questions.** (I think I have given as clear an answer as I can to the question of what are the possible outcomes in Iraq in terms of governance.)

**What are the intentions of the Bush Administration for the new term? Will there be a concerted reconstruction effort or implementation of an exit strategy?**

In a press conference in Washington just before Christmas, President Bush acknowledged that the insurgents in Iraq were “having an effect” and that American efforts to train Iraqi forces have produced only “mixed” results. Still, Bush said he was confident that Iraq will be transformed into a democratic beacon in the Middle East. The road to democracy in Iraq is long and difficult, he admitted, and will not end with the election of a National Assembly to draft a new constitution. He predicted that Iraqi insurgents would continue to try to “disrupt the democratic process in any way they can. No one can predict every turn in the months ahead, and I certainly don’t expect the process to be trouble-free. Yet I’m confident of the result.” Bush reminded reporters that diplomacy had failed to get Saddam to comply with UNSCRs and said that diplomacy must always come first.<sup>1</sup> President Bush also warned that American engagement in Iraq will intensify in the coming year and that the January 30 election marked the “beginning of a process” toward democracy that will require higher troop levels and continue through 2005. He concluded that he was confident of the result of his



policy, "I'm confident the terrorists will fail, the elections, will go forward and Iraq will be a democracy that reflects the values and traditions of its people."<sup>2</sup>

At same time, a Washington Post-ABC News Poll reported that more than 50 percent of Americans surveyed believe that the Iraq war has contributed to the long-term security of the United States but 70 percent thought these gains have come at an "unacceptable" cost in military casualties; 56 percent concluded that the conflict win Iraq was "not worth fighting". The Americans surveyed also felt that the situation in Iraq would not improve (57 percent), that Iraqi elections should be held as scheduled (60 percent) and that the elections would not be "honest" that is with a fair and accurate vote count (54 percent). Finally, 48 percent approved Bush's job as president, and 49 percent disapproved, 3 percent had no opinion.<sup>3</sup>

I take President Bush's words at face value. There appears to be no intention of a short-term exit strategy or of a lack of will on Iraq. We need to think about Mr. Bush and his national security advisers in the right context. Some political commentators have hinted that the hawkish advisers of the First Term—those who designed the 9/11 responses, the war in Afghanistan, and regime change and the "liberation" of Iraq—would be gone in the second term, victims of their failure to win the wars in Iraq and against terrorism. Others describe a second-term, lame duck President determined to shape his legacy by moving the center and focusing on issues such as Peace in the Middle East (Arab-Palestinian) and real democratization of autocratic Arab regimes (from Saudi Arabia to Egypt).



**In my personal opinion, all of these observations are wrong.** The Bush security team does not perceive any major errors in its decisions or actions. We need to think about the long-standing historical debate on the nature of American foreign and security policy.<sup>4</sup> The Bush Administration follows a conservative (some might say realist's) approach, basing its national security strategy on the doctrines of pre-emptive war and unilateralism. The world, the conservatives say, is a dangerous place. Of the instruments of national power available to the President, they give priority to the use of military power. Liberals, on the other hand, are more reluctant to use force as the first option, preferring instruments of diplomacy, trade sanctions, arms embargoes, international law, alliances, and organizations, and intelligence before exercising a military option.

- **The Conservative's Grand Strategy Model is based on 4 principles:**

1. Individual and national liberty (freedom) is more important than collective and universal equality;
2. Competition is a bigger engine of change than institutional or organizational cooperation;
3. Pre-emptive attack is sometimes necessary. Military power takes precedence over economic, diplomatic, and soft power because without military power other forms of power are impotent;
4. Unilateralism can be good and necessary. Legitimacy derives more from substantive beliefs of individuals and societies about the worth of individual human beings (often rooted in religious convictions) than from the approval or procedural habits of shared social practices and institutions (meaning the of multilateralism the UN represents).



Reduced to its basic elements, this means the rights of the individual are more important than the rights of the community (the `umma or tribe or state), God is on my side, and freedom means total individual liberty constrained by as little government as possible; competition and free trade are good and act as a balance of power to that favors human freedom. Military power defends national security, stability, and economic prosperity. Arms and balance-of-power relations do not cause international conflict—use of military capabilities by despotic powers cause international conflict. For many conservatives, enemies like al-Qaida, Iraq under Saddam Husayn, Iran under the mullahs, are hostile to democracy and free markets. The threat to democracy comes from religious militants using terrorism as their weapon of choice, authoritarian governments possessing or hoping to possess weapons of mass destruction, and failed states that can be used as terrorists' safe havens. Simply put, they hate who we are.

- **The Liberal's Grand Strategy Model:** Liberals also believe that the world is a dangerous place, that the United States has enemies, and that power and the determination to use it are stronger than principles or the justice of one's cause. They see power, however, as limited and transitory, and they see security in longer range terms than do conservatives. For American political liberals, security requires American engagement in defeating enemies and in building up alliances and allies. Power is not dominance; they place great importance on rule of law as the ultimate grand strategy. The UN is a source of collective moral action in international affairs, rather than an obstacle to action. Security is not simply the result of military balance of forces; it is the result of effective



balance of economic and social and cultural forces as well as multilateralism. **Liberal security policy is based on 4 principles:**

1. The national security strategy should embrace material and moral interests. Economic development, democracy and democratic institutions, and the health and well-being of its citizens are at the core of American security policy.
2. Nation-building is an important part of a national security strategy and not just military action.
3. Pre-emption is not a good doctrine on which to base your security strategy. Legitimacy does not grow out of force. Violations of human rights “invite” the possibility of outside intervention. No one is outside the reach of international law.
4. Multilateralism is a preferred good. International consensus on the American use of its military power to intervene internationally is necessary for legitimacy and successful operations.

It must be said here that the election of John Kerry instead of the re-election of President Bush would have made very little difference in the future course of action in Iraq. When they argued about Iraq, it was over how we got in there and not how or when we would get out. Both assumed that the U.S. would have a longer-term military presence and a commitment to open elections and the democratic process in Iraq. Both advocated the same measures regarding the insurgencies, terrorism, and violence that threaten to divide Iraq. And both would have remained committed to protecting U.S. friends and intersects in this region. Again, simply put, they hate who we are and not what we do. This takes us to the second question.



**To what degree is the U.S. still in control of events inside Iraq or have events preceded to such a degree that the U.S. is mainly a reactive participant?**

For many reasons, it would be easier and simpler if one could say that the U.S. is in control of events in Iraq—our mere presence provokes Iraqis to oppose us and fight us. Our strategies are too harsh, our military too easily provoked. We do not understand the culture, language, values, customs, etc. Well, I am afraid these reasons reflect a very limited reality. Yes, we made mistakes—de-Ba’thification and demilitarization are only 2 big ones. At the same time, in trying to correct for the impact on the Sunni Arab community, we insulted the Shi’a and Kurdish communities, both of which had suffered long years under Ba’thist oppression and Sunni Arab domination. Our inability to rebuild Iraq as quickly as it needs to be done—with money wasted on foreign contractors who love to plan monumental reconstruction projects when a smaller road or power grid would be better because of scale and immediate need—is legendary. How could the country with the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest proven and potential oil reserves need to import gasoline? And why can’t the most powerful military in the world bring security and end terrorist attacks? The U.S. military can win any war, defeat any military foe, but it cannot win the asymmetric battle that is terrorist insurgency. And Iraq has a number of insurgencies fought with well-trained and provisioned militants, some of whom have an end state in mind—an Islamic republic—and others whose only goal is to create civil war by killing innocent civilians and clerics who are different, who are Shi’a and therefore apostate or Kurds. They are able to move freely through the cities and towns of central Iraq and attack with seeming impunity. Wars against insurgents are never ended



quickly or easily. And the costs are high. Iraqis die and Americans die. The U.S. is forced into a reactive mode—searching for terrorists while some Iraqis are willing to hide and support freedom fighters. And aid workers, ngos, and companies with contracts to rebuild Iraq are forced to leave the country.

### **What are the dangers of a failed US policy in Iraq for the GCC states?**

For me, this question is both easy and hard to answer. On the easy side: failure to stabilize Iraq and secure a government moving towards democratic governance will be a serious failure; Iraq will become what some American conservatives said it was—wrongly—under Saddam. Saddam was a state-sponsor of terrorism, but not of the kind that Iraq must deal with today. A failed state in Iraq could resemble a failed state of Afghanistan, where the power vacuum was filled by extremists intent on a repressive and regressive form of governance and terrorists had safe haven and a base from which to recruit, train, and launch operations against neighboring states. For those seeing the U.S. presence as sufficient cause for rising religious militancy and terror, these would exist with or without our presence. To believe otherwise, is to deny the reality of what Usama bin Ladin sees as his destiny. Some in the region believe U.S. policy will have failed if the Shi'a majority in Iraq elects a predominantly Shi'a government. To believe this is to deny the impact of the Iranian Revolution, events in Lebanon, and the fall of Saddam—all these events have contributed to the growing "awakening" of the Shi'a and their demand for empowerment in the countries ringing Iraq and the Gulf.



**What can the GCC states do to mitigate the negative consequences from the Iraq crisis? What are some of alternatives available to the GCC countries to assist in influencing the future direction of the Iraq state?**

This is the most difficult question. It assumes negative consequences and asks what can be done to influence the future direction of Iraq. I assume the negative consequences include a Shi'a dominated government with the prospect of an Islamic republic resembling Iran's clerical rule and in close ties to Iran; growing influence of tribalism and decentralized rule with more autonomy for the provinces (a federalized state with self-rule in Kurdistan and maybe in the south); civil war in Iraq; or a pacified country with strong central authority, an increasingly effective military, and an attitude. In other words, there is danger if Iraq is too weak and threatens to dissolve into civil war and danger if Iraq strengthens and is able to secure its borders and ambitions. Will Iraq some day become a power to be reckoned with in the Gulf? Yes. Do Iraqis have an 'attitude' about their rightful place in the Gulf and the region, and the failure of their neighbors in times past to help them? Probably. my suggestions to the GCC?

- **Do not meddle in Iraqi affairs.** Supporting insurgents, arming the opposition, tolerating the passage of extremists through your territory with your money and arms will only breed anger and mistrust among the Iraqis and buy you no friends.
- **Help in reconstruction.** Help is not just an act of charity; it is also a way to regularize contacts. The resumption of trade and business as usual will do more to settle many areas than helping insurgents.



- **Recognize the legitimately elected government and support efforts to stabilize Iraq.** A divided Iraq will help no one—it will not quell unrest or end insurgencies.
- **Accept the presence of Iraq in regional security discussions and organizations.** You do not have to accept Iraq into the GCC, but you do have to find a way to resolve tensions that will inevitably arise again over borders, oil exploration and exploitation, refugees, etc. I believe the warning issued by the 20<sup>th</sup> century Spanish-born philosopher, George Santayana, is still true. “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” I add 2 thoughts:
  1. Ignorance of history is no excuse.
  2. What if Saddam was not an anomaly in Iraqi political history?

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<sup>1</sup> Michael A. Fletcher and Peter Baker, “Bush Acknowledges Impact of Insurgents,” *The Washington Post*, December 21, 2004, pp. A1, A4.

<sup>2</sup> Maura Reynolds and Sonni Efron, “Bush Foresees a Deeper U.S. Role in Iraq,” <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/la-fg-bushiraq21dec21.story>.

<sup>3</sup> John F. Harris and Christopher Muste, “56 Percent in Survey Say Iraq War Was a Mistake,” *The Washington Post*, December 21, 2004, p. A4.

<sup>4</sup> This discussion draws on a study published by the faculty of the Elliot School of International Affairs at The George Washington University before the November 2004 U.S. presidential election. See *Divided Diplomacy and the Next Administration: Conservative and Liberal Alternatives*, Henry R. Nau and David Shambaugh, eds. (ESIA, 2004).