

WHAT IS GOING ON IN IRAQ AND WHAT CAN WE EXPECT IN THE SHORT RUN

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I never thought much about Iraq in my younger years. It was just there and it occasionally came to the fore of my mind when there was yet another military coup in Baghdad. Later, when the terrible war of attrition took place for 8 years between Iraq and Iran in the 1980's, Iraq began to occupy a more prominent role in the news headlines and my conscious mind. When Iraq invaded Kuwait and the first Gulf war broke out, all of a sudden, Iraq began to matter in my own thinking about the Middle East and, later, when the American invasion took place in March 2003, it sat right in the middle of all talk and the agenda in practically anything to do with the United States and Turkey.

As this paper was being prepared, the daily number of killings and war related deaths was around 100 in Iraq; a number that is staggering by most standards. I am sure much can be said about the "Vulcans" the "Neocons" and all other folk who, in one way or another, must bear the responsibility for the start of the war. The list is very rich: it includes the fallen president of Iraq and the sitting President of the United States and all manner of different personae in

between. Still, in September 2006, we have an unbearable situation on our hands and we all must deal with it.

We can endlessly argue as to the necessity of the war and whether the U.S. and Coalition forces committed to the war effort was adequate in number. Common wisdom now shows that roughly 130,000 U.S. soldiers were not enough to do the job. Maybe twice or perhaps three times that number would have been needed. But where does one find these bodies and the means to supply and equip them in short order? The planners of the Iraq war were mostly men who had lived through the Vietnam experience and they know that sheer numbers were not enough to win a war. But to sustain an invasion and control a vast land where a sizable and relatively strong indigenous opposition existed, needed all together new thinking.

The respected New York Times columnist and Middle East expert Thomas Friedman wrote a column a couple of weeks ago.¹ His main argument is that the center of both American politics and Iraqi politics is not sufficiently motivated to put an end to the incompetence (America) and violence (Iraq). He says, memorably: "It truly, truly baffles me why a president who bet so much of his legacy on this project never gave it his best shot and tolerated so much incompetence. He summoned us to D-Day and gave us the moral equivalent of the invasion of Panama." The analysis of Mr. Friedman continues in regard to the Shiite and Sunni violence as well:²

For two years the Shiite center in Iraq put up with the barbaric Sunni violence directed against its mosques and markets - violence the U.S. could not stop because it did not have enough troops, and because the Sunni center inside and outside Iraq tacitly supported it. But eventually the Shiites snapped, formed their own death squads, turned to Iran for military aid and focused more on communal survival than on making Iraq's democracy work.

Then what will be the solution? Mr. Friedman suggests, and I agree with him, that until the Shiites, the Sunnis and the Kurds agree

¹Thomas Friedman, *The New York Times*, "The Central Truth", September 8, 2006.

²Friedman, *Ibid.*

how to share sovereignty and the oil revenue, there can be no lasting peace in that country.

The central question now is whether there is a civil war in Iraq as we speak. There is a report that just came out prepared by two researchers Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack who work at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy of the Brookings Institution.³ The authors analyze the situation in Iraq and while they do not state that there is an all out civil war in the country as yet, they are very worried, as we should all be, that if things come to a full-blown civil war and this begins to affect the whole region and the neighboring countries such as Turkey, then things will truly get out of hand with dire consequences for the whole of the Middle East and perhaps the world.

Let me summarize the findings briefly. The Brookings researchers have enumerated a number of possible outcomes if there is an all-out civil war in Iraq:⁴

The Threats from the Civil War: If the civil war in Iraq engulfs the whole of the country and is intensified, here are the major threats we can expect from this:

1. Death or maiming of hundreds of thousands, even millions of people.
2. Most countries in the region which are under autocratic rule will claim that democratization leads to chaos and this would be a setback for the democratic development in the region.
3. Iraqi oil production may be lost or halted which would result in \$100 a barrel oil prices with terrible economic consequences for both the developed and the developing nations.
4. A Civil war in Iraq could have a very serious spillover effect for the countries in the region.

³Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, *Things Fall Apart: What to do if Iraq Implodes*. The Brookings Institution, August, 2006.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

The matter of refugees is of particular concern. In any terrible strife in a given country the issue of refugees poses both a humanitarian and a security problem. In this country we had a taste of this when, after the First Gulf War, Saddam's forces attacked Kurdish towns and villages in Northern Iraq. Because of this, in April 1991, nearly 500,000 Kurdish refugees crossed the border into Turkey. While Turkey coped with this crisis quite well with some international aid, it put a strain on the regional economy and caused an undesirable environmental impact in the border areas of the country. A full-scale civil war would compound this kind of refugee problem and would not be as easily resolved.

Refugees also bring with them the danger of breeding terrorist activity and/or the infiltration of undesirable elements and intelligence assets belonging to unfriendly countries to seep into the camps and ultimately to the host country. If terrorism rises and certain parts of Iraq become "liberated" areas for terrorist training camps, this would pose a threat not only for the immediate neighbors of Iraq, but also for the whole of Western Europe and the United States.

The authors of the report I just mentioned also point to two other dangers that could emanate from a full-scale civil war in Iraq. One of them is that neighbors in the region may be compelled to intervene in Iraq as their national interest and security become threatened. This would result in further radicalization of the Iraqi population. Another danger is that as a full -scale civil war tears apart the country, a phenomenon that they call "secession breeds secessionism" may occur with disastrous consequences even in our country. While the success of this kind of action is nil here, it would nevertheless increase the level of violence in our country exponentially.

What are the Iraqi and American governments doing to improve the situation in Iraq then? In a recent Op Ed piece in the *Wall Street Journal*⁵ Zalmay Khalilzad the American Ambassador in Baghdad, outlines a strategy which is an optimistic plan to secure

⁵Zalmay Khalilzad, "The Battle of Baghdad: Rampant Insecurity—and a Plan to Combat It", *The Wall Street Journal*, August 22, 2006.

first, the capital, and then the whole of the country. The argument here is that if you secure the capital city and return it to some semblance of normalcy, the rest of the country might be easier to handle.

In a nutshell, the plan is this: divide the city into zones. Give each zone to the responsibility of one Coalition (American) and one or more Iraqi military units. As each zone is secured and cleansed of enemy forces, leave it to Iraqi forces to maintain security and slowly move through the city and finish the job in a relatively short time. The hope here is that, as the insurgents of all shades are beaten and their communication and infrastructure broken, the legitimate armed forces will take control of the whole of the city and peace and tranquility will return. When this is achieved, the joint forces would work on civic and economic development projects and the innocent civilians will begin to enjoy some semblance of normalcy that they so much deserve and long for.

There is one last, but very important requirement for the success of this formula:

In addition, a moral compact between the religious leaders of the two Islamic communities -which will ban sectarian killings—will delegitimize the violence. Such a compact would deny the killers political or religious sanctuary while Iraqi and Coalition forces deny them physical shelter. For the longer term, the plan seeks to induce insurgents and militias to lay down their arms by implementing a program to demobilize unauthorized armed groups.

Is this hard to do? Indeed, it is a Herculean task especially when you realize that in July alone, 2100 deaths occurred in Baghdad, and as I mentioned at the beginning of my comments, on September 14 alone, nearly 100 people died because of violent acts in Iraq. But certainly it is better to plan, even to dream, than to do nothing!

Let me now move on to how the "Iraq Affair" has affected alliance relationships. First of all, immediately prior to the start of the hostilities, the NATO countries were divided about how to react to the American insistence that there was a breach of the UN resolution concerning the full disclosure of the Weapons of Mass Destruction by Iraq. Two major powers in NATO, France and

Germany, were adamantly opposed to any military action. Great Britain, supported the American policy to the hilt, and Spain, Italy and Poland were also in support. Several other European countries, especially smaller, newer members of NATO lined up behind the U.S. But what about Turkey? I am not going to bore you with the details of the non passage of the all too familiar March 1 Resolution and the ensuing events and arrest of the Turkish military personnel on July 4, 2003. All of this has been discussed and analyzed to the nth degree in other fora and writings.

I will, however, dwell on the dilemma the Turkish decision makers and politicians now face. This is the dilemma of how to reconcile political exigencies and realities with the emotional reactions of the voters. During the Saddam regime, there was not a free flow of information out of Iraq. We occasional saw photographs of the "Great Leader" and his cohorts either in battle fatigues or Lanvin or Pierre Cardin suits, either holding guns or ivory handled canes but nothing the regime did not want to get out, got out of Iraq.

Immediately after the war started things began to change. Embedded reporters started to report from the battle field, many European, American and other Western reporters began to file first hand accounts from the battle zone and satellite TV stations such as Al Jezirah and Al Arabiya, and not to mention CNN and BBC fed all sorts of stories and images to world viewers and of course, to the Turks. The result of this has been that the attitudes of the Turkish general public toward the United States, and by extension, to the rest of the Western world have become increasingly unfriendly. Of course, the fact that the Turkish membership in the EU is so universally and adamantly opposed to by the publics of most of the EU member nations has had much to contribute to this turn of events .

The most recent published results of both the German Marshall Fund of the United States Transatlantic Trends Survey 2006, and the PEW opinion survey show how the Turkish public is cooling away from NATO, the U.S. and the E.U.⁶ The following is a short evaluation from the Marshall Fund survey:

⁶*Transatlantic Trends*. The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2006.

Turkish feelings toward the United States and Europe have cooled since 2004, with a warmth reading toward the United States declining from 28 degrees in 2004 to 20 in 2006 on a 100-point thermometer scale, and from 52 degrees to 45 toward the European Union. Over the same period, the warmth reading of Turkish feelings toward Iran has risen from 34 degrees to 43, and their feelings toward the Palestinians have declined from 52 degrees to 47.⁷

While 53% agreed with the statement that NATO is still essential for Turkey's security in 2004 and 52% in 2005, only 44% of Turkish respondents agreed in 2006. This percentage, while no longer a majority, remains the largest percentage of Turkish respondents.⁸

What is also significant is that according to this survey, while the Turkish public is cooling away from the West, it is warming towards Iran. This will make it particularly difficult for the Turkish politicians to respond positively to any possible future demand that Turkey joins in the decision to apply sanctions that the U.S. or the U.N. may want to put forward towards Iran because of its nuclear enrichment program.

There is no doubt that all politicians who are in power in a democratic society want two things. They want to provide for the needs of the people and look out for the best interest of the country and they also want to get reelected. If this supposition is true, herein lies the dilemma: how does one reconcile the requirements of being a good ally, respond to the overt for implied requests from a major ally from whom you expect much in all spheres of the political and security life of your country and the voters' perceived preferences. One possible solution is that politicians can take the lead to educate the public on international issues. For example one survey showed recently that only 16 *per cent* of Turks believe that Arabs staged the September 11th attacks in the United States and fully 59 *per cent* do not believe that Arabs had a hand in this horrible act.⁹ The public can be told the objective truth by opinion leaders on such issues and this would help change attitudes for the better, I am sure.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 18

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 19

⁹The PEW Global Attitudes Project. June, 2006. p. 4.

In conclusion, let me assert one more time that the jury is still out on what will happen in the immediate future in Iraq. It is true that the Iraq war has poisoned the relationships of many Muslim and non Muslim countries with the United States. The forces of peace and harmony can prevail with patience and perseverance. Let us hope that our efforts will bear fruit in short order.