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# OCCUPYING IRAQ

## A HISTORY OF THE COALITION PROVISIONAL AUTHORITY

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## Summary

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L. Paul Bremer arrived in Baghdad on May 12, 2003, with a broad mandate and plenary powers. As administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority, he was charged with governing Iraq and promoting the development of a functioning democracy that, it was hoped, would serve as a model for the entire Middle East. Bremer could dispose of all Iraqi state assets and direct all Iraqi government officials. He possessed full executive, legislative, and judicial authority. His instructions from Washington were quite general, and for the most part oral. Over the next several months he received plentiful advice but little further direction.

As a practical matter, Bremer's powers were much more limited than they appeared. He had no direct authority over 98 percent of official American personnel in Iraq. They were under military command. Most Iraqi officials had abandoned their offices, which had in turn been ransacked in rampant looting that had stripped most public facilities throughout the country to the bare walls, and beyond. The Iraqi army had deserted en masse, as had much of the police force. Several billion dollars in Iraqi funds were immediately available, but beyond this ready cash, the state was basically broke and producing no further revenue. Washington was still under the impression that the occupation would largely pay for itself and had made provision for only limited financial support to reconstruction. As a result, the CPA relied, throughout its lifespan, principally on Iraqi money to fund both reconstruction and Iraqi government operations.

Neither could Bremer count on much help from the rest of the world. The invasion had been launched against the advice of several

of America's most important allies. Many of Iraq's neighbors, including Iran and Syria, were hostile to U.S. efforts and suspicious that the United States might eventually want to overthrow their regimes as well. The decision to treat Iraq, for legal purposes, as a conquered nation further increased the controversy associated with the enterprise. The occupations with which most Iraqis were familiar were the British control of their country after World War I and Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, then in its fourth decade. These were not reassuring precedents. An alternative to formal occupation would have been a UN-authorized "peace enforcement operation," as in Bosnia or Kosovo. That sort of arrangement might have attenuated, but not eliminated, Iraqi and regional resistance to the American presence. The price for such an international endorsement would have been some level of international oversight. In the bitter aftermath of the failed attempt to gain United Nations Security Council approval of the invasion, neither the United States nor the UN was interested in having the latter assume such a role in Iraq's governance.

On May 22, 2003, the UN Security Council formally recognized but did not endorse the United States and the United Kingdom as occupying powers. Attempts were made to enlist as many coalition countries as possible, but with limited success. The United Kingdom had contributed a large contingent of troops for the invasion but soon scaled back its contribution to the occupation to less than 10 percent of the total. Other allied contingents were even smaller and generally less capable. Unlike the Balkans, where America's allies had contributed 75–80 percent of the soldiers and money, the United States was going to have to man and pay for this operation largely on its own.

## **Arrival and Early Decisions**

Bremer inherited the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), which had been structured in the belief that the Iraqi administration would remain in place, any American occupation would be short-lived, and the main challenge would be dealing with the consequences of the use of weapons of mass destruction and other

war-related damage. The transition from ORHA, headed by Army Lieutenant General Jay Garner (Ret.), to the CPA did not go smoothly. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld informed Garner about the impending change in leadership only one day after Garner's arrival in Baghdad; Garner had expected to be superseded, but not so quickly. Rumsfeld encouraged Garner to stay on under Bremer, but Garner declined, as he did again a couple of weeks later when Bremer made the same request.

Almost immediately on his arrival in Baghdad, Bremer announced two major steps that would prove to be the most controversial of his tenure. The first was to purge some 30,000 senior Ba'ath party members from public employment, and the second was to disband the Iraqi army. Both decisions, the details of which are considered further below, had been briefed to the President and his principal cabinet advisors and approved by Secretary Rumsfeld. Garner had not been consulted, however, and he advised Bremer against both steps on learning of them, as did other members of the ORHA team. Bremer declined to reconsider either measure.

No one in Washington had kept Garner apprised of the major changes in approach to the occupation being considered there, in part because no one in Washington short of Secretary Rumsfeld had been charged with keeping Garner so informed. Garner was supposed to be operating under the direction of General Tommy Franks, commander of U.S. Central Command, but Franks was soon to retire and also somewhat divorced from the policy discussions then under way in the Pentagon. Bremer might have been wise to have informed and consulted Garner on these issues before his arrival in Baghdad, but Bremer was not yet in charge, had never met Garner, and was fully occupied with preparing for his assignment. The result was to leave a residue of bitterness and recrimination from the very start of Bremer's tenure.

## **Building the CPA**

Bremer personally recruited a number of experienced and accomplished people to serve as his senior staff, although some of them showed up late

and few stayed for the duration. Their successors were generally also of good, sometimes superior, quality, but rapid and frequent staff turnover had a decidedly negative effect on continuity. Even more debilitating was Washington's persistent inability to fill more than half the mid-level and junior positions in the CPA and these seldom for more than three to six months at a time. As a result, while intended to be a dominantly civilian organization, the CPA remained heavily military. Many personnel were reserve officers, although a number of them possessed relevant civilian experience. Many younger staff were recruited through the administration's political patronage machinery. There was a chronic shortage of experienced middle-level managers. In particular, there was a shortage of Arabic-speaking regional experts and officials who had worked in previous postconflict stabilization efforts. The result was an organization made up largely of senior supervisors and junior subordinates.

Bremer rapidly established the skeleton of an organization intended to serve as a "government within a government." Half a dozen offices supervised a larger number of Iraqi ministries. Alongside these line units was a staff that included a general council, a financial management office, a policy planning unit, and an executive secretariat. Bremer did not, at first, formally appoint a principal deputy, although Clayton McManaway, a former ambassador with extensive service in wartime Vietnam, served as his closest advisor and assumed charge when Bremer was out of the country. Neither Bremer nor his chief lieutenants ever had any precise idea how many people were working for them on any given day. The Green Zone mess halls were feeding up to 7,000 people, but most of them were either under the military command or contractors working for the military. At its peak, the CPA's notional staff was around 2,000, of whom perhaps half were in the country at any one time. Those who were present routinely worked 80-hour weeks. A significant minority of positions within the CPA were filled by non-American officials from allied countries.

Bremer's management style was very hands-on. He exhibited great energy and a quick grasp of complex issues. He was willing to take responsibility and make difficult decisions. He was able, through his own example, to secure the respect, loyalty, and affection of his numer-



ous staff. Despite these strengths, the CPA structure was overly centralized, and Bremer was excessively burdened by the number of subordinates reporting directly to him and the variety of issues requiring his attention. The lack of any agreed-on plan, the improvised nature of the organization, and the rapidity of staff turnover made a greater degree of delegation difficult and, in the early days, possibly dangerous; but Bremer would have been better served by formally empowering one or two deputies, as he eventually did six months later.

The CPA was built from scratch, and every bureaucratic relationship had to be crafted from whole cloth. This went from determining who paid for use of the motor pool or mess hall to Bremer's relationship with his military partner and Washington superiors. American and coalition military forces came under Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, the commander of CJTF-7. Bremer and Sanchez, by their own accounts, maintained cordial relations. Sanchez was under formal orders from Secretary Rumsfeld to support Bremer, which he and his command did quite extensively. This injunction, in Sanchez's view, did not accord Bremer oversight of, or even necessarily visibility into, military operations at the tactical level. The two men differed on occasion and their staffs did so more often, but they also collaborated closely. The extensive overall level of CJTF-7 support for the CPA is noteworthy given that Sanchez's staff resources, although more numerous than Bremer's, were almost as undermanned as were those of the CPA.

The CPA's relationship with Washington was also improvised and unclear, as was Bremer's with his bosses. The CPA was, at one and the same time, an element of the Defense Department, a multinational organization, and a foreign government. In their capacity as the government of Iraq, CPA managers rejected efforts by Washington agencies, most notably the White House Office of Management and Budget, to impose strictures on how the CPA spent Iraqi funds. Bremer was subordinate to Secretary Rumsfeld but also a presidential envoy. He communicated directly with the President and the White House staff. This eventually led Rumsfeld to complain to both Bremer and Condoleezza Rice, the President's national security advisor. These complaints were unavailing, and from the fall of 2003, Bremer effectively worked under guidance from the White House. Rumsfeld seems

to have felt that Bremer was trying to circumvent him, but the main problem was that Rumsfeld had never established within the Defense Department an adequate mechanism to monitor, support, and guide the CPA's activities and to keep the White House and other relevant agencies informed on what was going on in Baghdad.

Putting both Bremer and Sanchez under the Secretary of Defense was intended to reduce tension between the civil and military components of the U.S. effort, but it probably had the opposite effect. Rumsfeld's management style was to nag his subordinates, peppering them with frequent suggestions but seldom issuing firm instructions or taking clear responsibility. As a result, disagreements between Bremer and Sanchez were rarely adjudicated in a timely fashion. Additionally, the sheer novelty of the arrangement made for difficulties. Friction between American ambassadors and local American military commanders is not infrequent, nor is it unheard of for American diplomats to deal directly with the White House. Such relationships are governed, however, by law, regulation, presidential directive, and decades of customary practice. As a consequence, it is well understood how all the players should behave, even if they do not always do so. With the CPA, a unique political experiment under Defense Department auspices in what became an active war zone, all such relationships had to be worked out anew.

Bremer and his staff were fond of complaining about Washington's "thousand-mile screw driver," and they were indeed the recipients of copious advice and a good deal of micromanagement on the use of U.S. funds. During the CPA's early months, however, Bremer was the victim not of too much policy oversight but of too little. Rumsfeld seems to have refused to allow non-Defense Department personnel in the CPA to communicate directly and formally with their own agencies. In addition, for the first few months the Defense Department failed to repeat Bremer's reports to the State Department, the White House, or the CIA, and was sometimes slow to do so thereafter. The White House, for its part, had decided to delegate responsibility for interagency coordination about Iraq to Bremer, a manifestly impossible task, given his limited staff, manifold other responsibilities, and the fact that non-Defense Department personnel in Baghdad had only

limited capacity to communicate with their home agencies, particularly in the early months. In consequence, other agency personnel in Baghdad were not in a position to fully tap the expertise of their home offices or fully represent their agency's views, although a great deal of coordination was achieved through informal phone calls and unclassified, unofficial email. Eventually, Rice was reduced to sending her staffers on forays into the Pentagon to find out what was going on. As a result of these communication blockages, which persisted throughout the CPA's lifespan to some degree but were particularly acute in the spring and summer of 2003, senior Washington officials were less informed and more surprised by events and decisions emanating from Baghdad than they should have been.

## **Creating the Governing Council**

Prior to Bremer's appointment, American planning for post-Saddam Iraq had proceeded along two ill-defined but divergent tracks, one moving toward the extended occupation, as finally eventuated, the other toward a swift handoff to a nonelected Iraqi successor regime, as had occurred in Afghanistan 15 months earlier. In Washington, the issue had been papered over in an interagency agreement to form an interim Iraqi administration. What was left undefined was whether this administration would have independent authority or would simply provide a vehicle through which the United States would govern Iraq—much as the Japanese government, which remained in existence after its 1945 surrender, was the medium through which General Douglas MacArthur had ruled Japan.

General Garner, the head of ORHA, and Zalmay Khalilzad, a National Security Council (NSC) staffer and presidential envoy to the Iraqi opposition, seemed to be proceeding on the assumption that the occupation would be short-lived. This is certainly the impression they conveyed to Iraqi leaders with whom they were consulting in an apparent effort to form an Iraqi government.

Before leaving for Baghdad, Bremer secured President Bush's agreement that there would be only one American envoy in Iraq. On

his arrival, he began consultations leading to the formation of the Governing Council, a body of Iraqi émigré and internal leaders chosen by Bremer with the help of the UN and a team of American and British regional experts. This body was to be largely advisory, although its influence and prerogatives would grow over the succeeding months. Bremer observed, in defense of his decision not to accord this group executive or legislative power, that a body that could not agree on its own chairman (the Governing Council chose to rotate that position on a monthly basis) could hardly be ready to rule. Others have speculated that if given real authority, the council might have behaved more responsibly. As with any counterfactual, it is impossible to prove or disprove this hypothesis, but the behavior of these same politicians when they were accorded real power a year later does not suggest that their reformation would have been rapid.

Bremer regarded the decision to mount an extended occupation rather than immediately turn power over to an Iraqi interim government as having been made, in principle, prior to his appointment and embodied in the general guidance he received from the President and Rumsfeld. The record on this point is unclear. The continuing debate over when and by whom a decision was taken to mount an extended occupation reflects the general lack of clarity characteristic of the administration's planning for and early management of its intervention in Iraq. Given that neither the President nor any of his principal advisors had so much as met Bremer prior to his selection, something more than simple confidence in his judgment seems to have been in play in the leeway he was given. It seems likely, therefore, that the decision to supersede Garner almost immediately on his arrival in Baghdad was occasioned by the mounting chaos there and was accompanied by an inclination to assert a firmer American grip, one result of which was the selection and dispatch of Bremer.

What is certain is that this shift in policy left the Iraqi leaders feeling deceived, military commanders uninformed, and senior levels of the administration unconsulted. It was not inappropriate for the administration to have retained two options for governing Iraq, given uncertainties about what they would encounter once Saddam fell. In the event, finding Iraq descending into chaos and the Iraqi elites badly

divided, it was not unreasonable to decide in favor of a more extended occupation. What was censurable was to have failed to distinguish between the two approaches, engage all the President's principal advisors on the decision, make a clear-cut choice in the end, arm Bremer and Sanchez with more than general and largely oral instructions, resource the operation commensurate with the expanded mission, and take a consistent line with the Iraqi political leadership.

For several months the Iraqi ministries were run, to the extent they functioned at all, by CPA senior advisors who directed the activity of their principal Iraqi subordinates. In August, Bremer allowed the Governing Council to appoint Iraqi ministers to head each agency. Thereafter, CPA advisors played a slightly less prominent role, although they retained veto authority over major decisions and controlled many of the purse strings.

## **Establishing Security**

Bremer understood the preeminent importance of establishing security as the first task of any occupying force. While still in Washington, he was told that most American troops were to be withdrawn from Iraq within the next few months, leaving as few as 30,000 by the fall of 2003. He immediately raised the issue of troop levels with Rumsfeld and President Bush before leaving for Baghdad. On the day of his arrival, he told his senior staff that law and order would be their first priority. He repeated this in a message to the President ten days later.

Bremer made an early decision to retain the Iraqi police but to build an entirely new army from scratch. Neither approach produced positive results. The new Iraqi army eventually became a relatively competent and reliable force, but it took several years. The police force, which had not been disbanded, was even slower to develop; it became, indeed, a serious source of insecurity for the next several years. This experience indicates that the CPA's critical failure lay not so much in retaining police or in disbanding the army, as some have charged, but rather in failing to reform and rebuild either of these forces in a timely fashion. Yet it is not clear whether the capacity to raise and train for-

eign security forces on the scale needed then existed anywhere in the U.S. government. In early 2004, the U.S. military assumed responsibility for rebuilding both the army and police but initially did only marginally better. Numbers increased but quality was much slower to follow.

The decision to disband the army has become the single most-cited criticism of the CPA's 14-month reign. This step was not taken without considerable forethought. Walter Slocombe, who had served as Under Secretary of Defense for Policy throughout much of the Clinton administration, had been chosen to head the security-related components of the CPA well before Bremer's appointment. He had been consulting with various DoD officials in preparation for that task when Bremer was named. By then it had become clear that the Iraqi army had disintegrated under U.S. military pressure and that most of its facilities had subsequently been destroyed in the looting. Slocombe and other senior DoD officials decided that it would be better to disband the existing Iraqi army and raise a new one, employing many current army officers in the process but not building on the old foundation. This step would obviate the need to employ a bloated and politicized officer corps or to force the return of reluctant and ill-paid conscripts. It would also, in Bremer's view, help persuade the Iraqi population that the break with the former regime was final and irreversible.

An order to that event was drafted and cleared throughout the Pentagon shortly before Bremer's departure for Baghdad. It also seems to have been cleared with Central Command and the staff of the senior American military commander in the field, although Lieutenant General David McKiernan, Sanchez's predecessor, has since denied approving or even knowing of the decision in advance. Slocombe discussed the proposal with British officials in London on his way to Baghdad. They raised no objection. On May 15, Garner tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade Bremer to reconsider the measure. On May 19, Rumsfeld approved the order. On May 22, the President and the other members of the National Security Council were briefed. Again, no one raised any objection. The next day Bremer issued the order.

This decision process, while more orderly, inclusive, and clear-cut than some administration actions of the period, was far from perfect.

The order had not been discussed on an interagency basis until the President and his chief advisors were informed on the day before its announcement. Stephen Hadley, Rice's deputy on the NSC staff, and Air Force General Richard Meyers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, both complained later that they had not been consulted, although the draft order had been shown to more junior NSC and military officials. At least some of the military officers who acquiesced in this decision did so in the misapprehension that large elements of the army would quickly be recalled to form the basis for a new force, which was not what Bremer and Slocombe intended. Their failure to clarify their intention in this regard from the beginning led to considerable subsequent resentment and recrimination. Given that the Iraqi army had already dissolved, there was no immediate necessity to issue such an order, other than the desire to demonstrate to the Iraqi population that there would be no return of a Saddamist-style government.

The order was certainly remiss in one respect: It made no provision for payments to the separated soldiers or for their reintegration into civilian society. A month later, provision was made for stipends to be paid to former career personnel; a month later still, such payments actually began.

A fully thought-through program for disarming, demobilizing, and reintegrating the old army would undoubtedly have expedited the selective recall of individuals and perhaps elements into the new army. It might also have recovered at least some of the weapons the dispersing soldiers had taken with them. Given that disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration schemes had by 2003 become a standard part of postconflict reconstruction missions, there was no good reason not to have incorporated all aspects of such a program in the original order, even if it had been necessary to delay its promulgation to do so. Approaching the issue in this more comprehensive fashion could have attenuated the negative reaction among former soldiers and their families, recouped some of the weapons former soldiers had taken with them, provided those separated from the service a constructive outlet for their continued activity, and facilitated recruiting some of them back into the new army in due course. ORHA's plans had called for such a program, but it assumed the army would be present for duty.

These plans were thus irrelevant. In the aftermath of Order Number 2, which dissolved the Iraqi army and other entities such as the Iraqi Intelligence Service, the CPA began work on a reintegration plan of its own but was unable to implement it.

In retrospect, it would have been better to put all Iraqi army personnel on inactive status, continue to pay them, and recall individuals incrementally and selectively. This is not too far from what eventually occurred. Most former soldiers were eventually paid and some were recalled to duty. But doing so without formally disbanding the army would have avoided the traumatic effect of abolishing a force and a national symbol that, unlike the Ba'ath party, was respected in parts of the Shi'ite and Sunni communities. It would also have allowed an accelerated recall of individuals and a selective recall of entire units, as the need emerged.

Efforts to rebuild both the army and police got off to a slow start. Initial CPA plans called for the gradual buildup of an Iraqi army that would concentrate on external defense. Despite pressure from CJTF-7, the CPA was slow to adjust the pace and refocus this training to meet the mounting internal threat. It was far from alone in this regard. Washington was even slower to appreciate what was happening in Iraq. Early on, Bremer agreed with Sanchez that the U.S. military should take over responsibility for training the new army, but lower-level disagreements and an absence of adequate follow through from the top seems to have blocked implementation of their decision until Rumsfeld ordered the shift in March 2004.

Bernard Kerik, former New York City police chief, had responsibility for directing, improving, and expanding the Iraqi police. He spent most of his energy on the first of these tasks, overseeing street operations in Baghdad but doing little to recruit and train the much larger and more professional force that was needed. His lack of federal and international experience was a serious handicap in this regard because all the required resources and expertise for such an effort would have to come from those sources.

After four months, Kerik left Baghdad, to the relief of many. Bremer had turned over responsibility for locating the site for a police training facility to Clayton McManaway, Bremer's *de facto* deputy and



close advisor, who secured the agreement of Jordan's King Abdullah to establish such a center there. Large-scale police training did not begin until late in the fall of 2003, six months after Saddam's regime was overthrown and well after the insurgency had begun to take root.

As American casualties mounted, the CPA came under increasing pressure from Washington to boost the number of Iraqi security personnel, almost regardless of quality. The result was to generate additional numbers of incompetent, corrupt, and increasingly abusive police and the formation of numerous, minimally trained militia (labeled the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps) attached directly to American units. Initial Iraqi army contingents, having been told their mission was external defense, balked the first time they were thrown into the counterinsurgency effort. Bremer resisted persistent military efforts to take over police training. In the spring of 2004, Rumsfeld eventually transferred responsibilities for training both the police and the army to the U.S. military. By the second half of 2004, there was a significant increase in the quantity of security forces, but their quality rose much more slowly.

The State Department had originally proposed sending several thousand American and international civilian police to Iraq, based on experience in Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and more than a dozen UN operations, where civilian police had provided a valuable supplement to military contingents in providing for public safety and professionalizing local security forces. The White House cut this number drastically and decreed that those police who were deployed should be unarmed. The State Department ultimately proved unable to deploy even the reduced number that had been authorized. Bremer persisted in pressing for more such police. The NSC staff advised against seeking UN police (on which NATO had relied in Bosnia and Kosovo) on the grounds that they had proven to be incompetent and corrupt. Eventually, the security situation in Iraq deteriorated beyond the point at which lightly armed civilian police would have been of much assistance, and efforts to secure their deployment were abandoned.

## Governing Iraq

Bremer's first decision on reaching Baghdad was to dismiss from public service thousands of senior Ba'athist officials. This may have been the most popular step taken by Bremer during his entire 14-month stay, at least among the Shi'ite and Kurdish majority, but it further antagonized the Sunni community, from whence an insurgency soon arose.

Again, this was not a hastily conceived measure, nor was Bremer its originator. The idea of excluding senior Ba'athists from public office had been raised by the Iraqi émigrés working on the State Department's Future of Iraq Project. It had been briefed to the President and the rest of the NSC on March 10. An order to this effect had been prepared for Garner to issue. Learning of it, Bremer asked that its promulgation be postponed until his arrival. As a result, it became CPA Order Number 1, issued on May 1.

Like the decision to dissolve the army, the de-Ba'athification decree was approved by Bremer's superiors in the Pentagon. Unlike the army decree, the decision on de-Ba'athification was also discussed with other agencies, although its exact nature and extent may not have been thoroughly reviewed outside the Defense Department.

There now seems little doubt that the decrees on dissolving the army and on de-Ba'athification could have profited from further review. Arguing against the delay needed to conduct such a review was the expanding chaos in Iraq and the sense of drift occasioned by uncertainty over the governance of the country. Bremer had been recruited to show a firmer American hand. He was anxious to establish the CPA's authority, and felt that both measures would reassure the bulk of the population that Saddam's dictatorship was truly over and not destined to return. Although informed of both actions in advance, President Bush was nevertheless surprised by their extent and rapidity of execution, but he was inclined to defer to Bremer's judgment as the man on the spot. For his part, Bremer believed he was acting on the basis of clear Washington guidance.

Although consciously modeled on de-Nazification in post-World War II Germany, the de-Ba'athification decree was designed to be much less far-reaching. In Germany, 2.5 percent of the population was

affected; in Iraq the intent was to cover only about .01 percent, or 25 times less. In Germany, senior Nazi party members were barred from all employment save manual labor; in Iraq, senior Ba'athists were barred only from government jobs.

Bremer intended that those purged who had not been guilty of personal abuses should be able to rehabilitate themselves through a process of review and exoneration. Unfortunately, encouraged by the Defense Department, Bremer turned implementation of this decree over to the Governing Council, which awarded it to Ahmad Chalabi. He and other Iraqi politicians exhibited little interest in restoring former Ba'athists to public office, no matter how free of personal guilt they might be.

Given the scale of Ba'athist abuses and the intense resentment toward the party among the Shi'ite and Sunni populations, some level of de-Ba'athification was justified and unavoidable. A rebalancing of government employment in favor of the Shi'ite and Kurdish majority was inevitable and inherent in the concept of representative government. Bremer's measure may, indeed, have been minimalist in this regard. Certainly, it is inconsistent to criticize the CPA for both delaying a return of sovereignty and purging the Iraqi bureaucracy too heavily, since a representative Iraqi government would probably have acted to free up even more jobs for its supporters.

Bremer soon regretted turning administration of this program over to Iraqi leaders, and he has since acknowledged that it was a mistake. Throughout his tenure, he came under continued pressure from Shi'ite and Kurdish politicians to extend de-Ba'athification further. Bremer largely resisted these entreaties, and, over Governing Council objection, eventually forced the rehiring of several thousand teachers who had been dismissed as a result of the decree.

U.S. officials were shocked at the state in which they found Iraq's electric, water, health, and education systems. Iraq's infrastructure had been relatively unaffected by the war, but it was badly run down by years of mismanagement and economic sanctions and further damaged by the widespread looting that followed Saddam's fall. Prewar American planning had called for fixing only what the invasion had

broken. It soon became evident, however, that a much vaster program of reconstruction was called for.

Electric generation is one of the metrics by which the CPA is often judged a failure. To some extent, the CPA has itself to blame for that, since Bremer publicly promised a large-scale increase in electrical generation. The judgment of failure is largely unjustified, however. By October 1, 2003, the CPA had brought electric power generation to a higher-than-prewar level. (It fell to slightly below prewar levels over subsequent months in consequence of both the antiquated state of the electrical grid and insurgent attacks on it.) Bremer also allocated available electricity more fairly throughout the country. Under Saddam, Baghdad had enjoyed more-or-less continuous service, while less favored areas of the country experienced frequent blackouts. Now these shortages were more evenly distributed. Unfortunately, most political leaders and nearly all foreign journalists lived in Baghdad, so the impression of an overall degradation in service gained currency.

Nor was Iraq's electricity production under the CPA substandard for a country at Iraq's overall level of development. On a per-capita basis, under Saddam and then under the CPA, Iraq generated electricity at levels equivalent to that of other countries, such as Jordan, that were more prosperous and more industrialized. But those countries did not experience chronic shortages. Iraq's problem was not principally an inadequate supply of electricity but excessive demand brought on by a failure to charge customers for what they consumed. Fees charged consumers for electricity under Saddam had fallen to negligible levels due to inflation, and the CPA chose to stop collecting them altogether. Unconstrained demand for electricity was further stimulated by the sharp rise in imports of white goods occasioned by the CPA's decision to largely eliminate external tariffs, an otherwise quite beneficial move. With much lower prices, ordinary Iraqis stocked up on refrigerators and air conditioners, giving no thought to the cost of their operation because, from the consumer's standpoint, there was none.

The CPA committed large sums, ultimately over \$5 billion, to increase electricity production over prewar levels. Some of this money was necessary because insurgent attacks on the grid required continued investments simply to keep it at existing levels. Much of it was ulti-

mately wasted, however, in the years following the CPA's lifespan, as a result of rising violence and lack of Iraqi maintenance.

In contrast, the CPA was able to raise the delivery of health and education services well beyond prewar levels. Spending on public health increased under the CPA by 3,200 percent. Thousands of schools were refurbished, textbooks rewritten to eliminate Ba'athist content, and millions distributed. Higher education continued to lag, however.

The CPA charted an uncertain course with respect to local government. This may have been unfortunate, but it was hardly unusual. Most democratization experts recommend beginning at the grass roots, holding local elections, allowing a new generation of leaders to emerge thereby, and proceeding to national elections only when civil society, free media, and nonsectarian political parties have had time to get organized. In practice, this almost never happens. The international community often has little presence beyond the capital, there is frequently great urgency attached to forming a national government, the powers of local governments are seldom well established, and postconflict societies are often prey to serious centrifugal forces which make empowering such governments dangerous in the absence of an established and functioning central authority.

All of these conditions applied in Iraq. Only with great difficulty was the CPA able, by the end of its lifespan, to deploy a handful of its personnel—often no more than one or two—to Iraqi provinces. Iraqis had no modern experience with federalism, and considerable skepticism regarding it. By contrast the CPA was under great pressure, from the moment of its creation, to hold national elections and restore sovereignty to the resultant government. And finally, the fragmentation of Iraq into three or more warring states was an ever-present danger that might have been advanced by empowering local governments before establishing a national one.

As a result, the CPA proceeded cautiously in this sphere. Bremer instructed U.S. military commanders to stop holding elections for local councils. The CPA was slow to provide funding for the councils that had been created. In the early fall of 2003, Bremer's staff was recommending that the CPA authorize caucuses to refresh local councils that had previously been formed by appointment. Once the mid-November

decision to accelerate the handover of sovereignty was made, however, Bremer pulled back, feeling that the interim constitution, then under negotiation among Iraqi leaders, should deal with and establish the role of such governments. Only in April 2004 did Bremer finally sign an order establishing the authorities and responsibilities of provincial and municipal councils, governors, and mayors.

In retrospect, the CPA's failure to do more to foster local government was a lost opportunity, but it was understandable under the circumstances. Elections at the municipal and provincial level might have been particularly useful in the Sunni regions, providing an overt and democratically legitimated alternative leadership to that of the mounting insurgency.

## **Promoting the Rule of Law**

In no sector were staffing shortages more keenly felt than in those CPA units overseeing the Ministry of Justice, the courts, and the prisons. The U.S. Department of Justice was not prepared to draw significantly on its Washington staff or that of U.S. Attorneys' offices throughout the country to staff positions in Iraq. As a result, the Justice Department had the worst record of any U.S. agency in meeting the CPA's staffing needs. Nevertheless, the CPA was able to purge Iraqi laws of Ba'athist influence, reopen the courts, and begin to build an independent judiciary. By September 2003, the CPA had reported 90 percent of the courthouses open, although the justice system was far from fully functional. In April 2004, Iraqi judges adjudicated more than 3,000 cases, an all-time record for the country.

In June 2003, the CPA created a Central Criminal Court in Baghdad to handle major cases of national interest. A number of high-profile trials ensued, involving corruption, arms smuggling, and abuse of office. The CPA also laid the groundwork for prosecution of war crimes and crimes against humanity. It trained Iraqi judges, investigators, and prosecutors; oversaw the collection of forensic evidence; registered and examined mass grave sites; and established a mass grave database. It also resisted pressure from Washington to introduce inter-

national judges and prosecutors into the Iraqi process. The resultant trials of Saddam and other of his henchmen, which came after the CPA's demise, built on this work. The result was an Iraqi process that exhibited some imperfections but was vastly more expeditious and inexpensive than any international tribunal would have been.

Bremer gave high priority to anticorruption measures, and the CPA introduced a number of reforms designed to reduce the incidence of corruption. Among the most important was the assignment of independent inspectors general to each of the ministries. When one minister exceeded his authority and fired an inspector general, Bremer forced a reinstatement.

Bremer deflected pressure from Iraqi and American political figures to open a CPA investigation into corruption associated with the UN-run Oil-for-Food Program, supporting instead the UN's inquiry and turning the Iraqi investigation over to the independent and apolitical Board of Supreme Audit rather than the Governing Council, as Chalabi and others were demanding. Bremer also resisted pressures from both Washington and the Governing Council to close down Al Jazeera's broadcast operations in Iraq. The CPA did proceed with the prosecution of several Al Jazeera journalists who were accused of profiting from advance knowledge of insurgent attacks to secure exclusive film footage, rather than warning the authorities, but it refrained from acts of censorship, despite the station's sometime incendiary content.

Bremer decided to reopen Abu Ghraib prison after the invasion, determining that there were no short-term alternatives for housing the growing number of detainees. But the CPA had no authority over the handling of detainees, and the eventual prisoner abuses at Abu Ghraib, once they became known, were a major blow to the credibility of U.S. efforts in the rule of law area, as they were more generally.

## **Growing the Economy**

Economic growth in Iraq for 2004, the first year after the CPA's arrival, was 46.5 percent. This is the second-highest figure in any of the 22 postconflict environments studied in previous RAND publications. It

was exceeded only by Bosnia and is much higher than growth registered in post–World War II Germany or Japan or any of the many UN-led post–Cold War nation-building endeavors.

The CPA achieved these results by curbing inflation, issuing a new currency, working with the Central Bank to stabilize the dinar through transparent daily auctions, reducing external tariffs, reforming the banking system, expanding liquidity, and stimulating consumer demand. This growth was achieved without a large influx of U.S. or other external assistance. Substantial U.S. government aid began to flow into Iraq only after the end of the CPA. The CPA also promoted, supported, and helped broker what became the largest debt relief package in history, one that will ultimately free Iraq of some \$100 billion in public and privately held debt.

Iraqis were nevertheless disappointed with the state of their economy under the CPA. This was the product both of unrealistic Iraqi expectations and the Bush administration's own rhetoric, which had emphasized the material improvements in Iraqi well-being that would flow from the occupation.

The CPA failed to make significant cuts in Iraq's comprehensive and vastly counterproductive system of subsidies for electricity, fuel, food, and state-owned enterprises. Given the deteriorating security situation and the distinct possibility that making such cuts would generate further unrest, this may have been a prudent choice and was understandable in any case. The CPA economic policy has been criticized as being naively ideological in its devotion to free-market principles. Some of its programs fit this mold. Certainly the CPA's effort to create a Baghdad stock exchange was premature, given the state of the Iraqi private sector. On the whole, however, the CPA's economic policies were consistent with established best practices in postconflict environments and, if anything, were too cautious when it came to cutting subsidies.

Temporary employment-generating schemes are seldom a good choice for scarce public resources in postconflict environments. Such efforts almost invariably produce only a limited and very short-term impact; the CPA's efforts in this regard were no exception. Combined with a well-considered counterinsurgency strategy, job schemes might



have made some sense, but the U.S. military was still several years away from adopting such a strategy. If the CPA is to be criticized in this area, it would be for putting too much money into temporary job schemes rather than too little.

Problems in the allocation of the \$18.2 billion in supplemental funding voted by Congress in November 2003 became evident after the demise of the CPA and were due, in part at least, to choices made under its authority. In particular, the large proportion of those funds devoted to electricity generation and other forms of heavy infrastructure was unwise. As noted earlier, by the end of the CPA, Iraq was generating per-capita kilowatt hours at a level comparable to those in Jordan and other countries at Iraq's level of development. It was experiencing chronic blackouts primarily because of excess demand arising from the fact that it was not charging consumers for the power they used, not just because of deficiencies in the electric power system. Assistance in this sector, beyond the emergency repairs that the CPA had successfully implemented, should have been conditioned on the elimination of this subsidy and the implementation of plans to maintain and eventually amortize the costs of new power plants. Some of the money originally designated for the heavy infrastructure sector was eventually reprogrammed for capacity-building within the Iraqi government, which should have had a higher priority from the beginning.

Although the Iraqi economy rebounded dramatically in 2004, economic output fell in 2005 as a result of the rising civil war. Assuming the gains in security of 2007–2008 can be sustained, the reforms introduced by the CPA should provide the basis for a growing economy less entirely dependent on oil.

It nevertheless proved a serious mistake for the United States to have premised so much of its appeal to the Iraqi people on an improvement in their economic circumstances, particularly when it proved impossible to deliver on these promises, due to rising violence. That is not to say that the United States should have withheld economic assistance. Rather, it should have deflated expectations of a rapid rise in the Iraqi standard of living. It would have been better to have confined American promises to (1) liberating the Iraqi people, (2) protecting them, and (3) allowing them to choose their own government, while

stressing that eventual prosperity would depend on hard work and the policy choices that their government made. Had these three promises been made and kept, the substantial, and for the most part well-considered, economic reforms put in place by the CPA would have paid larger and more enduring dividends than did the massive American aid package introduced at the end of the CPA's tenure—much of which was dissipated in security costs and ill-conceived, often uncompleted, projects.

## **Running and Reorganizing the CPA**

As time wore on, Bremer made a number of changes in the CPA's structure. He opened a CPA office in the Pentagon to improve backstopping, recruitment, and other forms of support. President Bush himself had noted to Bremer that the latter had far too many subordinates reporting directly to him. In November 2003, Bremer appointed two formal deputies, the senior responsible for policy and filling in for him when away, the second for operations, principally those related to reconstruction. Bremer also bolstered the strategic planning function. The CPA was eventually able to establish small teams in each of Iraq's 18 provinces. Beginning in November, when the decision was made to speed the return of sovereignty, Bremer refocused the work of the CPA on improving the capacity of the various Iraqi ministries to take on these responsibilities, and began to graduate individual ministries from CPA oversight.

Throughout the CPA's lifespan, staffing remained an acute problem. In fact, it became even more difficult as the end of the CPA's mandate neared, and agencies other than the State Department became even less inclined to send people forward. The CJTF-7 staff was similarly short of personnel. Although blame for the failure to fully man the CPA and CJTF-7 can be widely distributed, in the end, it was the responsibility of the Secretary of Defense to ensure that both organizations were staffed and the President's job to see that he did so.

## Promoting Democratization

In early September, Bremer published a seven-step plan for the restoration of sovereignty. This plan required the drafting and ratification of a constitution and the holding of national elections to precede the formation of an Iraqi government, a sequence likely to take a couple of years. This timetable proved too slow for the Iraqi political leadership, and, as it turned out, for Washington as well.

By the fall of 2003, the original American project for Iraq was clearly faltering. Violent resistance was rising, and most Iraqis, however unfairly, blamed Americans for the damage and wanted them gone. The President and his advisors concluded that it was important to end the occupation as soon as possible. In mid-November, Bremer secured Governing Council agreement to an expedited timetable that called for negotiation of an interim constitution, known as the transitional administrative law, a transitional national assembly that would be chosen by provincial caucuses rather than by ballot, and a transitional government to be chosen by this assembly. The entire process was to be completed by mid-2004.

The new plan ran into immediate opposition from Grand Ayatollah Ali Hussein al-Sistani, Iraq's leading Shi'ite cleric. As a result, it had to be amended once again to eliminate both the caucuses and the transitional assembly. Instead, a UN envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, was invited by Washington and the Governing Council to help select the members of the transitional government. One was eventually formed with the secular Shi'ite Ayad Allawi at its head.

During this period, Bremer and his staff focused heavily on supporting and influencing the negotiation of the transitional administrative law, which Bremer correctly believed would largely determine the contents of the permanent constitution that was to be drafted and ratified a year later.

The erratic nature of U.S. policy—first signaling in early 2003 that the formation of an Iraqi government was imminent, then shifting in May to a much slower timetable, then shifting in November back toward a more expedited process, and finally in early 2004 abandoning the caucus system in favor of a UN-conducted selection process—

undoubtedly created confusion and irritation among Iraqi leaders and their constituents. In retrospect, it would probably have been better to have begun in the spring of 2003 with the more expedited process that was finally adopted, thereby anticipating that the United States was not going to deploy enough of the assets needed, in terms of troops, civilian officials, and money, to effectively secure and govern Iraq for the extended period needed to first write a constitution and then hold elections. But that conclusion was not as evident at the time, and Bremer's more deliberate plan was consistent with the best available expert advice. Indeed, to the extent Bremer was criticized by democratization and nation-building experts throughout the first half of 2003, it was for moving too quickly toward the transfer of sovereignty, rather than too slowly.

Of the three speeds toward sovereignty—slow, fast, and immediate—only the last was not tried. Some believe this might have yielded the best results, citing the Afghan example of late 2001. There is little reason, however, to think that an Iraqi government formed in the spring of 2003 would have performed any better than the one that was finally empowered in the summer of 2004. The result of such an attempt might well have been to simply accelerate the descent into civil war.

In the event, the CPA adjusted to the new and much accelerated November timetable, and set in train the various steps needed to effectuate the transition by the mid-2004 deadline, including the elaboration of a liberal interim constitution, a strengthened bureaucracy, and the beginnings of a more coherent interagency structure for managing Iraq's national security affairs. These contributions endured through the civil war that raged in the aftermath of the occupation, and they provide what hope there is that Iraq will neither fragment nor return to the savage dictatorship it experienced under Saddam.

## **Disarming Militias and Countering Insurgents**

The CPA's closing months were dominated by mounting war on two fronts with both Sunni insurgents and Shi'ite militia. In the spring of

2004, these threats came together in a manner that almost derailed the approaching transfer of power. For months, the CPA and CJTF-7 had been steeling themselves to neutralize the most militant of Shi'ite militia leaders, Muqtada al-Sadr and his Mahdi army. On March 31, Sunni gunmen in Fallujah ambushed and killed four armed American contractors, after which a frenzied mob mutilated and exhibited the Americans' charred bodies. Washington wanted quick retribution, insisting that Fallujah be secured forthwith.

The decision to respond to these Sunni and Shi'ite provocations by launching simultaneous offensives against both the Fallujah insurgents and Muqtada al-Sadr's militia was ill conceived. The effort to retake Fallujah was pushed by Washington despite reservations on the part of the American civilian and military leadership in Iraq. The resultant fighting enraged both communities. Members of the Governing Council threatened to resign. The UN threatened to abandon its efforts to form a transitional government. In the end, Bremer and Sanchez were instructed by Washington to discontinue both efforts.

The failure to provide timely and consistent guidance to both the CPA and CJTF-7 on how to respond to months of repeated provocations from Muqtada al-Sadr was also primarily a Washington problem. Bremer and Sanchez had both sought a go-ahead from Washington to arrest al-Sadr on a number of occasions, but never received a clear decision from Rumsfeld or the President. Bremer and Sanchez were not always in synch and most agencies in Washington were opposed to taking on al-Sadr; but ultimately it was the President and Secretary of Defense who failed to make a clear-cut decision, and the NSC staff that failed to bring the issue to a head.

In its closing months, the CPA developed a pathway toward disarming several of the Shi'ite militias and even secured the agreement of their leadership, al-Sadr excepted, to do so. These plans could only have been implemented, however, if backed by more money and military muscle than Washington was prepared to deploy and employ for the purpose. In the end, the problem was passed on to the new Iraqi government, which did not pursue the effort further for the next several years.

## Mission Accomplished or Mission Impossible?

On June 28, two days earlier than expected, Bremer formally transferred sovereignty to the Iraqi people and their interim government. He left Iraq later that same day. Following Bremer's departure, the CPA was quietly dismantled. Neither the Defense Department nor the State Department was eager to claim its legacy. The Department of Defense had no desire to repeat a foray into the political and economic aspects of reconstruction, nor was State inclined to look to the CPA for positive lessons. For both agencies, as for many Americans and Iraqis, this now defunct organization became a convenient repository for blame about everything that had gone wrong over the preceding 14 months.

Yet in the course of that relatively brief period, the CPA had restored Iraq's essential public services to near or beyond their prewar level, instituted reforms in the Iraqi judiciary and penal systems, dramatically reduced inflation, promoted rapid economic growth, put in place barriers to corruption, began reform of the civil service, promoted the development of the most liberal constitution in the Middle East, and set the stage for a series of free elections. All this was accomplished without the benefit of prior planning or major infusions of U.S. aid. Measured against progress registered over a similar period in more than 20 other American-, NATO-, and UN-led postconflict reconstruction missions, these accomplishments rank quite high.

But the CPA could not halt Iraq's descent into civil war. With the return of sovereignty, violent resistance to an occupation devolved into an even more violent conflict between Sunni and Shi'ite extremist groups. With respect to security, arguably the most important aspect of any postconflict mission, Iraq comes near the bottom in any ranking of postwar reconstruction efforts.

The CPA thus largely succeeded in the areas where it had the lead responsibility but failed in the most important task, for which it did not. The degree to which one judges the CPA's overall performance, therefore, must depend heavily on how one assesses its contribution to the deteriorating security situation.

Principal responsibility for rising insecurity must be attributed to the U.S. administration's failure to prepare its forces to assume respon-

sibility for public safety after the collapse of Saddam's regime, to deploy an adequate number of troops for that purpose, and to institute appropriate counterinsurgency measures when widespread and violent resistance emerged. These omissions cannot be laid solely, or even principally, at the CPA's door.

The United States went into Iraq with a maximalist agenda—standing up a model democracy that would serve as a beacon to the entire region—and a minimalist application of money and manpower. In particular, it deployed only enough troops to topple the old regime, but not enough to deter the emergence of violent resistance or to counter and defeat the resultant insurgency. The subsequent difficulties encountered owe much to this disjunction between the scope of America's ambitions and the scale of its initial commitment. Given what the CPA had to work with, it now seems apparent that its mission could never have been fully executed with the manpower, money, and time available to it.

It will be endlessly debated whether disbanding a then-absent army and purging an abusive (and incompetent) bureaucracy contributed to the disorder. These were certainly not the proximate causes of Iraq's descent into chaos, since that had started before the CPA was created and these steps were taken. Those two actions did antagonize the Sunni community from which the insurgency soon arose, but a high level of Sunni dissatisfaction was inherent in any effort to provide Iraq a representative government responsive to the bulk of its population. The two steps also further limited the ability of the Iraqi state apparatus to respond to the CPA's needs. Given the performance of the Iraqi police, which notably were not purged, this further degradation may or may not have made much of a difference. Formally dissolving the army was probably an unnecessary and counterproductive gesture; failing to recall a larger number of former soldiers more quickly was the more costly mistake.

Having been set an impossible task, Bremer and his team were then left bereft of adequate support, backstopping, and oversight. Throughout the CPA period, the administration never committed manpower or money commensurate with its rhetoric or its ambitions. Both the CPA and CJTF-7 staffs were grossly undermanned. Bremer

governed and reconstructed Iraq with largely Iraqi funds. By the time large-scale U.S. financing became available in the waning days of the CPA, some key programs, including those for building up local security forces, were running on fumes.

The White House was mistaken in thinking that its responsibilities for interagency management could be delegated first to the Department of Defense and then to Baghdad. Bremer's two most controversial decisions, disbanding the army and firing thousands of Ba'athist officials, had been thoroughly discussed in the Department of Defense and approved by his superiors, but they had not been adequately debated or fully considered by the rest of the national security establishment, something that Condoleezza Rice and her staff should have insisted on. President Bush himself was sometimes surprised by Bremer's decisions, although inclined to back him up and defer to his judgment. If senior people at the Departments of State and Defense and at the White House were often surprised and sometimes displeased by decisions made by the CPA, the failure lay principally with Washington for not establishing a clear and transparent channel for reporting and instruction.

The decision to give oversight for all nonmilitary tasks in Iraq to the Defense Department was an important contributing factor to this lack of support and oversight. By doing so, the President took himself and his staff out of the daily decision loop. Whatever sense it may have made in the abstract to transfer nonmilitary responsibilities to the Department of Defense, doing so only a few weeks before the invasion imposed immense start-up costs on the operation. That department, despite its wealth of resources, had no experience in setting up, supporting, and running a branch office of the U.S. government half a world away, a core mission of the State Department. The result was a series of heroic, but in many cases unnecessary, improvisations as new arrangements had to be established to handle tasks familiar to the State Department but new to the Department of Defense.

One of the administration's most serious conceptual and rhetorical errors was to model its efforts in Iraq on those of the post-World War II occupation of Germany and Japan. Those two countries were both highly homogenous societies, with no proclivity toward sectarian



conflict. They were first-world economies whose populations did not need to be taught how to run a successful free-market system. And they had surrendered unconditionally. By contrast, Iraq in 2003 looked a lot more like Yugoslavia in 1995—ethnically and religiously divided, with an economy wrecked by war and sanctions and a pattern of historic sectarian grievances. The deceptive ease with which a democratic transition had been arranged in Afghanistan 15 months earlier encouraged an underestimation of the costs and risks of nation-building on this scale. Had the administration recognized that it was taking on tasks comparable to those NATO had assumed only a few years earlier in Bosnia and Kosovo, but in a society ten times bigger, it might have scaled up its initial military and monetary commitments and scaled back its soaring rhetoric. (Alternatively, of course, such a realization might have caused the administration to reconsider the entire enterprise.)

By the same token, it was, as has been noted, a mistake for the United States to have premised so much of its appeal to the Iraqi people on an improvement in their material circumstances. This emphasis on the economic aspects of reconstruction derived, in some measure, from an inaccurate reading of history, in particular, of the post-World War II German and Japanese occupations. Germany did not receive reconstruction aid until 1948, and Japan never did. In both cases, democratic political reforms had been put in place well before their subsequent economic take-offs. Experience in these and many other cases has dictated a prioritization of postwar tasks: beginning with security, then restoring basic public services, stabilizing the economy, and finally reforming the political system. Some level of growth will automatically resume when and if the fighting stops and people stop killing each other and go back to work. Further economic growth is helpful to consolidate political reforms and sustain peace, but it is not a prerequisite for the initial application of those reforms and cannot, in any case, be sustained in the absence of security. The United States should have aided Iraq's economic development, as it did, but it should also have depressed rather than stimulated Iraqi expectations for rapid improvement in their standard of living and directed a larger share of

its assistance to rebuilding the Iraqi army, police, and government as a whole.

Given the circumstances in which they found themselves, Bremer and his team performed credibly. Senior levels of the CPA staff were generally competent and experienced. Everyone worked very hard. Not every decision was optimal, but choices were made in an orderly fashion on the basis of professional advice despite the hectic pace of events. Bremer was restrained and judicious in the use of his extraordinary powers, sometimes resisting or ignoring ill-considered advice from Washington. Most CPA policies were consistent with best practices that had emerged in the conduct of postconflict reconstruction missions over previous decades. The results in most spheres, security excepted, bear comparison—in some cases quite favorable comparison—with the record of earlier such operations.

On the negative side, the CPA structure was overly centralized, particularly during the first six months. Staff turbulence exacerbated this problem, leading Bremer, not unnaturally, to rely increasingly on those few key staffers who stayed for the duration. The frustration of CPA officers assigned to the provinces was particularly acute, as their capacity to communicate with and influence the center was limited—both practically, as a result of inadequate communications, and organizationally, as a result of this centralization of decisionmaking.

Planning for the occupation of Iraq has been rightly criticized, but it is also important to stress the lack of preparation. There was a good deal of planning in the State and Defense Departments and in several military commands. But these disparate activities were never fully integrated into a national plan that could have been given to the ORHA and then CPA leadership when they deployed. This meant that the CPA, chronically understaffed, had to create a strategic plan “on the fly.”

Contrast this to the planning and preparation for the conventional battle that toppled Saddam. Those plans represented more than a year of intellectual work on the part of the administration’s top military and civilian leadership. Even more important, that planning process was accompanied by the movement of hundreds of thousands of men and tens of thousands of machines into position for battle and by

the allocation of tens of billions of dollars for its execution. By contrast, the CPA was initially bereft not just of a plan, but of the manpower and money needed to carry one out.

It has been rightly said that no war plan survives first contact with the enemy. It is also true that no postwar plan is likely to survive first contact with the former enemy. In any postconflict situation, some degree of improvisation is therefore inevitable, no matter how good the prewar preparations. The true test of any planning process is not whether it accurately predicts each successive turn in an operation, but whether it provides the operators with the resources and flexibility to carry out their assigned tasks. This the planning process for postwar Iraq signally failed to do.

It is unlikely that American officials will again face decisions exactly like those required of the CPA in the spring of 2003. Second-guessing those decisions will take one only so far in preparing for future challenges. But it is certain that the United States will again find itself assisting a society emerging from conflict to build an enduring peace and establish a representative government. Learning how best to prepare for such a challenge is the key to more-successful future operations. In this regard, Iraq provides an object lesson of the costs and consequences of unprepared nation-building.