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Planning post-conflict reconstruction in Iraq: what can we learn?

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The post-conflict reconstruction of fragile and failing states has emerged in recent years as a leading concern for the international community.¹ International policy-makers concerned with security issues and with development concur that (re)constructing state structures, peacebuilding and facilitating transition are high-priority tasks.² The number of peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions has increased since the end of the Cold War, and a US administration that came to power opposed to nation-building is now transforming its military and civil structures to support just such a mission. As lessons have been learned from past missions, other governments and multilateral institutions have sought to improve their institutional capacities and to refine their intellectual frameworks for such missions.

There were a number of post-conflict reconstruction operations in which international military and civilian actors assumed temporary governance functions before the 2003 invasion of Iraq by an Anglo-American-led coalition. That in Iraq has, however, been the most ambitious and demanding of such operations, and some of the painful lessons learned are finding their way into institutional or doctrinal changes in both the civilian and the military worlds. Although Iraq's case was unique in many ways, we can draw some lessons for the conduct and management of future post-conflict reconstruction operations. The complexity and difficulty of the Iraq case can also serve to test worst-case scenarios that will need to be addressed in planning for future operations. At the same time, the stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq are very much works

* This article, and the work it describes, would not have been possible without the efforts of the staff of ORHA and CPA's planning offices in 2003–2004 and of RAND colleagues with whom the author has worked on 'after action' studies of the Iraq war. Special credit is due to successive directors of the CPA's policy planning office and their deputies: Dayton Maxwell, Colonel Paul Hughes, Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Polk and Kevin Kuklok. My thanks also to Keith Crane, Jim Dobbins, Nora Bensahel, Olga Oliker and Tom Sullivan at RAND; and to L. Paul Bremer III and Sir Jeremy Greenstock, who provided invaluable comments on an earlier draft. The views expressed here nonetheless reflect those of the author alone.

¹ OECD Development and Assistance Committee, *Principles for good international engagement in fragile states*, 7 April 2005 (draft), DCD(2005)8/Rev 2.

² This article uses the term 'transition' to encompass the transition from violent conflict to peace, and political transition from a failed state or authoritarian regime to a more democratic system.

in progress; it is not too late to draw pertinent lessons for the continuing efforts in Iraq.

In examining post-conflict reconstruction operations, there are a number of analytical perspectives that can be taken. One approach is to focus on the specifics of state-building in a particular national context;³ another is to examine the generic substantive policy requirements of reconstruction and state-building.⁴ This article uses a case-study of Iraq under the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to address a third perspective, focusing on the planning and management processes and institutions required to make effective use of international resources. The importance of this perspective is underlined by an influential recent report to the United Nations which noted: 'While there is a tendency to blame the limited success rate [of peacebuilding missions] on lack of resources, it is equally possible that the main problem is more related to a lack of coherent application of the resources already available.'⁵

Post-conflict reconstruction: why and what?

The debate over 'post-conflict reconstruction' is beset by definitional uncertainties. This uncertainty is based in part on linguistic/historical differences,⁶ and in part on differences in focus. Nonetheless, there is a convergence of efforts by states and multilateral institutions to deal pre-emptively with 'countries at risk of instability',⁷ and to enhance institutional capabilities to undertake stabilization, post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding.

The international discussion has been heavily influenced by the American debate over 'nation-building', defined by one study as the 'use of military force in the aftermath of a conflict to underpin rapid and fundamental societal transformation ... [including] comprehensive efforts ... aimed to engineer major social, political, and economic reconstruction'.⁸ The dominant official US discourse, notably since 9/11, has been couched in terms of national and international security, often mediated through the lens of 'promoting freedom'. As President George W. Bush put it in April 2005, as 'Iraq[i] democracy succeeds,

³ Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: the failure of nation-building and a history denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

⁴ Roland Paris, *At war's end* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Derek W. Brinkerhoff, 'Rebuilding governance in failed states and post-conflict societies: core concepts and cross-cutting themes', *Public Administration and Development* 25, 2005, pp. 3–14.

⁵ Espen Barth Eide, Anja Therese Kaspersen, Randolph Kent and Karen von Hippel, *Report on integrated missions: practical perspectives and recommendations*, independent study for the Expanded UN ECHA Core Group, May 2005, p. 5.

⁶ Cf. e.g. the usage of the terms 'nation-building' by the United States and 'state-building' by Europeans.

⁷ This is the term used in the British government's project that seeks to predict the countries in which it may be necessary to take action to prevent or mitigate conflict and instability. The effort to undertake such forecasting is something of a growth industry that this article does not address. See Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, *Investing in prevention: an international strategy to manage risks of instability and improve crisis response* (London: Cabinet Office, 2005).

⁸ James Dobbins, John G. McGinn, Keith Crane, Seth G. Jones, Rollie Lal, Andrew Rathmell, Rachel Swanger and Anga Timilsina, *America's role in nation-building: from Germany to Iraq*, MR-1753 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2003).

that success is sending a message from Beirut to Tehran that freedom can be the future of every nation. The establishment of a free Iraq at the heart of the Middle East will be a crushing defeat to the forces of tyranny and terror.⁹

More broadly, scholars and practitioners of international security have pointed to the growing challenge posed by state failures and weakness in large parts of the world that may require additional international interventions in the guise of 'liberal imperialism' to ensure that these states can provide for the human security of their peoples and do not become havens for international terrorists and criminals.¹⁰ This debate, embodied for instance in the concept of international trusteeships, highlights the functional continuities with an earlier era of 'small wars' and mandatory state-building.¹¹ In line with this national security discourse, in western military circles the requirements of stability and peace support operations are increasingly shaping military doctrine, training and structures.¹²

In the development community, meanwhile, there has been an increasing focus on a number of aspects that overlap with the interests of the security community. It is recognized that peace and stability are important contributors to economic and social development, and that international aid can either exacerbate conflict or help to transform conflict dynamics and contribute to peacebuilding.¹³ At the same time, it has long been accepted in the development business that the building of state institutions and 'good government' is critical to the achievement of developmental objectives.¹⁴ The international development community has therefore focused in recent years on how it can support fragile states, promote capacity-building in governance, make aid conditional on improved governance and use aid to transform conflict dynamics.¹⁵

Arising from this convergence of national security, human security and developmental interests has been an effort on the part of governments and

⁹ 'President discusses war on terror at Fort Hood', 12 April 2005, at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/04/20050412.html>, last accessed on 13 September 2005.

¹⁰ This proposition has naturally been interpreted rather differently from varying political perspectives. See Richard Caplan, *A new trusteeship? International administration of war-torn territories*, Adelphi Paper 341 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2002); Tobias Debiel, Stephan Klingebiel, Andreas Mehler and Ulrich Schneckener, *Between ignorance and intervention: strategies and dilemmas of external actors in fragile states*, Policy Paper 23, Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden, Bonn, Jan. 2005; Michael Ignatieff, *Empire lite: nation building in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan* (London: Penguin, 2003); Robert Cooper, *The breaking of nations* (London: Atlantic Books, 2004); Naomi Klein, 'The rise of disaster capitalism', *The Nation*, 2 May 2005.

¹¹ In other words, while the motives of the intervening powers in the twenty-first century may be different from those of their imperial or mandatory predecessors, the instrumental challenges they face will often be similar. See Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Small wars* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1940); Kimberly Zisk Marten, *Enforcing the peace: learning from the imperial past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

¹² US Department of Defense, *Draft directive: Department of Defense directive for stability operations*, Number 3000.Cce, 28 Feb. 2005.

¹³ Paul Collier, 'On the economic consequences of civil war', *Oxford Economics Papers* no. 51, 1999; Lisa Chauvet and Paul Collier, *Development effectiveness in fragile states: spillovers and turnarounds* (Oxford: Oxford University Center for the Study of African Economies, Jan. 2004).

¹⁴ Or, more practically, good enough governance. See Merilee S. Grindle, 'Good enough governance: poverty reduction and reform in developing countries', Nov. 2002, at <http://www.grc-exchange.org/docs/HD32.pdf>, last accessed on 13 September 2005.

¹⁵ United Nations Development Group, World Bank and United Nations Development Programme, *Practical guide to multilateral needs assessments in post-conflict situations* (Washington DC: UN, Aug. 2004).

multilateral institutions to improve the mechanisms they use to undertake post-conflict reconstruction. The US government has founded an Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization and the UK has founded a Post-Conflict Reconstruction Unit, both charged with improving planning for and management of the civilian aspects of post-conflict missions.¹⁶ Regional organizations have also been active. The EU and NATO have both worked to enhance their capabilities in this area.¹⁷ The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Union (AU) have been active in developing concepts and capabilities for peacebuilding.¹⁸ At the international level, a reform programme is seeking to build improved UN capabilities to manage complex emergencies, post-conflict reconstruction missions and peace-building efforts. The proposed Peace-Building Commission and Peace-Building Support Office are key tools that the UN will develop to ensure improved management of international resources in post-conflict states.¹⁹

Assessing Iraq

Critiques of the coalition effort at nation-building in Iraq were prevalent even before the April 2003 invasion. Many criticized the intervention in principle, as well as the way in which prewar diplomacy and planning were undertaken. Since the fall of the Ba'athist regime criticism has increased, with even supporters of the invasion having been disappointed by mistakes in the stabilization and reconstruction effort.

It is now over three years since serious military planning for the invasion and occupation of Iraq began. A number of 'after action' and 'lessons learned' reports have circulated within coalition governments, and have informed subsequent policy-making. The wider debate is also increasingly well served. The first draft of history has been provided by a number of journalistic accounts of the preparation for and conduct of coalition operations.²⁰ Personal accounts are also beginning to emerge from former coalition officials.²¹ These accounts have been

¹⁶ Christopher Lee, 'New State Dept. office aimed at postwar aid', *Washington Post*, 25 March 2005; HM Government, *Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit: background brief*, www.postconflict.gov.uk, last accessed on 13 Sept. 2004.

¹⁷ NATO has for some time worked towards being able to achieve the so-called Petersberg tasks. The EU is developing crisis management capabilities in the Council Secretariat and Commission, and is seeking to develop deployable civilian capabilities through the Civilian Headline Goals process.

¹⁸ New Partnership for Africa's Development, *African post-conflict reconstruction framework*, June 2005; Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge and Sybert Liebenberg, 'Developmental peacekeeping: what are the advantages for Africa?', *African Security Review* 13: 2, 2004, pp. 125–31.

¹⁹ The Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative is an additional initiative that is worth noting. See United Nations, *A more secure world: our shared responsibility: Report of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change* (New York: UN, 2004); United Nations, *In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all: Report of the Secretary General, A/59/2005*, 21 March 2005.

²⁰ James Fallows, 'Blind into Baghdad', *Atlantic Monthly*, Jan.–Feb. 2004; Bob Woodward, *Plan of attack* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004); Rowan Scarborough, *Rumsfeld's war* (Washington DC: Regnery, 2004).

²¹ See e.g. Noah Feldman, *What we owe Iraq: war and the ethics of nation-building* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); David L. Phillips, *Losing Iraq: inside the postwar reconstruction fiasco* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2005); Hilary Synnott, 'State-building in southern Iraq', *Survival* 47: 2, Summer 2005, pp. 33–56; Mark Etherington, *Revolt on the Tigris* (London: Hurst, 2005).

supplemented and informed by a number of hearings, reports and inquiries held by the US Congress and UK parliament on aspects of the reconstruction.²² Think-tanks and scholars have addressed both the overall reconstruction effort and important particular aspects, such as security sector reconstruction and economic reform.²³

This article focuses on an aspect of the coalition mission in Iraq that has received relatively little attention in the public debate: that of mission planning and management. Although there has been a vociferous debate about the degree and nature of pre-intervention planning, there has as yet been little discussion of how this translated into management and planning during the mission itself. The public debate has been poorly served by repeated assertions that the coalition had no postwar plans.²⁴ This was not the case; there were plans and planning processes. It is the efficacy and appropriateness of these plans and processes that are open to challenge, not their existence.

This article concentrates on the period of the CPA, which ran from May 2003 to June 2004. This period is the most instructive from the perspective of other international missions that assume widespread government functions via protectorates or trusteeships. Since the demise of the CPA, the relationship between the international presence and the Iraqi authorities, in the form first of the Iraqi Interim Government (IIG) and then of the Iraqi Transitional Government (ITG), has gradually been transformed into one of support provided to the indigenous authorities.²⁵

The article uses a four-part model of organizational production to understand the components of an international reconstruction mission.²⁶ In this model, international *inputs* (e.g. financial aid, international forces or advisers) are mobilized via a management *process* (the international mission) to produce *outputs* (such as trained local security forces or elections) and to contribute to desired *outcomes* (e.g. peace and stability, and democratic political transition).²⁷

²² Government Accountability Office, *Rebuilding Iraq: resource, security, governance, essential services, and oversight issues*, GAO-04-902R (Washington DC: GAO, June 2004); House of Commons Defence Committee, *Iraq: an initial assessment of post conflict operations: government response to the committee's Sixth Report of Session 2004-05*, First Special Report of Session 2005-06, HC 436 (London: House of Commons, July 2005).

²³ Rick Barton and Bathsheba Croker, *Progress or peril? Measuring Iraq's reconstruction* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, Sept. 2004); Chris Foote, William Block, Keith Crane and Simon Gray, 'Economic policy and prospects in Iraq', *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 18: 3, Summer 2004; Seth G. Jones, Jeremy M. Wilson, Andrew Rathmell and K. Jack Riley, *Establishing law and order after conflict*, MG-374 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005); Anthony H. Cordesman, *Inexcusable failure: progress in training the Iraqi army and security forces as of mid-July 2004* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 20 July 2004).

²⁴ Jackson Diehl, 'Winning the post-postwar', *Washington Post*, 16 Feb. 2004.

²⁵ In practice, though, the institutional weakness of the IIG and the ITG, combined with the massive foreign military and aid presence, means that the US and its allies have had a significant and sometimes directing influence on many policy areas.

²⁶ Model adapted from: Prime Minister's Delivery Unit and HM Treasury, *Planning and managing for PSA delivery: a guidance document* (London: Cabinet Office, 2003), p. 7; William T. Gormley, Jr and David L. Weimer, *Organizational report cards* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 7-8.

²⁷ It is important to be clear that the outputs of the international mission will be only one of the variables contributing to the overall outcomes. The impact of international assistance will be critically affected by

This article focuses upon the lessons to be drawn from the *process* of how the coalition planned and managed its mission.

The article proceeds through the following steps. First, it introduces the case of the CPA in Iraq. Second, it discusses prewar assumptions, preparation and planning, and how the reality on the ground differed from these assumptions. Third, it outlines the planning and management processes and institutions developed by the CPA. Fourth, it identifies a number of lessons from the coalition experiences. Fifth, it draws some conclusions on the way ahead, both for Iraq and also for efforts to improve the international community's capability to undertake post-conflict reconstruction operations.

Iraq: a difficult case

Iraq was not a promising environment for achieving the goal of building a peaceful, democratic, free-market nation. Iraq had failed to develop into a cohesive nation-state; its state structures had the form but not the substance of a modern state, its economy was in poor shape and its society had endured almost half a century of debilitating violence.

The British mandatory authorities and the Hashemite monarchy, as well as their military and Ba'athist successors since 1958, had undertaken extensive efforts to forge an Iraqi nation as well as a modern state. Various ideological models had been tried, ranging from Arab nationalism to its variant, Ba'athism. That these efforts had some success in forging a sense of Iraqi national identity was evident in the willingness of Iraqis to fight in the Iran–Iraq War. However, these models had failed to accommodate the demands of the Kurds and had only limited success in moulding Shi'is into Iraqi citizens loyal to a largely Sunni-dominated and Baghdad-centred series of regimes.²⁸

As a result, politics had become in large part a matter of the exercise of force by an authoritarian centre.²⁹ By 2003, Iraqi society had little experience of politics and violence as separate activities. The Hashemite monarchy and its British allies fought against the Kurds, Shi'i tribes and mullahs in the Mandatory era. During and after the Second World War, violence and coups punctuated Hashemite rule. After the 1958 coup, internal repression as a tool of politics became commonplace, culminating in the escalating repression of the Saddam Hussein regime. This regime plunged Iraq into three devastating wars as well as atomizing civil society and turning what little civil politics the Iraqis had enjoyed into a Hobbesian struggle for survival.

other factors, ranging from pre-existing levels of crime and insecurity to the attitudes of neighbouring states. For further discussion of inputs, outputs and outcomes in this domain, see Jones et al., *Establishing law and order after conflict*. The term 'outcomes' is intended to be analogous to the terms 'effects' as used in many defence communities and 'results' in United Nations circles.

²⁸ Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*.

²⁹ Charles Tripp, *A history of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 7; Phebe Marr, *The modern history of Iraq* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1993).

The failure to build a nation and the destruction of Iraq as a civil polity were accompanied by the collapse of the economy. International sanctions and economic mismanagement had a devastating effect on the economy and on society during the 1990s. Iraq under Saddam had combined the worst features of a Soviet-style command economy and an oil-rich rentier state. The situation was worsened by the fact that, by 2003, the state-run economy had essentially become a mafia-style criminal operation. Whereas in Russia and the Balkans it took the collapse of the communist system to allow organized crime to take over much of the economy, in Iraq this had already happened during the 1990s.

As a result of these political and economic developments, by 2003 the Iraqi state could be described as 'fierce' but deteriorated.³⁰ Although it gave the appearance of modernity, it was not a strong state. It had not put down roots into society, the rule of law had been completely voided and, since the 1980s, the state had not generated legitimacy through its provision of goods and services. Instead, para-state structures such as the security services enforced obedience through intimidation and violence while the loyalty of parochial groups, such as certain families or tribes, was purchased through material rewards.³¹

This bleak picture was not fully recognized by the outside world, which had had limited access to Iraqi society during the 1990s. Indeed, to outside observers Iraq appeared a reasonable candidate for nation-building. After all, it appeared to have a modern bureaucratic state presiding over a middle-income economy, with abundant reserves of oil that could fund development.³²

There were a number of important differences between the coalition nation-building effort in Iraq and the majority of similar missions in the preceding 15 years. Individually, these differences would have made the Iraq mission harder; the combination increased the level of difficulty several times over. First, the operation was not mandated by a multilateral organization. The most important result of the failure to gain a UN mandate was that the coalition was largely unable to draw on the resources of the UN and its agencies. Although Sergio Vieira de Mello and his office played a valuable political role in Baghdad during 2003, the coalition sorely missed the wealth of expertise and field capabilities that the UN could have brought to bear.³³

Second, the model chosen was direct governance. This model had been adopted most recently in East Timor and Kosovo, because of the lack of indigenous governance structures. The assumption of authority by an intervening power has a long pedigree, and US officials frequently looked to the post-1945 occupations of Germany and Japan for their inspiration. However, the assumption of

³⁰ Nazih Ayubi, *Overstating the Arab state* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1994).

³¹ Judith Yaphe, 'Tribalism in Iraq, the old and the new', *Middle East Policy*, June 2000; Amatiza Baram, 'Neo-tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's tribal policies 1991-1996', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, 1997, pp. 1-31.

³² Hannah Batatu, *The old social classes and the revolutionary movements of Iraq* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978).

³³ James Dobbins, Seth G. Jones, Keith Crane, Andrew Rathmell, Brett Steele, Richard Teltschik and Anga Timilsina, *The UN's role in nation-building*, MG-304 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005).

such authority in an urbanized, centralized, semi-socialist state such as Iraq brought with it the responsibility to manage a daunting array of day-to-day policy and service delivery areas, even before addressing questions of reform and transition.

The third difference was the deteriorating security environment. Societies such as El Salvador and Cambodia experienced high levels of violent crime during nation-building missions and Somalia experienced large-scale, organized insurgency. But the mission in Iraq, and the governing structures it sought to build, have had to cope with a number of large-scale insurgencies, massive international terrorism and widespread, organized criminality. It is not surprising that the security environment soon came to dominate the coalition's agenda. The need to address short-term security threats inevitably distorted the long-term nation-building effort.³⁴ At the same time, it must be recalled that the nation-building enterprise in Iraq, as in Afghanistan, was conducted in the context of the post-9/11 security environment. This meant that the US approach was heavily influenced by the concepts and philosophies of the 'global war on terrorism'.

Prewar preparations and postwar realities

Criticism of the coalition's postwar performance in Iraq has tended to concentrate on the nature of its prewar planning. A common argument has been that a lack of prewar planning left coalition forces and their civilian counterparts without the resources or policy guidance needed to stabilize and reconstruct Iraq. While the full story of the coalition's prewar planning is unlikely to emerge in public for some time to come, enough is now known to enable us to identify what happened and what went wrong.

During 2002 the British and American governments undertook a range of planning activities in respect of Iraq.³⁵ However, domestic and bureaucratic politics in both Washington and London meant that these efforts were fragmented until late in the day. In the US, differences within President Bush's cabinet between key players such as the Vice-President, the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State saw State Department efforts sidelined and authority centralized in the Department of Defense (DoD). In the UK, opposition to the war by the Secretary of State for International Development limited the ability of her department to participate in prewar planning.

³⁴ For instance, the effort to deploy Iraqi security forces rapidly since 2003 has meant that getting heavily armed police and soldiers into the field has increasingly taken priority over efforts to inculcate democratic values and respect for human rights. See Peter Beaumont, 'Revealed: grim world of new Iraqi torture camps', *Observer*, 3 July 2005.

³⁵ As did influential think-tanks. See e.g. Council on Foreign Relations and James A. Baker III Institute, *Guiding principles for US post-conflict policy in Iraq* (Washington DC: CFR, 2002); and Center for Strategic and International Studies, *A wiser peace: an action strategy for a post-conflict Iraq* (Washington DC: CSIS, Jan. 2003).

In the US, an interagency planning process under the National Security Council's Executive Steering Group (ESG) was formed in the summer of 2002, supported by an Iraq Political–Military Cell. The ESG spawned a number of working groups, including one on relief and reconstruction. This working group received less high-level attention than work on preparations for combat operations and for humanitarian assistance. It did, however, produce guidance on issues such as security sector reform and, in March 2003, a high-level outline for Iraqi reconstruction.

Departments also undertook more detailed work on postwar issues. Both the Department of Defense, through its Office of Special Plans (OSP), and the State Department, through its Future of Iraq project, considered the wider aspects of Iraqi nation-building. The OSP, formed in August 2002, produced a range of guidance on issues ranging from de-Ba'athification to the future of the Iraqi army. This guidance was to inform later decisions taken by coalition officials in Baghdad.

The Future of Iraq project was especially noteworthy in that it brought together scores of Iraqi opposition figures during 2002 and early 2003 to examine how Iraqi politics, society and government institutions could be reformed after the removal of Saddam's regime.³⁶ This process usefully assembled many of the Iraqi intellectuals and opposition activists who were to be involved in post-Saddam politics, and addressed many of the political and institutional issues that would have to be considered.³⁷ However, although the project enabled the US government to expand its contacts with Iraqi exiles, it did not produce plans for Iraqi reconstruction that could be translated into practical action.

Military planning had commenced in late 2001, with US Central Command (CENTCOM) commander General Tommy Franks presenting an initial concept of operations to Secretary Rumsfeld on 7 December of that year.³⁸ CENTCOM's Oplan 1003V envisaged a four-phase operation. Phase IV, which covered 'post hostility operations', was intended to produce a representative Iraqi government. General Franks noted that this phase could take years. From January 2002, planning for Phase IV was undertaken by the Third Army, which had been designated the Combined Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC). During 2002 and 2003 CFLCC developed detailed operational plans that encompassed Phase IV operations. The first was labelled COBRA II; however, when the plan was put through an exercise in early 2003 it was felt not to have taken sufficient account of the risks of a 'catastrophic collapse' of the Saddam regime. A sequel plan, ECLIPSE II, was therefore developed in the run-up to the fall of Baghdad. This plan took more account of

³⁶ US Department of State, 'White House applauds results of Iraqi opposition conference', press release, 17 Dec. 2002; Phillips, *Losing Iraq*.

³⁷ See e.g. the recommendations on political transition outlined in Future of Iraq Democratic Principles Work Group, *Final report on the transition to democracy in Iraq*, Nov. 2002, available from <http://www.iraqfoundation.org/studies/2002/dec/study.pdf>, last accessed on 13 Sept. 2005.

³⁸ Tommy Franks, *American soldier* (New York: Regan, 2004); Woodward, *Plan of attack*; Williamson Murray and Major-General Robert H. Scales, Jr, *The Iraq war* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/ Harvard University Press, 2003).

the risk of regime collapse and the need for coalition forces to make a rapid transition to peacekeeping and reconstruction tasks.

However, despite the fairly extensive Phase IV planning that had been undertaken, CFLCC planners were still hampered by assumptions that were to prove faulty. Planners assumed that military operations would have a clear and decisive end, in other words that there would not be extensive postwar resistance by Iraqi forces;³⁹ that the coalition would have to deal with serious humanitarian crises, including flows of refugees and internally displaced people; that the coalition could rapidly hand over civil governance to robust Iraqi governing institutions such as the line ministries and the police;⁴⁰ and that most Iraqis would embrace the political transition to a 'new Iraq' and actively support democratization of the political system.

Coalition military planners therefore envisaged that coalition forces would have to engage in extensive stability and reconstruction activities in the wake of a military victory, but they expected to be able rapidly to draw down troop levels and hand over to Iraqi structures and coalition civilian agencies. Furthermore, coalition military planners worked within conditions set both by their civilian leadership and by the geostrategic conditions of the conflict. Much has been made of the desire by the Pentagon's civilian leadership under Donald Rumsfeld to 'fight light', and it is clear that there was an active debate over the troop levels that would be required for Phase IV.⁴¹ Franks had suggested 250,000 troops in his initial concept of operations. Chief of Staff of the Army General Eric Shinseki suggested that some 400,000 troops might be necessary in the immediate aftermath of the war.⁴² CFLCC's plans assumed that smaller numbers of troops would be adequate on the assumption that they could hand over to Iraqi civilian institutions. In the event, the failure to persuade Turkey to allow US ground troops to deploy into northern Iraq, and the decision by the DoD to halt the deployment of the First Cavalry Division when the Saddam regime collapsed, meant that the coalition military presence across Iraq was even lighter than had been planned.

In parallel to the military planning, in January 2003 the Bush administration gave the DoD the lead role in postwar planning and the department established the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Affairs (ORHA) to coordinate planning for, and implementation of, the postwar mission. In accordance with the administration's planning assumptions, the office concentrated on preparing

³⁹ In fact, since April 2003 Iraqi generals have pointed out that no formal surrender took place.

⁴⁰ Martin Howard, then deputy chief of the United Kingdom's Defence Intelligence Staff, told the House of Commons regarding coalition planning in April 2003: 'I am not aware of anything from my knowledge where we explicitly looked at how we should deal with policing in the aftermath of conflict.' UK House of Commons Defence Committee, 'Evidence of Mr Martin Howard, Lt General John McColl, Major General Nick Houghton and Major General Bill Rollo', 6 Jan. 2005, HC65-ii.

⁴¹ Doug Feith and Paul Bremer have both commented publicly on this debate since the war. See Robin Wright and Thomas E. Ricks, 'Bremer criticizes troop levels: ex-overseer of Iraq says US effort was hampered early on', *Washington Post*, 5 Oct. 2004; Ann Scott Tyson, 'Pentagon official admits Iraq errors', *Washington Post*, 13 July 2005.

⁴² Interview with James Fallows for *Frontline: invasion of Iraq*, available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/invasion/interviews/fallows.html>.

for humanitarian crises and assumed a rapid transfer of authority to Iraqi government institutions. Unfortunately, the injection into the planning process at this late stage of a new body, which had to spend much of its time in the spring of 2003 simply establishing itself in Washington and Kuwait, had only a marginal impact on the coalition planning effort at theatre level.⁴³

The reality of postwar Iraq

The reality of postwar Iraq is now fairly well understood; the differences between that reality and the assumed situation were so crucial for the fate of the occupation that they can be labelled ‘surprises’.⁴⁴

The first (positive) surprise was the absence of major humanitarian crises. This was in part attributable to the rapid collapse of the Saddam regime, which had in any case handed out rations prior to the hostilities, and in part to the fact that coalition planning for possible humanitarian crises was robust; humanitarian concerns significantly affected military plans for how the war was fought. It is a fundamental tenet in humanitarian assistance that populations be kept at home or as close to home as possible, and the nature of the combat operations achieved this objective.

The second surprise was the disintegration and paralysis of governing institutions, notably law and order structures. As the Commander of the US Army’s 5th Corps, Lieutenant-General William Wallace, remarked: ‘What in fact happened, which was unanticipated at least in [my mind], is that when [we] decapitated the regime, everything below it fell apart.’⁴⁵ While a certain amount of disorder and criminality had been predicted, the surprise was the complete disappearance of the Iraqi security institutions during April 2003. Prewar planners had assumed that the Interior Ministry and Iraqi police would take the lead in ensuring public safety, and that some former Iraqi army units would be available to assist with maintaining order. The Iraqi security sector, however, disappeared—army conscripts deserted, army officers and police personnel left their posts, and members of the security services went underground. Where they did not voluntarily disappear, local police officers were often removed either by the advancing coalition forces or by anti-regime militias.

The immediate consequences of this collapse were evident in the widespread, often organized, looting that followed regime change. Organized crime also exploded into the open, much of it indistinguishable from sabotage by elements of the Ba’athist regime and, reportedly, foreign intelligence services. Indeed,

⁴³ Some confusion had already been injected into military planning processes when, at the direction of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Forces Command had assembled Task Force IV to support CENTCOM in the planning of Phase IV operations. Task Force IV was dissolved in March 2003, having failed to clarify its relationship with the CENTCOM and ORHA but nonetheless having produced some useful planning materials.

⁴⁴ For a discussion of the concept of surprise in foreign and security policy, see: Richard K. Betts, *Surprise attack: lessons for defense planning* (Washington DC: Brookings, 1982).

⁴⁵ Interview with Lieutenant-General William Scott Wallace for *Frontline: invasion of Iraq*, available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/invasion/interviews/wallace.html>.

many of the prisoners released from Iraqi gaols by Saddam in December 2002 had been armed in the expectation that they would join the Saddam *fedayeen*.

This wholesale collapse of the security sector was a microcosm of the wider paralysis of Iraqi governance at all levels. The CPA's initial orders in May 2003 dissolving the army and the security services and imposing de-Ba'athification measures gave legal sanction to the paralysis of government that was already under way.⁴⁶ The nature of the bureaucratic authority structures in the Saddamite state meant that the removal of the ministers did not simply allow their subordinates to take over and carry on. Power and authority in the Saddamite system had been too centralized to allow competent subordinates to emerge. In the security sector, meanwhile, even when the police were recalled to work by coalition forces it rapidly became clear that the few who reported for duty were incapable of imposing order. The real instruments of social control in Iraq had been Saddam's extended family and patronage network, the internal security services and the institutions of the Ba'ath party.

In addition to the top-down paralysis of governance institutions as a result of regime change, the coalition soon discovered that Iraq's administrative, social and physical infrastructures were in a far worse state than had been expected. A common view among prewar observers, propagated by the Saddam regime, was that Iraq was a relatively modern and developed society. This was certainly true until the early 1990s, when Iraq had boasted a relatively highly educated middle class and extensive access to world markets.⁴⁷ However, by 2003 Iraq's governing bureaucracies were hollowed out, its society was impoverished and fractured along lines of clan loyalties, and its physical infrastructures were often held together by the proverbial wire and string. The reality of Iraq's deteriorated and neglected systems meant that reconstruction of social and physical infrastructures was far more challenging a task than had been expected.

The third surprise was the emergence of a number of insurgent and terrorist campaigns. Although a certain amount of resistance by paramilitary forces had been experienced during the invasion, it was not expected that organized resistance would be a significant challenge to the coalition or the new Iraqi state. In the event, regime loyalists were dispersed rather than destroyed during the invasion. This meant that the coalition had to face an influential network of well-funded, well-armed former regime loyalists with no stake in the new Iraq but plenty of experience with clandestine organization and the use of terror. Although these 'spoilers' took some time to reorganize and reconstitute over the summer of 2003, it was not long before disparate groups coalesced around opposition to the occupation.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ It should be noted that the majority of senior Ba'athists had left their posts as the Saddam regime crumbled. The CPA's policies affected perhaps 1% of party members and were far less extensive than the Allied de-Nazification efforts in postwar Germany. See CPA Order no. 2, *Dissolution of entities*, 23 May 2003.

⁴⁷ The relatively rapid reconstruction of Iraqi infrastructure after the 1991 Gulf War was often cited as an indicator of the sophistication and resilience of Iraqi society.

⁴⁸ In April 2003 the ORHA obtained a document dated 11 March 2003 that laid out an eleven-point plan for an insurgency by the regime's security organs. Former officials in Saddam's security sector have also recounted organized preparations in the spring of 2003 for an underground movement that would survive the fall of the regime. Communications with the author by ORHA and Iraqi officials.

The reality of the CPA mission

In sum, the coalition prewar planning effort was weakened by both conceptual and organizational errors. Conceptually, the coalition's assumptions about the postwar environment proved overoptimistic about the prospects for a relatively peaceful transfer of authority to new Iraqi governing institutions. Organizationally, the coalition did not prepare its institutions responsible for postwar planning or mission management early enough or integrate them well enough with other government agencies.

ORHA was replaced in May 2003 by the CPA. In assuming government authority, the CPA found itself in a similar position to some other international missions in the preceding decade, albeit in a more challenging environment. The CPA mission ended up covering the following areas: day-to-day governance of Iraq at all levels (local to national); day-to-day operations of Iraqi security forces and essential services; reconstruction *and* upgrading of essential services and physical infrastructure; building the capacity of Iraqi civil administration and security forces; managing a political transition to a fully sovereign government; implementing a programme of democratization, economic transformation and sustainable development; laying the basis for a process of transitional justice; setting up media systems; and supporting a medium-intensity counterinsurgency and counterterrorist campaign.

Processes and institutions

This section examines how the coalition sought to plan and manage its mission in Iraq.

As noted above, the failure to gain UN Security Council support for the invasion of Iraq meant that the coalition was unable to draw on the experience of the international community with post-conflict reconstruction and transitional states. More concretely, the coalition was unable to draw on tested mechanisms and experienced individuals, either in the UN system or among a wider range of states. Within the US government, the administration's decision in January 2003 to vest authority for Iraq in the DoD was in principle a sensible move to ensure unity of command. In practice, though, the DoD had forgotten its experiences of reconstruction after the Second World War and the Vietnam War, had limited recent experience in the civilian aspects of post-conflict reconstruction and lacked internal capacity to staff civilian nation-building operations. The DoD sought to build this capability rapidly, via ORHA and then the CPA, but at the same time had to rely on other agencies, such as the Departments of State, Justice and Treasury, that were not under DoD command.

As a result of these decisions, the CPA was always a work in progress. Throughout its life it had to build and staff itself while simultaneously designing and undertaking its mission. In its short life, the CPA had to change course in response to a number of major policy shifts, notably the transition from a short-term relief perspective in April 2003, and the conclusion of the 15 November

2003 agreement, which set an end-date to its own existence. The CPA also dealt with a number of rapidly evolving approaches to political transition. These included the creation of the Iraqi Governing Council, the appointment of interim ministers, the 'refreshment' of provincial councils, the long-running debate over national elections, and the eventual formation of the Iraqi interim government in June 2004.

The CPA also underwent significant internal organizational transformations. In November 2003 it was restructured to improve internal management and increase State Department influence. During the spring of 2004, coalition officials expended considerable energy on planning the massive bureaucratic task of transition from the DoD (CPA) to the Department of State, which was to take responsibility for relations with Iraq in June 2004. Bureaucratic politics in Washington also noticeably affected the CPA; the rising influence of the National Security Council (NSC) over Iraq policy in late 2003, for instance, led to increased reporting requirements from Baghdad.

Throughout its life, and in part as a result of the decision to give the DoD authority in Iraq, one of the CPA's critical weaknesses was staffing. Although a number of CPA staff were experts in their fields, and many performed above and beyond the call of duty in very difficult circumstances, overall the CPA was badly weakened by its human resource management. In general its civilian staffing was at half the planned strength; it had too few personnel, especially at senior levels, with experience in the region or in post-conflict environments; the recruitment mechanisms were ad hoc; and there was far too rapid a turnover of staff.⁴⁹

Strategic and operational planning

As the history of international post-conflict missions makes clear, there is nothing new in the observation that mission management, planning and reporting structures are often cobbled together in an ad hoc manner. Missions led by military headquarters tend to bring with them pre-existing staff structures, management and planning processes, and standard operating procedures; but in 2003 there was no such standing capability available to US and UK civilian actors.

Strategic and operational planning processes are important management tools to ensure that all components of a mission are pulling in the same direction, that efforts are prioritized and that problems are identified for decision-makers so that they can redirect resources as required.⁵⁰ At the same time, since no plan survives contact with reality, it is important to have a flexible planning process that will allow rapid adaptation when circumstances change.

⁴⁹ According to the CPA Inspector General, of 2,117 authorized positions, CPA had only 1,196 personnel on staff as of 8 March 2004: 56% of total authorized slots. See Inspector General of the Coalition Provisional Authority, *Audit report: management of personnel assigned to the Coalition Provisional Authority in Baghdad*, Report no. 04-002, 25 June 2004, p. 1.

⁵⁰ The term 'operational planning' here is used similarly to the UN concept of 'mission planning'.

Although the CPA inherited various planning documents and guidance, ranging from the reports of the Future of Iraq project to CENTCOM Phase IV planning, neither the ORHA nor the CPA deployed with either an integrated planning process or a set of strategic and operational plans.⁵¹ The first interagency planning conference was carried out by the ORHA in Washington in February 2003, followed by a review of post-conflict plans by the various military and civilian actors in Kuwait in March 2003. Working with Task Force IV, ORHA planners produced a draft Unified Mission Plan (UMP), which brought together in one place the various post-conflict plans under development.⁵² The UMP was not adopted by the ORHA as a strategic and operational plan, in part because the ORHA believed its brief was to deal only with immediate relief and reconstruction needs. The planning process did serve the function of identifying critical requirements, such as the need to secure key Iraqi government sites, but failed to ensure that military and civilian resources were applied appropriately.

During April and May 2003 the ORHA had to focus on immediate reconstruction requirements in the face of the unexpected scale of the breakdown of Iraq's government systems. ORHA staff therefore focused on tasks such as paying public sector salaries, restoring basic services, reconstituting local police forces and installing local councils. The lack of a longer-term plan, and the fact that many of the senior coalition advisers brought into Baghdad had not participated in the ORHA planning process, limited the cohesiveness of the organization's initial efforts.

As the ORHA prepared to give way to the CPA, its planners made the case to the authority for a more structured and longer-term deliberate planning process. The CPA Administrator, Ambassador L. Paul Bremer III, and his deputies authorized the production of an integrated plan which they immediately began to use to guide their activities. As the plan evolved and the CPA's management structures firmed up in the autumn of 2003, the planning processes became routinely integrated into management systems of the CPA and the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF-7).

In July 2003 CPA's planners produced *A vision for the restoration of sovereignty to the Iraqi people*,⁵³ the first overall CPA 'strategic plan'.⁵⁴ This plan had two inspirations—the 'lines of operation' model used in Bosnia and Kosovo, and a study on post-conflict reconstruction by the Association of the US Army and Center for Strategic and International Studies, which provided a list of essential tasks. *A vision for the restoration of sovereignty* contained the key elements of any

⁵¹ Dayton Maxwell, 'Deliberate and development post-conflict planning in Iraq: a USAID perspective', unpublished report, 29 July 2004.

⁵² Within the military alone, post-conflict plans were under development by five separate offices.

⁵³ The first draft, of eight pages, was entitled 'A vision for Iraqi empowerment' but Ambassador Bremer proposed the revised title. This enabled CPA planners to orient the remainder of the plan around the goal of restoring sovereignty.

⁵⁴ The CPA used the term 'strategic plan' for its country-level planning products; according to the definitions used in this article, 'operational' or 'mission' plan might have been more apposite terminology.

planning process, including statements of the mission, the desired end-states, the planning assumptions and the mission priorities.

Although this plan was briefed up the US chain of command and supplied to coalition capitals, it was only a framework, and CPA planners had to fill in the detailed tasks that would help achieve the overall objectives. By late July, Ambassador Bremer was able to take with him to Washington a more detailed plan, entitled *Achieving the vision to restore full sovereignty to the people of Iraq*. This plan set out the coalition goal thus: ‘We seek a unified and stable, democratic Iraq that provides effective and representative government for the Iraqi people; is underpinned by new and protected freedoms and a growing market economy; is able to defend itself but no longer poses a threat to its neighbors or international security.’ To achieve this goal, the plan was broken into a number of core foundations, or ‘pillars’:

- security—establishing a secure and safe environment;
- essential services—restoring basic services to an acceptable standard;
- economy—creating the conditions for economic growth;
- governance—enabling the transition to transparent and inclusive democratic governance.⁵⁵

Under these headings, *Achieving the vision* provided a more detailed description of the tasks that the CPA would need to undertake, broken down into 90-day phases but focused on the next 60 days. This plan was briefed to the administration and discussed with Congress.⁵⁶ The 60-day plan also became the basis for discussion with the CPA’s ESG, consisting of the deputies of the key coalition organizations in Iraq, who reviewed interim progress after one month.

During September and October 2003, CPA and CJTF-7 planners, working with CENTCOM, expanded the scope of the deliberate planning process. Responding to a request from the Office of the Secretary of Defense for a unified ‘campaign plan’, coalition planners elaborated the CPA strategic plan into a truly systematic planning tool that brought together civilian and military lines of operation. The plan was refined to incorporate performance measures over time, or metrics for each of the tasks.⁵⁷ In addition, detailed charts of planned milestones over the coming 18 months were prepared for each area of coalition activity.

By October 2003 this comprehensive plan was being used to measure progress by CPA and CJTF-7 entities in Iraq.⁵⁸ The plan looked ahead to 2005

⁵⁵ A fifth pillar, namely ‘strategic communications’, was included in the first version of the plan, but resources to implement it were unavailable, so it was dropped out of the next version and not reintroduced until December 2003.

⁵⁶ Eric Schmitt, ‘US to outline 60-day plan for Iraq rebuilding projects’, *New York Times*, 23 July 2003.

⁵⁷ This was the term adopted by the CPA and the US government.

⁵⁸ Reporting requirements were always regarded as burdensome by overstretched coalition officials. However, the presence of an electronic version of the plan on the home page of the CPA intranet made it relatively easy for CPA offices to input progress reports on a regular schedule.

and covered the whole gamut of CPA and CJTF-7's responsibilities for Iraqi governance, operations and state-building. After the agreement of 15 November 2003, the CPA strategic plan was thoroughly rewritten as coalition forces and civilian advisers refocused their efforts on the critical tasks that had to be achieved before the CPA handed over authority to the Iraqi interim government. This revised plan, entitled *Towards transition: building sustainability*, was issued in early December 2003, and guided the CPA through to its dissolution on 28 June 2004.

Using the plan

As the CPA's management structures evolved, so did the use it made of the plan. Over time, the CPA's Office of Policy Planning and Analysis produced a variety of planning products and progress reports for the CPA leadership and for national capitals. From the summer of 2003, the Administrator used the plan in two ways: first, as an internal management tool to provide a sense of focus and priorities to CPA staff and to enable all staff to measure their progress; second, as an outward-facing tool, to inform the US Congress and the US administration of thinking in the field. By the late summer of 2003, the CPA Administrator had begun to request monthly progress reports so that he could have an overview of progress, problems and critical issues. However, it was only in the late autumn that he gained the support of an institutionalized management structure to which he could turn for assistance in management of the mission, including routine assessment of progress against performance targets. This new structure involved the appointment of a serving State Department ambassador as Chief Policy Officer and Deputy Administrator, and a Chief Operations Officer, with primary responsibility for managing CPA's efforts to reconstruct Iraq's essential services.

By late 2003 this new management system had settled into a routine. Long-established daily morning meetings of the CPA and CJTF-7's senior officials served to circulate information and covered immediate issues. At weekly meetings of the executive board, chaired by the Chief Policy Officer, CPA and CJTF-7 deputies and other top officials discussed policy and operational issues in more depth. The board also instituted a weekly review of progress against the strategic plan, enabling it to identify areas where decisions or additional resources were required to get back on track. On a monthly basis, the Administrator was provided with a comprehensive update of the strategic plan. This provided him with reports on progress and problem areas, and enabled him to visualize at a glance all of CPA's planned activities. He also periodically scheduled meetings with his top coalition representatives in the Iraqi ministries to go over the details of their plans.

The CPA leadership also used the planning process to manage the operational implications of policy changes. For instance, after the 15 November agreement, the CPA's ministry advisers had rapidly to reorient planned multiyear

reconstruction and reform programmes to prioritize the building of basic capacity to allow for a hand-over to the IIG in June 2004. In the spring of 2004 CPA's decision-makers were provided with reports on a 'ministry transition readiness assessment' that judged the capacity of Iraq's ministries for self-governance.

In addition to its use as a management information system and decision-making tool, the CPA planning process facilitated policy and operational coordination at working levels. For a number of reasons, CPA and CJTF-7 suffered from organizational stove-piping and poor communication between offices and staff branches. Since it had a unique remit to oversee developments across the whole of the coalition operation, the CPA's policy planning office was well positioned to facilitate policy coordination.⁵⁹ This was particularly important in the security sector, where a lack of joined-up policy was hampering the development of coordinated Iraqi security forces.⁶⁰ Likewise, in the area of economic policy the policy planning office had some impact in bringing together the often disconnected policy initiatives pursued by the various offices of the CPA that dealt with economic and social policy. In addition to these tasks, the policy planning office supported the CPA leadership by providing analytical support and coordinating policy on particular topics, ranging from assessments of overall mission priorities, through evaluating programmes to build Iraqi security forces, to appointing inspectors general in Iraqi ministries.

Lessons identified

Governments have a sterling record of identifying lessons from post-conflict operations but not learning them or institutionalizing change. Too often, 'lessons learned' exercises identify that lessons from previous operations have not been acted upon.⁶¹ This section of the article identifies three key topics relating to mission management and planning from which lessons can be identified, sets out those lessons and suggests how they may be acted upon.

Command arrangements

Unity of command is vital to ensure unity of effort and purpose in the field; but achieving this unity has long been a challenge in civil-military operations.⁶² In Iraq, the fact that both the CPA and CJTF-7 nominally reported to the US Secretary of Defense was intended to ensure such unity of command. In practice,

⁵⁹ Mechanisms such as a weekly Joint Planning Group co-hosted by CPA and CJTF-7 planners proved valuable for sharing information and understanding areas of respective concern.

⁶⁰ Andrew Rathmell, Olga Olikier, Terrence K. Kelly, David Brannan and Keith Crane, *Developing Iraq's security sector: the CPA experience*, MG-365-OSD (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005).

⁶¹ Nicola Dahrendorf, ed., *A review of peace operations: a case for change* (London: King's College London, 2003).

⁶² For a more detailed analysis of various models for interagency planning, see Bruce R. Pirnie, *Civilians and soldiers: achieving better coordination*, MR-1026-SRF (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1998).

the entities retained distinct civil and military chains of command.⁶³ Although there were nominally distinct areas of responsibility, for instance with CJTF-7 having responsibility for security and the CPA for the political process, in practice there were numerous areas of overlap. Difficulties arose as the coalition's civilian leadership only sporadically acknowledged the causal linkages between security and other policy areas such as political and economic reforms. The military leadership, meanwhile, did not do a good job of conceptualizing the campaign as an integrated political–military effort, sometimes failing to put tactical military operations in the broader political context. Although civil–military planning and field operations were remarkably well integrated compared to many other post-conflict situations, coordinated decision-making was at times hampered by institutional stove-piping.

The lesson is easy to identify but difficult to implement. Whatever the command arrangements that may be necessary for political purposes, mechanisms need to be designed and implemented at all levels of the interagency and civil–military interface to ensure that unity of effort is achieved. It often proves difficult in the US system to subordinate the military to a mission's civil authority, but the old lesson is valid: stabilization, reconstruction and counterinsurgency activity are political challenges and command arrangements need to reflect this reality.

Institutions

The lessons from Iraq about institutional arrangements, both in national capitals and in the field, should be evident. In Iraq, the coalition created new, untested structures on the fly. The fact that the ORHA was still forming itself when it deployed to Kuwait in March 2003 was the most striking example of this, but the CPA's constant reinvention of itself and its internal policies and procedures was also reflective of this failure. One of the coalition's main failures was the inability to mobilize available expertise effectively. Tried and tested international mechanisms to manage and deploy specialists, for instance in democratization and police reform, could not be used because of the lack of a UN mandate. The coalition made things harder for itself by allowing bureaucratic wrangling to prevent it from using expertise that was available in its own governments, ranging from regional expertise in the State Department to expertise in institutional reform and development in agencies such as USAID and the UK's DfID.

The lesson is simple but critical—design and exercise institutional arrangements before a mission, and develop personnel policies conducive to deploying the most appropriate expertise.

⁶³ Although the CPA and CJTF-7 were overwhelmingly American operations, all of the troop-contributing countries had their own lines of authority back to national capitals which affected their activities in the field; the significant and senior British presence in CPA Baghdad and CJTF-7 headquarters also meant that policy debates did not take place just within the US chain of command but also involved often distinctive British perspectives.

Planning

Ideally, a mission plan should start from first principles—i.e. an understanding of the policy goals and desired end-states, an analysis of the needs of the post-conflict state and an understanding the dynamics of the underlying conflict.⁶⁴ It should then move on to determining a strategy that makes best use of international resources in a prioritized and sequenced manner to address the critical issues at the right time. CPA planners attempted to implement this process from the outset but were not given sufficient authority to carry it out. The initial plan was therefore more a compilation of activities being pursued by coalition agencies than a structured response to an assessment of Iraq's conflict dynamics and underlying needs.⁶⁵

More broadly, the following areas can provide lessons from the CPA planning experience.

The first surrounds the question of *assumptions and assessment*. The fact that prewar planning assumptions proved to be badly flawed is not a sign of a systemic problem in itself—mistakes happen, and the weakness of the Iraqi state surprised many observers. The systemic problem was that these assumptions could not be effectively challenged in the coalition's political–military planning process. This unwillingness to challenge assumptions and question established plans persisted during the course of the occupation, giving rise to the ironic refrain among disgruntled coalition planners that 'optimism is not a plan'. This failure was compounded by a persistent tendency in both the military and civilian chains of communication to avoid reporting bad news and not to plan for worst-case, or even other-case, contingencies. Deviations from the planned-for trajectory that could perhaps have been addressed earlier if reporting had been more accurate and contingency planning had been undertaken included the growth in political violence during late 2003 and 2004, repeated failures to field capable Iraqi security forces on schedule, and slower than planned increases in the output and distribution of electric power.

Three key lessons emerge from these failures:

- First, the importance of institutionalizing processes such as independent reviews by 'red teams' and tabletop exercises that will ensure plans cover more than one scenario. These will help to ensure that, given the political will,⁶⁶ the necessary resources are available for a variety of worse as well as better cases.

⁶⁴ In Iraq, the conflict was about enforcing violent regime change, i.e. the unconditional surrender of the Saddam regime and the Ba'athists. It was not about liberation of an occupied country.

⁶⁵ The problem of an international plan being mainly supply-driven by the interests of donor agencies rather than demand-driven by a prioritized needs assessment is sadly common in such missions.

⁶⁶ Such exercises may not be enough if the institutions involved are unable or unwilling to address the problems identified. ORHA exercises in February and March 2003 identified the likely 'security gap' in Iraq and pointed out the need to protect key government sites, but these needs were not addressed.

- Second, the importance of a robust audit and assessment function, both within the mission and in national capitals. The ability of the CPA administrator to get reality checks on the performance of his key programmes improved during the life of the CPA, especially after the deployment of a strong team into the office of the Chief Operations Officer. The DoD, however, had to rely on periodic assessment missions to get to the truth of the situation on the ground.
- Third, the need for an institutionalized feedback loop whereby the field can recommend policy adjustments to higher decision-makers.

The second area relates to the *locus of planning* in a mission and the relationships of the mission headquarters both upwards, to its higher headquarters in national capitals, and downwards, to field offices. The CPA was bedevilled by poor communication and coordination up and down the chain. Tensions between Baghdad and Washington and ongoing interagency disputes meant that at some times multiple overlapping plans for Iraq existed. It is not surprising that CPA programme directors and advisers expressed frustration at having to report on the same issues several times, through different channels. The fact that national capitals often expected reports on tactical details—the ‘long screwdriver’ approach—understandably increased friction.

Relations between Baghdad and the CPA regions were also problematic. The main difficulty was in communicating. The lack of a reliable IT or telecommunications network for the bulk of routine business transactions meant that most consultations had to take place in person. The dangerous security environment, however, meant that visits, whether by road or air, were difficult and time-consuming to arrange. As a result, it was only from November 2003 that CPA field offices and CJTF-7 divisions were briefed on the details of the CPA plan, and it always proved difficult to ensure sufficient feedback from the field to adjust plans in response to circumstances.

The lessons from the CPA experience are perhaps a counsel of perfection, but are worth noting nevertheless:

- Clear distinctions need to be made between strategic plans, established in national capitals, and operational mission plans owned by the country team. The country team needs to be held accountable by the capital for achievement of mission objectives, but needs to be free to develop its plans and to use its own planning process to monitor and manage progress.
- If there are field or regional offices as part of the mission, they need to be included in the development of the plans, which may need to be supported by local implementation plans.
- A robust communications infrastructure, preferably providing a collaborative information environment, is an important factor in ensuring this relationship works.

The third area concerns the relationships between *planning*, *decision-making authority*, and *resource allocation and management*. Under the CPA, these processes were never effectively integrated. This was evident both in Baghdad and in the interagency process. In Baghdad, major discretionary funding decisions were made by the Program Review Board, which responded as much to a bottom-up process of bidding by coalition departments as it did to a formalized top-down set of priorities. More significantly, the expenditure programme for the bulk of US aid money destined for Iraq, which eventually became the US\$18.4 billion ‘supplemental’ for financial year 2004, was designed with limited coordination with CPA’s planners.⁶⁷ The US investment programme was based in part on the UN/World Bank needs assessment, and its design and execution prioritized large-scale, long-term physical infrastructure projects rather than sustainable peacebuilding and state-building activities. Another issue was the fact that the CPA and CJTF-7, like any mission, relied on others to generate the resources they required, whether these were people, funds, equipment or diplomatic activity. All too frequently, even when Baghdad made it clear that resources were required to implement the plan, these were not made available by London, Washington or other capitals.

The lessons here from the CPA experience are:

- The importance of ensuring that planning and resource allocation and budgeting processes are integrated both in the mission and in capitals.
- The importance of setting goals commensurate with the available resources. As the Brahimi Report concluded in 2000, divergence between a mission’s mandate and its resources is one of the key causes of failure.⁶⁸

Conclusions

This article’s conclusions fall into three categories: understanding the CPA experience; adjusting policy and practice towards Iraq; and learning lessons for future operations.

Understanding the CPA experience

This article has not discussed the policies adopted or tactics used by the coalition, whether in terms of the approach towards political transition or economic reform, or in terms of the tactics of coalition troops in the field. There are important lessons to be drawn from Iraq in such diverse areas as transitional justice, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, the holding of elections, economic reform, counterinsurgency doctrine and the tactics, techniques and

⁶⁷ It must be recalled that the ‘supplemental’ request was put together rapidly and, in the late summer of 2003, in a relatively benign security environment. See HR 3289, *Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense and for the Reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan*, 2004, Public Law 108–106, 6 Nov. 2004.

⁶⁸ UN, *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, A/55/305-S/2000/809, 21 Aug. 2000.

procedures of US ground forces. It seems clear that different strategies and tactics in Iraq would have made a difference in a number of areas.⁶⁹

However, this article has focused on the management and planning process used to translate international inputs into outputs and outcomes on the ground. Iraq provides some valuable positive lessons. The CPA's planning process did produce a set of plans and planning products by the autumn of 2003 that were of value to the CPA's leadership in directing effort within the mission, communicating upwards and downwards, and identifying risks and requirements. For all the frustrations, civil–military and interagency policy coordination was facilitated by the planning process and, at times, worked remarkably well.

Unfortunately, most of the successes of the CPA planning and management process were achieved as a result of remarkable efforts by officials in the field who managed to overcome failures of forethought and management in capitals. Although Ambassador Bremer as head of the CPA was given broad responsibility by President George W. Bush for achieving results in Iraq, in practice he had limited autonomy and limited control over the assets he required. A great deal of operational and tactical decision-making went on in Washington DC; the CPA had limited oversight of CJTF-7; and the CPA's ability to deliver was largely determined by the willingness of civilian agencies in the US and UK to deliver personnel and programmes to the field.

The CPA's planning processes reflected these broader problems. In the run-up to the invasion, the coalition had failed to produce an integrated political–military plan for Iraq. This meant that the CPA had to fit such a plan retrospectively on to activities already under way in the summer of 2003. Furthermore, badly flawed prewar assumptions, which were not effectively challenged, left the coalition unprepared and underresourced for the task it faced. The prewar assumption had been that the coalition would be universally welcomed by Iraqis and that Iraq's administrative and physical infrastructures were robust enough not to require too much international assistance. In reality, the CPA ended up creating nation-building institutions on the run, governing Iraq at all levels, supporting a counterinsurgency campaign, reconstructing and reforming Iraqi state institutions, and implementing democratic and economic transformation.⁷⁰

Of course, more accurate assumptions and better prewar planning and preparations would not have made the task in Iraq a simple one.⁷¹ As Republican Senator Richard Lugar has put it, 'We should not pretend ... that a few adjustments to our reconstruction strategy or an extra month of planning could have prevented all the challenges we now face in Iraq. Even in the best

⁶⁹ Larry Diamond, *Squandered victory: the American occupation and bungled effort to bring democracy to Iraq* (New York: Times Books, 2005); Mattias Karen, 'Polish PM: Iraq nation-building "failed"', *Associated Press*, 1 Aug. 2005.

⁷⁰ Coalition Provisional Authority, *An historic review of CPA accomplishments* (Baghdad: Coalition Provisional Authority, 2004).

⁷¹ David C. Hendrickson and Robert W. Tucker, 'Revisions in need of revising: what went wrong in the Iraq War', *Survival* 47: 2, Summer 2005, pp. 7–32.

circumstances, political and economic reconstruction of Iraq after the overthrow of an entrenched and brutal regime is going to stretch our capabilities, our resources and our patience to the limit.⁷² Nonetheless, a greater willingness to question over-optimistic assumptions and more and more thorough preparation would have given the coalition a running start rather than putting it on the back foot from the outset.

Adjusting policy and practice towards Iraq

Since the summer of 2004 the coalition has learnt a great deal in Iraq, and has shifted course several times. The Multinational Force-Iraq (MNF-I) has adopted new approaches to the counterinsurgency campaign, emphasizing support for the nascent Iraqi security forces, and has learned how to combine military and civil affairs activities at the tactical level.⁷³ The US State Department has gone back to Congress to gain authority to reorient reconstruction spending, shifting the focus away from large infrastructure projects implemented by costly foreign contractors to smaller-scale projects with immediate impacts implemented through Iraqi contractors. More attention is being paid to building sustainable Iraqi capacity.⁷⁴

Nonetheless, the coalition is still struggling with four critical issues for Iraqi reconstruction. The first is the need to build true partnerships with the Iraqi government at all levels. It is important to be realistic about the capacity limitations of Iraqi central and local government. Under the Saddam system, authority, including policy-making and financial allocations, was held by the presidential diwan.⁷⁵ Since April 2003 the coalition has encouraged Iraq's line ministries to take on the policy and management roles expected of ministries in a western state. The institutional and cultural changes that this transformation will involve are massive. Nonetheless, the oft-repeated mantra of 'local ownership' remains critical. Progress has been made, for instance with the adoption by the Iraqi transitional government of a new National Development Strategy, but the country remains in a transitional period in which actual Iraqi sovereignty is limited and the constant temptation for the coalition is to bypass the often inefficient and sometimes corrupt Iraqi state.

Second, it remains vital to mobilize additional international expertise. This effort has been at the heart of US and British efforts over the past two years, with limited success. Without a reduction in violence, it seems unlikely that many more countries will offer significant amounts of either military or civilian assistance, but the effort to drum up additional expertise to supplement the over-

⁷² 'US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations holds a hearing on security in Iraq', *Congressional Quarterly*, 18 July 2005.

⁷³ Department of Defense, *Report to Congress: measuring stability in Iraq*, July 2005; Greg M. Grant, 'New strategy details security handover in Iraq', *Jane's Defense Weekly*, 27 April 2005.

⁷⁴ Marc Grossman, 'New priorities for US assistance under the Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund', on-the-record State Department briefing, Washington DC, 14 Sept. 2004.

⁷⁵ Even the supposedly powerful Finance Ministry controlled less than 10% of government budgetary allocations.

stretched coalition forces and civilians needs to continue. Since additional combat troops are unlikely to be forthcoming, attention needs to shift to the coalition's other critical lack, namely of qualified civilian experts committed to and capable of making a sustainable difference to Iraq's central and local governance institutions.

Third, progress has been made towards unity of effort, at least in the Anglo-American civil and military programmes. Coordinated planning mechanisms have been developed in Washington and civil and military activities are now better integrated in the field. However, with the constant rotation of civilian and military personnel in Iraq, the importance of coordination and joint planning has to be constantly relearned. Iraqi leaders and officials are now routinely involved in many of these decision-making processes; this is a big step forward.

Fourth, the shift must be continued to directing donor funding towards activities that support long-term, sustainable political and economic reform and development. Building the capacity of Iraqi institutions is key to this process. The CPA made a limited start in certain areas and progress has since been made at many levels. But a sustained commitment over some years will be required if short-term military, political and aid interventions are not to be wasted.

Looking forward to future post-conflict reconstruction operations

Improving international capabilities to undertake post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding operations has become a fashionable policy topic.⁷⁶ The UK and the US have both formed new units to build the requisite capabilities; Canada, Australia and a number of European countries are following suit. NATO militaries are working on a comprehensive approach to such operations. The EU is building its capabilities to address human security and post-conflict operations.⁷⁷ The UN is reforming its capabilities to address the nexus of security, development and democratization, notably in fragile and post-conflict states.

Iraq should not be taken as a model for future operations; the assumption of all government functions by occupying forces in the aftermath of coercive regime change in such a large and conflicted country will be a rare occurrence. Nonetheless, it usefully reminds us that the tasks of stabilization, peacebuilding and state-building are inherently extremely challenging. In Iraq, it may well have been that, with the international resources and time available, the stated goals were unachievable.⁷⁸ More generally, it is becoming evident that while peace-keeping troops can have a rapid and direct impact on stability and development,

⁷⁶ Among the many recent recommendations for new approaches, see e.g. Samuel R. Berger and Brent Scowcroft, co-chairs, *In the wake of war: improving US post-conflict capabilities* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2005).

⁷⁷ Ulrich Albrecht, Christine Chinkin, Kemal Dervis, Renata Dwan, Anthony Giddens, Nicole Gnesotto, Mary Kaldor, Sonja Licht, Jan Pronk, Klaus Reinhardt, Geneviève Schméder, Pavel Seifter and Narcís Serra, *A human security doctrine for Europe: the Barcelona Report of the Study Group on Europe's Security Capabilities*, 15 Sept. 2004, at http://www.cercl.lu/article.php3?id_article=588, last accessed on 13 Sept. 2005.

⁷⁸ Phebe Marr, 'Occupational hazards', *Foreign Affairs* 84: 4, July/Aug. 2005.

international intervention is a very blunt and uncertain instrument with which to effect political and economic transformation and state-building.⁷⁹

Nonetheless, the international community will continue to intervene in failing and fragile states. The CPA experience provides some pointers towards the key areas that need to be improved in the planning and management processes that are used to turn international inputs into outcomes on the ground. To reiterate the critical points:

- Mechanisms must be built to ensure unity of effort in a mission. In the UN system, considerable work is being done on the concept of ‘integrated missions’; this will be a step in the right direction in the international context.⁸⁰
- The required institutions must be built before a crisis and organized and staffed appropriately.
- Early planning must be adequate, and mission leadership must build planning and reporting processes into a system that they routinely use for decision-making. Mechanisms must be built into planning processes to challenge assumptions and to plan for failures, as well as to audit performance. They also need to make appropriate distinctions between the international, country and local level of planning and management while ensuring transparency and feedback up and down the chain of command.
- Finally, the planning process needs to be integrated with the resource allocation and management process if the mission is to be able to sensibly align priorities with resources.

⁷⁹ Amitai Etzioni, ‘A self-restrained approach to nation-building by foreign powers’, *International Affairs* 80: 1, Jan. 2004, pp. 1–18; Francis Fukuyama, *State-building: governance and world order in the 21st century* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2004); Salman Ahmed, ‘No size fits all’, *Foreign Affairs* 84: 1, Jan./Feb. 2005, pp. 162–9.

⁸⁰ United Nations Development Group and World Bank, *An operational note on transitional results matrices: using results-based frameworks in fragile states* (Washington DC: UN/World Bank, Jan. 2005).