

## ANOTHER VIEWPOINT

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### A NON-PARTISAN APPROACH TO IRAQ\*

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#### PREAMBLE

The best interests of the United States (US) are of primary consideration. The most powerful country in the world has vital international interests, which must be protected and enhanced, in cooperation with others, but not intentionally at the expense of others. However, success and victory have relative meanings, ranging from maximum benefits to minimum costs. Victory does not mean vanquishing the enemy. Compromise is the essence of peace making, conflict resolution, and avoidance of revenge. One can maximize benefits and not be victorious. In contrast, one can minimize costs and be regarded as triumphant, at least in the long run. Overcoming obstacles is a science and an art, and that is where good management, intuition, and fair decision making comes in. It is important for the United States to put an end to the human costs of the war in Iraq, and to reduce the material costs as much as possible, sooner rather than later. This means trying to reverse the trend of the last three years.

The conditions in Iraq are not improving, if not deteriorating, though this is arguable, since the assessment of events depends much on where the assessor comes from politically, economically, and strategically. The Coalition Forces (CF) have sustained their efforts to contain the conflict, but they have made little progress against the violent insurgents, especially in Baghdad and Anbar Province. It is evident that a different approach may be advisable and timely. This is especially true since the US is carrying most of the war and reconstruction burden in human and material costs. The American taxpayers are wondering how billions of dollars have been allocated to the operations in Iraq, with little positive observable effects. If not dealt with soon the situation may become irreversible. This seems to be also the gist of the bipartisan Iraq Study Group assessment, which has just been released by its co-chairs Baker and Hamilton. However, this is a non-partisan proposal, and it has little in common with the Baker/Hamilton study.

## THE NON-PARITISAN PROPOSAL

This is a proposal in support of US interests, peace, and conflict resolution, with more benefits and lower costs for all concerned, especially to the US. The proposal is to invite the United Nations (UN) and the League of Arab States (LAS) to gradually, take over the responsibilities of the CF in Iraq and allow the CF to leave Iraq within a given period of time, say one year. The UN/LAS replacement forces will go to Iraq as peacekeepers, not as peacemakers. In that capacity they will have no adversary, on the assumption that the Iraqi people want peace and stability in their country. The UN/LAS will not take sides in the conflict, but act as mediators and facilitators of communication between the various factions. To be able to do that, they will need to explain their mission to the Iraqi people and emphasize their positive role in guiding reconstruction and economic development. They will also highlight the fact that they have recruited the forces and leaders of the mission independently of any outside influence, on the basis of expertise, social qualifications, and experience in mediation, conflict, and peacekeeping.

## TERMS OF THE MISSION

To be able to carry out its mission, the UN/LAS force will determine its own approach to the conflict and its resolution. They will carry defensive weapons only. They will not go into combat, nor will they have combat weapons at their disposal. They will depend on the cooperation of the Iraqi people, the prestige of the organizations they represent, and the experience of their leaders and troops in the field. They will also have material benefits to dispense in guiding and promoting reconstruction, which most Iraqis want.

The UN/LAS will receive adequate material support to cover their costs for all operations. The support will come from the UN members, or from the CF home countries that bear all the costs at the present time. This arrangement will accrue savings for those countries since the UN/LAS will deploy fewer troops than the CF, use less equipment, and avoid the heavy losses and destruction entailed by combat. Probably about 50,000 troopers will be sufficient for this mission, to replace the current American force of 137,000, in addition to the troop contribution of the allies.

To make sure the mission is functioning as expected, it will report periodically to the UN Security Council, or to the Secretary General of the UN and the Secretary General of the LAS, as will be determined in advance.

#### WHY THE UN AND LAS?

The UN is an all-inclusive organization. It includes among its members both the CF home countries and Iraq. The UN is non-partisan and cannot take sides with any faction against any other. However, it can make judgments on the actions of the different factions, and make suggestions and recommendations for improvement. It will also try to prevent harmful acts by other means that are at its disposal, including creating a buffer zone to maintain peace between the warring parties.

The UN will have no problem communicating with all the factions since it is nonpartisan. It will avoid any outside influence. And it will keep communications with various factions open to maintain their cooperation. In this respect the UN is unique because of its experience in mediation, conflict resolution, and peacekeeping, especially in the Middle East. The UN will also have access to the largest pool of expertise for this mission, whose personnel will be expected to behave in a fair, reasonable, and helpful manner.

The LAS, on the other hand, includes Arab countries, including Iraq. Its members use the Arabic language used in Iraq. They are familiar with the intricacies of the conflict as seen by the different Iraqi factions. They understand the importance of culture and religion in the conflict. Therefore, they should be able to reconcile some of the differences and neutralize those that cannot be reconciled, especially the differences related to religion. They will be helpful in maintaining unity in the country because it is in the region's benefit as well as in Iraq's benefit. Furthermore, the LAS will have no self-interest in Iraq and will dedicate all efforts to the success of its mission, as defined in the terms of engagement of the mission.

#### BENEFITS TO IRAQ

Iraq is now in a most chaotic condition. Many in Iraq attribute the conflict to foreign occupation. The UN/LAS mission will free them of the perception of foreign

occupation because neither the UN nor the LAS can be considered an occupier. As soon as the CF begin to leave Iraq the fear of permanent occupation will begin to dissipate. By the same token, the Iraqi casualties and their material losses will begin to decline. The infrastructure will no longer be a target for destruction. The UN/LAS will come in as an accepted mediator and peacekeeper and expect no reward for their actions, except the promise of success of their mission in promoting stability, keeping the peace, and resolving the conflict. Finally, the Iraqis will be responsible for their own affairs and will not be told what, when, and how to reconstruct their economy and society. The UN/LAS will be there for their guidance and support with material and technical knowledge as recommended by the mission.

#### BENEFITS TO THE CF HOME COUNTRIES

The CF home countries will be able to gradually withdraw from Iraq in an honorable way. They will be delegating responsibilities to keep the peace and promote stability and unity in Iraq to international organizations that have experience, qualifications, and have no partisan self-interest in the conflict. They will be able to bring the human losses, to an end and realize a great reduction of the material losses. They will be freed from the accusation of intending to be permanent occupiers. They will also be able to bid for the Iraqi oil on the international market, or reach a bilateral agreement with Iraq, without fear of being accused of trying to stay in Iraq to secure privileged access to the oil reserves of that country.

The CF home countries know that democracy cannot be imposed, from above or by a foreign occupier. It has to be inbred through education and practice for it to work, be stable, and permanent. The UN/LAS will have nothing to do with imposing democracy on the Iraqi people. On the other hand, the US and its allies have virtually realized the objectives for which they invaded Iraq: displacement of Saddam Hussein and ridding the country of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Saddam Hussein is out and Iraq is free of WMD. All other objectives are artificial, representing values that are foreign and strange to the majority of the Iraqi people. They are perceived as an imposition on Iraq, its culture, and its religion. Those other objectives are best left to the Iraqi people to contemplate, and adopt or discard as they see fit.

Finally, the US and its allies in the war have no other promising strategy for success in achieving peace, stability, and conflict resolution in Iraq. The Baker/Hamilton proposal are too many, difficult to adopt, and will take time to make a difference. In fact there is no strategy or proposal on the table that promises more benefits or lower costs than this non-partisan proposal. Hopefully all parties concerned will consider it seriously and proceed to make the proposed mission a reality.

\*This AVP originated as a letter to President George W. Bush, with copies to several leaders of both parties.

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