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FAILURE TO ENGAGE WITH THE IRAQIS

1. A point that is being made with increasing force by members of the Iraqi community is that the coalition is failing to engage them in the process of their liberation. They have no role or ownership, nor are they being invited to join in the fight for what they want (whatever it might be). The coalition's largely successful efforts to avoid disrupting daily life means that, by and large, Iraqis have nothing to do but stay at home and watch the coalition slug it out with Saddam's forces.
2. Several people have made the point to me that we need to get Iraqis visibly involved on the side of the coalition, and in whatever way is possible establish a sense of partnership between the coalition and the Iraqi population. If we do not do so, we may find that we are dealing not with a jubilant population but one that says, "OK, you've got rid of Saddam. Now what?" There is almost certainly a feeling that they are not going to have much control of post-Saddam events, so there is not much point in trying to hasten his departure. Furthermore, at this stage in the campaign, there is nothing to encourage Iraqis to believe that the coalition will successfully dislodge Saddam, so they are even less likely to commit to opposing him.
3. The sense of a lack of partnership is unfortunately strengthened by our own focus on the humanitarian side - handing out food, bringing in "aid". Iraqis are proud, and don't feel they need aid or handouts. The Basran Iraqis we saw yesterday said that it would be better if Iraqi NGOs were involved in distribution, wherever supplies came from.
4. This may already be being taken into consideration in the field, but I suspect that more could be done. It might be an idea to have some Iraqis - military and civilian - with our own military; or perhaps to form an Iraqi military unit that can be seen to be operating alongside the coalition. Others may have useful ideas.

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