

INTERIM ADMINISTRATIONS IN IRAQ: WHY A UN-LED INTERIM ADMINISTRATION WOULD BE IN THE US INTEREST.

Acceptance within Iraq...

All the available evidence – from our posts, from the International Crisis Group and from the Iraqi opposition movement – indicates that ordinary Iraqis do not want an occupying power administering Iraq after a change of regime. But an outside, interim administration with a degree of Iraqi participation will, almost certainly, be needed to stabilise the country, to find and destroy all WMD, and secure long lasting political and economic reform.

The Iraqi people are more likely to accept and work with an outside interim administration if the international community supports it. That in practice means having a UN-led operation, since it seems highly unlikely that a US-led interim administration, working outside UN control and not wishing to be constrained by a detailed UN mandate, would get the Security Council's support.

...will be a necessary condition for lasting reform.

If the US are to invest time, political capital, money and people in turning Iraq into a beacon of good government for the region, the reforms in Iraq have to stick. The Iraqi people are likely to resent the presence of outsiders in the interim administration. But their resentment will be greater towards a US-led administration than to a UN mission, which will involve regional (fellow Muslim) as well as other international actors.

The transition from an interim authority to a competent and sustainable Iraqi administration will necessitate strengthening the capacity of Iraqi officials and the institutions in which they serve. The more the interim administration is accepted inside Iraq, the easier that task should be. Otherwise, if there is a perception of lead nation partiality in an interim administration, individuals may not co-operate with it for fear of being seen as 'collaborators'.

Economic reform could involve disposing of bad stock and privatising going concerns. This could be particularly germane to the oil industry. That will require clarity over whether the authorities have the legal right to dispose of Iraq's state assets. That may best be achieved through a UN-led interim administration, rather than a national one. Even if the US were satisfied that they had the necessary legal authority under a military government, other countries would be likely to be dubious. So on trade and investment-related issues, such as this, a clear (UN) legal basis for an interim administration's actions would also be in the US interests.

International and Regional support for an interim administration will also be critical to embed reform...

The chances of a new Iraqi political system enduring, after an interim administration departs, are increased if the international community has supported the process leading to the new arrangements. Without UN or other international support for a new Iraqi government, it will be harder to deal with accusations that the new Iraqi authorities are merely a US stooge. The question of legitimacy is one of legality as well as political support. In the absence of Security Council cover for an interim administration, most countries are likely to conclude that a post-conflict US presence in Iraq is simply an illegal occupation. This conclusion is likely to become more

strongly held the longer the situation continues, with damaging effects on the coalition and on the prospects for lasting reform in Iraq.

...and to reduce the risk of terrorism

The Security Council's backing will be a necessary condition of reducing hostility to the US in the Arab world. That in turn should lessen the risk of terrorism against the US (and her coalition allies). Without the UN taking the lead, US action in Iraq would be likely to increase the breeding ground in the Arab world for the recruitment of terrorists. Street protests and worse, in response to the US presence, could destabilise other regimes in the region. Conversely, a UN operation would make it easier to handle the cross-linkages to the MEPP, in the region and in the Islamic world.

International legitimacy is good for stability...

All things considered, a UN administration has the best chance of ensuring that any future Iraqi government is regarded as fully legitimate both inside Iraq and in the region, thus providing the best basis for future stability in the area.

...and should ease burden sharing...

The willingness of other countries and organisations to share the burden - costs, people and political risk - with the US in running an interim administration will depend largely on whether the operation enjoys international legitimacy. Without UN political cover, even friends of the US, such as some EU member states, would be inhibited from giving practical support. Bear in mind that the costs of the post-war administration will probably be higher than the costs of the war itself.

...since the UN is best placed to attract large numbers of skilled people...

We do not know how many outsiders will be needed to run an interim administration in Iraq. But it will be hundreds, possibly thousands even on the heroic assumption that the Iraqi administration will be able to function with only light outside supervision. Under UN cover, the pool from which to fish these people is much bigger.

...and is used to running long operations.

To root reform in Iraq will take a lot of time - years rather than months. The higher the level of ambition in promoting reform, the longer the interim administration will need to govern. The UN is used to marathons. But would the US administration and the American people have the patience to carry the burden of leading such a huge effort for so long, including through the next presidential campaign? And the task would not end with the hand-over to an Iraqi administration since whoever leads the interim administration will need to remain engaged, politically and economically, to help bed down the new arrangements.

Humanitarian operations will run better under the UN...

There is some risk that some humanitarian agencies would be reticent to engage with a national-led, as opposed to a UN-led, interim administration. This may affect the overall capacity to respond to humanitarian and recovery needs. And the UN has the expertise and recent experience of conducting humanitarian operations within Iraq.

...which would provide a familiar forum for co-ordinating international bodies.

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UN departments critical to reconstruction such as DPKO, UNDP, UNHCR, OCHA and DPA as well as international bodies such as the World Bank, IMF and the WFP will have roles to play in an interim administration. Co-ordination of these players would only be possible through the UN.

The same goes for disarmament...

There is a good case for leaving disarmament also in the hands of the UN - in the shape of UNMOVIC and the IAEA - who have the technical expertise and the mandate to carry out this task with a degree of international credibility which unilateral coalition/US action would lack. With a genuinely co-operative Iraqi administration there is no reason to think they could not do an effective job. And Iraq pays their costs.

... and a UN-led administration can more easily speak for Iraq internationally.

Someone will have to represent Iraq in international meetings - of which the most important could be OPEC. A US general, in circumstances where the coalition's presence in Iraq was internationally controversial, could hardly do that.

Although its record is mixed, the UN has a lot of relevant experience...

The UN is one of the few international organisations that has direct and current experience of operating within Iraq - in central and southern Iraq as well as in the north. It is also used to dealing with the Kurdish authorities as well as central government. More widely, the UN has experience, expertise and the institutional memory of administering other territories, eg Kosovo (UNMIK) and East Timor (UNTAET). And if the UN record is mixed, the record of ad hoc, non-UN administrations, eg as in Bosnia, which are unable to draw on UN resources, is worse.

...and can be flexible over C2.

Kosovo provides an interesting example where US forces are working alongside, but are not answerable to, a UN administration. (Under a pillar arrangement, the US could retain responsibility for security while the UN would take on only civilian administration and the political transition.)

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