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The situation in Fallujah played a part in all my conversations in Baghdad last week. I thought it would be helpful to record a few recurring points.

Firstly, no-one questioned our own conclusion that however messy the compromise that emerged, it was better than a US onslaught that would have flattened parts of the city, led to many civilian casualties and could have enflamed the situation across the country.

At the same time, concerns about the implications for the US decision remain very high. A British member of the combined cell working to General Sanchez told me that he estimated that at least half of the so-called Fallujah Brigade were recruited from the ranks of the insurgents who had been fighting the American forces in the previous three weeks. Their motivations may vary – some were almost certainly regime elements, others might have been local youths joining what they thought as patriotic resistance to defend their town. But either way, the idea that the Fallujah Brigade would now turn on the insurgents in the city was fanciful.

Political figures were also very concerned by what might happen next. The concept of Iraqis providing for security was warmly welcomed across the board. But many, in particular Shia and Kurds, saw the organisation of a local brigade to provide local security as sowing the seeds for a regional and ethnically based security force structure which itself was a recipe for civil strife and civil war in the years ahead. They all emphasised how important it would be to dissolve the Fallujah Brigade or, perhaps more likely, to split it up and divide the personnel between a number of other units in either the Iraqi Army or the ICDC. I think this is a very important

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conclusion, to which we must hold the Americans (and the Iraqi Interim Government).

Not much new light was shed during my visit on how we ended up with this compromise. Ambassador Bremer indicated to me that he had been kept as much in the dark as we had. The effort led by, his deputy, Dick Jones had turned out to be a side-show.

It is a good example of how much more difficult it has been to work with the Americans as the pressure mounts, the rivalry and finger pointing between various elements of the American Administration increases and short term decision making prevails over a consistent strategy.

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