

ORF OCCASIONAL PAPER #7
JANUARY 2007



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“ By 2010 we will need [a further] 50 million barrels a day. The Middle East, with two-thirds of the oil and the lowest cost, is still where the prize lies. ”

- Dick Cheney, 1999.

“ C reported on his recent talks in Washington. There was a perceptible shift in attitude. Military action was now seen as inevitable. Bush wanted to remove Saddam, through military action, justified by the conjunction of terrorism and WMD. But the intelligence and facts were being fixed around the policy. The NSC had no patience with the UN route, and no enthusiasm for publishing material on the Iraqi regime’s record. There was little discussion in Washington of the aftermath after military action. ”

- Secret Downing Street Memo, July 22, 2002.

“ The Intelligence Community (IC) suffered from a collective presumption that Iraq had an active and growing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program. This “group think” dynamic led Intelligence Community analysts, collectors and managers to both interpret ambiguous evidence as conclusively indicative of a WMD program as well as ignore or minimize evidence that Iraq did not have active and expanding weapons of mass destruction programs. This presumption was so strong that formalized IC mechanisms established to challenge assumptions and group think were not utilized. ”

- Conclusion 3 of the Senate Intelligence Committee Report on pre-war intelligence, July 2004.

The invasion and occupation of Iraq in March-April 2003 by a ‘Coalition of the Willing’ led by the United States was the second part of the response to the outrage conducted by a non-state actor on September 11, 2001. This was perceived in Washington as a gift from history, an opportunity to reshape a region of crucial relevance to the politics and economics of the western world. The impulse for drastic action was greater because notwithstanding the regime of draconian UN sanctions and the use of subversive devices embodied in the Iraq Liberation Act of the US Congress, policy relating to Iraq in

the wake of the war of 1991, embodied in the April 16, 1991 assertion of US President that 'there will not be normalisation of relations with the US until Saddam Hussein is out of there', had reached a dead end by the end of the decade.

The decision to go to war was preceded by an ideological debate premised on the belief that in a unipolar world, the United States possessed predominant military power that can be used cost-effectively to capture terrorists, reshape alliances, promote far reaching political changes and spread democracy. President Bush himself enunciated the doctrine: 'By a combination of creative strategies and advanced technologies, we are redefining war on our terms.' An essential ingredient of it was the doctrine of Pre-emption. The certitude of success was instrumental in the decision to ignore the UN and proceed unilaterally. Despite this evident illegality, the Security Council conferred post-facto legitimacy on the act, and on the Coalition Provisional Authority, through Resolution 1483 of May 22, 2003.

In a message to the Iraqi people on April 10, 2003 President Bush spelt out the objectives of the war:

"The goals of our coalition are clear and limited. We end a brutal regime, whose aggression and weapons of mass destruction make it a unique threat to the world. Coalition forces will help maintain law and order so that Iraqis can live in security. We will respect your great religious traditions, whose principles of equality and compassion are essential for Iraq's future. We will help you build a peaceful and representative government that protects the rights of all citizens. And then our military forces will leave."

Subsequent events followed a somewhat different course. The miscalculations and misjudgements prior to the war were continued in the immediate aftermath. The CPA under Ambassador Paul Bremer III outlawed the Baath party, disbanded the Iraqi army, privatised the economy but failed to communicate with the Iraqi people and understand the public mood. While there was little initial resistance to the Coalition forces, problems developed rapidly in terms of internal security, so visibly typified by looting of museums and government offices, in the breakdown of public utilities like water and electricity, and in the creation of massive unemployment. An assessment on July 17, 2003 by Anthony Cordesman of CSIS concluded that 'many of the problems the US encountered were caused by the failure of the US and its allies to provide adequate security, prevent looting, and take immediate action to ensure continuity of government'. A day earlier, on July 16, the commander of USCENTCOM described the post-war fighting as 'a guerilla war', though of low intensity. Two weeks later a staff report for Senators Lugar and Biden of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee described the situation as 'precarious' which, 'if not urgently addressed, posed a significant threat to American troops as well as national security interests of the United States in the Middle East and beyond'.

Mistakes of a more serious nature were made. There was a failure to understand the

working of the Iraqi society and the religious impulses that had surfaced in the past decade in both the Shia and the Sunni segments of the Iraqi population. The Coalition was selective in the inclusion of grass-root Iraqi political organisations and not sufficiently discriminating in the choice of expatriate Iraqi politicians with whom it ‘cut backroom deals’.

Iraqi attitudes to invasion and occupation were reflective of the changing situation. An opinion poll taken in April 2003 in the major cities in Shia, Sunni and Kurdish regions showed that 43 per cent considered the US presence as liberation and 46 per cent as occupation; six months later, in October, the corresponding figures were 15 and 67. In December 2006 an opinion poll conducted by the Iraq Center for Research and Strategic Studies (ICRSS) and the Gulf Research Center, Dubai showed that 95 per cent were of the view that the security situation was better prior to the US-led invasion of 2003, 89 per cent felt the same way about the political situation and 79 per cent about the economic situation. A graphic account of life for Iraqis under the prevailing conditions—as portrayed by the Shia and Sunni local employees of both sexes of the US embassy—was given in Ambassador Khalilzad’s telegram of June 2006 to the Secretary of State.

Iraq was to be the model for the creation of a ‘New Middle East’. Why, and where, did policy and implementation go wrong? What has been its impact on the domestic, regional and international situation? Does it, in any manner, impact on India? An assessment on different counts provides some answers.

Law and order

The progressive deterioration in the law and order situation, month by month, is recorded in the reports to the US Congress by the Department of Defence, in the Iraq Index of the Brookings Institution, and the data base maintained by other research bodies. The insurgency indicators from all sources indicate a massive upsurge in terms of numbers and groups in the 2004 – 2006 period. The same is true of the diversity and frequency of attacks and sophistication of the means used. The insurgency since its inception was ‘driven substantially by the occupation, its practices, and policies’. As a result, Iraqis did not trust US troops and held them responsible for much of the violence in the country. There was also significant public support for attacks on US forces.

Two sets of reactions characterised the public response to the aftermath of the war:

(a) general resentment over the presence of foreign troops, and

(b) reactions to specific practices of the occupation. Reactions also varied in terms of regions and ethnic groups. The Kurds stood apart in terms of the positive nature of the response given by them to the presence of coalition forces. The Sunni Arabs were uniformly resentful. Their attitudes were also conditioned by the mass dismissal of civil and military officials, the de-Baathification order of the CPA, the excesses at Abu

Gharaib, Falluja and Haditha, and by the electoral system put in place by the occupation authority. Attempts at influencing Sunni opinion through tribal chiefs were made from time to time; they did not meet with much success. The Shia reactions were reflective of the ambivalence of their situation: 'They needed Washington to keep the Sunnis down and the Kurds in'; the war, on the one hand, brought about the downfall of the Baathist regime and opened the way for Shia access to political power; at the same time, it meant a great deal of bloodshed and hardship in Shia areas. Relations at the leadership level of different Shia political groups reflected differences in goals and aspirations. The clerical leadership, in particular, was resentful of American presence in the region and was, in turn, suspected for their Islamist political orientation and their links with Iran. The sources of support, and the nuances within the ranks, of the Shia clergy were not fully appreciated. In the initial stage, Grand Ayatollah Sistani positioned himself against the occupation and refused all overtures; once the electoral process commenced, he refrained from direct involvement and left the field to younger, more radical, elements who developed a following among the young and the very poor and were successful in radicalising opinion.

Ten months after the invasion, a commentator in *Al Hayat* summed up the public perception: 'The US has achieved a miracle in Iraq. It has made people regret the downfall of Saddam's regime'. In March 2006, on the third anniversary of the war, the newspaper reiterated the assessment: 'it is yet to be known if another people is willing to hand in its fate to the US soliciting liberation from a blood-thirsty dictator, only to cast it in the mazes of a fierce civil war'. In December 2006, the Baker-Hamilton Panel Report assessed that 'there is no guarantee of success in Iraq' since 'violence is increasing in scope, complexity and lethality', is particularly high in four of Iraq's eighteen provinces that together cover 40 per cent of the total population of the country, resulting in great suffering and pervasive pessimism. The pressure of this on the American armed forces became an additional dimension of the problem: 'many combat units were under considerable strain' since 'nearly every US Army and Marine combat unit, and several National Guard and Reserve units, have been to Iraq at least once'.

The November 2006 Report of the Department of Defense to the US Congress observed that 'little progress' has been made in Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki's National Dialogue and Reconciliation Project because:

'Critical domestic issues, including hydrocarbon legislation, de-Baathification reform, provincial elections, and demobilisation of militias, must still be addressed. The failure of the government to implement concrete action in these areas has contributed to a situation in which, as of October 2006, there were more Iraqis who expressed a lack of confidence in their government's ability to improve the situation than there were in July 2006'.

The Report added that in the past three months, the number of attacks by insurgents had increased by 22 per cent, and were principally directed at the Coalition forces; 54 per cent of these took place in Baghdad and Anbar provinces of the Sunni Triangle. Attacks on infrastructure, it said, decreased 'but the lack of recovery from the cumulative effects of these attacks, combined with ineffective infrastructure repair and maintenance, impeded the delivery of essential services to the Iraqis and undermined the legitimacy of the government among the Iraqi people.'

Estimates of numbers in the ranks of the insurgency and in the militias shed light on the progressive deterioration in the security situation. This stood at 5000 in November 2003, climbed to 20,000 in October 2004, remained between 15-20,000 a year later and stood at 20-30,000 in October 2006. The number of foreign fighters climbed from 500 in early 2004 to about 2000 at the end of 2006; 29 per cent of these were from the Maghreb countries alone.

2006 witnessed changes in the character of the insurgency, and the dynamics of fighting. Sectarian Shia-Sunni violence intensified after the bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samarra in February and Shia militias now constitute a principal obstacle to the government's reconciliation efforts. Groups like Moqtada al Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi are reported to have developed 'rouge components'; their effort at ethnic cleansing of Sunni localities in Baghdad and some other cities is indicative of their methods and intentions. The Sunni insurgency, on the other hand, remains focused on the western province of Anbar. The American dilemma, in the words of the US Ambassador, is that demobilisation of Shia militias depends on the reduction of Sunni insurgency. On the other hand, US experts assess that Sunni insurgents 'continue to adapt their tactics to stay one step ahead of the US military technology upgrades.'

Economy

'Establishing a market economy in Iraq,' said Paul Bremer in May 2003, 'is a corner stone of the Bush Administration's goal of bringing lasting prosperity to Iraq and creating a model that could lead to the spread of free markets throughout the Middle East'. The results of the endeavour, however, have been very different and reports from all sources present a dismal picture. The failure to restore basic amenities, and reduce unemployment and under-employment, has affected every segment of society and influenced public perceptions. An assessment for the CSIS in December 2006 is categorical on this count:

'Amid widespread violence in the country, economic conditions continue to deteriorate. Iraqis faced a severe fuel crisis, joblessness, high inflation rates, and a burgeoning black market. Oil production remained below pre-invasion levels and electricity averaged only 6-8 hours a day in the capital in November. Education and healthcare in Iraq

also began to show the effects of the civil war as the educated either fled the country or were assassinated.

The Baker-Hamilton panel's findings are no different. It draws attention to the US\$ 34 billion package for the reconstruction of Iraq and opines that 'Congress has no appetite for appropriating more funds' on this count. It observes that numerous instances of waste and abuse have 'not all been put right'.

Other aspects of mismanagement are no less evident. In December 2006 the US Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction spoke about corruption: it 'is the second insurgency, and I use the metaphor to underline the seriousness of this issue.' A similar observation was made a month earlier by deputy Prime Minister Barham Saleh: 'The political economy of this conflict is very much rooted in the alarming levels of corruption that we are dealing with. A lot of money from many sectors of the economy is diverted to sustain the violence.' The smuggling of oil on a substantial scale, and lapses and errors in the awarding and monitoring of contracts have aggravated this in good measure. UN bodies and Transparency International assessed 'gross irregularities by CPA officials in their management of the Iraq Development Fund and condemned the United States for lack of transparency and providing opportunities for fraudulent acts'.

A new oil law, still at the draft stage, is causing misgivings in public. In a departure from West Asian practice, it proposes to introduce a production-sharing arrangement, valid for 30 years, with foreign oil companies who would be allowed to retain 20 per cent of the profits once all costs have been recouped.

Political process

'Securing Iraq', wrote an analyst in March 2006, 'is a necessary condition for success, but is hardly sufficient.' A principal objective of the invasion was to replace tyranny with democracy. However, the crafting of the change at conceptual and implementation levels exhibited serious deficiencies. By November 2003 the CPA realised the imperative necessity of accelerating the political process and restoring Iraqi sovereignty. Sistani's initial demand was for immediate elections. The UN, called back to assist after being ignored, sent Lakhdar Brahimi in February 2004 tasked to assess all aspects of a legitimate political process leading to the formation of a democratically elected government. He concluded that (a) 'credible elections' cannot be held by June 30, 2004 (b) at least eight months would be required to prepare for elections (c) the deadline of June 30, 2004 for transferring sovereignty to an elected government cannot be met (d) the only feasible alternative is to transfer sovereignty to a provisional authority (e) if a legal framework is established by May 2004, elections can be scheduled for end December to elect an assembly to function both as a legislative body and to draft a constitution. Brahimi dissuaded Sistani from his insistence on immediate elections; he was also instrumental in

persuading the CPA to abandon plans for caucus-based elections.

The central element in the political process of post-invasion Iraq is the Constitution of 2005. The political backdrop to the constitution-making process, and the alignment of forces in Iraq's political society in the aftermath of the invasion and occupation, determined in large measure the conceptual framework of the document and its specific provisions. Two positive impulses, and one negative one, were decisive: (a) the insistence of the Kurds to retain the autonomy gained by them in the post-1991 and post-invasion periods (b) the demand of the Shias to exercise the full weight of their numerical majority and (c) the boycott of the political process by the overwhelming majority of the Sunnis. In this tug of war, questions of viability and considerations of a workable balance were often lost sight of. The Iraqis voted to divide, not unite; the net result was a constitution structured to divide. It made Iraq a democratic, parliamentary, bilingual and federal republic with residual powers resting with the regions and the role of the central government severely restricted, particularly with regard to the allocation of oil revenues. Islam was declared the official religion and 'a basic source of legislation'; in the same breath, some progressive legislation of earlier years relating to personal status was rolled back. Pending enabling legislation on about 55 subjects would intensify the regional or sectarian debate.

Progress in four critical areas would determine developments in the immediate future: (1) a national reconciliation process (2) the drafting of a law relating to regions (3) review of the Constitution and (4) a time-table for the assumption of security responsibilities by the Iraqi security forces (ISF). The first is at a stand still on account of the spurt in sectarian violence; the second, which will effectively define the shape and content of Iraqi federalism, has been deferred for 18 months to allow time for more discussion; for the third, a Constitutional Review Committee was set up in September 2006 but is yet to commence its work; capacity building in regard to the fourth is in progress and US figures currently put the number of trained soldiers and police at 3,22,600. It is admitted at the same time that the 'Iraqi army still suffers from shortcomings in its ability to plan and execute logistics and sustained requirements and will continue to rely heavily on Coalition forces for key assistance and capacity development'. Public perception of corruption and sectarian interests in the security forces also has an impact on their effectiveness.

Impact on and imprint of external factors

The occupation alienated opinion in the Arab street but did not unduly perturb the Arab regimes; the aftermath, however, did. The failure to pacify and rebuild Iraq has impacted differently on various regional actors; its imprint has not been lost beyond the region.

Governmental reactions in Iraq's immediate neighbourhood were determined by

strategic considerations of considerable complexity. The Arab neighbours of Iraq – Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria had antipathy to the Saddam regime but empathy (except in the case of Kuwait) with the Sunni segment of Iraq's Arab population; these were reinforced by tribal affiliations. Iran welcomed both the decimation of an enemy and the installation in power of political groups whom it had supported in exile in Iran. An uncharitable comment summed up the resulting situation: 'America fought the war, and Iran won the war'. Sharing a common border, and a regular flow of large number of pilgrims to Shia shrines in Iraq, Iran plays a crucial role in the flow of assistance (lethal and benevolent) to Shia groups and organisations in Iraq. One aspect of the change in Baghdad was to give Iran an opportunity to reshape its strategic environment; the other aspect was to confront it with the reality of American power on its western flank. The implications of the latter could be far reaching given the developing contradiction between the American insistence on reshaping the Gulf and West Asian regions, on the one hand, and Iran's longer term ambition of becoming the most important power centre in the region, on the other.

Turkey's principal concern pertains to Kurdish autonomy and its impact on Turkey's Kurdish areas; to a much lesser extent, this is true of Iran also. Syria too, as Iran's strategic ally and Iraq's western neighbour, is interested in the happenings in Iraq but not in a position to influence them decisively.

The insurgency, the role of radical Shia and Sunni groups, and the US failure to pacify Iraq, changed perceptions in regional governments and added a sense of alarm and urgency to them. Jordan opted for a close alignment with the US and costs were 'paid in terms of domestic politics' through restrictions on political freedoms of a citizen body that was demonstratively hostile to the United States. Jordan also took an active role in the training of the Iraqi security forces and in the sharing of intelligence on Sunni radical groups. In the case of Saudi Arabia, and as the insurgency developed, the attention came to be focused on its implications for Saudi national security in terms of (a) the radicalisation of opinion in Saudi public and use of tribal linkages to assist Iraqi Islamists b) the possibility of the break-up of the Iraqi state and infiltration of Islamist elements across the Iraqi-Saudi border. Both Saudi Arabia and Jordan voiced (with justice) concern over Iran's growing influence in Iraq and apprehension about the emergence of a 'Shia Crescent' in the upper Persian Gulf region given the percentages of Shias in the population of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Some circles in Saudi Arabia, apprehensive of an early US withdrawal, hinted at the possibility (unrealistic at the best of times) of a Saudi military intervention.

Elsewhere in the Gulf and in the Arab world, the direction of events in Iraq has resulted in acute unease, a widening gap between public and official perceptions, and a sense of frustration over the turn of events. These were aptly summed up in President

Mubarak's comment on the hanging of Saddam Hussein.

New policy?

The ground reality, together with a changed public mood in the United States, the results of the November Congressional elections, and the Baker-Hamilton panel report, eventually compelled the Bush Administration to attempt a course correction. In an address to the nation on January 10, President Bush was candid in accepting personal responsibility for mistakes made: 'It is clear that we need to change our strategy in Iraq' since 'failure in Iraq would be a disaster for the United States' and would strengthen (a) radical Islamic extremists (b) enable them to topple moderate governments (c) create chaos in the region (d) use oil revenues to fund their ambitions (e) embolden Iran in its pursuit of nuclear weapons (f) give a safe haven to enemies to plan and attack America. The new strategy would involve the induction of 20,000 more American troops, most of them to secure Baghdad, embedding US advisers in Iraqi army units, ending sectarian violence without political interference, and handing over security of all Iraqi provinces to the Iraqi government by November 2007. The Iraqi government will also spend \$ 10 billion of its own money on 'reconstruction and infrastructure projects that will create new jobs,' pass legislation to share oil revenue among all Iraqis, hold provincial elections later this year, enable more Iraqis to enter the political process through 'reform of de-Baathification laws, and establish a fair process for considering amendments to Iraq's constitution.' America 'will hold the Iraqi government to the bench marks it has announced.' Furthermore, the US will disrupt the subversive activities in Iraq of Iran and Syria by stationing an additional carrier strike group in the region, by the deployment of Patriot air defence systems 'to reassure our friends and allies,' for and by cooperating with countries like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Gulf states. Iran will be prevented from 'gaining nuclear weapons and dominating the region.'

There are identifiable similarities between the contents of the speech and the course of action suggested by the January 5, 2007 Phase I Report of the Iraq Planning Group of the American Enterprise Institution recommending 'a new approach to war' through decisive action 'to restore stability and security to Baghdad' by clearing 'high-violence Sunni and mixed Sunni-Shia neighbourhoods primarily on the west side of the city' without attempting to clear the Sadr City (base of Muqtada al-Sadr's militia) since that 'would damage Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al- Maliki's political base and thus lead to the collapse of the Iraqi government.'

The speech was premised on the faulty major premise of the global war on terror and credible American analysts assess that it 'raised more questions than it answered them.' Congressional reactions are indicative of the doubts in the public mind about its efficacy. The expectation that the Iraqi government would disarm Shia militias, assume full

security responsibility by November, permit some former members of the Baath party to re-enter the political system or address the question of constitutional changes leading to a fair allocation of oil revenues, is unrealistic. If the Maliki government fails to show results in a few months, would it be replaced by another set of politicians of the same ilk? How would their performance be judged when both the President and his military commanders admit that the new strategy would not yield immediate results and that the results may be visible only by the end of summer 2007? As for the economic promises, their realisation would depend on security and internal organisation; both these are unlikely to materialise in a short time span.

The focus of the President's speech was as much on Iraq as on Iran and, with regard to the latter, the unambiguous message was of confrontation rather than negotiations. This became clearer in the Congressional Hearings that followed the speech. The reference to the second carrier group and the Patriot air defence system was thus intended to reassure GCC allies whose political support is being sought against Iran on the plea of an 'Iranian threat' to their security. This build up of forces, combined with provocative incidents like the recent one in Erbil and persistent reports of clandestine commando operations inside Iran, is thus intended to pressurise Iran and seek an excuse for direct military action.

Reactions to the speech, within the United States and elsewhere, suggest an effort to buy time by a beleaguered presidency. Within the region, reactions have been uniformly negative. Iran described it as 'continuation of occupation' and as a step that would enhance insecurity and raise tensions. Syria said it would 'pour oil on the fire'. Arab commentators doubted the capacity of the Iraqi prime minister to act against Shia militias. They feel the new plan is based on the erroneous assumption that a military solution is possible. Saudi Arabia expressed apprehensions about the decision to use more force and about the implications for the region of an early American withdrawal. The US effort, to seek support for the new strategy from 'moderate' Arab governments, is clearly intended to influence Sunni opinion in Iraq and contain Iran's role in regional terms.

Assessment

It would be easy to conclude that the Iraq policy of the Bush Administration was simply premised on misstatements, misperceptions and on errors of planning and execution. Great powers, however, do not blunder in this fashion unless they are propelled by an over-riding impulse that determines their perception of national interest. This impulse did not emanate with the Bush Administration. It goes back to the post-World War II period. Successive administrations subscribed, amplified, and adapted it to their requirements. The three ingredients of this approach were (a) assured access to petroleum resources of West Asia (b) prevention of the emergence of unfriendly powers (c) guaran-

tee of Israel's security as defined by Israel. In the post-Cold War period, the opportunity of establishing undisputed American hegemony was seen as a gift from history; 9/11 reinforced it in ample measure and provided the opportunity. Details and modalities were spelt out in the National Security strategy of the United States of America (2002 and 2006) and in National Defense Strategy document (March 2005).

The humbling of Iraq was the first part of the project for a new Greater Middle East. The failure in Iraq, thus, inevitably impacts on other ingredients of the package; an assessment of the implications provides a clearer picture of the resulting situation:

- **Modernisation of West Asia:** The Bush effort was to join the 'battle for the Muslim mind' and help bring forth regimes that would be 'moderate' and 'modern'. This has not happened and in country after country in West Asia Islamist groups have added to their ranks in considerable numbers.
- **Security of Israel:** The Sharon approach of suppressing the Palestinians and delaying the peace process had the tacit if not express endorsement of the Bush administration. Israel's infallibility and invincibility has been dented by the electoral victory of Hamas and Israeli army's failure to dismantle the Hezbollah in Lebanon.
- **Democratisation:** Expectations have not materialised and only token efforts have been made by regimes that have successfully argued that war on terror has to take precedence over the demands for rights. There is much less talk today in Washington of the democracy initiative.
- **Unipolarity and pre-emption:** The moment of unipolarity has passed and the global landscape today is characterised by uneven multi-polarity in which the United States remains the most relevant power in terms of military prowess and technological advancement, but less so on other counts. Iraq has dealt a blow to its hegemonic ambitions. Pre-emption retains the status of official policy but is discredited after the Iraq experience.
- **Alternate approaches to regional and global security:** Despite the Baker-Hamilton panel's recommendations about a broad regional initiative for (a) creating an Iraq Support Group of neighbouring states (b) engaging directly with Iran and Syria (c) convening an OIC or Arab League conference in Baghdad (d) engaging directly to move the Palestinian and Arab-Israeli peace processes forward, the Bush Administration continues to consider them as separate questions.

Iraq today is a case in which the strategic interests of domestic and external players both converge and diverge. The exercise of reconciling these impulses would be complex and require careful balancing. Within Iraq, the challenge is to contain Kurdish ambitions of autonomy after a decade and a half of virtual independence from the central government. On the sectarian front, and having promoted and unleashed the sectarian

strife, the US effort now to contain it by balancing extreme Shia and Sunni interests is difficult. A critical input would be the proposed amendments to the Constitution and drafting of regulations for equitable distribution of oil revenues. These would be a pre-requisite for the inevitably slow process of re-building of community relations between the sects. Within the region, the effort to energise the new approach by raising Arab apprehensions of Iran is short sighted, could cause greater disruption, and gives credence to the allegation that stability in the region is not the goal but the target. Given the experience of the recent past, it is imperative to develop a cooperative approach to regional security.

The Iraq experience of the United States has wider relevance. It has demonstrated the inefficacy of:

- a doctrinaire approach to international affairs;
- the quest for seeking unilateral solutions;
- the propensity to dispense with international law and agreements;
- the excessive reliance on 'high-tech revolution in military affairs';
- the failure to discern the motivation and nature of insurgencies, and
- the inclination to allow problems to fester.

America has paid a heavy price for these in human and material terms; the costs are even higher with regard to its standing in the world.

The story of the effort to entice India into the Iraq quagmire is yet to be told fully.

Public opinion, and a judicious decision by the government and Parliament, saved the country from this misadventure.

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