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FILLING THE SECURITY VACUUM? AMERICA'S SURGE IN BAGHDAD

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A preliminary consideration to take into account is that differing analyses of the current situation may derive from varying access to information in Iraq. Based on our own admittedly limited access, I will try to establish why the situation in Iraq has become so dangerously unstable, analyse the possible measures to stabilise it and give some recommendations for the future.

Behind the United States' Motives for the War on Iraq

The stated US motives for the invasion were, first of all, to overthrow a dictatorial regime that had "gassed its own people", to remove the menace of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and to sever the suspected link between Iraq and Al-Qaeda. Many questions have been raised concerning these motives (since there was no evidence linking the regime to Al-Qaeda, and because the UN had disarmed Iraq), and alternative ones have been offered: The desire, fed by revenge, to remove a regime that had been friendly to the US and had been allied with it but that had gone out of control –the Kuwait invasion being the turning point; the desire to create a democratic state in Iraq as a model for authoritarian regimes in the region (since US policy of propping up undemocratic regimes for the sake of stability during the last fifty years had led to great instability); and finally to warn Iran, which was also suspected of having active WMD programs. A ground invasion of Iran would have been very difficult –and at this point it is almost inconceivable– but at the time the US thought it could send a warning to Iran and other states suspected of developing nuclear weapons by invading Iraq, a country with a highly unpopular regime and an army the US thought it could defeat easily. By sending such a warning to Iran, the US may have thought the leadership would back down from its WMD plans and thus would become less dangerous. There was even talk of regime change, which could yield a new set-up friendly to US interests.

If these were the motives, then the result has been the opposite: While there was no proven Iraq-Al-Qaeda link before 2003, Al-Qaeda has grown tremendously as a result of the mistakes that were made before, during and after the war, which offered space to jihadi fighters to come in from the outside and to start recruiting among disaffected Iraqis, mostly Sunni Arabs.

If the motive was to send a warning to Iran, then the opposite message was received by the Iranians, who, after about a year, had already realised that this enterprise was going to fail and from then on started to spread their influence throughout Iraq, most importantly in the January 2005 elections when the Shi'ite Islamist parties gained power, and also through their security agencies, which began funding a wide range of Iraqi actors.

Before moving forward, it is crucial to analyse why things went wrong in conceiving this Iraq war. The Bush administration made some elementary mistakes: First of all, the war was designed by a very small band of people, generally known as the neo-cons, and their allies in the administration. This small group relied on military commanders and civilians in the Pentagon to carry out the task of defeating the regime and rebuilding the country, and it cut out from the debate and from the planning for the post-war period agencies such as the State Department, the CIA and, outside the US, the United Nations. And so, when the war was over, and even though militarily it was a great success –the regime was defeated in three weeks– the US was not prepared for the post-war period. There was no reconstruction plan or any plan for stabilising Iraq, for imposing law and order on the first day. As a result, from day one looters took over and started a campaign of destruction –although it was totally spontaneous and unorganised– that was totally predictable because it had happened before in Iraqi history, in fact as recently as 1991 in the South. And so this could and should have been anticipated, but apparently it was not and so no US troops were available to stop the looters. In cases where they were present, they didn't lift a finger.

The United Nations was not only cut out from post-war rebuilding, it was also not asked to authorise the war. As a result, this was a unilateral US war (some major states like France and Germany preferred to stay out), augmented by a handful of selected allies such as Britain and some lesser actors. This was critically important because it led many Iraqis to believe (I was there right after the war and talked with a range of people) that the US had ulterior motives and that they were there to protect the interests of Israel and to lay its hands on Iraqi oil and not to overthrow a violent regime and replace it with a democratic one.

Part of the problem for the US in this period was what Roger Owen has called "willed ignorance" and the use of "expert non-knowledge". The US was guilty of willed ignorance in the sense that there was no desire on the part of US agencies –the ones in charge of reconstruction– to learn anything about Iraq. Moreover, they relied on a handful of Iraqi exiles, such as Ahmed Chalabi and Kanan Makiya, for their information about Iraq. Although these exiles had not been in Iraq for a very long time, they had strong and even intelligent views about Iraq. Nonetheless, to rely on a few people to invade and rebuild a society that had developed considerably since the time they had been there was to start from a very thin basis. The State Department had brought together a larger number of Iraqi exiles, including Kanan Makiya, in 2002-2003, to make a plan for the post-war period, but this plan, known as the "Future of Iraq" plan, was set aside at the time of the war and was not used.

In terms of expert non-knowledge, the US sent many reconstruction experts to Iraq who had been previously to places such as the Former Yugoslavia, East Timor, and other transitional societies and who brought a certain technical expertise to bear on the situation in Iraq. However, their knowledge was technical and did not extend to any knowledge of the country itself or its people. One of the major problems was that the US did not have any Iraq experts working with it, nor could it rely on Iraqis after the war was over as it did not trust

them, nor did it have people that could correctly translate from English to Arabic and from Arabic to English, or translate culturally from Iraqi culture to US culture and vice versa. This was an important problem that I saw manifested over and again when travelling to various parts and witnessing the interactions between Iraqis and Americans. There was a total disconnection in communications. Although in the beginning there was a lot of goodwill toward the US, because Iraqis were overjoyed by the regime's fall and were very grateful to the Americans, this goodwill evaporated soon because of the chaos the Americans allowed to happen: the looting and then, over time, as the months passed, the growing insurgency, the attacks against the UN, against the ICRC, against Shi'ite leaders, and against a growing range of targets.

Vacuums Created by the Implementation of US Strategies

All of these mistakes led to the faltering of the US effort in Iraq. But perhaps the most important ones are the dismissal of the Iraqi army in May 2003 and the de-Baathification campaign. The problem, however, was not the de-Baathification campaign itself, but the way in which it was carried out. The army was dismissed even though it lacked any proven loyalty to the regime. In fact, it was because Saddam Hussein *distrusted* the army that he had set up rival institutions that had a lot more power than the army. The dismissal of four-to-five hundred thousand men without any provision for their well-being through pensions or any kind of salary afterwards led to a great deal of discontent, and this extended throughout the ranks regardless of religious beliefs or ethnicity to all Iraqis who had been part of this institution.

In addition to creating a huge security vacuum, the Americans created a managerial vacuum by decapitating the managerial class. The Baath party, for all its repressive nature, had provided the country's managers.

When decapitating an autocratic regime verging on the totalitarian, all institutions are essentially disabled. In Iraq one could only follow orders as there was no initiative within the structure. So in removing the leadership, those one level down were put in charge, although they had never been encouraged to take decisions, and in many cases did not even want to take decisions because they were afraid. After April 2003, under the Americans, they were not necessarily afraid to take decisions (US commanders were openly encouraging them to show initiative), but they simply did not have the capability as they have never learned to do so. For example, I attended meetings of town councils that US commanders had established where there was a chairperson, a vice-chair, and several members who discussed the need for specific reconstruction projects. In the end, the council could not come to any decision and so the chairperson would turn to the US colonel or major sitting at the same table and ask: "What should we do? You should decide." And then the officer would reply: "No! I'm not here to decide; this is your country and you should decide for yourself." And then there would be total chaos and nobody knew what to do. In the end, very few decisions were taken and US military commanders ended up spending money on projects that they thought were important without regard for any plan or any existing institution in the reconstruction effort.

In addition to a security vacuum and an administrative vacuum, a political vacuum was created when the regime was removed. And the overriding question was: how were these vacuums going to be filled?

On the security front, the Americans started to rebuild the Iraqi army. But this project took a while to get off the ground –some time in 2004– while as for the police, which had collapsed and had been totally corrupt under the former regime, no efforts were made to even replace it. It took several years before there was a proper understanding of the importance of the police over the army in terms of bringing security to Iraqi streets. The Americans never quite understood in the first two or three years that to Iraqis their own personal security mattered most of all. They were only

concerned with what they refer to as force protection, the protection of their own military forces. Hence, they focused on rebuilding the army and they did not put similar emphasis on rebuilding the police. This meant that the security vacuum in the streets *for Iraqis* continued for many years and in fact it exists until today in different forms.

The managerial vacuum was never quite filled either, with responsibility for reconstruction basically handed over to large companies, US companies in most cases, that overspent and misspent money, often proved totally corrupt (there were many cases of no-bid contracts, for example), and completely overlooked what the most pressing *Iraqi* needs were. As the security situation deteriorated, these passed over Iraqi labour in favor of workers they could trust, meaning foreign labour, in many cases Asians or Turks.

The political vacuum was filled in the first phase –there was a long debate over this with some back and forth– by an Interim Governing Council that was appointed in July 2003. Kanan Makiya recently said at a conference that even though this Council had been appointed, it had the advantage of being representative of Iraqi society because it included Shi'ites and Sunnis, Kurds and Arabs, a Turkoman, a Christian, etcetera. In other words, it was representative of the many communities of which Iraq is composed. But one instance in which the Council was not representative –and it is really a fatal one– was that it was heavily weighted toward former exiles to the exclusion of Iraqis who had never left the country. In many cases these people were very skilled as they had lived in the West for many years, obtained degrees and worked in managerial positions. However, in some other cases they were not. In fact, several Interim Governing Council members who had come from Britain had been on welfare there. Nevertheless, neither of them enjoyed the trust of ordinary Iraqis, who never had the chance to leave the country, and who thought that these people were opportunists who came back to Iraq in order to gain power and make a lot of money. Whether this was true or not, this was the perception. And so there was a large credibility gap

between this governing institution and the Iraqi people, and it was perpetuated in the governing institutions that followed, even after they were elected by these very same Iraqi people. This is a crucial paradox.

What happened was that these former exiles enjoyed a head start in Iraq: they already had parties in many cases. The Kurds, for example, enjoyed a good deal of popular support in their own areas, in Kurdistan. The Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq also was a party with a clear leadership and structure, with a a political branch and a military branch. And there were other parties, like Islamic Da'wa, that had similar set-ups. The same holds for the Iraqi Communist Party. And it was only after some time that other parties began to emerge, or perhaps not parties so much as movements. There is only one significant movement, and that's the Sadrist trend led by Moqtada al-Sadr, who represents the un- and under-employed Shi'ite urban under-class, the *lumpenproletariat*. But otherwise, Iraqis until now have not been able to form any significant political movements or parties. And so, by default, these pre-existing parties that returned from exile participated in the elections and, by default, they won. And they won massively, as most Iraqis were eager to cast their first free vote in their history, and were also encouraged to do so by their religious leaders. This is why the political arena in Iraq has become heavily skewed toward Shi'ite Islamist parties –not Shi'ite parties but Shi'ite *Islamist* parties– as well as the Kurdish parties (which are of course ethnic parties) at the expense of everybody else, including the Sunni Islamist parties, which barely exist, and most importantly secular Iraqis, who are either Shi'ites or Sunnis. In fact, the complete evaporation of the secular stratum accounts for the high polarization and sectarianisation of Iraq that we have seen in the past two years.

And so the current paradox is that today Iraq has a popularly elected government that lacks popular legitimacy. People do not support this government because they feel it does not represent them, govern them or provide essential services. Baghdad has been virtually without electricity for months, except for privately-owned generators. Before,

electricity used to come for at least a few hours every day but now the city is almost without it. Refrigerators are not running in a society that used to be highly developed. Iraqis had all the amenities of modern life, and now they no longer could preserve food. In the summer heat this has been very difficult for people. Furthermore, the lawlessness in the streets, as well as the bombings in market places, make it difficult for Iraqis to go out shopping. These are some of the very basic problems that people face on a daily basis and that deeply affect them and their attitude toward the foreigners who supposedly came to liberate them. "How can I safely go out shopping and bring food on the table when it is dangerous out there? I don't have electricity at home and I don't have much money because, like most Iraqis, I don't have a job." This is a common statement you hear.

Ordinary Iraqis face a total crisis, while the government governs only inside the Green Zone; its writ does not extend into Baghdad proper, let alone into the rest of the country. An Iraq analyst who recently came back from Baghdad, where he spent a month working for US General Petraeus, said that the key problem in Iraq today was the complete disconnection between the government in Baghdad and the rest of the country. There is no effective government in Iraq today.

What we see instead is a spreading insurgency that feeds on the disaffection of ordinary Iraqis, that is strong particularly in the Sunni areas –"Sunni-Arab" is a better term, as Kurds are mostly Sunnis, too– and that has transformed itself into many different groups, one of the most potent being the group calling itself "the Islamic state in Iraq" or "Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia" or "Al-Qaeda in Iraq," a group led by Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi until his death in June 2006 and by other commanders since then, and which has made a speciality of attacking Shi'ites in order to create conditions for a sectarian war and chaos, the idea being that in that kind of situation the United States will pull out. This in turn would give an opportunity for this group and those affiliated with it to establish power, certainly in part of Iraq if not in all of it. Other Sunni groups have

aligned themselves with Al-Qaeda in Iraq in part because Al-Qaeda in Iraq has lots of money (apparently it is funded by private sources in the Gulf and maybe even by Iran), and in part because the insurgent groups see in this a possibility for the Sunni Arabs to regain power. There is a very strong notion in this community that they lost power to the Shi'ites as a result of the regime's removal, and this is the only way to regain it. This insurgency is now setting the terms of the political debate in Iraq.

Facing them are Shi'ite militias that enjoy support among a Shi'ite population that feels threatened by insurgent attacks, especially attacks that have targeted them as Shi'ites. And so this lethal dynamic arose, which has become institutionalised since 2005. Following the January 2005 elections, the Shi'ite Islamist parties, in addition to the Kurdish parties, came to power, which allowed the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq to take over the Interior Ministry, which had previously been controlled by Iyad Alawi's men. And once they had the Interior Ministry, they took control of the police and security forces and used these to carry out revenge attacks against predominantly Sunni Arab neighbourhoods where the insurgents had found a more or less friendly environment. There was a good deal of intimidation and coercion going on as well, but by and large they found support in these neighbourhoods.

As this sectarian conflict developed, the situation deteriorated, accompanied by a number of other conflicts. There is, first of all, rampant criminality, especially kidnapping for ransom and robberies (with the victims murdered in many cases). We've also seen an emerging conflict between Arabs and Kurds over the situation in Kirkuk and other mixed-population areas. We have seen intra-Sunni conflicts, because some of the Sunni insurgent groups and certainly some of the tribal groups in the Sunni areas have rejected Al-Qaeda's rule, and now the United States has started to exploit these differences by supporting these groups against Al-Qaeda. So, we have seen intra-Sunni conflict in these areas and we have seen an intra-Shi'ite conflict as well. For example, in the southern city of Basra, we have already witnessed a new conflict between the Badr Corps

of the Supreme Council (its armed militia) and the Mahdi Army of the Sadrist movement. All these conflicts are increasing, not decreasing, and today we face a situation that is starting to resemble a failed state: No effective government but instead growing conflicts spreading out throughout Iraqi territory with small oases of peace in some areas in the south, as well as in Kurdistan, which has had a well-defended frontier, a fairly cohesive regional government, and security forces protecting the region, which is also protected by the United States.

The Surge as the Last Chance to Bring Stability to Iraq

Going back to the original objectives, if one of the motives was to spread democracy in the Middle East and to prevent Al-Qaeda from gaining a foothold there, then the opposite result has been obtained. Now there is chaos in Iraq, with Al-Qaeda gaining in strength and being able to send fighters back into neighbouring Arab states and maybe into Europe to carry out attacks. If the motive was to send a warning to Iran, then in fact now we see that Iran has –this is the perception among Arab states– won the Iran-Iraq war belatedly, with a 20-year delay. Iran is now seen as controlling the Iraqi government. It certainly has great influence with the Shi'ite Islamist parties that are in this government, and otherwise it has a lot of leverage with a range of Iraqi actors that it funds. The US essentially gave a present to Iran, its enemy.

The Iranian objective is to have a weak Iraq as a neighbour that is friendly to its interests, has no weapons of mass destruction (anyway there is no prospect that Iraq will have such weapons anytime soon), and stays whole, because Iraq's breakup could be very dangerous for Iran given the fact that Iran itself is a mosaic, just like Iraq. In pursuit of these objectives Iran is following a strategy in Iraq that we could call a diversified portfolio of investments: it is supporting a broad range of actors in order to make sure that somebody friendly comes to power, to

obtain useful information from everybody about the situation in their areas, and to have a way of influencing the activities of these actors. It is therefore not entirely incredible to think that Iran would be giving some support to Al-Qaeda, to which it is ideologically totally opposed, as this would be a way to gain information about the organization and its activities, and to influence its behaviour.

At this stage, the United States realises that the situation is becoming desperate, that its efforts to bring democracy to Iraq have failed, that, at best, it can now only bring some kind of stability to Iraq, which would allow the current government to survive –obviously there may be some rotation, but the current set-up would survive– that violence can be reduced, and that the important work of rebuilding the Iraqi security structure can continue. In order to make this happen, the decision was taken to focus all efforts on Baghdad. And so in January of this year President Bush announced a security plan for Baghdad, nicknamed the Surge. A surge is a spike of electricity, and in this case it denotes a military shock approach of short duration to stabilise the situation in Baghdad with the hope of creating enough political space to allow Iraqi actors to come to the kinds of political deals that are necessary to restart the political process.

Now: how has the surge actually happened? The irony is that the surge had an immediate impact even before the extra American troops were deployed. The surge was announced in January, and already in February and March immediate results were evident while the major troop deployments did not begin until April and May before reaching their apex in June. What happened in February and March is that the violent actors in Baghdad –militias and insurgents– decided to lie low and to wait out the storm. The reasons for this were that, first, they did not want to suffer militarily too much; two, they knew that the surge would be short-lived, that the Americans would leave eventually and that if they could survive militarily, they could survive politically as well and end up on top. And most importantly, three, they thought that the Americans would do their

dirty work for them and fight their battles with their enemies for them. For example: the insurgents thought that US forces would attack the Mahdi Army, as US commanders announced, and in fact they made some efforts in that direction. And so it made sense to the insurgents to simply melt away, to wait for another day to fight, and in the meantime to let the Americans take care of their main enemy, the Mahdi Army.

Likewise, the Supreme Council, which controls the Interior Ministry and which is very powerful within the Iraqi government and a rival to the Mahdi Army, has wanted the Mahdi Army to be reduced in military strength. Hence, it reckoned that by playing the game, by playing it the American way, it would encourage the Americans to confront only the militia of the Sadrist movement and not its own militia.

The Sadrists also decided to lie low because they realised that the Americans wanted to attack the insurgents. Moreover, somewhat ironically, Muqtada al-Sadr allowed the US to attack loose elements within the Mahdi Army. The young cleric had started to lose control over his own movement, which, unlike the Supreme Council's Badr Corps, never was a well-constituted militia with a high degree of internal discipline. A number of loose elements emerged that formed death squads and started to kill Sunnis indiscriminately, especially after the Samarra shrine bombing in February 2006. These elements were performing tasks that were not consistent with the Sadrists' stated political agenda, which was to have a cross-sectarian, nationalist response to the former exiles, especially the Supreme Council. And so Muqtada al-Sadr allowed the Americans to fight, and to arrest and detain or kill these loose elements in February and March. When these arrests and killings happened, Muqtada Al-Sadr remained silent; he did not respond. This clearly was something that was consistent with his own agenda.

Consequently, because of the fact that all these various actors, for their own reasons, decided to lie low in these early two months when the additional US troops had not yet been deployed, there was an early political momentum that could have been used by the Americans to bring

about the political deals that were needed, that could have brought the various actors together around a new national compact. However, that momentum was lost because the Americans were not prepared to seize the moment, which had come too early, and because one particular group decided not to lie low, and that was Al-Qaeda in Iraq. On the contrary, it decided to escalate its suicide bombings in various areas, including in Baghdad. Its objective was, first of all, to show the Americans that they were incapable of carrying out the new security plan successfully, and secondly to draw the Sadrists back into the streets, so that the Americans would confront the Sadrists directly. Even Al-Qaeda in Iraq was hoping that the Americans would do their dirty work for them! But they were also ready to do their own dirty work and, just as they had triggered sectarian fighting before, now they succeeded in their effort to bring the Sadrists back into the streets. This is why we have seen a return to the tit-for-tat sectarian killings in Baghdad that we saw in 2006; the body count is going up again: every day we hear of at least 30 bodies turning up in empty lots and in the morgue.

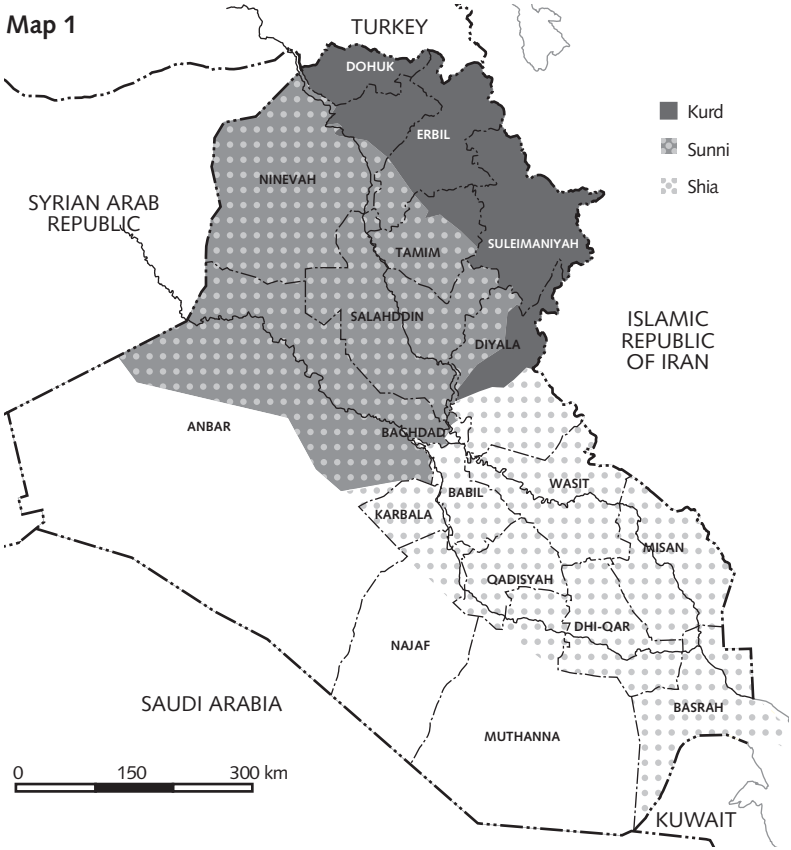
Summing up, having reached the maximum number of troops in Iraq, that early momentum has already been lost. The real question is if the US will be able to regain it by suppressing the most violent actors in Baghdad. The answer is: probably not, because the political plan that was supposed to accompany this surge has not even been rolled out yet. We have only seen some early reports about it in the media, but what we know is that it is basically more of the same: it is an attempt to bring about certain political deals through the Iraqi government. But this Iraqi government is both incapable and unwilling to make these deals because it cannot do anything, even govern. Hence, it does not seem probable that it will achieve very difficult political deals with its enemies. Nor is it willing, because it is in fact a party to this sectarian war. It does not want to reconcile with its enemies, the Sunnis; in fact it thinks it can crush them once the Americans leave. This is very dangerous thinking but all sides are guilty of this.

Future Possible Scenarios and Recommendations

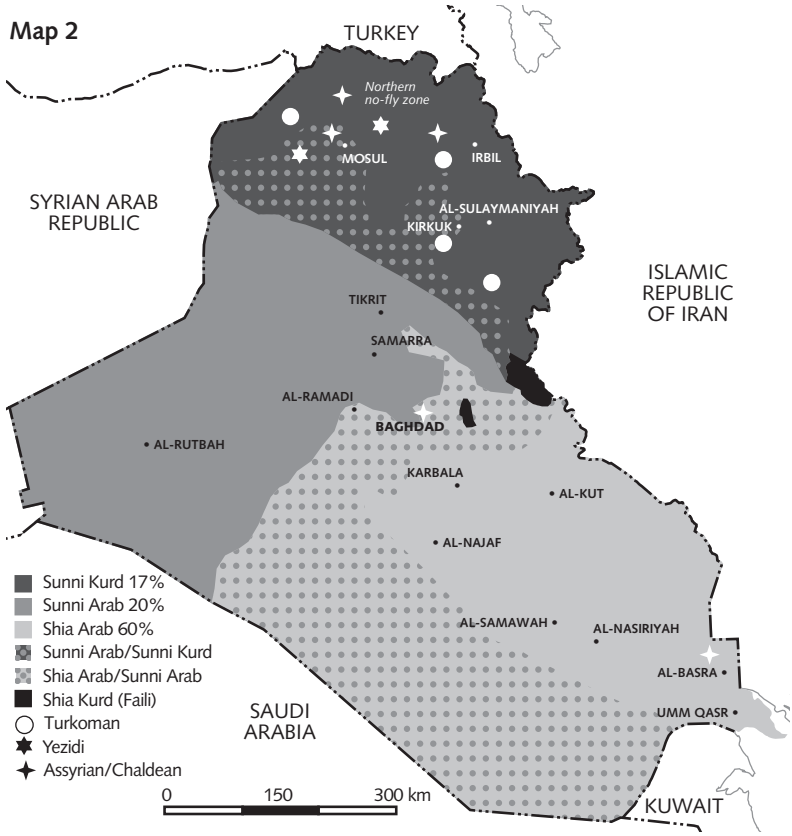
The upshot is that the surge will probably fail because the political plan that is supposed to accompany it will be too little, too late. Once the surge peters out, we will see a return to the mayhem of 2006, but now we will additionally see a fairly rapid withdrawal of US forces from populated areas. This will allow various other actors to step into the vacuum; it will also lead to a rapid breakdown of the Iraqi army and other security forces. The Americans, almost by default, have held these forces together by their very presence and by training them. But now they will fall apart and moreover, thanks to US training, they will be able to escalate their war: they have better weapons, they have better skills, and they certainly have the motivation.

The question we face today is: What will happen next? We can distinguish roughly three scenarios: One is that we will have ongoing chaos in a failed state, in which the Americans retain a presence in their large desert bases from which they will launch air and special-forces attacks against their enemies, such as Al-Qaeda in Iraq. Al-Qaeda is a threat not only to US allies in Iraq but also to US allies in the Arab world, and so it needs to be defeated or contained. In this scenario, there will not be effective government and the situation will more or less continue in this way for a prolonged period, with a great deal of violence. The second scenario, which has been promoted by certain people in the United States, prescribes a partitioning of Iraq: the Kurds in Kurdistan, an area of Sunni Arab dominance, and a Shi'ite area. A third scenario sees Iraq collapsing into a failed state with a growing threat of external intervention (with Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia coming into the country to secure their vital interests), which could lead to a much wider conflagration. I am afraid that the third scenario is the most likely, although I would like to think that the first one is still possible. Of course, the preferred scenario is one that is entirely different from any of these three, although it does not seem achievable at this time. Concerning the partition scenario, which has gained some popularity especially in the US, it is totally

unrealistic as can bee observed by analysing the distribution of the population throughout the country.



This map is a typical map of Iraq that shows four areas: the dark grey one is Kurdish, the grey with moles one is Sunni Arab, the white with grey moles one is Shi'ite, and then there is a white area that is represents sparsely populated desert. This is the kind of map that US forces brought with them to Iraq with very simplistic and totally incorrect representation of the population in Iraq.



The second one is slightly better: it shows some more nuances with the dark grey being the Kurdish area, the medium grey being the Sunni Arab area, the light grey being the Shi'ite area, the light grey with moles being mixed Shi'ite-Sunni areas, and the dark grey colour with moles being mixed Arab-Kurd areas. The little symbols with different shapes represent mixed towns. This map still ignores the pervasive commingling of the Iraqi population in most of these areas, especially in the most

densely populated areas; and just as importantly it ignores the pervasive intermarriage that exists across Sunni-Shi'ite lines, across Kurdish-Arab lines, and across any lines.

Map 3

Finally, the third map shows the complexity of the make-up of the Iraqi population in the neighbourhoods of Baghdad and as the distribution is constantly shifting, this may already be slightly different. The Tigris runs through the middle of it and the government is located in the Green Zone . The dark grey-coloured area denotes a primarily Shi'ite area; the light grey is a primarily Sunni area, whereas the lighter colours indicate mixed areas. This map is useful to realise that while internally more homogeneous than they used to be, different communities continue to be totally intermingled. To partition the city would involve huge population movements, amid major bloodshed. Although this is the intention of some of the actors in Baghdad, this is a project that is far from complete

and certainly should not be advocated. It is something that ought to be prevented.

In short, the notion of partitioning Iraq into four parts, with Baghdad being a stand-alone region, is totally ludicrous. It would involve drawing boundaries through living rooms and bedrooms. The only exception is the Kurdish area. There is clearly an area called Kurdistan with a majority of Kurds, but even there the boundary is hotly and violently disputed. This is a historically mixed-population area where Kurds, Arabs, Turkmens, and Chaldo-Assyrians have lived together until now, but it is also an area that is rich in oil –a very unhappy coincidence. The fight over this area is likely to be bloody and protracted and it would not be easy to draw a boundary. But even if it were possible to draw a line separating the Kurdish area from the rest of the country, it is not feasible to draw one between Sunni and Shi'ite areas, as these boundaries would be totally unclear and they would be shifting for a long time and at great human cost.

Even if partition will be the result of the current situation, it should not be the prescription and should not be advocated as a solution, as it would be extraordinarily bloody to accomplish. However, the most likely outcome in Iraq nowadays is a failed state, not partition.

The ultimate question is whether the United States has a Plan B. The answer is yes, although they are not admitting to having one because they cannot be seen to be talking about one, as this would mean they acknowledge that Plan A is not working. There probably is a plan B and if there is one, it probably is something to the effect of having some sort of regional effort to contain the failed state within the boundaries of Iraq. In other words, to prevent the spillover from these various civil conflicts that are raging in Iraq into the neighbouring states, and to prevent –and this is linked, of course– the neighbouring states from intervening directly in Iraq as their proxies fail.

What is needed is a regional security framework, a mechanism in which all the neighbouring states will participate on the basis of shared understandings. What is clear is that all the neighbouring states have one

thing in common: none of them wants Iraq to fall apart. This is important but it is also a very thin basis to start from, because all of these states see their rivals undertaking actions in Iraq that are contrary to their own interests, and they may want to respond to this. To protect their short- and medium-term interests, they may actually act against their own long-term interest, which is to keep Iraq together.

A certain reversal of US policy with respect to Iran has occurred, in the sense that we have had at least three occasions on which they have talked about Iraq together, but these discussions have not gone beyond the bland: "You're wrong, you're wrong, you're wrong," and so they have not made any serious progress in terms of building toward this security framework. Nonetheless, something has started to happen and this should be encouraged. If this fails, then the prospect for Iraq and the entire region is very dangerous, and a spillover beyond the region should then also be considered as a possible scenario.

Finally, it is important to mention the three consequences of a further deterioration in Iraq. One is the issue of refugees. Already Jordan and Syria have absorbed huge numbers of refugees, other countries as well but less so. These people would ideally like to go back to Iraq, but this is clearly impossible now, and it is not going to happen in the next decade or so. They are unhappy in the places where they are; they want to move on and so they will go to Europe if they can, and a number of them will succeed, creating pressures there. The second issue is the issue of terrorism. A number of the jihadi fighters in Iraq, the ones who do not blow themselves up but who actually are fighting, are going to go back to the countries from which they originate or, if they are Iraqis, will go to other countries in order to carry out attacks against the established order. It will not take many of them to create a lot of havoc, as we have seen already. The third critical issue is the economy. If the Iraq war leads to a wider conflagration, we will see a steep rise in the price of oil, and this will, of course, affect the world economy. We should take these factors into account when thinking about a Plan B.