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DCI Red Cell

Director of Central Intelligence

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"Occupied Iraq"—Thinking About Post-Saddam Governance (b)(3)

British imperial experience in Egypt and Iraq and contemporary experiences in the Balkans and Afghanistan may be more useful precedents for administering post-Saddam Iraq than the occupation of Germany and Japan after World War II. International troops and bureaucrats are likely to lack the clean slate provided by collapse of the old order seen in 1945, and the US and its partners will be under the scrutiny of opportunistic neighbors highly suspicious of the US presence. Earlier Western experience may point to lessons for how the US can maintain a predominant voice while avoiding international expectations that Washington alone will be responsible for stability, development strategy, and footing occupation costs. (b)(3)

The Red Cell was asked to comment on the relevance of the German and Japanese occupations to post-Saddam Iraq. We see several limitations in the WWII models and offer some thoughts on other possible precedents for administering Iraq "the day after." (b)(3)

Vast Differences in Culture and Context (b)(3)

The occupations of Germany and Japan took place after the destruction of the regimes and of much of the economic and social fabric of the two countries. Moreover, the entire European and East Asian worlds were prostrate and at the Allies' mercy—there were no neighboring centers of power or ideology to oppose the will of the victors. (b)(3)

- Germany and Japan both had strong socio-economic foundations for rebuilding: ethnic homogeneity, the legitimacy of national unity, a well-educated workforce, and modern industrial organization.

- Before WW II Germany had experimented with democracy (albeit one viewed by many constituents as illegitimate) and Japan had experienced forms of pluralism within a modernizing military-dominated imperial system. (b)(3)

Iraq has none of this. Its monarchs and autocrats have manipulated the country's communities and tribes more than they have encouraged the development of a national political culture. Dissatisfaction at the distribution of power and resources has been dealt with through uprisings and coups. The notion of a rule of law—important in German political culture—or the sense of belonging to a millennium-long cultural order as in Japan has no resonance in a country that has existed only since the end of WWI.

- Iraq was created by Anglo-French decree from three Ottoman provinces and still reflects regional distinctions between Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra and between the country's Kurdish, Sunni, and Shi'a populations.

- International occupiers are thus better viewed as analogous to earlier imperial and mandatory overlords of a notional "Iraq" rather than to temporary occupiers of (b)(3) well-established nations in Germany and Japan. (b)(3)

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Rather than the global exhaustion of 1945—which for a few years limited competing ambitions and agendas of Germany's and Japan's neighbors—the context for Iraq's occupiers will be one of post-Saddam Iraqi factions and neighboring states all looking at an occupation by non-Muslims and scenting opportunities to push parochial agendas.

- Turkey desires a role in northern Iraq. Many Iranians vigorously resent and oppose US power. The Saudis will compete with Iran for influence in southern Iraq. Jordanian Hashimites may dream about a restoration of their family in Iraq.

- And overhanging Iraq's occupation would be the general Arab expectation that a victorious US will now finally move to solve the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. (b)(3)

British Imperial Models . . . (b)(3)

Examples such as the British administration in Egypt that developed before World War I and UK policies in Iraq itself after 1918 might have more relevance to post-war Iraq. Just as the international community does not seek a colony in Iraq, London did not initially seek to control Egypt—it wanted to protect its route to India through the Suez Canal. However, the weakness of notional Ottoman overlords of Egypt, the incompetence of Egypt's government, and rivalry with the French led the British eventually to take control of Egypt's finances and foreign policy.

- Local politicians and a nominally independent ruler handled day-to-day affairs under the eye of a British "agent" whose authority was buttressed by a relatively small military presence. The British engaged in laborious bargaining with other states having a stake in Egyptian debt but were generally able to get their way while satisfying the stakeholders. (b)(3)

Similarly, the British did not rule the new "Iraq" directly after World War I. London ensconced an Arabian king in Baghdad and ruled Iraq as a formal and then informal protectorate. When Iraq's "independence" was declared, the British remained the predominant influence and retained a small military base in the country until 1958. (b)(3)

Lessons for the US from the British experience focus on the ability to defend strategic interests—once the Suez and oil, now oil and the taming of a rogue regime harboring WMD—with relatively small military forces, using local politicians, and relying on relatively soft power.

- In neither Egypt nor Iraq did the British claim to be installing any version of Western democracy. Rather, they attempted to institute more honest administration, promote stability, and defend their geopolitical interests.

- A credible Arab government in Baghdad might shield the US from responsibility for running the country's affairs and from fears that we intend to destroy Arab regimes and transform them in our image—a fear raised by the discussion of the post-WWII models, even among US allies in the Arab world. (b)(3)

. . . and Contemporary Alternatives (b)(3)

The international community could opt for a Balkan model for Iraq, in recognition of the weakness of any post Saddam polity and the need for a prolonged US and coalition military presence to contain regional and communal differences—as NATO forces have done in Bosnia and Kosovo. International supervisors would oversee all aspects of Iraqi government, even as they imposed a constitution (written mainly by Western lawyers), elections, and the other forms of "democracy."

- As in the Balkans, local Iraqi notables would quickly learn the rhetoric of democratic palaver while attempting to manipulate international officials to their side of parochial interests.

- We surmise, however, that the strength of tribal and other loyalties and, conversely, the unfinished nature of "Iraqi identity" would retard political development; "national" leaders would try to play both ends—family and tribal interests and the international community— off each other. (b)(3)

Nevertheless, as in the Balkans, the overwhelming power of the occupying forces would maintain a baseline stability. Iraq might not soon be able to stand on its own but might be relatively quiet. However, Iraq's neighborhood is more dangerous than that of Bosnia and Kosovo, and the danger of spillover from a crisis in Iran, Jordan, or Palestine would be greater than any danger to SFOR or KFOR from problems in Serbia or Macedonia. (b)(3)

An "Afghan alternative" presumes a softer international hand on Iraq. International forces would protect a notional "central" government but would focus on removing WMD and terrorist infrastructure and not on reshaping regional and tribal autonomies or other actions popularly known as "nation building." Local power brokers would be accommodated either in Baghdad or their home regions, and international forces would pursue fewer immediate pretensions to establishing a Western political order.

- This Iraq might be messier than under the Balkan model. A leaner international administration would permit more local and inter-communal ferment, which neighbors like Iran or Turkey could exploit. But it might also leave the locals more responsible and more likely to blame problems on their own leaders rather than on the US or international forces. As in Afghanistan, the US would face international criticism for not being assertive enough in rebuilding Iraq. (b)(3)

Soft Power vs. Hard Power (b)(3)

Debate over models of post Saddam occupation point to the strategic choices facing the international community: To what extent should the international community rule directly or through surrogates after Saddam? Do the US and its partners want to aggressively pursue political change in Iraq or will they be satisfied simply to keep the place reasonably quiet? How much time and effort are necessary to create conditions for a free-standing democracy? (b)(3)

Soft power may turn out to be the best arrow in the US quiver. The unprecedented reach of US traditions of freedom, secularism, and popular culture attracts imitators as it enrages enemies. Ability to use American norms as well as US power creates opportunities with a secular and well educated Iraqi elite, especially if Muslim allies help tailor the US message to local audiences.

- Whatever political structure emerges in the immediate wake of Saddam's regime, the growth of cultural activity by Iraqis empowered to create, express, and criticize— international occupiers as well as local politicians and Mullahs—could accelerate modernization and open at least some to adopt an "Iraqi identity" broader than family, tribe, and creed. (b)(3)