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Iraq: Consequences of a Rapid Coalition Victory

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A rapid coalition victory—especially in case of regime collapse rather than defeat—may leave Iraqis less cooperative than they would be after a war requiring deeper collaboration with the internal opposition and greater coalition sacrifices. A brief war would carry clear benefits—fewer casualties on both sides, less damage to Iraqi civilian infrastructure, and reduced international criticism of US policy—but this paper explores the potential negative aspects of a “catastrophic success” by coalition forces.

Sunni Domination Perpetuated

The Sunni minority’s control of major Iraqi institutions probably would extend into the postwar period in the absence of a protracted conflict that otherwise would leave a “clean slate” of military and bureaucratic organizations and a greater power vacuum. Sunnis clinging to control of military formations and other national positions could prompt Shia and Kurdish resentment of the status quo and compel coalition forces to remove and replace—rather than just appoint—Iraqis to roles of authority.

“Whose Victory?”

Rather than seeing the US and its allies as essential to their liberation, a quick collapse of Saddam’s regime might prompt Iraqis to question the need—or justification—for a US occupation. Many Iraqis would stake their own claims to having played key roles in facilitating the coalition’s advance, arranging surrenders and defections, and possibly in removing Saddam and his lieutenants.

- Sunnis have the most to lose from regime change and are more likely than Shia or Kurds to view the US as “the enemy.”
- Sunnis also would be more likely to call for foreign Arab/Islamic participation in postwar relief and reconstruction.

Remaining Army Units Demand Their Say

Rapid regime collapse would be likely to leave some Iraqi military units—virtually all of which are dominated by Sunni commanders—intact and in a position to try to influence US efforts at promoting stability. Factors unique to each commander would affect his disposition toward US efforts in a post-conflict environment, including his popularity among fellow officers and soldiers, ties to the former regime, and views of the US and the nature of the coalition occupation.

- E.O. 13526, section 1.4(c) Iraqis want US occupation to be as brief as possible, but their patience with an extended US presence after an overwhelming victory would be even shorter.
- Iraqis probably would be less inclined to allow US forces an open-ended schedule for fulfilling key US postwar goals, such as WMD disarmament and counterterrorism operations.
- Iraqis already distrustful of the expatriate opposition would be even less willing to allow outsiders to “hijack” their triumph by participating in an interim authority.

- Commanders viewed by their troops as professionals dedicated to the Iraqi nation would be more likely to draw the support necessary to try to claim a role in any interim authority. Their ability to

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back their intentions with force—and to maintain unit cohesion—would depend largely on the proportion and attitudes of Shia conscripts under their command. A charismatic Sunni commander who appeals to nationalistic instincts over sectarian fears might attract Shia support.

- Most commanders, however, probably would try to use their de facto authority to help local officials with whom they share family or tribal ties to stake claims to power. [redacted]

#### Heightened Impatience for Reconstruction Help [redacted]

Despite the shortened conflict, humanitarian conditions in many parts of Iraq could rapidly deteriorate in a matter of days, and many Iraqis probably would not understand that the coalition wartime logistic pipeline requires time to reorient its mission to humanitarian aid. The public would be likely to want help immediately and to complain loudly in its absence, leading to a potential US credibility gap.

- Order in southern Iraq during the Gulf war broke down as Iraqi forces were rapidly evicted from Kuwait and spontaneous uprisings in major cities led to widespread upheaval. Fast-moving battlefield developments would threaten the region with a similar power vacuum affecting local services.
- Nonetheless, a rapid coalition victory would be likely to reduce the number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The UN has projected as many as 1.5 million refugees and 900,000 new IDPs; CIA estimates 300,000 of each. [redacted]

#### Knee-Jerk Responses by Regional Players [redacted]

Turkey, Iran, and possibly other neighboring governments—seeing the conflict end sooner than expected—might calculate they are running out of time to influence formation of a new regime. These states could rush into more heavy-handed attempts at intervention, relying on direct military intervention into northern Iraq in Turkey's case or, in Iran's, providing greater support to surrogates.

- Ankara has said it would send troops into northern Iraq to disarm Kurdish groups after a US-led war against Saddam's regime. Turkish forces would try to preempt any effort by Iraqi Kurds to exploit the collapse of Saddam's military by declaring their autonomy or by seizing Mosul or Kirkuk.

E.O. 13526, section 1.4(c)

- Western press reports [redacted] suggest Iran has begun moving additional Badr Corps proxies into northern Iraq, probably in part to prepare for such contingencies. [redacted]

Withheld from public disclosure as provided for in 50 U.S.C. 403(g) section 6, the Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949.

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