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Title: Iraq in Fragments: The Occupation and its Legacy

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This volume provides a compelling analysis of the consequences of the US-led invasion of Iraq. It is a first rate account of the underlying problems of the processes of state building in post-Saddam Iraq. Eric Herring and Glen Rangwala suggest that state building in Iraq has been undermined more by US attempts to control that process rather than by pre-existing weaknesses in the Iraqi state. In their view, the US has been unable to draw the various elements of Iraqi society into cooperating actively with and participating in its state-building project in ways that would not challenge its control of the project's broad parameters.

The authors show that US efforts to bridge the gap between state and society by establishing channels of communication, influence, and providing services have largely failed. They explain that the US has resorted to a range of strategies to trade off control and effectiveness - sectarian balancing, creating institutions but limiting their authority, playing off the centre against the periphery, as well as playing off political parties against tribes and other embedded leaders. When the US has had to choose between trying to build a state and trying to retain control, it has mostly chosen the latter. The authors think that the US has achieved neither, as increasing amounts of power have been accumulated by neopatrimonial, sectarian and clashing actors.

Iraq cannot be called a collapsed state, because its institutions have been revived to some extent, even if some are still highly fragile. This book shows that since the invasion, the Iraqi state has retained a high degree of domestic autonomy for three main reasons. First, one of the key successes of the insurgency has been that the personnel and institutions of the state have been limited severely in their ability to engage with the citizenry. Secondly, the electoral processes have not generated significantly greater responsiveness among politicians to the populace. And, thirdly, the Iraqi state has relied on foreign, and overwhelmingly US, sponsorship. At the most basic level, nonetheless, successive governments have known that their hold on power has existed solely by virtue of the US military presence in the country. As a result, the personnel of the state have accepted the integration of Coalition personnel into

decision-making roles in all spheres of government activity, and their priorities and purposes - in the view of Herring and Rangwala - have only occasionally been in conformity with Iraqi popular wishes.

Analyzing the insurgency in Iraq, the authors attest that it is not a coherent single movement. The insurgents, however, are clearly united about at least one thing - wrecking the US-led state-building project. For its part, the approach of the US to counter-insurgency has relied heavily on coercion.

The authors opine that the US approach to counter-insurgency in Iraq has been influenced by a strategic and organizational bias towards a conventional war approach. They show that US counter-insurgency doctrine has elements that emphasize coercion as well as others that emphasize legitimation. In their view, the failure at the political level to bridge the gap between the state and society has been fundamentally important in shaping policy towards the insurgency. As the political process has not generated sufficient legitimacy, in central Iraq especially, to influence the population to back the Coalition against the insurgents, the US military has relied on coercion.

The word "occupation," while an international legal term used by the Coalition as neutral and descriptive, for most Iraqi Arabs denotes something highly humiliating, resonant of imposition, coercion, and the brutal and illegal Israeli occupation of Palestine. Hence, all the insurgent bodies claim to be engaged in patriotic, Islamic and non-sectarian resistance (muqawama) against occupation (ihtilal) and a Christian Crusade (harb salibiyya).

This book stresses that the insurgent groups have not articulated separate or joint state-building programs of their own. They have not advocated Sunni Arab dominance, the return of the Ba'th to power or a unified broader Islamic state as their objective. Their focus has been on forcing the withdrawal of Coalition forces, and they have argued that government security forces would quickly collapse should Coalition forces leave. The insurgents expect to win by inflicting costs on foreign forces that will force the latter's withdrawal, preventing the normalization of daily life, attacking the government's new security forces and staging large high profile attacks as demonstrations of strength and the ability to strike at will.

The primary focus of the insurgency has been upon disrupting the project of state building on anti-occupation grounds, rather than upon attacking Shi'a targets, although the anti-occupation attacks have often been highly indiscriminate. As the greatest hostility to the Coalition has been in Baghdad which is mixed Sunni and Shi'a, the major factor in hostility to the occupation is direct experience of it rather than sectarian difference. The authors cite Pentagon reports of October 2005 and February 2006 which state that "approximately 80 percent" and "almost 80 percent" respectively of all attacks by insurgents were upon Coalition forces. Herring and Rangwala argue that since the focus of the insurgency has been on international actors, it is misleading to characterize the conflict as being a case of low-intensity civil war; it has remained primarily an international conflict throughout.

In trying to deal with the insurgency, the Coalition was faced with the choice of emphasizing state-building through coercion or through legitimation. From early on, the US has relied on the former. The authors argue that the armed conflict in Iraq from 2003 onwards has been primarily one in which the US has attempted to bring Iraq under the rule of a central government and the insurgents have concentrated their attacks on Coalition personnel. Although inter-sectarian violence has grown considerably in Iraq since 2005, this has remained on a smaller scale than violence between the Coalition and insurgents. Hence the representation of the armed conflict as being primarily a civil war is -- thus far -- misleading. Nevertheless, this could change rapidly and decisively if the kind of fighting that broke out in April 2006 in the

mainly Sunni Arab al-Adhamiyya district of Baghdad reoccurs and the US decides to stand aside rather than back the Shi'a forces as it has done so far.

Herring and Rangwala use opinion polling data which suggests that the centrality of the US in the state-building process is a crucial element undermining its legitimacy. Iraq's Sunni Arabs have not accepted the legitimacy of the US role and the state that is being formed as a result of it. Moreover, through the insurgency which has sustained itself in the Sunni Arab community, they have demonstrated that they have a de facto veto on its success. The authors think that popular attitudes demonstrate significant common ground within Iraq for a reoriented state-building process which is regionalized and internationalized rather than US-dominated, but also a shared suspicion that the US could prevent such an outcome from occurring.

Moreover, the authors suggest that an insurgent-driven and profit-driven informal economy is combining with US-led processes of globalization to fragment the Iraqi state so that its elements serve the interests of those driving these processes rather than the interests of the Iraqi population generally.

Of all the many elements of Iraq's informal economy, oil is the most important and is decentred (it is not under the predominant control of a single actor) and transnational in character. Non-state actors have had a significant role both in determining the potential for the state to export its oil officially, through sabotage, and in selling off the oil extracted, through smuggling. The result has been that the state's role in oil sales has been considerably smaller than predicted. Furthermore, Iraq is being integrated more deeply into the global informal trading in weapons, pornography and illegal drugs. Iraq increasingly is being used as a transit site for hashish and heroin from Afghanistan (which produces 90 percent of the world's opium, from which heroin is derived) smuggled through Iran and then through Iraq and Jordan.

The authors opine that Iraqi decision-making is not being restored through the return of sovereignty, nor is it being subordinated by a denial of effective sovereignty. It is being transformed into an integral part of the norms and structures of the contemporary form of capitalist globalization, with the blurring of lines between corporate and public decision-making and between the national, international and transnational. This is not a stable process, as the actors involved are defending and promoting their own sectional interests within it, the insurgents are seeking to disrupt the process, and the rapidly evolving networks of patronage and corruption within and beyond Iraq are seeking ways of accommodating and exploiting this dynamic situation.

For Herring and Rangwala the impediments to state building in Iraq are essentially political. As long as state building is in the hands of US-sponsored actors and as long as the Iraqi government remains unresponsive to the majority of the population on many issues, and to the views of Sunni Arabs in particular, insecurity will be rife and economic reconstruction hobbled.

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