

Book Reviews

Occupying Iraq: A History of the Coalition Provisional Authority

By James Dobbins et al.
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Integrating Civilian Agencies in Stability Operations

By Thomas Szayna et al.
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A cursory glance at the foreign policy section in your local bookstore would reveal many volumes of output and analyses generated over the past few years by the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq and its aftermath. Selections vary from wide-ranging strategic reviews to gripping accounts of the house-to-house fighting that occurred in places like Fallujah and Sadr City. However, until 2009, no one had produced a comprehensive analytical study of the Coalition Provisional Authority's (CPA's) occupation of Iraq, when it operated as the country's de jure and de facto government from early May 2003 to the end of June 2004.

Ambassador James Dobbins, the leading authority on overseas contingencies, and his coauthors have filled this reportorial gap with this landmark work, which will stand as an authoritative history of the CPA for years to come.

Occupying Iraq paints a diverse picture of the early postwar administration in Iraq, identifying some successes (based largely on CPA documentation) and concluding that the CPA, which was led by Dobbins's long-time State Department colleague Ambassador L. Paul Bremer III, did the best it could, given poor resourcing, insufficient staffing, and the lack of an established interagency structure for support. Among successes, the authors credit the CPA for promoting the development of the most liberal constitution in the Middle East, initiating reforms of Iraq's civil service and judiciary, and restoring some of Iraq's essential services to near-prewar levels (at least for a short while). In explanation of shortfalls, they point to inadequate direction and insufficient support from the Federal interagency community in Washington as the chief cause.

When it formed in Iraq in May 2003, the CPA had no integrated plan or system from which to develop operations. It thus was expediently and expeditiously cobbled together as the management successor to the Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), the ad hoc Pentagon-led entity created in late January 2003 to manage postwar Iraq. The CPA's very distinct mission was to *occupy and govern* Iraq. This notably diverged from and expanded greatly upon the postwar plan President George W. Bush approved only 2 months earlier, in March 2003. The President's first plan anticipated the expenditure of about \$2 billion in relief and reconstruction money, a

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limited continuing military footprint, a quick transition to Iraqi governance, and a rapid U.S. withdrawal. This original conception essentially sought to replicate what had happened in Afghanistan a year earlier.

But hopes for an alacritous shift to Iraqi control vanished quickly with CPA's inception, as it quickly superseded ORHA's modest reconstruction effort with visions for a program 10 times as large. Because the authors do not explore why this fundamentally transformative expansion happened, others will have to unpack the political twists and improvisational turns that occurred in the late spring and early summer of 2003, which led to what is now a 7-year stay in Iraq, at great cost in blood and treasure.

The study begins by tracing the brief, troubled life of ORHA, which was led by retired Army Lieutenant General Jay Garner. ORHA was stood up a scant 61 days before the invasion, was undermanned from the start, and failed to garner sufficient interagency buy-in. It thus arrived and operated in Iraq lacking the civilian expertise necessary for effective nationbuilding. ORHA existed long enough to expose the serious interagency coordination problems that would plague the entire Iraq endeavor. As one example, Ambassador Dobbins recounts how Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld vetoed many of Garner's staff selections for ORHA simply because they came from the State Department.

ORHA's days as the lead reconstruction agency came to an abrupt end with Bremer's arrival on May 12, 2003. (Interestingly, the Bush administration never formally dissolved ORHA, but Garner left Iraq shortly after Bremer's arrival.) The nature of Bremer's authority presented inherent problems. On the one hand, he was President Bush's special envoy to Iraq; but he was also the CPA administrator, reporting to the Secretary of Defense. The dual chains

of command and the consequent multiple lines of communication created discontinuities for Bremer at both the Pentagon and the White House. Deeper disconnects stemmed from interagency short-circuits in staffing and support. There was no coherent system or structure from which to draw. This structural and resource problem was not Ambassador Bremer's fault; it long preceded 9/11, and it still exists today.

Occupying Iraq devotes substantial attention to the very real constraints under which the CPA operated. The organization was hampered in executing its relief and reconstruction mission by the coalition's failure to deploy a sufficient military force to secure the country after the conclusion of major combat operations. The security situation deteriorated through the end of 2003, dropping to its first nadir during the spring of 2004, with the explosive Sunni uprisings in Anbar Province and spike in Shia militia attacks in the south and around Baghdad.

Even if the security situation had been better, the CPA still lacked the necessary resources to accomplish the ambitious relief and reconstruction mission it undertook. In large part, this stemmed from the lack of a developed U.S. interagency system that could efficiently staff, resource, and manage the mammoth program under way in Iraq. *Occupying Iraq* reports that the CPA was never more than 65 percent staffed, suffering particularly from a lack of mid-level supervisors—the very people who should have populated the primary liaison positions between Bremer and the Iraqi ministries. Dobbins is also critical of the short tours served by many CPA staffers, noting that only seven people stayed for the entirety of the CPA's existence. In short, the staffing problems confronted by Ambassador Bremer exemplified the ad hoc impulses that would burden the ever-evolving U.S. effort to stabilize postwar Iraq.

Occupying Iraq ultimately is useful, not as a paean to the CPA, but as a case study of what can and will go wrong when nationbuilding ambitions outstrip U.S. Governmental structural, management, and resource capacities. This important and well-founded insight should inform subsequent studies and drive further reform. However, the book occasionally is handicapped by its unwillingness to measure the CPA in light of what we now know was the failure that followed quickly upon the heels of Bremer's departure in June 2004. The security disaster that ensued led to the loss of most CPA gains. For example, to promote rule of law, the CPA had created two new national anticorruption institutions. But these offices were under-resourced, and they proved to be a poor fit in Iraq's legal and bureaucratic cultures. Their lack of capacity to enforce the rule of law contributed to the security breakdown. Six years on—notwithstanding the well-intended efforts of many brave Iraqis and their well-meaning U.S. advisors—public corruption remains a severe existential threat to the legitimacy of the Iraqi state.

The heart of *Occupying Iraq* is its analysis of the CPA's decisionmaking process. The authors trace how and why Ambassador Bremer decided on a number of controversial courses of action, including, most notably, CPA Order Number 2, which, among other things, dissolved the Iraqi army. On March 10, 2003, the President approved a plan that would keep the army intact after the fall of Iraq. Shortly after the successful March 20 invasion, U.S. military commanders began to work with Iraqi army commanders to reconstitute scattered forces. These efforts came to a sudden stop with the CPA's mid-May order dissolving the army. Although Bremer acted quickly to amend the order and restore certain payment and pension provisions for disbanded

soldiers, its ill effects were nevertheless harshly felt in the form of riots, which U.S. troops had to counter. General David Petraeus said that the dissolution order certainly helped foment the insurgency that followed.

The decision to disband the Iraqi army stands as a stark example of poor interagency planning. The order was not reviewed on an interagency basis until Ambassador Bremer informed the President and his advisors the day before he published it. Dobbins criticizes Bremer for not involving ORHA's Garner and other subject matter experts from the Department of State in the decisionmaking process, and he suggests that more considered deliberations involving all relevant stakeholders would have yielded a better solution.

In May 2003, Ambassador Bremer also ordered a "de-Ba'athification program," which prohibited certain party members from the Saddam era to hold public office. This program, which some have described as more severe than the President's plan anticipated, was handed over to Iraqi control too quickly, as Bremer has acknowledged. Although ostensibly approved by the Pentagon, the program's implications failed to receive sufficient scrutiny from the interagency community. Nevertheless, Dobbins defends the CPA's decision, arguing that strong de-Ba'athification was necessary to ensure Shia support for the coalition.

Occupying Iraq favorably reviews the CPA's transformative economic agenda, which aimed not just to bring Iraq out of its post-invasion freeze but also to institute ambitious free market reforms. The authors highlight the high economic growth rate achieved during the CPA's tenure as evidence of the program's success. But because the war had driven the Iraqi economy to a virtual standstill, growth from this stasis point inevitably would appear substantial in

percentage terms. The fact is Iraq's economic progress—then and now—is driven by the sale of oil and gas; no other sector produces positive revenue flow.

As a central part of its free market economic agenda, the CPA discontinued support for Iraq's state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and pursued an ambitious privatization effort. The SOEs operated at a loss in Iraq's authoritarian economy and produced shoddy merchandise. But they also provided employment for hundreds of thousands of Iraqi citizens; moreover, the SOEs in the hydrocarbons sector played significant production roles. The SOE shutdown program nevertheless quickly came to fruition, despite some dissenting voices within the CPA. The juxtaposition of the military's dissolution and the SOEs' closure pushed well over half a million Iraqis into unemployment in less than 6 weeks. The Department of Defense later acknowledged the importance of SOEs to Iraq's economy by creating the Task Force on Business Stabilization Operations and charging it with restarting many of the SOEs that the CPA had closed. Interestingly, RAND's *The Beginner's Guide to Nation-Building* points out that processes such as reforming SOEs "need to be managed in ways that draw the society's major contending factions into a process of peaceful competition and away from violent conflict."

A helpful complement to the many important issues raised in *Occupying Iraq* is *Integrating Civilian Agencies in Stability Operations*. This book explores the existing weak structure for interagency coordination of overseas contingencies. While Dobbins and company illustrate the structural and systemic symptoms of what went wrong during the early U.S. experience in Iraq, *Integrating Civilian Agencies* proposes pathways toward redressing their causes by analyzing current

planning systems for civilian-military integration and cooperation in complex contingency operations. *Integrating Civilian Agencies* identifies several major shortcomings in the current U.S. approach: a lack of financial resources, a shortage of deployable personnel, and weak interagency planning and management structures.

As *Occupying Iraq* shows, the CPA encountered each of these problems. When U.S. leadership called for interagency collaboration on Iraq in 2003, the existing system provided no incentive for agencies to work together. Moreover, the lack of capacity at most civilian agencies to move beyond their domestic missions inhibited them from responding effectively. This critical structural problem must be remedied.

Integrating Civilian Agencies suggests a series of national level reforms to improve civilian-military coordination:

- ❖ Establish an interagency Goldwater-Nichols Act that would increase unity of effort and decrease compartmentalization.
- ❖ Set up a standing, integrated contingency planning capability.
- ❖ Increase the capacity of the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development through a long-term, joint congressional and Presidential plan.
- ❖ Hold U.S. Government agencies accountable for overseas contingency efforts with specific benchmarks and metrics to measure progress. The Defense Department and the combatant commanders need to be willing to share military contingency plans with their interagency partners, and both

civilian agencies and the military need to be held accountable for the planning and execution of stabilization and reconstruction operations.

- ❖ Fund and train a civilian reserve corps.

Over the past few years, the U.S. Government has pursued a variety of contingency reform initiatives, but none yet has solved the problem. The Department of State's Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization possesses new civilian expertise and resources to conduct reconstruction and stability operations, but it has lacked institutional and financial support to truly tackle the interagency mission. The Department of Defense, driven by Directive 3000.05, "Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction Operations," has fostered a robust and well-funded stability operations capability; but housing reconstruction and stabilization operations at the Pentagon runs the risk of a perceived militarizing of U.S. foreign policy. Finally, the Reconstruction and Stabilization Civilian Management Act of 2008 placed the paramount burden for planning and managing the civilian response to overseas contingency operations on the State Department—but the resources to sustain this burden have not been provided.

Discussions continue in Washington on how to implement necessary reforms of the U.S. Government structure and system for managing overseas contingency relief and reconstruction operations. Although a variety of options remain on the table, there is widespread agreement that further reform is needed. Whither—rather than whether—reform is the question; and getting to the right question is progress. But enduring answers remain to be found.

One innovative suggestion on the table proposes developing an agency or office specifically tasked with overseeing, integrating, and managing interagency contingency relief and reconstruction efforts. This entity would coordinate and integrate work already accomplished by extant agencies, thereby institutionalizing many of the solutions suggested in *Integrating Civilian Agencies*, which would obviate the possibility that the United States could again face the kind of painful impasses described in *Occupying Iraq*. [PRISM](#)