

Planning for Reconstruction

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After the destruction a historic opportunity beckons, but US plans to rebuild a post-Saddam Iraq are unclear.

President Bush insists that the war on Iraq is about liberation and not occupation. He promises that in the process of liberating Iraq and its people, the U.S. will rebuild a better, Saddam-free nation. But while Washington's decision to destruct has been crystal clear, its vision of reconstruction is muddled.

Even as US bombs rain down on Baghdad, the Bush administration says it is planning intensely for reconstruction, working towards a transformed post-Saddam Iraq. Already, however, US plans are not going according to plan. The US was confident that the Iraqi people would rise against their dictator. But Saddam Hussein and his regime are appealing to Iraqi nationalism and the people are responding - not because they love Saddam, but because they love their country and do not want outsiders in their country.

It seems inevitable that the US will eventually defeat an Iraq weakened by war and sanctions. But the real US-led victory will only come with proof that it can put Iraq in a better form than it was before - and do so without alienating people throughout the region.

Rebuilding Iraq will decide not only Iraq's future, but also President Bush's political career and future world politics. A successful war will be one with minimal casualties and damage followed immediately by a multilateral effort to rebuild before the dust from the last bomb has settled. Success in Iraq will tell something about American power and how it will be used in the world.

On 25 March, President Bush formally sent Congress details of a \$74.7 billion package. According to the White House budget office, at least \$53.4 billion is for military operations in Iraq. Defence officials earlier said that combat could cost up to \$500 million a day. The military funds also include \$1.4 billion in aid for countries opposing Iraq and helping the United States, \$1.7 billion for reconstruction and \$543 million for humanitarian aid and other needs in Iraq.

The Treasury Department is speaking about channelling revenues from Iraqi oil production to aid the effort to rebuild the country. The Bush administration also hopes to use \$1.4 billion that has been frozen in US banks since the first Gulf War.

The State Department's goal is to create stability and to have the US and the United Nations oversee Iraq while it rebuilds. British Prime Minister Tony Blair is in favour of this approach, which he feels will get the US and Europe working together again. The Department of Defence, on the other hand, supports American military occupation for as long as necessary. It wants to re-base its Middle Eastern forces from Saudi Arabia to Iraq, with a gradual transfer of power to elected Iraqis who are "Washington-friendly".

The State Department has put together a list of Iraqi exiles, most of whom are technocrats and live in the US, to go to Baghdad to serve as the front men of Baghdad's new government as soon as possible after Saddam's regime falls.

The US plans to divide Iraq into three regions for administrative purposes. An Iraqi Interim Authority approved by President Bush on 15 March would include Iraqis from each of the country's major ethnic, tribal and religious groups. It would progressively take over government functions and would eventually help draft a new constitution. During this interim period, the US plans to substitute the dollar for the Iraqi dinar and the US military would have initial responsibility for running Iraq.

In the meantime, the administration has hired several Iraqi exiles who plan to go to Iraq as soon as the regime collapses for contract periods of between 90 and 180 days. Volunteers are also being considered for shorter periods. These Iraqis will help in the early phases of reconstruction, communication and humanitarian aid.

The US Civil Affairs Units will join the US forces in Iraq after the war. Civil Affairs units will help military commanders work with civilians and civilian authorities. They will assess disaster situations and support the military operations.

UN relief organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are uncertain about their role in rebuilding Iraq. President Bush plans on sidelining UN, NGO and other development agencies in efforts to rebuild roads, schools, hospitals and other buildings. Reconstruction contracts worth more than \$1.5 billion are already being offered for private US firms. The Pentagon and the US Agency for International Development are expected to choose the main contractor for a \$900 million assignment to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure.

Kellog Brown and Root, a subsidiary of Halliburton, were awarded the contract to oversee any fire fighting operations in Iraq's oilfields. Vice President Dick Cheney was chief executive officer of Halliburton between 1995 and 2000. As one of the largest global providers of equipment and services to the oil industry, Halliburton needed a chief executive who could ensure that the company had the government's full support. Cheney's 2000 income from Halliburton was \$36,086,635. Ironically, under Cheney's direction, Halliburton became the biggest oil contractor for Iraq, selling more than \$73 million in goods and services to Saddam Hussein's regime.

Once Saddam Hussein's regime is removed from power, a historic opportunity will open to rebuild Iraq to its old glory. This will require a commitment from the United States as well as the international community. The US must be relentless in its security and financial support. This support should expand beyond military parameters into economic, health, humanitarian and policy and civilian efforts to revive a country and to help her help herself and her beloved people.

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