



# SPECIAL REPORT

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## ABOUT THE REPORT

This report is a product of the United States Institute of Peace's Iraq Experience Project. It is the third of three reports examining important lessons identified in Iraq prior to the country's transition to sovereignty in June 2004 and is based on extensive interviews with 113 U.S. officials, soldiers, and contractors who served there.

This report is focused specifically on governance in Iraq under the Coalition Provisional Authority.

The other two reports examine security and reconstruction, respectively. These reports are intended for use as training aids in programs that prepare individuals for service in peace and stability operations, so that lessons identified in Iraq may be translated into lessons learned by those assigned to future missions.

Celeste J. Ward, formerly the director of national security policy with the Coalition Provisional Authority, prepared the report. The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training conducted the interviews under a contract with the Institute.

**The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policy positions.**

*Celeste J. Ward*

## The Coalition Provisional Authority's Experience with Governance in Iraq

### Lessons Identified

#### Summary

- In Iraq, the United States planned to remove Saddam Hussein from power and quickly organize a replacement regime, while holding the existing bureaucracy in place to administer the country. This plan became untenable when looters destroyed government ministries and their staffs scattered. As a consequence, several independent and uncoordinated streams of activity to create governance in Iraq got under way.
- Under the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), there were three major phases in the process of building new governance structures in Iraq. Each phase marked a significant change in policy and implementation. Actions to establish Iraqi governance were undertaken by coalition military forces, the CPA, and the U.S. Agency for International Development through a private contractor. The ad hoc and disjointed nature of these efforts exacerbated the challenge of establishing governance in Iraq.
- Important lessons for future peace and stability operations were identified by those who participated in CPA efforts to establish governance in Iraq. Recognizing the importance of preplanning and prepositioning resources was foremost among these lessons.
- Interagency planning that fully integrates civilian and military activities is vital for developing governance structures in a postconflict environment. Postconflict tasks should be an integral part of military operational plans, and relevant civilian agencies and experts should participate in that planning process. The U.S. government should form interagency planning groups to develop combined political-military contingency plans.
- Civilian agencies and organizations of the U.S. government need to develop greater capacity to plan and carry out operations. This requires fostering interagency plan-

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## ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

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ning expertise, having access to greater logistical and transportation resources, and creating personnel systems to ensure that there are enough trained and qualified personnel available.

- U.S. government agencies and other organizations involved in building governance structures should develop finance systems that allow them to get money moving quickly. Those working with indigenous governing bodies should leverage reconstruction dollars to empower local officials by allowing them to deliver real improvements in the lives of the population.
- Establishing democracy requires not only setting up proper institutions but also education, long-term mentoring, and capacity building. People with no experience of civil society or democracy often have enthusiasm without the understanding of how to ensure fairness and transparency. Populations formerly dominated by dictatorial regimes may also lack the personal initiative and responsibility to truly embrace democratic institutions and become functioning members of them.
- Building democratic structures requires an understanding of the cultural and historical context of the people in the country. Area experts can be of great assistance in the planning process by designing structures that are more likely to be accepted by local populations and integrated into the existing culture.

## Introduction

The U.S.-led coalition that invaded Iraq, toppled Saddam Hussein's regime, and occupied the country for thirteen months attempted to build the foundations of democratic governance. By the time sovereignty was returned to an interim Iraqi government in June 2004, the coalition had assembled provincial councils in all fifteen non-Kurdish provinces of Iraq and established hundreds of neighborhood, village, and city councils. Establishing these governance structures during the period of occupation was an enormously challenging and deeply flawed process. The coalition's initial plan—to remove Saddam and his close associates from power and to hold in place the existing bureaucracy to administer the country—became untenable when those structures dissolved. Looters gutted seventeen of twenty-three ministries, stealing or destroying their records, while ministry personnel went home or disappeared. When the initial plan proved unrealizable, there was, by all accounts, no backup strategy. As a consequence, several independent and uncoordinated streams of activity to create governance structures got under way; the ad hoc nature of the ensuing process and the lack of coordination and shared objectives exacerbated the challenges of establishing legitimate, democratic governance in Iraq.

Under the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), there were three major phases in the process of building new governance structures in Iraq. Each marked a significant change in planning and policy:

- *Phase One* (January 2003–May 2003) saw the establishment of the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) and initial planning for post-Saddam Iraq and ended a few weeks after the war.
- *Phase Two* (May 2003–November 14, 2003) witnessed the creation of the CPA and the beginning of a longer-term occupation.
- *Phase Three* (November 15, 2003–June 28, 2004) began with the coalition's November 15 agreement to return sovereignty to Iraq and ended with the establishment of the Iraqi interim government in June 2004.

How postwar Iraqi governance was planned and executed, and the experiences of those who participated, offer lessons for future efforts to establish or strengthen democratic governance elsewhere. Of course, each situation is different, and the challenge in identi-

ying lessons is to distinguish the unique from the general. This paper highlights some of the lessons identified in Iraq during CPA control that may be applied to future postconflict environments. The report begins by providing background information on Iraqi governance structures under Saddam Hussein and then describes how postwar Iraqi governance structures—from the local to the national level—were erected during all three phases. This report concludes by identifying lessons from the CPA’s experience in Iraq.

## **Iraqi Governance under Saddam**

Saddam Hussein ruled Iraq for three decades through a strict, highly centralized, regime. Saddam, his close relatives and associates, and the Ba’ath Party stood at its center. The ministries ran the country from Baghdad, and an elaborate security apparatus undergirded the regime’s absolute authority. The demonstrated brutality and vast reach of the security services ensured the Iraqi population’s obedience. While there were administrative divisions at the neighborhood, village, district, city, and provincial levels, these local and regional governments had little say over budgetary or policy matters. Governors were appointed by Saddam and were usually senior Ba’ath Party members. They collected taxes and maintained order in their province but were ultimately beholden to Saddam and the party.

Provincial councils existed in all of the provinces, but they had little genuine power. Though by law the councils were supposed to be elected, in reality they were appointed by and took their marching orders from ministries in Baghdad, often through the directors general who represented ministries at the local level. At the lowest level of governance were municipal councils (or village elders in more rural areas), but their purviews were restricted to garbage collection, record keeping, and other such matters. Council members also served as informants for the regime.

Beyond membership in the Ba’ath Party, very few forms of association were permitted in Saddam-era Iraq. Individuals learned through bitter experience that the wages of personal initiative were incarceration or worse. One’s success rested on the whims of Saddam and his cronies. Thirty years of dictatorship deeply penetrated virtually all aspects of life, leaving little foundation on which to build local, democratic, governance in Iraq.

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## **Phase One (January 2003–May 2003)**

In January 2003, the Bush administration created the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) by executive order and appointed Lt. Gen. (ret.) Jay Garner to lead the organization. As part of the Department of Defense, ORHA’s task was to develop and implement plans to assist the Iraqis in developing democratic governance and reconstructing the country once Saddam Hussein was deposed. In the two months ORHA spent developing these plans, Garner’s team consulted with experts on Iraq and worked with a number of Iraqi exile parties, such as the Iraqi National Congress (INC), the Iraqi National Accord (INA), Da’wa, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), and other organizations.

The initial plan for a postwar Iraqi government was based on the assumption that the coalition would remove Saddam Hussein and his close associates from power, but that broad structures of the bureaucracy would remain in place. As administration officials said, “The coalition would cut off the head of the snake but leave the body.” ORHA and other coalition personnel would temporarily become the “head” and immediately recruit Iraqis to form a new leadership cadre that would assume control after a short period of mentoring. The coalition was led to believe (in part by Iraqi exile groups) that the country’s infrastructure, while aging, was still largely serviceable. As a result, the coalition was surprised when it later found Iraq’s infrastructure to be in a highly dilapidated state.

On March 19, U.S. and coalition forces launched their offensive to remove Saddam from power. On April 9, U.S. soldiers famously tore down a statue of Saddam in a central Baghdad square, bringing his rule to a symbolic end. Days later, Tikrit, Mosul, and Kirkuk—the last pockets of resistance—fell to coalition forces.

***As the statues of Saddam crumbled, so did all semblance of public order.***

Unfortunately, as the statues of Saddam crumbled, so did all semblance of public order. Looters razed public buildings, pulling pipes from the walls and making off with furniture, records, equipment, and even doorframes. Because U.S. military forces had not been ordered to maintain public order, they did not attempt to stop the looting, though they did secure the Oil Ministry. (This fact would later become a source of resentment among the Iraqi population.) With the Iraqi government effectively dissolved and seventeen of the twenty-three ministries destroyed, workers stayed home.

***Though major combat operations had been over for two weeks, the staff was initially refused permission to enter the country because of concerns about security.***

Garner and his staff deployed to Baghdad in mid-April 2003. Though major combat operations had been over for two weeks, the staff was initially refused permission to enter the country because of concerns about security. The coalition planned to create an interim Iraqi administration as rapidly as possible. Though the details of the plan continued to evolve, the general idea was that an interim administration would be selected by a conference of influential Iraqis representing major segments of Iraqi society. This administration would write a new constitution, appoint provincial governors, and preside over the country until a new government could be democratically elected.

The first step toward creating a new Iraqi administration was a conference held in Nasiriyah on April 15, 2003. Garner gathered roughly one hundred Iraqis to discuss the creation of a new Iraqi government. These individuals came from different ideological perspectives and various tribal, religious, and political groups. On April 28, there was a follow-up meeting with about 250 Iraqis. The second meeting ended in an agreement to hold a third meeting a month later to select an interim Iraqi administration. On May 5, Garner announced in a press interview that, by the second week of May, the nucleus of a temporary Iraqi government would be in place.

### ***Early Development of Local Government***

After the coalition's military victory, the country was divided into six major subordinate commands (MSCs): north, north-central, western, Baghdad, center-south, and southeast. MSC commanders were charged with securing their sectors and beginning the process of reconstruction. To carry out their mission, military units needed Iraqi interlocutors and thus began to build local and regional councils.

***In the absence of preplanning or guidance, commanders were left to freelance.***

Evidence suggests that the military units received only very general guidance about how they were to carry out their postcombat missions. In the absence of preplanning or guidance, commanders were left to freelance, making it up as they went along. Military civil affairs units are trained in reconstruction and democracy building, but they proceeded without a larger understanding of purpose and objectives. A noteworthy example of the military's efforts to create local governance occurred in May 2003 in Ninawah Province. Maj. Gen. David Petraeus, the commander of the 101st Airborne, established a provincial council there that also served as the city council for Mosul. Petraeus gained a reputation for establishing law and order, gainfully employing Iraqis, and generally getting things done.

The MSCs were able to draw from three sources of funding to initiate reconstruction projects in their sectors—the Development Fund for Iraq (DFI), Iraqi assets from oil exports and other sources of income, and the Commanders Emergency Response Program (CERP). Brigade commanders could disburse up to \$100,000 and division commanders up to \$500,000 without consulting higher authorities. The CERP funds provided commanders with ready resources to undertake local projects that would improve the lives of Iraqis.

## ***Research Triangle Institute***

In April 2003, another initiative got under way to help establish local democratic institutions in Iraq. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) gave one of its largest contracts ever (worth a potential \$236 million over two years) to the Research Triangle Institute (RTI), a North Carolina-based nonprofit organization experienced in the development of government institutions. RTI had four major tasks: (1) to help local governments restore essential services such as water, sanitation, sewage, and emergency power; (2) to improve the effectiveness of public servants responsible for administration and service delivery in their districts; (3) to strengthen access of citizens to local government and other mechanisms; and (4) to help the coalition bring Iraqis together to discuss the type of government they desired, the role of federalism, the election process, and other matters. Without coordinating with ORHA, the CPA, and the MSCs, RTI began its mission in late April, when it started work in Basra. By the time RTI arrived, British coalition forces had already set up a city council there. RTI soon relocated a substantial part of its effort to Baghdad, where it helped to establish councils at the neighborhood and district levels, and eventually a city and a provincial council.

During this initial period, OHRA, coalition military commanders, and RTI operated independently with little effort at coordination.

## **Phase Two (May 2003–November 14, 2003)**

In early May, the coalition made its first major change in course on Iraqi governance. It abandoned Gen. Garner's plan to hold elections and rapidly establish an Iraqi administration. On May 6, 2003, the administration appointed Ambassador L. Paul Bremer III as head of the CPA, which subsumed ORHA. On May 17, 2003, a day after his arrival in Baghdad, Bremer (accompanied by British diplomat John Sawers) announced the coalition would remain in charge of Iraq for an indefinite period. Instead of a provisional government, the coalition would create an Iraqi interim authority that would assist the CPA in drafting a constitution and planning future elections.

In late May and June 2003, members of Ambassador Bremer's governance team fanned out across the country, looking for influential Iraqis who could represent critical elements of the society in the interim authority. One or more members of the CPA staff visited all of the country's eighteen provinces. They talked to hundreds of individuals, including tribal sheiks, religious leaders, academics, engineers, lawyers, and businessmen. They selected twenty-five members, and, in July 2003, Ambassador Bremer announced the creation of the Iraqi Interim Governing Council (IGC).

The IGC attracted criticism almost immediately. Iraqis who had been involved in Garner's conferences had been encouraged by the prospect of an early handover of power and were disappointed by the change in course. The large number of exiles in the IGC and the opaque manner in which the council was appointed led to objections that it did not represent the Iraqi people. Further, it was difficult for the coalition to find Sunnis willing to join the IGC. Iraqis suspected that the IGC had no real power and was merely a puppet of the coalition. As a result, the IGC suffered a legitimacy gap that worsened over time.

The IGC's role was set out in a seven-point plan. Significantly, one of its key tasks was to develop a process for drafting an Iraqi constitution by December 2003. According to this plan, after the document was written, it would be ratified in a referendum, and then a sovereign Iraqi government would be elected. The entire process would have taken several years.

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## ***United Nations***

The United Nation's postcombat involvement in Iraq was authorized by UN Security Council Resolution 1483 of May 22, 2003. The United Nations was not new to Iraq. It had been in charge of the Oil for Food program (OFFP) that had been established in 1996 to alleviate the hardships experienced by the Iraqi people as a result of UN sanctions against Saddam. UN secretary-general Kofi Annan appointed Sergio Vieira de Mello, a veteran Brazilian diplomat who had directed the highly successful UN mission in East Timor, as his special representative. Ambassador de Mello and twenty staff members deployed to Iraq in May 2003 and set up the UN's headquarters in Baghdad's Canal Hotel. The UN began a series of assessment tours and held meetings with prominent Iraqis. Several UN humanitarian agencies began reconstruction projects, among them the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNICEF.

## ***Continued Development of Local Governance***

Meanwhile, RTI, the CPA, and the military's Civil Military Operations Center (CMOC) began to establish local governance in Baghdad. They set up eighty-eight neighborhood advisory councils, nine district advisory councils, and a city advisory council. Iraqis elected the neighborhood advisory councils (in some cases they were appointed), which voted on representatives to the district advisory council. In turn, these council members voted on representatives to the city advisory council.

With the success of the Baghdad process, the CPA sought to replicate this model throughout the country. It assigned small governance teams to all fifteen of the non-Kurdish provinces. Though the composition of the teams varied, they generally included a CPA provincial coordinator and a deputy, as well as military personnel and staff from RTI. When the provincial teams arrived in the provinces, they found a variety of governing structures that had already been created by the military. They worked with those existing structures and created new councils where needed. Not surprisingly, the composition and procedures of these councils varied widely, as did their legitimacy among Iraqis. Over time, the CPA appointed regional coordinators to oversee activities in broad sections of the country. Significantly, the CPA divided the country into four administrative regions—north, central/Baghdad, south-central, and south—that did not correspond to the military's six MSCs.

## ***A Growing Insurgency***

During this period the security situation worsened considerably. This had a deleterious impact on the coalition's ability to conduct its business. In the summer of 2003, CPA staff members could walk around Baghdad, eat in local restaurants, and talk freely with Iraqis on the streets. By fall, these activities were increasingly perilous, and CPA personnel were forced to spend more of their time working from inside their heavily fortified headquarters in the Green Zone. Virtually every aspect of the CPA's mission required dealing with Iraqis, but leaving the Green Zone could be undertaken only with the greatest caution. Getting Iraqis into the zone meant causing them to wait in long lines (often for hours) and to be searched and escorted. As CPA personnel spent more time in the Green Zone, they became increasingly disconnected from what was happening in the country.

Insurgent attacks were also effective in isolating the coalition from its international partners. On August 19, 2003, Ambassador de Mello was killed by a car bomb that exploded outside UN headquarters. Shortly thereafter, Secretary-General Annan decided to remove all UN personnel from Iraq due to the security situation there. The United Nation's departure was followed by the exit of most international nongovernmental relief organizations and private companies.

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## Phase Three (November 15, 2003–June 28, 2004)

In late fall 2003, the CPA made another major course correction in its path to institute Iraqi self-governance. By then it was clear the IGC would not meet its deadline to develop a process for drafting a constitution. The growing insurgency also had convinced CPA officials that it would be better to turn power over to the Iraqis sooner rather than later. In November, Ambassador Bremer returned from a short-notice visit to Washington with an alternate plan for transferring sovereignty to Iraqis. After obtaining approval from the IGC, Bremer announced on November 15, 2003, that the coalition would hand over sovereignty to the Iraqis by June 30, 2004.

This plan was based on a system of provincial caucuses. In each province, five members of the IGC, five members of the provincial council, and one member of each of the five largest city councils would form a fifteen-person organizing committee. This committee would oversee the selection of candidates for a provincial caucus. The caucus would then select delegates to an interim national assembly, which would select a government, form a cabinet, and prepare elections for a constitutional assembly. The number of delegates per province would be proportional to the province's share of the national population.

The November 15 agreement had major implications for provincial councils, as they would play a central role in selecting a national government. Unfortunately, many provincial councils had been established by military commanders whose priority was finding Iraqi interlocutors quickly, not identifying the ideal individuals. Ambassador Bremer ordered that the councils be "refreshed" with new members and that new councils be created where none existed. This refreshment of existing councils meant removing former Ba'ath Party members and expanding the membership to make the bodies more representative. The process for appointing governors and the forty-member provincial councils was standardized. Tribal groups, political parties, and civic groups received twelve seats each, with women and religious dignitaries receiving two each.

This refreshment exercise caused problems. Done in great haste to meet the timetable specified by the November 15 agreement, selection methods were not always viewed as fair. As a consequence, some councils suffered from a lack of legitimacy. There were elections in some cases and self-selecting caucuses in others. Despite the attempt to standardize the councils, a lot was left to the discretion of the local CPA coordinator.

On April 6, 2004, Ambassador Bremer signed CPA Order Number 71, which described the authorities and responsibilities of the governorates and municipal and local governments. For the first time, local government structures were afforded a genuine role. CPA Order 71 did a number of things:

- It created governorate councils that could establish priorities for the province, impose taxes and fees, and initiate projects. Significantly, it made the governorate councils independent from the directors general of the ministries and gave them a role in determining the appointments of directors general for the ministries. To ensure independence from Baghdad, the governorate councils would be funded by the national government rather than through the ministries or their provincial departments.
- It stipulated that those who already held office as members of the governorate councils would keep their office, but that should vacancies occur, there would be a fair, open, and competitive selection process. Governorate councils were authorized to elect governors and deputy governors for provinces where these positions had not been filled.

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- It established the roles and responsibilities of the governors and deputy governors. The governor would direct and oversee implementation of the council's decisions; deputies would report to the governor and serve in his absence.
- It allowed for the creation of municipal councils. Existing councils and incumbent officials would remain, but, in future, councils could be created according to regulations approved by a majority vote of the governorate council. Municipal councils were empowered to elect mayors and deputy mayors.
- It gave the governorate councils the ability to approve the appointment of chiefs of police for three-year terms. The Interior Ministry would nominate qualified candidates and the council would vote on their confirmation.

While the order had its imperfections (for instance, the provincial councils could not fire the police chief), one regional coordinator described it as "one of the most important orders written by the CPA, the order that actually decentralized governance in Iraq."

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### ***Adjusting the November 15 Agreement***

Almost immediately after the November 15 agreement was announced, the CPA was forced to make yet another change of course. Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, the highest and most respected Shia religious authority in Iraq, objected to the proposed transfer of sovereignty to a body chosen through a series of caucuses. From the very beginning of the occupation, Sistani had advocated elections as soon as possible. It was unclear, however, when elections could realistically be held. After November 15, Sistani did not want to request that the coalition stay longer so that proper elections could be held, nor did he want to accept transfer of sovereignty to an unelected body. In early 2004, the UN appointed a special envoy, Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi, to help resolve the question of whether it was possible to hold elections in time to transfer sovereignty on June 30, 2004.

***Brahimi's presence helped defuse the crisis.***

Brahimi's presence (and direct communication with Sistani) helped defuse the crisis. Brahimi struck an agreement with Sistani that elections would happen as soon as possible, but not prior to the transfer of sovereignty by June 30. Sovereignty would have to be transferred to another body. The CPA proceeded to draft a Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) that described the powers of an interim government. After marathon negotiations, the IGC signed the TAL in March 2004, enshrining a new process.

***The TAL enshrined devolution of power to the provincial level by protecting provincial officials from being fired by the central government.***

The TAL stipulated that an Interim Iraqi Government (IIG) would preside over the country until elections could take place. These elections would be no later than January 31, 2005. The IIG would be assembled by the IGC and the coalition. In the elections, Iraqis would vote for representatives to a 275-member National Assembly, which would then elect a Presidency Council from among its ranks. Significantly, the TAL enshrined devolution of power to the provincial level by, for example, protecting provincial officials from being fired by the central government. During the same elections, Iraqis would also select members to sit on their provincial councils (in the three Kurdish provinces, voters would elect the Kurdistan Regional Government).

After further negotiations in the spring of 2004, the coalition, the IGC, and the United Nations reached agreement on the process that led to the appointment of the interim government. The precise nature of this process is still not well known and the small group who participated in it has been reluctant to offer details. On May 28, the IGC announced that Ayad Allawi, a former member of the IGC, had been selected as the interim prime minister. On June 1, 2004, the rest of the interim government was announced, including the president, two deputy prime ministers, and twenty-seven ministers.



## Lessons Identified

The coalition's experience in erecting democratic structures in Iraq offers a number of lessons for efforts to create or strengthen democratic institutions in future stability operations. Foremost, the coalition discovered that it is extremely difficult to attempt reconstruction and the establishment of new governing structures in the midst of an insurgency. The coalition also encountered numerous shortcomings in the U.S. government's organizational ability and capacity to conduct postconflict interventions. Among the most important lessons in this regard are the following.

### ***The Roles and Missions of U.S. Government Organizations***

*The U.S. government should better define the roles and missions of its departments and agencies for postconflict reconstruction and democracy building. In some cases, roles and missions should be shifted from one organization to another; in other cases, necessary roles and missions from planning to execution have yet to be assigned. Further, the United States should better coordinate the roles and missions of these organizations with respect to coalition partner capabilities and nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations.*

If we define "roles" as those enduring purposes for which an organization is created, and "missions" as those responsibilities assigned by the political leadership, in the case of establishing Iraqi governance, neither the roles nor the missions were well defined. In Iraq, from the planning stage to execution, the division of labor among U.S. government institutions, both with respect to one another and with respect to the coalition and nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations, was never established or clear.

U.S. and coalition combat forces began establishing local government structures in Iraq out of necessity. Some of the appropriate capabilities are resident in military organizations—for example, civil affairs units are trained to create governing institutions and begin reconstruction efforts. It is sensible, then, that in an uncertain security environment, military units should lead and the timing and criteria for transition to civilian administration should be defined. While the specific organizational arrangements may depend to a degree on the specific situation, establishing the appropriate organizational framework will be critical to future success.

### ***Interagency Planning***

*Interagency planning that fully integrates civilian and military activities is vital for developing governance structures in a postconflict environment. Postconflict tasks should be an integral part of military operational plans, and relevant civilian agencies should participate in the planning process. The U.S. government should create interagency planning groups to develop political-military contingency plans that include multiple scenarios and identify the resources necessary to deal with worst-case scenarios. Planners should identify desired end-state governance structures based on long-term objectives, and governance plans should contain timelines, metrics, and divisions of responsibility between agencies.*

Many of the challenges in establishing governance structures in Iraq flowed from two fundamental problems. First, the assumption behind the prewar planning for governance was that Iraq's bureaucratic and administrative structures would remain intact. In fact, law and order broke down and these structures ceased to exist, but there was no backup plan for this eventuality. Second, the United States suffered from an acute lack of accurate information about the state of Iraqi society and infrastructure. This information gap exacerbated a tendency to discount more pessimistic predictions concerning the postwar environment.

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***U.S. and coalition combat forces began establishing local government structures in Iraq out of necessity.***

***The United States suffered from an acute lack of accurate information about the state of Iraqi society and infrastructure.***

***In a sense, the coalition military's effort to establish local councils and to create democracy on the ground was a success story.***

Once the original plan proved untenable, improvisation and ad hoc approaches were the only options. Until the fall of 2003, there was no common vision for the nature of the various layers of governance from the local to the national level and how those layers would relate to one another. For most of the occupation, various actors lacked a shared vision or set of objectives or timelines.

In a sense, the coalition military's effort to establish local councils and to create democracy on the ground was a success story. In a number of cases, however, commanders inadvertently appointed individuals with questionable backgrounds or scruples, which undermined the credibility of the councils. Military commanders were operating in an unfamiliar environment and freelancing to meet their immediate goal of establishing security. To do this, commanders required a means for discerning the immediate needs of the community, locating insurgents, and recruiting Iraqi workers for reconstruction projects. An alternate set of goals—education on democratic principles and the development of transparent leadership—came into play when the process of establishing local government was taken over by civilians.

### ***Increasing the Capacity of Civilian Agencies***

*U.S. government civilian agencies need to develop greater capacity to plan and carry out operations. This requires developing interagency planning expertise, having access to greater logistical and transportation resources, and creating personnel systems to ensure that there are sufficient trained and qualified personnel to be part of any effort.*

***One source of tension between the military and the CPA stemmed from the utter mismatch in capabilities.***

Even if planners had correctly anticipated the difficulty of establishing stability and governance in postwar Iraq, there is simply no capacity in U.S. civilian government agencies to mobilize large numbers of the right people quickly. One source of tension (and there were many) between the military and the CPA stemmed from the utter mismatch in capabilities. The CPA was the ultimate authority in the land and charged with rebuilding the country, but it had a staff, at its peak, of no more than five thousand people (70 percent of its planned target). Further, the organization was composed of a pickup team, and it underwent enormous turnover; it was not unusual for CPA employees to stay in Iraq for only a month.

***The occupation authority was known derisively in military circles as "Can't Provide Anything."***

It was not until late fall 2003 that the CPA had a coordinator in every province in the country. The CPA's provincial staffs were small—sometimes just a half-dozen people—while the military had between 130,000 and 150,000 people in the country to interface with Iraqis, dig wells, refurbish buildings, hand out school supplies, and establish local government councils. The occupation authority was known derisively in military circles as "Can't Provide Anything." Faced with civilian implementation, military commanders wondered aloud, "Isn't this something the CPA should be doing?"

***The enormity of the tasks facing the CPA simply overwhelmed its small staff.***

The enormity of the tasks facing the CPA simply overwhelmed its small staff. Innumerable problems were never addressed for lack of time, including critical oversight of activities outside of Baghdad. Even when CPA coordinators arrived in the provinces, they were largely on their own, working with military counterparts and with little real connection to headquarters in Baghdad. This significantly hampered the CPA's ability to link local and national government structures. As the CPA was invented on the fly and continued to reinvent itself over time, it was known to be bureaucratic, ponderous, and slow. This was particularly true when it came to providing funds for projects. This further undermined its credibility, giving it a reputation for lack of follow-through. Frustrated military commanders gave up working with the CPA and used CERP funds for small projects just to get them started.

### ***Streamlined Administrative Structures***

*U.S. government agencies and other organizations involved in building governance structures should develop financial systems that allow them to get money moving quickly. Those working with indigenous governing bodies should leverage reconstruc-*

*tion dollars to empower local officials by allowing them to deliver real improvements in the lives of the population. If promised projects are not delivered rapidly to suffering publics, this undermines the credibility not only of the occupying authority but also of the emerging indigenous leadership whose credibility hinges on its ability to make things happen.*

Though attempts were made to streamline contracting procedures, the CPA was maddeningly slow in delivering funding for projects. Reconstruction efforts that would have delivered vital goods and services to Iraqis remained in limbo, waiting endlessly for funding. Failure to deliver timely—and promised—improvements in the lives of ordinary citizens undermined the credibility of both the CPA and Iraqi officials. Military commanders were successful in building credibility among the population because they were able to use CERP funds to make quick improvements. In many cases, regional CPA coordinators turned to the military for CERP funds, knowing how long it would take to get money from the CPA.

Mechanisms for ensuring the responsible disposition of funds are essential, but transporting Pentagon contracting procedures to Iraq was counterproductive. Streamlined accounting systems should be designed in advance to ensure the timely delivery of goods, services, and reconstruction projects.

### ***Rebuilding Civil Society***

*Building democratic structures requires understanding the cultural and historical context of the country. People with no experience with civil society or democracy often have enthusiasm but lack knowledge of processes that will ensure fairness and transparency. Furthermore, populations formerly dominated by dictatorial regimes may lack the personal initiative and responsibility required to embrace democratic institutions and to quickly become functioning members of society. Establishing democracy requires more than just setting up structures and institutions—the skeleton of a democratic government. It also requires training initiatives, long-term mentoring programs, and institutional capacity-building measures.*

Under Saddam, Iraqis learned to seek official approval for virtually everything. Individual initiative under the Ba'ath regime could get one killed. In one region, a battalion commander had trouble getting Iraqis to do things without something in writing. Lacking an official seal, he began using a “no slack” battalion stamp on documents. He found that once the Iraqis had a stamped document in hand, they could move around the region and get things done.

CPA officials discovered that Iraqis had been so downtrodden and terrified, individual initiative was almost totally lacking. Because Saddam had effectively stamped out civil society, Iraqis did not understand the concept of volunteering for community service. The mushrooming of local government structures, for all of its problems, was one of the success stories of the occupation. Iraqis leaped at the opportunity to be part of new neighborhood, city, district, and provincial councils. Once there, however, they did not know what to do.

Area specialists can be of great assistance by designing structures that are likely to be accepted by local populations and easily integrated into the existing culture. They are also critical in the execution stage, particularly those with language skills. Additionally, attempts should be made to break certain local habits. For example, when Iraqis completed job applications, they often provided their ethnic background and religious sect, an undemocratic practice the CPA wished to discourage. Taking local practices and culture into account can smooth the transition toward democracy.

***Though attempts were made to streamline contracting procedures, the CPA was maddeningly slow in delivering funding for projects.***

***Transporting Pentagon contracting procedures to Iraq was counterproductive.***

***CPA officials discovered that Iraqis had been so downtrodden and terrified, individual initiative was almost totally lacking.***

***The lack of accurate information about the state of Iraqi society and infrastructure led to overly optimistic projections.***

An online edition of this report can be found at our website ([www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org)), together with additional information on the subject.

## Conclusion

President Dwight D. Eisenhower famously said that “plans are nothing; planning is everything.” The original U.S. plan for establishing an Iraqi government could not be implemented after the bureaucratic and administrative structures collapsed and looting destroyed government ministries. Further, the lack of accurate information about the state of Iraqi society and infrastructure led to overly optimistic projections. Prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom, there was substantial evidence, however, that looting was typical in immediate postwar environments. It would have been useful if coalition planners had anticipated such an outcome and devised a contingency plan. Even if this plan had proven imperfect, the process of planning would have better prepared the coalition for establishing governing structures. The coalition’s efforts to establish democratic governing structures in Iraq were marked by ad hoc approaches, reversals, course corrections, and playing catch-up. In the future, the United States will be involved in assisting other nations establish or strengthen democratic governance. Success will be more likely if we are able to “operationalize” what we learned in Iraq.

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