

**Europe and Iraq:  
From Stand-off to Engagement?**

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POLICY PAPER

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## Abstract

As of November 2004, persistent violence in Iraq and the legacy of opposition in some European countries to the US-led invasion continued to militate against more extensive EU engagement in the country. At the same time, since the transfer of power to the Iraqi interim government in June 2004, European governments and the Brussels institutions have begun to deliberate on their contribution to building a democratic Iraq. A new EU strategy, agreed in the summer of 2004, promises consideration of a range of new forms of cooperation and dialogue.

Once the Saddam regime was ousted, most European governments demonstrated far greater concern for the recovery of Iraqi sovereignty than for democracy-building. After the formal transfer of power to the interim government, European governments continued to criticise what they judged to be the lack of effective Iraqi autonomy.

Hence, while the new EU strategy suggests a greater willingness to contribute to institution-building challenges, governments remain uncertain about more practical involvement on the ground. Indeed, a coherent European democracy strategy for Iraq has been conspicuously absent, with the EU having developed no clear position on the main political restructuring challenges now facing the country – including in relation to the elections due to take place in January 2005. A number of member states have actively reined back the scope of new institution-building initiatives.

The security situation also continues to discourage European donors from dispersing significant amounts of aid to post-conflict state-building and reconstruction efforts. Politically-oriented aid work has been particularly limited. The UK has attempted to ‘fill the gaps’ left by the US and has usefully focused on building democratic capacity at the local level, while at the same time under-investing in governance issues related to other areas.

Europe’s absence has been felt most acutely in the security sphere, both in terms of troop deployments and the contribution to the training of Iraqi security forces. European governments have valid criticisms over the coalition’s handling of Iraq’s post-conflict imperatives, and are right not to over-commit to Iraq under the present circumstances.

However, there are a number of areas where stronger European engagement might now be both possible and helpful. These include:

- economic projects in the areas least affected by violence;
- a discussion of Iraqi participation in some of the softer social and cultural aspects of EuroMed programmes;
- development of sub-national institution-building programmes;
- support for the development of a dense web of national institutions, such as syndicates, chambers of commerce and universities;
- capacity-building for emerging political parties;
- preparation of sub-national elections;
- elaboration of a more carefully thought through regional plan;
- training and capacity-building for border guards;
- broadening the scope of security sector reform assistance; and
- mediation with insurgents.



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## Introduction

If under Saddam Iraq provided one of the most salutary experiences for the incipient common foreign policy of the European Union (EU), regime change in Baghdad has done little to ease the tensions that beset EU efforts to influence events in the country. At the time of this writing, the intensifying insurgency, combined with the legacy of opposition in some European countries to the US-led invasion, continue to militate against more extensive EU engagement. There are only slim prospects of being able safely and productively to deploy people and resources to engage in the standard range of civilian 'post conflict' work – a term that anyway seems increasingly ill suited to describe Iraq's post-invasion predicament. And, of course, George Bush's re-election will hardly be seen as propitious for a reconsideration on the part of non-coalition European governments. At the same time, however, since the transfer of power to the interim Iraqi government in June 2004, European governments and the Brussels institutions have begun to deliberate their contribution to building a democratic Iraq.

## Beyond Sovereignty

For non-coalition European governments, the primary focus of Iraq policy has been on securing an end to the US-led occupation. The recovery of sovereignty has comprehensively trumped issues of democracy-building.

In the sphere of democracy-building in Iraq, Europe starts from a low base. The absence of European deliberations on democracy in Iraq was palpable during the 1990s, when policy was of course driven by the logic of containment. Divisions between Europe and the US in fact began to take root as far back as 1998 when the Clinton Administration passed the Iraq Liberation Act and appeared to shift from a strategy based on containment to one of regime change. One effect of the well-known differences of opinion on military action was to discourage any significant consideration of the challenges involved in fostering a more democratic Iraqi polity. A December 2002

A new EU strategy, agreed in the summer of 2004, promises consideration of new forms of cooperation and dialogue.

This paper charts the development of European positions on political and security issues in post-Saddam Iraq, seeking to shed light on current debates and the prospects for more significant EU involvement. The analysis reveals both the extent of genuine preparedness to widen the scope of European engagement and assistance, but also the caution and uncertainty that continues to pervade the planning of future strategy. The paper finishes by suggesting a number of areas where future European efforts in Iraq could most usefully add value. The paper sets out ways that might enable the EU to offer the clear prospect of a more proactive and distinctive contribution, while avoiding precipitate and unproductive involvement in current circumstances.

conference on this subject had to be moved from Brussels to London due to other European states' caution. One senior CFSP official lamented that on Iraq there was only 'intermittent superficial discussions and the occasional minimalist declaration', that failed to address underlying structural issues.<sup>1</sup> The UK itself declined to start working on any concerted democracy promotion strategy beyond the issue of military intervention. Contact with Iraqi opposition groups was sporadic and few proactive initiatives were taken. One of the few initiatives involved the Westminster Foundation's supporting the Iraq Institute for Democracy in Kurdish controlled northern Iraq to generate ideas for democratisation across Iraq. Britain's Ambassador at the UN during this time, Jeremy Greenstock, admitted that in terms of Iraq's internal political restructuring, 'there was a wider remit' in Washington than in London.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Crowe B. (2003) 'A common European foreign policy after Iraq?', *International Affairs* 79/3: 535 (533-546).

<sup>2</sup> Transcript of BBC interview, 27 July 2003.

From the immediate aftermath of the military conflict, the Europeans' preference was for the UN to assume full control and for elections to be held in the short term. The primary aim of ousting the US was undisguised. In other post-conflict situations, France has been one of the most ardent advocates of gradual democratisation, but in Iraq it led the charge for a rapid move to elections. Europeans were rather keener on the UN taking over than was the UN itself; and in spite of the fact that the UN did not appear to enjoy unmitigated legitimacy amongst ordinary Iraqis.

While UK officials cautioned that there were justifiable grounds for not rushing into elections, they expressed frustration that little was being done in practical terms to make elections more feasible – for example, exploring the use of the existing ration card system to make practicable some form of at least initial community consultation. The UK has proclaimed a local-level perspective on pluralistic political processes. The UK's senior representative in the south of Iraq suggested that 'participation' should be the immediate aim rather than full-scale, pristine democracy. Broadly representative bodies covering relatively mundane, technocratic issues could, it was held, help build trust by incorporating different religious and ethnic groups to discuss issues of daily relevance over which communal cooperation was required.

In debates over the formation of the interim government, the UK was ambivalent towards the concept of US-selected caucuses and pressed in favour of the UN's proposed system of more open, 'cascading caucuses', in which participatory community meetings would themselves select representatives up to each successive level of administration. Focusing on such local level forums would, it was argued, provide legitimacy-strengthening participation while 'avoiding the uncertainties of democracy'. A basic form of local elections were organized in Basra in the spring of 2004 – but subsequent UK plans for direct elections in the south were vetoed by CPA officials in Baghdad.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Diamond L. (2004) 'What Went Wrong in Iraq?', *Foreign Affairs* 83/5: 45.

For the French government, in contrast, the need was for an Iraqi 'strongman' to take over quickly, not a gradual CPA-mediated bottom-up development of democracy. The delays to elections were frequently cited by most European states as grounds for not engaging more systematically in questions of political process. Reports from French sources themselves revealed that this reluctance was increasingly blackening French and other European states' credibility within Iraq.<sup>4</sup>

In the period up to the transfer of power, the US was criticised by one influential organisation for raising expectations in trying to sell a notion that genuine 'sovereignty' could realistically be transferred in the short term.<sup>5</sup> European governments might be accused of being even more guilty on this score.

Far from narrowing differences, the formal transfer of sovereignty to an interim Iraqi government at the end of June 2004 seemed to open a further round of European criticisms. With the French government again assuming its role as lead protagonist, Europeans complained that the interim Iraqi government lacked anything close to full sovereignty and that, contrary to UN special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi's aims, the interim government resembled in large measure a continuation of the US-appointed IGC. (Interestingly, one US advisor held the opposite view, that Brahimi had got most of the personnel he had sought).<sup>6</sup> One common fear was that the deal had ensured the worst of both worlds: a loss of international control without any concomitant increase in governmental legitimacy – indeed, with extended powers for bodies conspicuously lacking such legitimacy.

The French model had been for a broad national conference to select a government. Ultimately, such a gathering was called after the government had been selected and was accorded only a limited role. In addition, Europeans pointed to the very limited powers of the constitutive assembly set up to monitor the interim government. Moreover, when the

<sup>4</sup> Le Monde 18 March 2004.

<sup>5</sup> International Crisis Group (2004) *Iraq's Transition on a Knife Edge*, Middle East Report no. 27, April: 30.

<sup>6</sup> Diamond, 'What Went Wrong': 50.



national conference did finally take place in August, it was criticised for being highly stage managed. A slate compiled to incorporate smaller parties, including those with links to Muqtada al Sadr, was excluded, while many Sunni Arab groups did not participate at all. As a result the assembly will be dominated by the bigger parties represented in and aligned with the Allawi government.<sup>7</sup>

In the wake of the transfer of power to the Iraqi interim government, Europe has begun to contemplate forms of new engagement. But the violence of the insurgency has continued to breed caution.

In June 2004 the EU agreed on a new strategy paper for Iraq.<sup>8</sup> This struck a more positive and constructive tone, observing that Europe had an even greater need than the US for Iraq to succeed, not least to help stabilise Turkey – with Iraq potentially soon to be an immediate neighbour for the EU – as well as to encourage the return of the large number of Iraqi exiles in Europe. It was pointed out that engagement in the development of standards and legal frameworks familiar to European investors would be important if the latter were not to find themselves excluded from the Iraqi market. The strategy argued that the EU's own experience would enable it to play a particularly strong role in fostering processes of national reconciliation, consensus-building and the development of federalism and decentralisation. The new strategy committed the EU to enter into dialogue with the Iraqi government on the rebuilding of political processes, consider security sector support, and develop a more significant role in judicial reform and the strengthening of the rule of law. The EU would also use its engagement with other Middle Eastern states to push these into a more constructive partnership with the new Iraqi government. The strategy suggested that the EU would invite Iraq to participate in the EU's new Strategic Partnership for the Mediterranean and Middle East, push for Iraq's entry into the

<sup>7</sup> See, Ridolfo K., 'Assessing Iraq's National Conference', *Arab Reform Bulletin*, 2/8, September 2004: 3-5.

<sup>8</sup> European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, 'The European Union and Iraq: A Framework for Engagement', COM(2004) 417 final, Brussels, 9.6.2004.

WTO, and reinstall EU trade preferences, which ceased to apply in Iraq after the first Gulf War. A troika meeting with the Iraqi interim government was arranged in September at the United Nations in New York.

External Relations Commissioner, Chris Patten, stated that the EU would now make it a priority 'to work for a better future in Iraq whatever the bitterness of past disputes'.<sup>9</sup> The notion of working to incorporate Iraq into a regional framework was accorded particular importance, in terms of what could be the added value of an EU contribution. Encouraging a more positive and proactive involvement on the part of Iraq's neighbours was seen as crucial in moving beyond a situation where post-conflict debates were, in the words of one European diplomat, 'treated as a transatlantic issue'. In this light, Javier Solana met in Cairo with the Conference of Neighbouring Countries of Iraq in September to push these ideas forward.

EU officials have lamented the limited impact of this new strategy, which was able to define long-term goals in a more coherent fashion, but remained uncertain about short-term priorities. Indeed, the Strategy expressly focused on the long-term structure of EU-Iraq relations to avoid short-term controversies. Member states declared a desire to engage symbolically, through increased visits and regular dialogue with the Iraqi government and the 'big three' states leant heavily on the Commission to elaborate new strategies in this regard. But governments remained uncertain over more practical involvement on the ground in Iraq. Their diplomats recognised that many key questions had not been addressed within the framework of the EU strategy and that, on many of the most difficult political issues, the EU continued 'to put things off'. A number of member-states admitted to having reined back the scope of the new strategy, out of concern that EU policies might be pressed by governments in the military coalition occupying Iraq. Diplomats opined that the strategy's main impact was to force member states for the first time into a more substantive debate on Iraq's

<sup>9</sup> Speech to the European Parliament, 15 September 2004, [www.europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/news/patten/sp04\\_399.htm](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/news/patten/sp04_399.htm).

political development. Insiders claimed that, by this stage, discussions were finally beginning to move beyond the replay of familiar differences with US policy, while acknowledging that far-reaching consensus on proactive engagement remained absent.

Thus far, EU discussions have focused on possible assistance for Iraq's elections. An EU scoping mission in September 2004 recommended this as an area for potential European action. Germany introduced plans for election training in Jordan, and other donors considered similar initiatives. However, many member states were still reluctant to move forward with concrete plans and financial commitments until it became clearer that the election timetable would be adhered to. A number of member states complained that the scoping mission was precipitate and unrealistically ambitious, pushed too hard by the presidency now held by a coalition-member – the Netherlands. Moreover, EU plans have centred on an indirect contribution to monitoring elections. The prospect of an EU observer mission being deployed to Iraq, let alone a more significant role in the direct organisation of elections, appears to have been ruled out.

On the one hand, European governments have expressed concern about the prospect of elections being delayed, allowing prime minister Ayad Allawi to consolidate his hold on power and thus American influence to be prolonged. On the other hand, member states have also berated the US for adopting a heavy-handed approach to security in order to save its face by ensuring some form of election does take place by the January deadline.

The creation of an EU envoy or special representative to Iraq and the opening of an EU office in Iraq are (at the time of this writing) still blocked by a number of governments. France in particular continues to resist talk of anything over 50 per cent debt relief. While a new discussion has been taking shape at official level on more detailed institution-building challenges, EU ministerial meetings still fail to engage in these less high profile issues. Diplomats acknowledge that Europe continues

to see itself playing a role only 'at the margins'. In striking contrast to elsewhere in the Middle East, there has been no push from member states keen to ratchet-up EU commitments to at least temper US influence. Intimations at Iraq being included in a possible wider Middle East framework were in fact not welcomed enthusiastically by the EU's Mediterranean partners, the latter being concerned with the prospect of European resources being diverted to Iraq.<sup>10</sup>

EU ambitions were limited to assisting ad hoc peace support and institution-building work within a framework set by the UN, in large part to avoid being completely excluded from Iraq over the longer term. Any attempt to delineate a 'grand vision of Iraq's politics' has been eschewed within EU forums, but rather, in the words of one diplomat, 'taken as given' from the primary domestic and international players in Iraq. Amidst the Najaf Shia uprisings of August 2004, a common EU position on Muqtada al-Sadr was conspicuously absent. Most European policy-makers presumed themselves to be keener than the US to see al-Sadr incorporated into the political process, but nothing was done to influence this. Indeed, issues relating to the CPA were expressly excluded from EU discussions.

While the French supported the new EU strategy, they remain at arms length in many discussions and events, often pointedly not turning up to workshops and civil society initiatives. Some diplomats argue that, in its relentless focus on sovereignty transfer, the French government had its bluff called on 28 June 2004, explaining fluctuating and slightly uncertain positions in the months following the formation of the Iraqi interim government. When Iraqi President al-Yawar toured European capitals in September, his visit to Paris was cancelled by the French government, reportedly in response to the Iraqi Prime Minister's swipe at France's 'neutrality' on the terrorism sweeping Iraq. Rumours even abounded that Paris was instrumental in al-Yawar's visit to the European Parliament also

<sup>10</sup> This regional approach was often seen as a natural comparative advantage for the EU's focus. For example, Luciani G and Neugart F. (2003) *Toward a European Strategy for Iraq* (IUE/RSC Policy Paper).

being cancelled.<sup>11</sup> Spain's new Socialist government has declared a 'hands off' policy to Iraq, the circumstances of the March elections – held a few days after the Atocha station bombings – rendering this a highly controversial topic domestically. Madrid has insisted in particular that broader – and in practice, elusive – international consensus should underpin any external political initiatives.

The European caution to engage on overtly political issues has also been presented as a form of conditionality. After some internal discussion it was decided that the EU would not offer Iraq a relatively symbolic agreement that could be concluded immediately, but a more comprehensive agreement that would require approximation to democratic and human rights norms over the medium term. The aim to bring Iraq into the same network of standards and conditionalities applying to other states sought to address concerns over (what was perceived to be) Allawi's autocratic style, the government's reintroduction of the death penalty and the apparent suppression of media freedoms during the summer of 2004. Significantly, those states least keen on EU political conditionality elsewhere in the Middle East were those keenest on its being applied in Iraq.

For many, this appears to be the wisest approach: the EU should not rush to engage, but offer partnership in the long term, while nudging Iraq along the path of democracy by clarifying the reforms expected for this to materialise.

## Building an Iraqi State

The security situation has also discouraged European donors from dispersing significant amounts of aid to post-conflict state-building and reconstruction.

The paucity of European funding was apparent at the Madrid donor conference in October 2003. Out of a total \$33bn committed at this

conference, \$20bn came from the US; \$5bn from Japan; \$1bn from the UK; \$300 million from Spain; and only \$1.5bn from other EU states and the European Commission. France declined to make any commitment. Key to European demands was that more money be managed by a UN fund, to which the US would have limited access.<sup>12</sup> The German development ministry was keen to channel aid through the UN as a means of depoliticising its potential contribution in Iraq from German public opinion. One EU diplomat highlighted governments' increasingly acute concern 'not to be associated with a failure'. The lack of European funding was a bitter disappointment to many international – and particularly Arab – NGOs who were keen only to accept European and not US funds after the military invasion.<sup>13</sup>

When Iraqi foreign minister, Hoshiyar Zebari, met with his EU counterparts in July 2004 to ask for European assistance he was rebuffed. Indeed, by this stage, several European governments were intimating that Iraq's aforementioned re-introduction of the death penalty might further discourage new EU funding.

Much of the European aid that has been forthcoming has been ring-fenced for purely humanitarian purposes. EU development commissioner, Poul Nielsen, rejected US proposals to coordinate the deployment of European humanitarian aid with US post-conflict efforts, strongly resisting a politicisation of humanitarian aid.<sup>14</sup> Of the 230 million euros committed by the European Commission, 30 million were channelled through UNDP, mostly towards water, health and education projects. Even coalition members, such as Denmark, have been keen on limiting their funding to basic emergency relief and reconstruction. German assistance has been concentrated in the areas of water provision, agriculture and vocational training, along with cultural initiatives providing support for museums, language training and sports teams.

<sup>12</sup> *Economist* 13 September 2003: 21.

<sup>13</sup> MacGinty R. (2003) 'The pre-war reconstruction of post-war Iraq', *Third World Quarterly* 24/4: 601-17) p.611.

<sup>14</sup> *Financial Times*, 31 March 2003.

<sup>11</sup> BBC Monitoring Service, 15 September 2004.

More politically oriented aid work has been particularly limited, even though this was identified as a priority area for European aid, as EU donors commonly complain that the US is neglecting governance issues and focusing overwhelmingly on infrastructure and security forces training. (Although in reality, the US has developed a number of democracy projects with local civil society groups and through the creation of democracy training centres).<sup>15</sup> At the end of 2003, 3 million euros were allocated to assist the UN in building local institutions, the judicial system and advocacy NGOs, and an additional 8 million euros were made available under the EU's Rapid Reaction Mechanism to help initiate the UN presence in Iraq. But the disbursement of this EU political aid was then held back, pending agreement on a more prominent UN role in Iraq's political process. Moreover, for 2004-5 only 10 million euros were set aside for governance and human rights work, out of a total Commission commitment of 200 million euros.<sup>16</sup>

Amongst member states, Sweden has developed the most forward-leaning profile of political work, within a \$54 million aid package announced early in 2004. Denmark allocated 50 million euros to Iraq for 2003-04, split evenly between humanitarian aid and reconstruction, the latter including some 'soft' projects on democratic and judicial capacity-building; However, Danish funds then declined to 20 million euros allocated for 2005-06.

Compounding the general political ambivalence on the part of many European donors, no clear state-building strategy has been elaborated to guide aid work. European governments and the EU institutions criticise the US for leading Iraq towards a system of ethno-federalism. There has, however, been no proactive strategy aimed at stemming the drift towards sectarian politics or facilitating any alternative political model. There has been no European engagement with or support for secular-ideological parties, cross-cutting in terms of their ethnic and religious make up. No policy initiatives or diplomatic engagement have taken shape on a range of

political issues: the strengthening of relatively secular Shia parties as alternatives to Dawa and the Iran-backed SCIRI (Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq); the development of a secular Sunni party, to fill the gap left by the Baath party; cooperation with other secular, national parties, like the Iraqi Communist Party; the design of an electoral system best able to mitigate ethnic exclusivity; the possibility of assisting the rising Democratic Gathering of Tribal Leaders. European diplomats have routinely berated the Coalition for failing to focus on the building of state structures in Iraq, but have declined to offer significant resources or expertise in this area themselves.

On the issue of governance-building, one diplomat observed that the EU was 'leaning on the UN in the absence of a clear European policy'. One group of experts urged the EU not to make its institution-building engagement conditional on multilateral control of the political process.<sup>17</sup> But this appears to be precisely what has happened.

UK aid priorities have included small scale technical assistance for economic and social reforms; public service reform initiatives, especially those involving the Finance, Planning and Development Cooperation and Municipalities and Public Works Ministries; and the efficient and transparent management of public budgets. Judicial reform was prioritised as an area that other donors had declined to target. Compared to the UK's \$4 billion spending on military and security issues in Iraq, however, the investment in building democratic institutions has remained modest.<sup>18</sup>

Very gradually, European states have moved to consider increasing assistance. The EU scoping mission in September recommended initiatives in the field of civil administration and the rule of law, in addition to police training and electoral support. Concern that the UN's focus remains overly technical – in its role designing formal electoral rules, for instance – has encouraged EU aid officials to shift more funds

<sup>15</sup> Diamond, 'What Went Wrong?': 55.

<sup>16</sup> For these figures, see the Commission's *Iraq Assistance Programme 2004*, pp. 14, 18, 23 and 25.

<sup>17</sup> Dodge T., Luciani G. and Neugart F. (2004) *The European Union and Iraq: Present Dilemmas and Recommendations for Future Action* (Bertelsmann Stiftung, Gutersloh): 10.

<sup>18</sup> Information on UK funding from weekly DFID *Iraq Updates*, and DFID *Iraq Country Strategy Paper*, February 2004.

into civil society organizations. While the EU has lamented that it has been powerless to correct the worrying priority given to particular political elite figures and to the notion of sharing out quotas of power along ethnic-religious lines, the Commission has begun to develop some modest initiatives to offset these trends. Seminars have been organised to enjoin European diplomats to engage with a broader range of civil society actors. Projects have been designed around themes – such as media freedoms or women’s rights – that could cut across and bridge ethnic divisions. While strategy has not extended into the detail of which civil society groups and political parties required more proactive support, the Commission sees itself as benefiting from being a more neutral actor in establishing an increasingly wide range of contacts.

The UK has also developed programmes planned to target ‘the broader institutional context of policing’ and the overall political management of the Iraqi police force. Funds from the Global Conflict Prevention Pool (reduced from £19 million in 2004 to £8.5 million for 2005) will be diverted from the security sector into a human rights strand, in particular for minority rights training programmes and support for Iraq’s special tribunal – a tribunal of course failing to win UN approval. Two new UK funds have come on stream. A £5 million Civil Society Support Fund targets small Iraqi organisations working on poverty, with the aim of giving ‘a voice to the poorest’. A parallel £5 million Citizen Involvement Fund (initially christened Political Participation Fund) is more specifically oriented towards preparation for elections. The main priority of this Fund is to promote the participation of women in public debate. Tentative civic education programmes have commenced in preparation for elections.

Overall, however, caution still reigns and progress has unsurprisingly been limited by the deteriorating security situation. The new EU Strategy did not encourage firm commitments of significant amounts of new aid for democracy-building. Practical cooperation on security sector reform in Iraq remains too controversial for many states. Few European

governments are keen on increasing aid flows while most of the commitments made at the Madrid donor conference remain unspent – particularly those of the United States. Spain has retained the \$300 million aid commitment made under the Aznar government, but like other donors in current circumstances judges an actual disbursement of such funds imprudent. Southern European states, and in particular the new Spanish government, have been adamantly opposed to proposals made by some coalition members that MEDA funds be made available to Iraq. This mirrors a broader concern that new possibilities for aid work in Iraq should not lead to the diversion of resources away from other aid recipients.

Many Iraqis are critical of the extent to which European donors have made aid conditional on money not being spent with US contractors or programmes. They also question the value of training and other activities provided from Amman – this being seen as continually draining away resources from Iraq to provide skills with little practical relevance.<sup>19</sup>

Much planning during 2004 was undertaken in the hope of a John Kerry victory in the US elections – even if some acknowledged that a Kerry win would have brought its own challenge of obliging the EU actually to live up to its stated position of wanting to cooperate with a more multilateral president. Bush’s re-election is likely further to discourage Europeans from developing their own democracy-building strategy in Iraq – but it also renders just such a European policy more necessary.

## Europe and Iraq’s Security Challenges

It is quite obviously the case that the lack of security has dominated all other considerations. In the aftermath of Saddam’s overthrow, it quickly became apparent to observers that the most serious barriers to building democracy in Iraq were directly or indirectly related to

<sup>19</sup> International Crisis Group (2004) *Reconstructing Iraq*, Middle East Report no. 30, September: 25.

security.<sup>20</sup> This continues to explain UN hesitancy to assume a more significant political role.

The most immediate effect of divisions over the invasion was the limited European willingness to commit troops to assist with post-conflict security challenges. In addition to the UK's 11,000 men, by mid-2003 eight other European states were contributing just over 5,000 troops – from Italy, Spain and Poland, and a smaller number from Denmark, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Norway. These contributions represented relatively modest shares of an overall coalition deployment of 155,000 troops, itself a far more limited force than had been present in the Balkans. (It was estimated that scaling up the Balkans deployment on a comparable basis for Iraq's greater size would have required a mission of half a million troops.) Much emphasis was, of course, placed on the absence of French and German troop commitments.

At the same time, the influence of the Iraqi conflict on internal European security debates was greater than the European impact on Iraq. It was largely in response to events in Iraq that in April 2003 France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg met to devise plans for a separate EU military command, pointedly crossing one of the most significant red lines drawn by the UK in its conversion to European Security and Defence Policy.

Within the coalition, the issue soon became less one of massively strengthening European troop deployments and more one of preserving those contributions that had been made. Most conspicuously, the change of government in Spain in March 2004 led to the withdrawal of Spanish troops. When the US pleaded for additional troop commitments after the April 2004 Shia uprising, only the UK responded positively. By June 2004, even the British government had reconsidered, deciding to send additional troops to Afghanistan rather than Iraq. In accounting for their increasing uncertainty over sustaining troop commitments, several European states cited what they judged

to be US heavy-handedness in responding to the lynching of American civilian contractors and the renewed violence triggered in April 2004.

The US itself was increasingly adamant that it was less interested in securing European troop commitments than in having Turkish, Pakistani and other Muslim forces present in Iraq. Demonstrating the frequent tension between security aims and the transfer of sovereignty, it was the increasingly assertive Iraqi Governing Council that blocked Paul Bremer's efforts to negotiate a role for Turkish troops. In this skirmish, many European governments leant on Turkey not to send troops, with some accused by Turkish officials of making threatening linkages to Turkey's accession prospects.

European governments pushed for UN language that would ensure a prospective multinational force with greater operational autonomy from the US. This issue was fudged in UN Security Council resolution 1546, but it was significant that this was another issue on which the UK government confronted the US and sought to mediate between Washington and European capitals.

These debates also filtered into European approaches regarding the reconstituting and preparation of Iraqi security forces. While urging a rapid end to the occupation, non-participating European governments berated the US for speeding up its army training programmes in a way that over-looked human rights issues. The US's moves at the end of 2003 to accelerate the development of a 40,000-strong Iraqi army from 3 years to 1 year was criticised and not supported in any concrete fashion by the majority of European governments. The British government also admitted concern that with regard to human rights standards in the Iraqi army there was 'some haste creeping in'. British officials recognised that the focus on building the capacity of a civilian defence ministry had been tardy, and that there had been too strong an orientation in security sector reform towards quantitative rather than qualitative aspects – the provision of equipment, hardware and additional capacity prevailing over the need to enhance mechanisms of democratic control.

<sup>20</sup> Byman D. (2003) 'Constructing a Democratic Iraq', *International Security* 28/1 (47-78); Zakaria F. (2004) 'No Security, No Democracy', *Newsweek*, 24 May: 15.

There have also been differences on the issue of militia forces. While the US adopted a relatively hard line, ordering the dissolution of all militia forces, with the exception of the Kurdish *peshmergas*, European positions were from the outset less clear cut. UK and other European officials found it difficult to engage with Shia paramilitaries in the south, but were reluctant to push hard to disband these groups, arguing this would be a sensible objective only in the long term. European forces were reported to be engaged with Muqtada al-Sadr's Mehdi army from the beginning of 2004. Of course, the US's own approach became more pragmatic, and it failed to follow through on its own strictures as irregular forces were increasingly relied upon to help suppress the insurgency. Indeed, when the US struck a deal with Sunni militias to end the April 2004 stand-off in Fallujah, several European coalition members complained that this risked undercutting their own work with the incipient Iraqi army – the latter angrily fearing a weakening of its own position against the militia forces.

The need to develop Iraqi civilian police capacity has become a universally recognised priority. The possibility of an EU police mission was discussed after the invasion. However, most European states insisted that this should only take place after the end of the military occupation. The US was itself sceptical of the idea of a European police mission. British diplomats also doubted that an EU police mission would be ready for what would necessarily be a far tougher policing mandate than had applied in the Balkans.

Instead, national contributions have developed on an ad hoc basis. In March 2004, Germany launched a training programme for Iraqi policemen in the United Arab Emirates. Denmark ceased police training proper to focus on 'more qualitative' aspects of security sector management, particularly around Basra. France promised use of a police training school, but only after sovereignty had been fully returned. Diplomats acknowledged a lack of internal European coordination on security sector reform work and a failure systematically to

incorporate lessons learned from policing missions in other post-conflict scenarios.

This is an area where some of the most significant divergences between the UK and the US appeared. Rumours abounded that the UK was increasingly unhappy with the Pentagon's militaristic imprint on policing doctrine. While British diplomats denied major differences, by February 2004, the UK had imprisoned only 65 insurgents in the south compared to the US's incarceration of over 9000 men.<sup>21</sup>

British officials lamented that the CPA had been slow to move towards police primacy, as initially the temptation was to focus on army capacities. A pool of 200 British volunteer police officers was eventually established. Of the £19 million allocated to Iraq for 2004 under the GCPP, nearly £10 million went to security sector reform work. By the end of 2003, the TiP (Transformation into Policing) programme was up and running, focusing on human rights, corruption, civilian control of security forces, mentoring and monitoring. UK-run training was based mainly in Jordan, where 50 British officers were stationed; in March 2004, the UK sent a group of 24 civilian police training officers into Basra for the first time. British officers were also deployed to monitor the chief of police in Baghdad, and subsequently to fulfil similar roles in the southern governorates. It was recognised that a lack of manpower limited monitoring provisions under the TiP, thus hampering efforts to improve human rights standards in policing. British officials also defined their approach as distinctive in its focus on policing embedded within local communities, arguing that the US emphasis on creating an ethnically-mixed national police force risked 'going against the Iraqi grain'. The limitations of these policing initiatives became clear after the renewed insurgencies of April 2004, when many Iraqi police officers refused to confront their countrymen. Indeed, by mid-2004 only 13,000 out of approximately 90,000 Iraqi police officers had received training, while shortfalls in basic equipment persisted.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *The Economist* 19 June 2004: 61.

<sup>22</sup> Dodge T. (2004) 'A Sovereign Iraq?', *Survival* 46/3: 54 (39-58).

European reluctance to get involved in the security sphere persists. Only on 22 September 2004 did France, Germany, Belgium and Spain permit agreement on a proposed NATO training programme for the Iraqi army. And they did so only after Paris had diluted the scope of the mission and the four governments had declared they would still not make any contribution themselves.<sup>23</sup> After much domestic debate, the Czech government agreed to retain its military policemen in Iraq until February 2005, but declined to commit itself to supporting the UN protection force thereafter.

On the other hand, some new commitments have emerged. Germany has pledged 4 million euros to the prospective UN protection force (the biggest European contribution) and has increased the scale of its police training programme in the United Arab Emirates, planning to have graduated 450 officers from its course by the end of 2004. The Danes meanwhile have returned to police training proper, and other donors have informally hinted at possibilities for new work in this area.

## Ways Forward

This evolution of European positions exhibits a strained balance. On the one hand, it is becoming increasingly evident that, in its own interest, Europe cannot remain on the sidelines indefinitely. On the other hand, all kinds of conditions, caveats and qualifications have been attached to suggested forms of engagement, due to a combination of deepening insecurity in Iraq and the legacy of bitter, pre-invasion disagreements. From this account of slowly accumulating European willingness to play a more proactive role in Iraq, derives a list of areas in which clear changes to EU positions could be useful. In ascending order of difficulty – from softer through to more hard-edged forms of engagement – these include:

- Moving much faster in terms of relatively uncontroversial economic projects in the areas least affected by violence. Here the EU, of course, has a wealth of experience. The economic dimension of US reconstruction efforts has been criticised for imposing excessively harsh neo-liberal market solutions prior to the creation of objective regulatory structures; for concentrating on high visibility, white elephant projects devoid of relevance to citizens' daily concerns; and for breeding resentment by limiting Iraqis to low paid menial jobs under contracts giving US contractors, ensconced in the Green Zone, millions of dollars in profits.<sup>24</sup> Clearly, there is much here that the EU could do better and which chimes with its professed expertise and approaches adopted elsewhere. Support and technical advice for the development of balanced and more inclusive 'social market' structures might have particular resonance.
- Considering Iraq's participation in some of the softer social and cultural aspects of EuroMed programmes.<sup>25</sup> Concerns over funds being diverted from other Mediterranean partners are legitimate, but these kinds of initiatives would be relatively low cost, low risk and symbolically important to Iraq.
- Developing sub-national institution-building programmes. It has been argued that rather than focusing on national elections the best strategy for building legitimacy will be through local structures at the municipal level.<sup>26</sup> Precisely this kind of approach has been a feature of EU post-conflict initiatives in other parts of the world. Cooperation with local councils has been a longstanding European speciality.

<sup>23</sup> *Le Monde* 23 September 2004.

<sup>24</sup> International Crisis Group, *Reconstructing*: 8-14

<sup>25</sup> Perthes V. (2004) 'The EU and Iraq: Self interest requires engagement', *Fride*, July

<sup>26</sup> International Crisis Group, *Iraq's Transition*, *op. cit.*: 19. This is also recommended by Dodge et al, *The European Union and Iraq*, *op. cit.*: 11.



- Supporting the development of a dense web of national institutions, such as the syndicates, chambers of commerce and universities. This would include the possibility of support for civil groups that have been strongly anti-CPA and thus so far excluded from political regeneration initiatives. European donors claim to be alive to the need to reorient funds away from prominent exiles' one-man-band NGOs that lack roots in civil society.
- Assisting political party building. Over 100 parties have emerged, few with fully coherent or comprehensive platforms or alternative programmes of governance, but rather acting as fiefdoms based on personal rivalries and ethnic carve-outs. Party capacity-building could help temper this fragmentation, to help ensure more peaceable channels for citizens' demands and interests.
- Focusing on sub-national elections. Debate has ensued over the nature of the UN's planned use of a single national list electoral system. One side argues that having just one national vote may leave some areas without local representation; others argue that national level proportional representation is optimal to the extent it allows for a low threshold for bringing in small parties and avoiding 'zero sum', winner-takes-all results. What can be said is that if there are indeed to be no local constituencies it is even more urgent to develop strong local level democracy. If there can be no standard EU monitoring role, it is perhaps at this level where European support and advice in the design and running of sub-national elections would be most feasibly and usefully directed.
- Elaborating a more carefully thought through regional plan. It might well be the case that the EU is better able to draw Iraq into a regional network of partnerships than the US. This may not be quite the harmonious panacea it is sometimes suggested to be: Europe's

relations with some other Middle East states are far from being problem-free, and so far, other Arab states have not welcomed the prospect of Iraq being granted the same preferences they enjoy under EU agreements. If such a route is to be feasible it would be as part of a general recalibration and strengthening of EU relations across the Middle East.

- Training and capacity-building for border guards to stop the passage of foreign fighters into Iraq. This would represent a valuable contribution to improving security without involving deployments deep into Iraqi territory, and a function highly pertinent to addressing the spiralling hijacking of European citizens.
- Assisting elements of a Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programme, if and when this develops as part of a broader political process. Militia forces need to be disarmed for elections to take place peacefully, and Europe has a good record in DDR.
- Broadening the scope of security sector reform assistance. European involvement in the training of security forces could usefully improve democratic control of these forces. The relative neglect of this issue in Iraq compared with other post-conflict situations could constitute a source of instability over the longer term. This is an imbalance that needs addressing, and which does not appear to be high on the list of US priorities.
- Mediating with insurgents in a way that the US has been unable or unwilling to do. This might emerge further down the road, when greater European presence has been established in other areas.

It is not difficult to identify areas where Europe could make a more significant contribution in Iraq. This list represents a fairly standard menu of post-conflict tasks. Iraq's predicament is such that it requires as full a range of peace support operations as possible for a considerable time to come.

Existing challenges provide ample opportunity for the EU to apply its own experience and expertise to good effect. The key is to determine the conditions under which such initiatives are offered. The insurgency and increasing rate of kidnappings clearly means that conditions are not ripe for many types of standard post-conflict engagement. Three aspects should be kept in mind, however: First, there may be greater scope for pursuing some softer initiatives in areas less affected by violence than has so far been acknowledged. Second, the imperative for the EU in the short term is to develop proposals, ideas and commitments sufficient to demonstrate that it is not ‘playing transatlantic politics’ in Iraq. Third, a clear path towards full cooperation and partnership between the EU and Iraq might – at the margins – provide one useful inducement to democracy-building efforts.

Clear and objective conditions should be laid out to help embed democratic norms in Iraq and to demonstrate that the hurdle is not set higher for Iraq than for the EU’s Mediterranean partners.

None of this should be seen to belittle the impediments presented by current levels of violence or to ignore the need to maintain justifiable criticism of US actions. But a modest increase in engagement, along with more positively framed suggestions for useful and distinctive areas of cooperation, would help to create the prerequisites for a comprehensive, European-style partnership with Iraq when conditions do eventually allow for this.

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