From Failed State to Civil War: The Lebanonization of Iraq 2003-2006 — An Analysis for Civil-Military Transitions

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Pauline H. Baker, President of The Fund for Peace, pioneered the methodology called CAST, the Conflict Assessment System Tool. It is the basis for the Failed States Index, the first attempt to rank countries by their risk of internal conflict. In collaboration with the team at The Fund for Peace, she oversaw the production and analysis of the Index, which was published in partnership with Foreign Policy magazine. Dr. Baker is a political scientist with over 40 years of experience working on issues concerning weak and failing states. She taught at the University of Lagos in Nigeria, the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, and Georgetown University's School of Advanced International Studies. Dr. Baker was formerly staff director of the African Affairs Subcommittee of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee. She has published over 80 articles, essays and books. She received her Doctorate from UCLA and her undergraduate degree from Douglass College, Rutgers University.

Many excellent assessments have been made of civil-military transitions in peace and stability operations, in countries ranging from Haiti to East Timor. Most of them are after-action reports conducted by the military, case studies written by scholars or journalists, or comparative studies of various peacekeeping operations and their operational effectiveness. However, these studies tend to be country specific, limited in scope and do not employ a rigorous social science methodology that can track the major social, economic and political/military trends on the ground, and measure whether, and why, stabilization strategies were succeeding or failing in fostering sustainable security.

Policymakers and military commanders involved in counter-insurgency operations or state-building (or nation-building, as post-conflict operations are often called) need a tool with effects-based metrics that can assess whether strategies and tactics are having the intended outcomes. Only then can they make informed decisions about operational and tactical moves, anticipate future challenges, evaluate whether policies have misfired, and adjust existing policies to avoid irreversible damage.

The Fund for Peace developed such a methodology, CAST (the Conflict Assessment System Tool), both as a conflict early warning tool and as a system for conflict assessment. We felt that the methodology had to:

- Be comparative, capable of capturing trends at national levels, not solely in a targeted theater of operations.

- Incorporate trends that cover the full scope of the conflict, from its origins to violent conflict and post-conflict reconstruction.

- Utilize all relevant data, much of it available in open sources.

- Employ quantitative and qualitative indicators, both of which are critical to understanding whether a society has achieved sustainable security.

This paper provides a short description of CAST, applies it to an analysis of Iraq from 2003-2006 and offers some comments on critical mistakes and future trends.

CAST OVERVIEW

Since 1996, the Fund for Peace has been developing and testing the CAST methodology with a wide variety of organizations and multiple applications for government, the military, the private sector, humanitarian organizations and universities. I will briefly summarize the substance of the methodology, present our main findings and conclusions as it was applied to Iraq, and offer some thoughts on missed opportunities and a path toward the future. Further details on the methodology and the Iraq study upon which this paper is based, as well as other applications, can be found on the FFP website: www.fundforpeace.org.

CAST diagnoses the vulnerability or risk of a country to violent internal conflict or state failure. It is based on the premise that state failure is a driver of internal conflict, not the other way around, as several journalistic accounts erroneously assume. The model is also based on the notion that the goal of intervention in a weak or failing state is to achieve sustainable security, the ability of a society to solve its own problems peacefully without an external military or administrative presence. This is not the same thing as regime stability or continuity. In our scheme, sustainable security is based on internal institutional strength. Sustainable security can be fostered in a failed or failing state through a dual strategy that simultaneously reduces the main conflict drivers while building the state institutions, particularly the core five: the police, military, civil service, justice system and leadership (executive and legislative branches). Representative, legitimate and capable leadership is therefore a necessary, but not sufficient, ingredient in successful state building.

For more than a decade, CAST has been reviewed and evaluated in collaboration with various universities, government agencies, multilateral organizations, and private sector corporations. The first version of CAST was published in *Parameters*, spring 1996. The first manual for practitioners was published in 1999. A software version of CAST began to be developed in 2001. The first annual Failed State Index, based on CAST, appeared in the July/August 2005 issue of *Foreign Policy* magazine. An updated electronic version of the CAST manual for practitioners was created in 2006. Patent approval of a computerized version of CAST was granted in 2006. An Advanced CAST that contains several research functions and correlation capabilities is currently being developed.

CAST consists of four primary steps: 1) evaluating twelve top conflict indicators; 2) evaluating the "core five" state institutions; 3) examining STINGs (surprises and idiosyncrasies); and 4) mapping the conflict on a conceptual map which depicts the typical historical life cycle of a conflict.

> STEP 1: Figure 1 shows the twelve top conflict indicators, broken down into three social, economic, and political/military categories. Each is rated on a scale of one to ten, with one being the lowest intensity (good) and ten the highest (bad). Each indicator has a number of measures, or sub-indicators, which identify the data gathered to rate the indicator. The twelve indicators are fixed in number to allow consistency and comparability of analysis, but there can be any number of measures, depending upon the relevance of the data. (Suggested measures for these indicators are contained on the FFP website, but are too numerous to list here.)

Figure 1: The Twelve Conflict Indicators.

> STEP 2: The second step involves evaluating key state institutions that are necessary to cope with the country's internal problems. These institutions, which constitute the "immutable core" of a state, are:

1. Police force and corrections system.
2. Civil service or professional bureaucracy.
3. Judicial system.
4. Military.
5. Leadership (executive and legislative)

Each is evaluated as poor, weak, moderate, good or excellent, based on three criteria:

i. *Legitimacy*: Institution must be accepted or perceived by local populations as serving their interests.

ii. *Representativeness*: Institution must not be dominated by any single group or faction.

iii. *Professionalism/competency:* Institution must be competent to fulfill its functions in a professional way.

> STEP 3: The third step of the methodology involves evaluating STINGs, an acronym which refers to unanticipated events and idiosyncratic factors that may intensify or reduce the risk of conflict, create a disproportionate impact on the risk factors, or affect the ability of the state to cope. These are the unique characteristics of a country or its cultural foundations that might impact stability. They consist of:

- Surprises (e.g., commodity price collapse).
- Triggers (e.g., assassinations, coups d'état, rigged elections).
- Idiosyncrasies (e.g., non-contiguous or mountainous geographical territory).
- National temperaments (e.g., cultural or religious perspectives).
- Spoilers (e.g., disgruntled followers, excluded parties, warlords).

When considering STINGS, analysts must decide whether, and how, they may affect the ratings already conducted on the indicators and core five. For example, would the 17,000 islands that make up Indonesia disproportionately affect its ability to control demographic pressures, contain insurgencies, promote even economic development or prevent a "state within a state" from emerging?

> STEP 4: The fourth stage of CAST involves applying the findings of the previous three steps to the conceptual map, which depicts the typical life cycle of a conflict and enables an analyst to track the history of conflict risk and future challenges. As shown in Figure 2, the typical life cycle of a conflict goes through five stages reading from left to right.

i. *Stage one* is the root causes of a conflict where an analyst identifies the society (s) with a predisposition for internal conflict, explaining what the history or long-term structural roots of conflict are, such as colonialism, conquest, cultural domination, or religious rivalry.

ii. *Stage two* refers to the immediate causes of a conflict, the events and trends that fuel violence in the short term, such as a controversial policy decision, a rigged election or an assassination. At some point in the evolution of a conflict, a country frequently reaches a decision point. Actually, there are many decision points, of course, but usually

there is one that tips the country toward a violent or nonviolent track. In Illustration 2, the violent track is depicted as the top horizontal dimension, and the nonviolent track is the lower horizontal dimension.

iii. In *stage three*, the transition, the country then either goes into full scale conflict, secession, ethnic cleansing, or disintegration of the state on the violent track or negotiations, state reforms and power sharing on the nonviolent track.

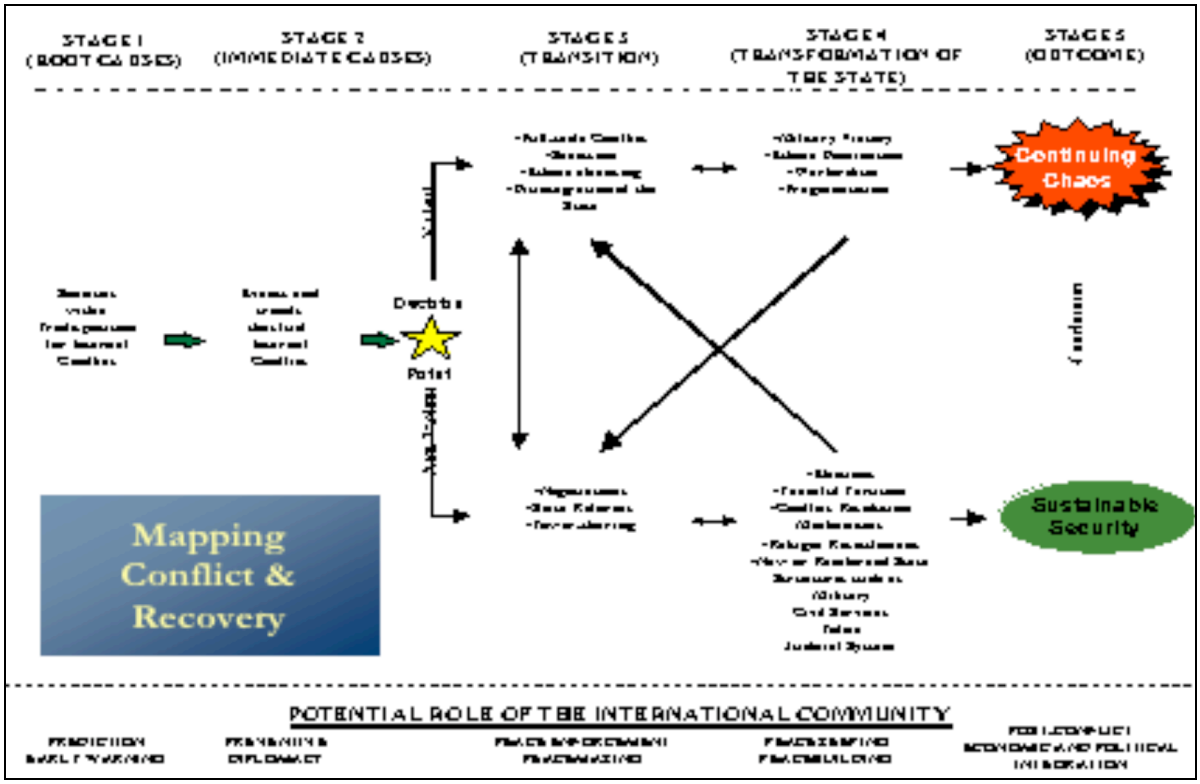

Figure 2: Mapping conflict and recovery.

iv. Depending upon the particular case, *stage four* involves transformation of the state, a stage in which there is no turning back to the status quo ante. On the violent track, the state is transformed through military victory, ethnic domination, warlordism, or fragmentation. Or, if it is on the nonviolent track, it is transformed through elections, peaceful partition, conflict resolution mechanisms, refugee resettlement, and new or reinforced state institutions.

v. Finally, *stage five* is the outcome which is represented in the conflict map as a continuum between continuing chaos or state collapse on the violent track, or sustainable security on the nonviolent track. In actuality, many intermediate outcomes are possible, lying somewhere between the two ends of this continuum, from an autocracy to a fragile power sharing coalition.

This is a dynamic conflict map, which allows the depiction of a conflict both forward and backward, vacillating between violent and nonviolent tracks. Hence, a country which has

reached stage four, that is engaged in elections and conflict resolution mechanisms, can also through a variety of factors backslide into stage three on the violent track. The same may happen in the violent track where a country in full scale conflict in stage three may move toward negotiations, state reforms and power sharing if there is outside military intervention and a peacekeeping force. The arrows in the chart depict the possible or likely changes in a country's conflict life cycle, showing that no evolution or resolution of conflict usually follows a linear progression. Indeed, if a state shows great fluctuation back and forth between the violent and non-violent tracks, it shows that the conflict is highly volatile. The dotted line on the bottom contains a list of potential roles that the international community can play beginning with prediction and early warning in stage one and post-conflict economic and political integration in stage five.

CAST as a methodology can be applied either manually or on an automated basis, based on the patent-approved computer program the FFP has designed to rapidly process vast amounts of public access information which is imported, indexed, scanned, and rated according to the scales indicated earlier. In this study on Iraq, the methodology was applied manually, using a wide variety of public sources. Since the 2003 U.S. led invasion of Iraq, the twelve indicators and several of the specific measures, or data points, to assess the indicators were evaluated month by month, indicator by indicator, for over three years.

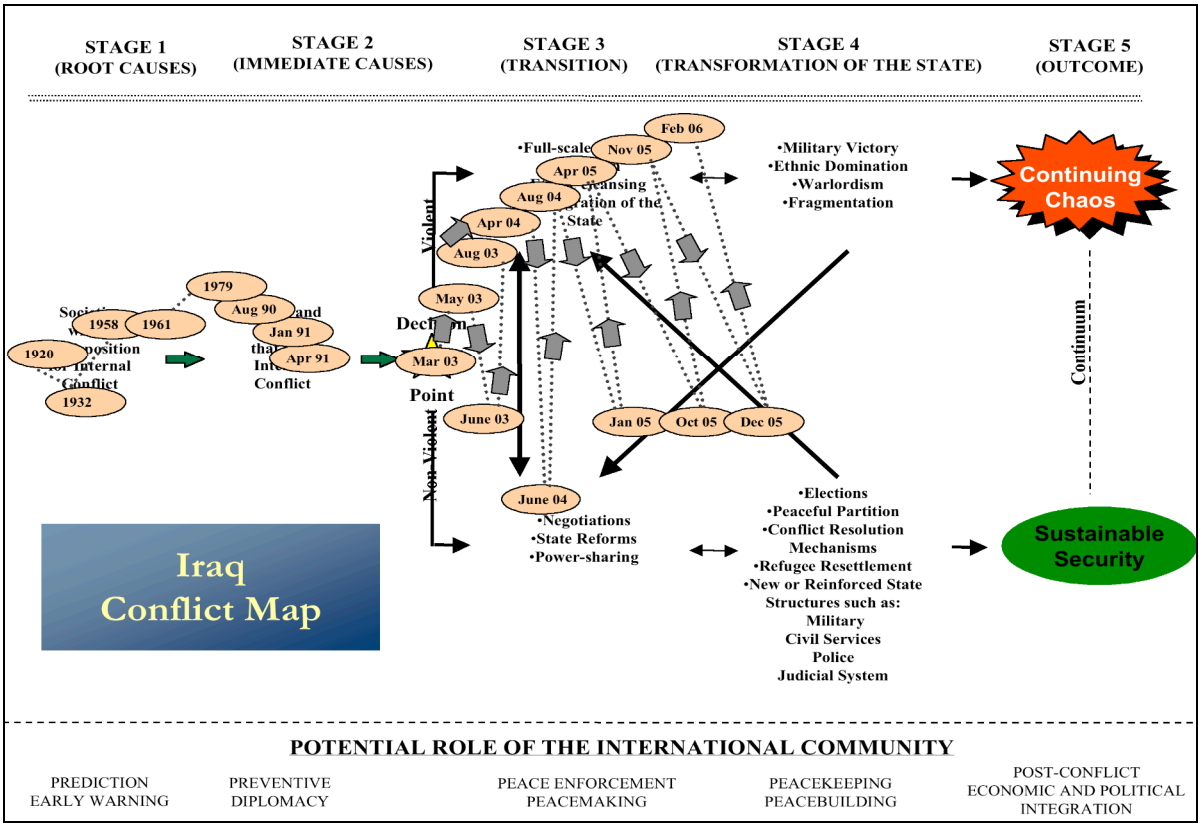

Figure 3: The Iraq Conflict Map.

IRAQ FINDINGS

The Iraq conflict map, Figure 3, shows the evolution of the conflict in Iraq from root causes going back to 1920 through February 2006.The decision point in this case was the invasion by the U.S. led coalition in March 2003. The invasion, however, occurred in a state that already had deep divisions and profound problems. As the map shows, the volatility between violent and nonviolent events over the 2003 – 2006 occupation period was severe. This, in itself, indicates a lack of stability.

The Iraq summary indicator ratings, Figure 4, show the individual scores for each of the twelve indicators from a prewar baseline assessment, which was based on data in the months before the invasion, for every month through February 2006, with aggregate scores at the bottom.

IRAQ: SUMMARY INDICATOR RATINGS

Pre-war through February 2006

Indicator	Pre-war	1-Apr-03	1-May	June	July	1-Aug-04	September	October	November	December	January-05	February	1-Mar-05	1-Apr	1-May	June	July	1-Aug-05	September	October	November	December	January-06	February	1-Mar-06	1-Apr	1-May	June	July	1-Aug-06	September	October	November	December	January-06	February
1. Mounting Demographic Pressures	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
2. Massive Movement of Refugees Internally Displaced Persons	8	8	6	6	6	5	9	9	8	7	9	9	9	8	8	7	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	8	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
3. Legacy of Vengeance-Seeking G Grievance or Group Paranoia	9	6	6	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	8	9	8	9	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	9	10	10	
4. Chronic and Sustained Human Flight	7	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
5. Uneven Economic Development Along Group Lines	7	6	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
6. Sharp and/or Severe Economic Decline	9	10	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	8	8	7	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
7. Criminalization and/or Delegitimization of the State	10	10	10	10	10	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	10	9	7	7	8	9	9	9	9	9	10	10	9	9	9	9	9	10	10	9	10	10	
8. Progressive Deterioration of Pub Services	7	9	8	8	7	8	8	7	7	7	7	8	8	9	9	9	8	8	9	9	8	8	8	8	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	
9. Suspension or Arbitrary Applicat Human Rights	10	5	5	6	6	6	6	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	
10. Security Apparatus Operates as "State Within a State"	10	8	5	6	7	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	9	10	10	10	10	9	9	10	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	
11. Rise of Factionalized Elites	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	10	9	9	9	9	9	9	7	7	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	
12. Intervention of Other States or External Political Actors	8	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	
Totals	101	97	88	92	92	94	98	100	101	98	101	102	102	106	104	100	98	104	108	108	106	104	106	103	104	106	106	109	110	111	111	112	112	110	112

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Figure 4: Iraq summary indicator ratings.

The Iraq indicator totals, Figure 5, plot the scores shown in Figure 4 on a line graph which shows the aggregate trends in Iraq over the same time period. The graph shows, on the x-axis, the time periods from prewar to February 2006 and, on the y-axis, the aggregate ratings on a scale of zero to 120 (transferring the one to ten scale by twelve indicators). On the CAST rating scale, one to 30 is "sustainable," 31 to 60 is "monitoring," 61 to 90 is "warning," and 91 to 120 is "alert."

At the time of the invasion in April 2003 the aggregate indicator score was 101 which shows it was already well into an alert zone. Iraq was, in essence, a failing state at the time of the invasion. However, there was a window of opportunity after the invasion when things began to improve. That lasted for approximately three months, after which the trend line began to worsen (go up), with a brief period of improvement in April to July 2004 when the U.S. led coalition transferred sovereignty to an interim Iraqi government. However, that period did not last long either. Things quickly began to worsen and stayed in a high level of alert ever since. From July 2005 onward, the scores for Iraq have been 110 or above.

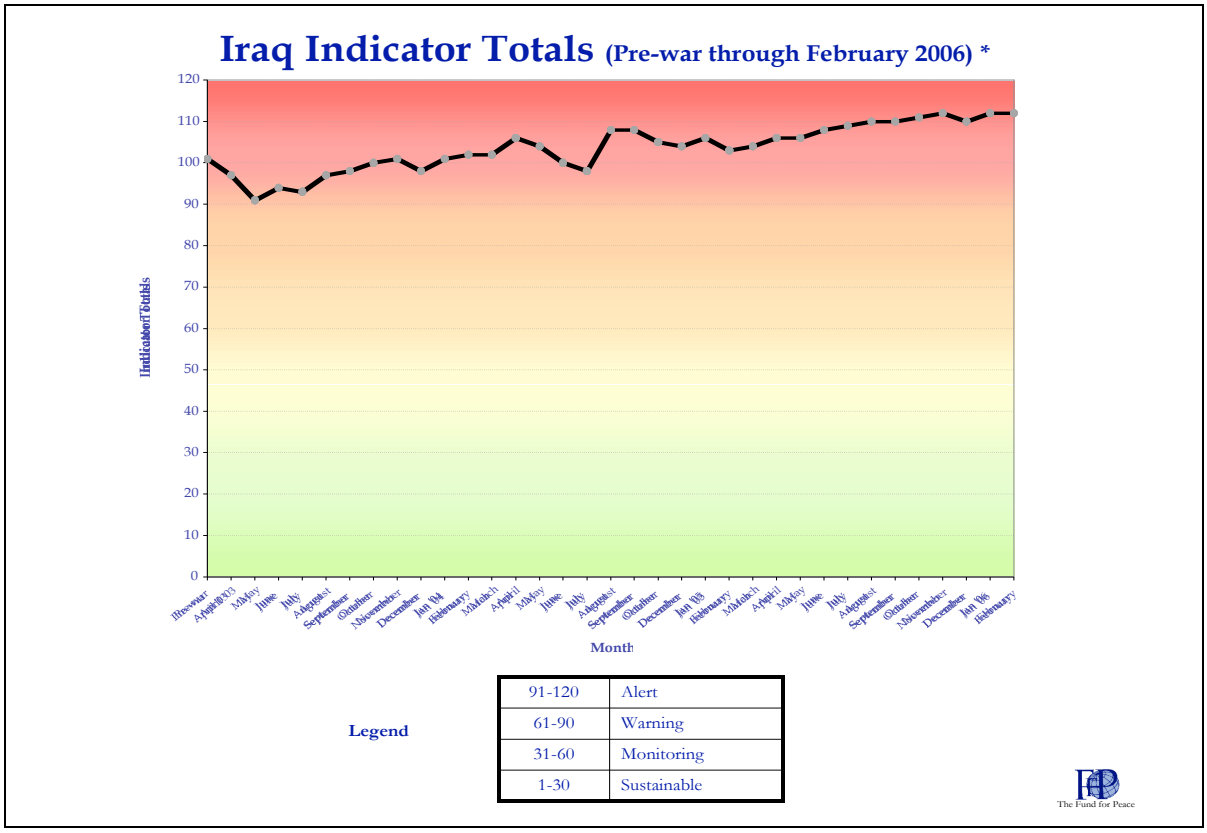

Figure 5: Iraq indicator totals.

Figure 6 shows the aggregate trend line graph enlarged to show sharper details, with correlations to key events. What is noteworthy is that when key benchmarks were achieved that the U.S. saw as progress – for example, the departure of Saddam Hussein, the transfer of sovereignty to the interim Iraqi government, national assembly elections – things actually got worse, not better. Sunnis saw these benchmarks as signs of progressive accumulation of Shia power, thus fueling the insurgency. Despite efforts to bring them in, Sunnis continued to feel disenfranchised and marginalized, subject to increasing domination by Shia with Kurdish support. The insurgency triggered retaliatory violence by the Shia, spiraling into sectarian violence and ethno-religious competition, both within and between groups.

From the beginning therefore, regime change in Iraq was seen by the Sunnis as an internal shift not only in the regime, but in the basic political balance of power in the country, a perception that was worsened by coalition policies that led to the aggregation of Shia power. The Sunnis were without independent sources of income or proportional representation in the institutions (especially the security forces). Rightly or wrongly,

coalition policies that followed the overthrow of Saddam Hussein were seen, in effect, as the collection punishment of a people favored under his regime.

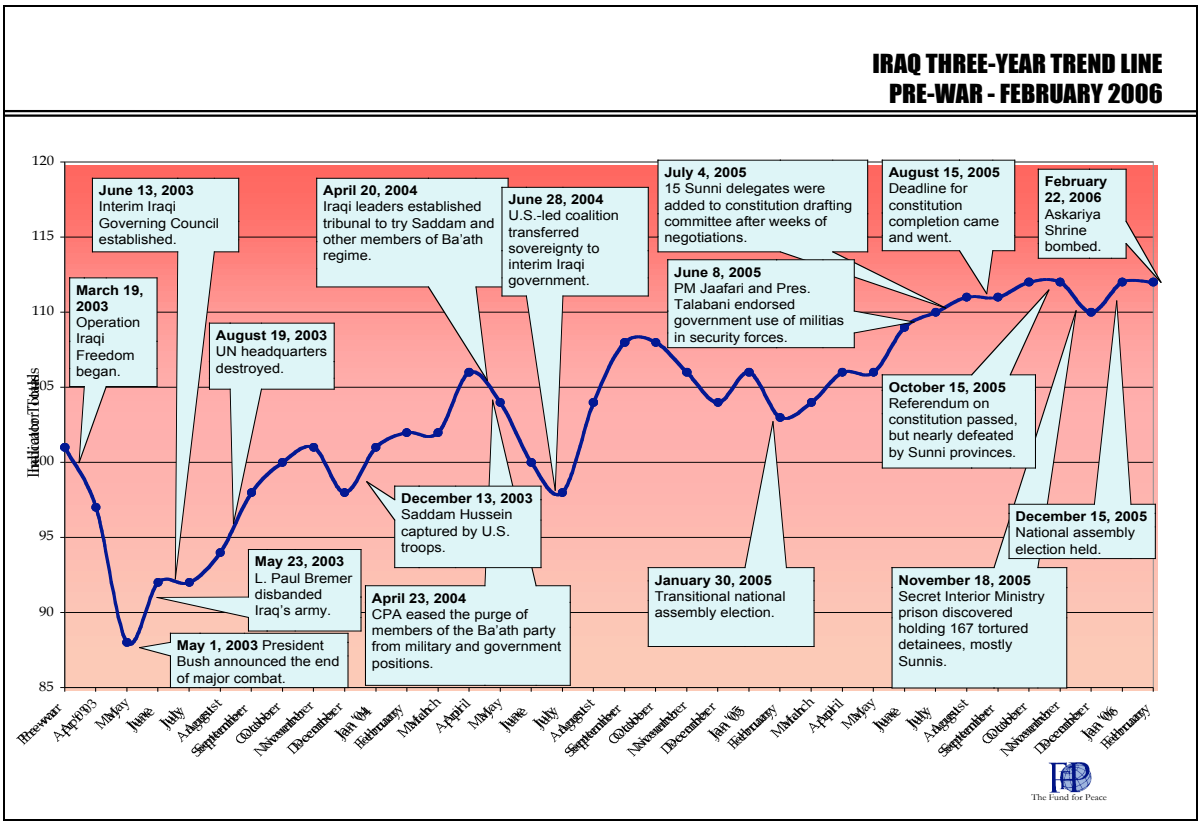

Figure 6: Iraq three-year trend line — Pre-war to February 2006.

CONCLUSIONS

The Bush administration has defined success in Iraq as achieving three objectives:

- Defeating and neutralizing the insurgency.
- Installing a democratic government.
- Making Iraq a model democracy in the Middle East and a strategic partner in the war on terror.

The singular objective of insurgents is to deprive the U.S. and Iraqi forces of these objectives. It is no surprise to learn from this review that none of the U.S. objectives has been achieved since the invasion. However, this analysis documents something more – a trend toward the "Lebanonization of Iraq," in which the country is becoming a battlefield of all against all. De facto partition is already taking place. The reference to Lebanon relates to the 15 year civil war in that country, but it is all the more poignant in light of events in Lebanon in mid 2006.

While there have been many analyses of the mistakes of the past, our review leads us to three primary conclusions:

- *Security*: The U.S. operation in Iraq focused on defeating "the terrorists" with coalition forces failing to deal with changing security threats as they arose – the violence and looting that flared following the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, the subsequent rise of sectarian militias, and their gradual infiltration into the police and military. The occupation should have focused more on protecting civilians, who were caught in the cross-fire. The core of counterinsurgency operations is to win over the population; we did precisely the opposite.

- *Politics*: The power vacuum created by Hussein's overthrow inspired a political struggle for control of the center along ethnic and religious lines. There were no plans for filling that vacuum. As a result, internal competition became fierce despite a U.S. and international military presence. Initially, the U.S. leaned in favor of the Shiites, which encouraged a Shiite-Kurdish political alliance and marginalization of the Sunnis, thus feeding the insurgency. Occupation policies underestimated the sectarian differences from the start.

- *Policy*: Neither the training of the Iraqi security forces nor the rushed electoral process – the twin pillars of the U.S. exit strategy – succeeded in stopping the insurgency, the proliferation of militias, or growing sectarian conflict. The pillars of the policy were based on completing the process of regime change, not fostering sustainable security in a failed state.

In addition to these three primary strategic mistakes, there were also a series of missed opportunities that could provide lessons for future civil-military transitions.

- Iraq was a failing state even before the military invasion; this was not recognized. Future peace and stability operations should be preceded by careful analysis of internal conditions.

- Reconstruction would have been more effective if the billions appropriated for public works programs aimed at grassroots employment instead of large, prestigious infrastructural projects.

- A broad based leadership pool beyond the Governing Council should have been cultivated at the outset. This should have been accompanied by a public debate on the constitution, with commissions that could have allowed broader political participation and established the rules of governance prior to holding elections.

- An immediate and thorough training of security and police forces from all ethnic and sectarian groups should have started immediately, including members of former armed forces of Saddam Hussein. Militias should have been prohibited from the outset, and their forces subjected to a rigorous disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program before they had an opportunity to grow.

- There should have been an agreement on forming a government of national unity prior to holding elections and a constitutional referendum. The effort to create a government of national unity is far more difficult after, rather than before, an election. The Iraqi elections deepened the difficulty of creating a unified government.

- Diplomatic initiatives should have been made early on for regional stabilization of Iraq, including talking to all of the bordering states.

FUTURE OPTIONS

What are the future scenarios at this stage in the game? First Iraq is likely to fragment violently if current trends continue. Second, withdrawing troops precipitously would accelerate this disintegration. A gradual withdrawal of occupation forces is inevitable, but it should be linked to events on the ground and a possible "soft landing" outcome. Third, stability is highly unlikely without a regional settlement involving Iraq's neighbors and other Arab states.

Thus, Iraq and the UN should host an international conference to consider:

- A decentralized Iraq with shared economic assets and autonomous regions.

- A negotiated partition that would include international guarantees for marginalized groups and contested areas.

- An agreed formula for sharing oil resources, based on equitable distributions in the context of an economy that would share a common currency, tariffs and customs and a central bank.

Under current circumstances, the main questions are not whether the U.S. or the insurgents are "winning" or "losing," as most commentators have argued, but whether national disintegration can be reversed, how fast the disintegration will occur if it is not, and whether a "soft landing" with minimal bloodshed can be managed.

The best chance for a reversal of trends lie not in greater militarization of the conflict but in one approach that has not yet been tried: a regional settlement involving Iraq's neighbors and other Arab states, all of whom want Iraq to remain whole and stable. Iraq and the UN should seek the convening of an international conference that will examine such a solution together with internal parties. The conference should consider a managed breakup of Iraq, under international auspices, that could permit the country to function as a common market with shared economic assets, facilitated through a pre-agreed revenue allocation formula for distributing oil revenues among autonomous regions that will have their own governments, police, army, civil service and systems of justice. A negotiated breakup could include regional and international guarantees for protection of marginalized groups and disputed territories.

Such a framework could contain the seeds of a "soft landing" outcome that would be the only way to stem the rapid descent into full scale civil war. Should these alternatives not

prove viable, Iraq is likely to fragment violently, with the full Leban**on**ization of Iraq that could suck in other outside parties, inflame the Shia-Sunni conflict in the region as a whole, impede a larger Middle East peace, and result in a precipitous pullout of coalition forces in a way that would leave a legacy of continuing upheaval and political unrest.