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# Putting Humpty Dumpty Back Together Again: Lessons Learned From State-Building in Iraq

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Putting Humpty Dumpty Back Together Again:  
Lessons Learned from U.S. State-Building in Iraq

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Andrew F. Clark

## Putting Humpty Dumpty Back Together Again: Lessons Learned from U.S. State-Building in Iraq

### **I. Introduction**

In 2003, the United States invaded Iraq to overthrow a tyrant, eradicate a terrorist organization, and destroy an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. Thirteen years later, there are still United States soldiers fighting in Iraq. The name of the war has changed over the last thirteen years. The failed effort to rebuild Iraq after the 2003 invasion illustrates a larger incoherence of the United States foreign post-conflict policy. There are valuable lessons to be learned from this failure because this is surely not the last time the United States will find itself in a situation like it did in Iraq at the turn of the millennium. The threat of failed and weak states did not end in 2011, nor will it end when the so-called Islamic State is defeated. Failed states pose a threat to the interests and security of the United States. Understanding the shortfalls of Operation Iraqi Freedom can help policymakers to address the threat of failed states in the future.

This paper will analyze and discuss the reconstruction of Iraq in three components. The first component will emphasize the importance of this analysis by establishing that failed and weak states are a threat to the security of the United States. The second portion will identify and assess the ends, ways, and means of rebuilding Iraq after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. The third will identify and discuss lessons learned from that effort, and how they apply to U.S. foreign policy going forward. In short, this paper finds and will prove that failed states are, in fact, a threat to U.S. national security and should be treated as such in strategic planning. Furthermore, the original sin of the Iraq War was a failure to understand that winning the war and winning the peace require different ends, ways, and means. Finally, this failure underlines the need for the United States to implement a strategic process for addressing the threats of weak

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states to international security and stability.

## **II. Failed States as a Threat to U.S. Security**

### **i. What are Failed States?**

In the Westphalian System, a state is required to have four components: a permanent population, a defined territory, a government, and the recognition by other states as a sovereign power.<sup>1</sup> The lack of one or more of these criteria determines a lack of statehood, but there is a difference between “not a state” and a “failed state.” Certain territories are not considered a state because they lack only the international recognition criteria. The international community, for example, does not recognize Taiwan as a sovereign state. This is despite the existence of a population, a territory, and a government; rather, it has more to do with political alignment and national interests.<sup>2</sup> Taiwan is very different, however, from a state that is not recognized by the international community (or worse— is recognized) despite the existence of a government that cannot or does not provide basic public goods to its citizens, which constitutes a failed state. It is vital to United States security that this difference be understood.

The best benchmark to assessing the strength of a state is its level of legitimacy.<sup>3</sup> When the citizens of a country do not consider their government to possess legitimate authority over them, the stability of that state quickly becomes fragile. When states exhibit the following qualities they are considered to be weak<sup>4</sup> or fragile states: significant extent of political violence

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<sup>1</sup> Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, Article 1, 1933.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Relations with Taiwan, Department of State September 13, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Stivachtis, Yannis A., Strategic Studies Institute pp. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Weak in this context refers to the the extent of their legitimacy and is not to be confused with the extent of power

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or constant threat of violence, significant control of police over citizens, major political conflict over what ideology will govern the state, lack of coherent national identity, lack of a transparent hierarchy for political authority and decision making, and large extent of control over the media.<sup>5</sup> Even before tensions become violent, these characteristics should serve as red flags to the international community that the government lacks legitimate authority of its territory. When the lack of legitimacy leads to insurgencies or civil war, a weak state can pose a threat to stability far beyond its borders.

**ii. Refugees**

The regional and global consequences of failed states can pose a major threat to the security of the United States through the destabilization of global order. When a state fails, it can send thousands, if not millions, of refugees across international borders, often into states that are not prepared for massive waves of immigration. The latest and most potent example of this is the Syrian refugee crisis. Since the civil war broke out in 2011, an estimated 4.8 million people have fled Syria to escape the civil war.<sup>6</sup> They are fleeing into neighboring countries like Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, and several European countries, almost none of which have the capacity to take in so many refugees. Jordan alone has taken 655,000 Syrian refugees. This number is equal to seven percent of their total population.<sup>7</sup> This level of refugee migration is unsustainable for a largely undeveloped country that is roughly the size of Maine.

Another example of this would be the aftermath of the Rwandan Genocide. In July and

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possessed by the state. See Ibid. Stivachtis pp. 21-23 for a more robust explanation.

<sup>5</sup> Stivachtis *ibid* pg. 23.

<sup>6</sup> UNHCR Syrian Regional Refugee Response, Inter-Agency Information Sharing Portal.

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR, Jordan: UNHCR Operational Update, September 2016.

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August of 1994, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) forced the genocidaire government control out of Rwanda and resulted in between 1.3 and 2 million Hutu refugees flooding into neighboring countries.<sup>8</sup> Amongst these refugees were the Hutu combatants who took part in the genocide and then fought the RPF. These genocidaires found refuge in countries, namely Zaire, that had been sympathetic to the Hutu government during the genocidal years. The RPF helped arm and train a coalition of Tutsi rebel groups in Zaire in order to hunt down the genocidaires who had fled, and to punish the regime that had been sympathetic to them. This led to the First Congo War, which saw the overthrow of the regime in Zaire and the creation of the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1997.<sup>9</sup> This historical example shows the implications that a single failed state can have on regional stability.

**iii. Terrorism**

Another way that weak and failed states pose a threat to U.S. national security is that they are a safe haven for terrorism. Terrorist organizations take advantage of the anarchy that exists within the failed or weak states and settle there for organization and training. This proved to be one of the reasons that the United States invaded Afghanistan after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Frequently, terrorist organizations thrive within a country that lacks either the strength or the will to eradicate them. According to Noah Feldman, “Strong countries... have an interest in building nation-states that seem reasonably legitimate to its citizens, because failed states and those perceived as illegitimately imposed from outside are likely to generate terror.”<sup>10</sup> An example of

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<sup>8</sup> Prunier, Gerard. *The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1995. pp. 312.

<sup>9</sup> Prunier, Gerard. *Africa's World War*. “Rwanda in Zaire: from refugee crisis to international war.” 2009. pp.113-115.

<sup>10</sup> Feldman, Noah. *What We Owe Iraq*. Princeton University Press. (2004). Pg 2.

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this is Boko Haram in Nigeria. The anti-Western Islamist organization wreaks havoc on Nigeria and its neighbors, but the Nigerian government is unable to suppress it largely due to Nigeria's lack of legitimacy. Nigeria lacks the governmental institutions, capacity and transparency to defend itself.<sup>11</sup>

**iv. Weak States and National Security Well-Understood**

Finally, the poignant conclusion of these realities is that failed states trigger a type of domino effect on the region and in some cases on the globe. Not only do the immigration flows and terrorist organizations impact international actors economically and socially, but they can pose a major security threat as well. Policymakers often make decisions implementing a policy of inaction about failed states from a narrow frame of context. This paper contends that national security well-understood,<sup>12</sup> that is national security with a broader understanding of interests and implications, would lead foreign-policy makers to view failed states as a threat to United States security.

The reality of the global impact of failed states can be fully considered by identifying the impact of the Syrian Civil War on Brexit. One of the driving factors for the United Kingdom (UK) to leave the European Union (EU) by referendum in June of 2016 was to regain control over its' immigration laws.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the refugee crisis has spurred a populist movement in several European countries that are calling for leaving the EU. Even in France, a legitimate presidential candidate called for exit from the Union. The future of the EU largely hangs in the balance because of these movements, which are largely due to the massive wave of Syrian

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<sup>11</sup> Adibe, Jidefor, *Boko Haram in Nigeria: The Way Forward* in "Africa in Focus", Brookings Institute. 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*...

<sup>13</sup> As evidenced by multiple news stories in bibliography: Business Insider, NPR, BBC.

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refugees seeking asylum in Europe. The fate of the EU without the UK has yet to be seen, but the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on the future of the European Union is undeniable. The United States' economic ties to the EU make the departure of the UK a major concern for the U.S. This example of regional and global instability is half a world away from the United States, but the realities of these threats are felt around the globe. When the United States rightly understands the implications of failed states, namely the global repercussions that even one small failed state can have, it is abundantly clear that failed states should be considered a threat to United States national security.

The point of national security well-understood is to broaden the scope of implications for decision makers. The National Security Strategy of the United States, produced by the Obama Administration in 2015, succeeded in identifying weak and failing states as a threat to national security.<sup>14</sup> The ways identified to address this threat, however, are entirely insufficient. The National Security Strategy identifies partnerships, a preference to work with “fragile states that have a genuine political commitment to establishing legitimate governance,” and using women as mediators.<sup>15</sup> These ways fall short of what is necessary to prevent state failure, as evidenced by the failure of Syria in 2011. It indicates clearly that the level of severity with which the United States considers the threat of weak states does not yet match the severity of their consequences.

The United States cannot engage and stabilize every weak or failing state, nor should it. The point of this analysis is not to state that all instability is a threat to the U.S., but rather that

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<sup>14</sup> U.S. National Security Strategy pp. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. pp. 10-11.



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even seemingly insignificant states can bear major consequences should they fail. The implications of weak and failing states must be considered more broadly in order to adequately address threats. The following analysis of the reconstruction of Iraq will provide valuable lessons to help create a strategy that will address those threats.

### **III. Phase IV: The Reconstruction of Iraq**

Although the United States did not agree with nor did it particularly like the Ba'athist regime in Iraq, Iraq was not a failed state until the invasion and overthrow of the regime. This paper does not attempt to explain or connote the invasion of Iraq, but rather analytically emphasizes the attempt to rebuild the country post-invasion. Given the previous conclusion that failed states are a threat to national security well-understood, it is imperative to analyze the rebuilding of Iraq to guide potential future operations.

Interventionist reconstruction of a failed state after conflict is a complex and contradictory endeavor.<sup>16</sup> The attempt to rebuild Iraq after overthrowing the Hussein regime was no exception. The United States has a long history of intervention and attempting to bolster a foreign state's capacity. The case in Iraq is a recent example that can inform and advise foreign policy in the future. This section is comprised of three parts: what the U.S. government planned to do in Iraq, what they did in Iraq, and finally, what lessons can be identified from those successes and failures.

#### **i. The Plan**

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<sup>16</sup> Paris and Sisk. *Managing Contradictions: Inherent Dilemmas of State-Building*. International Peace Institute. November 13, 2007. Accessed November 27, 2016. <https://www.ipinst.org/2007/11/managing-contradictions-the-inherent-dilemmas-of-postwar-statebuilding>.

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The first step to assessing the reconstruction of Iraq is understanding the strategy the United States set out for the ends, ways, and means of the mission. The ends are the overarching goals that were set out for the reconstruction of Iraq, or in other words, the end-state of Iraq once the reconstruction had been completed successfully. The ways are actions that were identified in order to achieve those ends. Finally, the means are the assets and resources used to execute the ways.

On June 12th, 2003, Paul Bremer, Presidential Envoy to Iraq, identified the ends of the post-conflict mission in Iraq before the House Committee on Armed Services. He provided three ends for Operation Iraqi Freedom: security and services, economic prosperity, and democratic governance.<sup>17</sup> However, this is not where the significant challenge lies, whether it is rebuilding Iraq or any other failed state. The complexity truly begins when it is time to assign the ways and means towards those ends.

For each end, in theory, there is a set of ways to accomplish that goal. Security as an end of state-building might be better defined as “the monopoly of legitimate use of violence.”<sup>18</sup> While the military was able to succeed against Saddam Hussein quickly, there remained skirmishes and resistance to the occupation in the outskirts of the country. One mean to attaining security in Iraq was to eradicate the insurgents that remained to resist the occupation.<sup>19</sup> Not only was the U.S. military responsible for counterinsurgency operations, but it also was responsible for policing and providing basic services to the major centers of Iraq. Another mean was to

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<sup>17</sup> *Operation Iraqi Freedom: Operations and Reconstruction*. Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives. 108th Congress, First Session. June 12, 2003. Accessed November 29, 2016. Opening Statement by Bremer. [http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/security/has163000.000/has163000\\_0.HTM](http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/security/has163000.000/has163000_0.HTM)

<sup>18</sup> Weber, Max. *Politics as a Vocation*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965. pg. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Committee on Armed Services, *ibid.* Bremer response to Mr. Skelton.

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establish the rule of law in Iraq in order to shift that responsibility to the Iraqis.<sup>20</sup>

To accomplish the end of economic prosperity, the primary mean identified by Bremer was the creation of jobs. The Iraqi economy was “more than fifty percent [unemployed] before the war, and only went up as state enterprises, which make up most of the economy, had been closed down.”<sup>21</sup> This posed a threat not only to economic development in the country but also contributed to the security risk. Due to the significance of the problem and the consequences, Bremer identified creating jobs as the “top priority.”<sup>22</sup> Another mean towards this same end was to shift the economy from state-dominated to a “vibrant private sector to provide...opportunities for all Iraqis.”<sup>23</sup>

Finally, it was clear to Bremer in 2003 that democratic governance was an important end for the reconstruction of Iraq. “Our objective is clear: We want to have an Iraq governed by a democratic process, with a government selected by election based on a new constitution.”<sup>24</sup> According to Stephen Hadley, the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs under President Bush, the Bush Administration had modest hopes for democracy in Iraq at the outset, but upon arrival realized that democratic rule would be the only system in which such diverse peoples would accept the new government.<sup>25</sup> The first mean to achieving this end was to write a new Iraqi constitution. From this constitution, there would flow a representative government that would bring together the diverse ethnic, political, and religious groups of Iraq. This would all be

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Bremer response to Mr. Abercrombie.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Opening statement by Bremer

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> "An Interview with Stephen Hadley." National Defense University. October 7, 2014. Accessed November 17, 2016. pp. 150. [http://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism\\_5-3/Interview\\_Stephen\\_Hadley.pdf](http://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/prism/prism_5-3/Interview_Stephen_Hadley.pdf)

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culminated by free and fair elections in Iraq.

Finally, each way must be assigned specific means to put the strategy into motion. To accomplish security, the means of counterinsurgency and rule of law were identified. Since the beginning of reconstruction, what would be required from a military perspective to defeat the insurgencies in Iraq was intensely debated and discussed.<sup>26</sup> Bremer's response was that he and President Bush wanted to "keep whatever conditions require us to keep here, and our force levels will be determined by what conditions are."<sup>27</sup> The use of U.S. troops was another mean for establishing rule of law. Bremer claims that the military was asked to fulfill a role normally filled by civilians in creating the rule of law and providing services for Iraqi civilians.<sup>28</sup> The mean to establish the rule of law required "substantially beefing up the civilian side of [the] operation... in the Coalition Provisional Authority."<sup>29</sup> In compliance, the military oversaw the training of local law enforcement agencies. Lawrence Di Rita, a special assistant to the Secretary of Defense, identified that the military also provided electrical power to Baghdad and other major cities.<sup>30</sup>

The second goal of reconstruction was to help the Iraqis achieve economic prosperity by creating jobs in a vibrant private sector. The ways to achieve this began by reinvigorating the economy with monetary stimulus. In the beginning, there were two major funding mechanisms to reboot the economy, an appropriated \$70 million action-plan to start community programs, and a \$100 million fund, sponsored entirely by the Iraqis, for completing construction projects

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<sup>26</sup> Committee on Armed Services, *Ibid.* Questions from Mr. Skelton and Mr. Abercrombie

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* Bremer's response to Mr. Skelton.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* Bremer's response to Mr. Abercrombie.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* Dirita's response to Mr. Langevin

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that were started before the war.<sup>31</sup> The coalition immediately recognized and acknowledged that this stimulus was necessary, but it would not be sufficient for creating a vibrant Iraqi economy. What would be required for success seemed to escape Bremer, at least when speaking before Congress. Bremer admitted that they were reviewing what would be necessary for sustainable economic activity by “looking at matters such as the investments that are allowed; the statement of enterprise and a bunch of other questions related to macroeconomic policy.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, the ways for sustaining the vibrant private sector had not yet been identified as of June 2003.

Similar to the ways to sustain the economy, the ways to democratize the Iraqis remained unclear at the beginning of the process. Bremer identified the political council as the means that would be created to serve as the political entity guiding the process. Beyond this, Bremer identified the transformation of public engagement in Iraq as another important way to democratization.<sup>33</sup> He considered the drafting of the Iraqi constitution to be the starting block to creating a legitimate democratic authority. However, there was a “structural problem” in that a new constitution needed to be written.<sup>34</sup> It was known that the existing Iraqi constitution written in 1970 was inadequate for democratic rule but it was unclear how long it would take the Iraqis to write a new one. He hoped that the process would begin during that summer of 2003.<sup>35</sup>

### **ii. The Execution**

The next step to learning from the U.S. efforts in Iraq is to analyze what ends were accomplished, which failed, and why. This section looks at what the United States did during

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Bremer opening statement.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. Bremer response to Mr. Hefley.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. Bremer response to Mr. Meehan.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Bremer response to Mr. Meehan.

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reconstruction, and how it aligned or differentiated from what they set out to accomplish.

It is clear today that maintaining security in Iraq after the invasion was no simple task. The U.S. and Iraqi forces were battling insurgents throughout the entire operation, including during the exit of some U.S. troops in 2011. While overthrowing the Ba'athist regime was accomplished more quickly than expected, securing peace proved to be far more difficult. The military was, in fact, unprepared for what a successful counterinsurgency required; much of their staff, resources, and attention was given to law enforcement, economic development, and providing services. The severity of this failure cannot be overstated. By 2006, the security situation became so poor that soldiers articulated, "It feels like we are just driving waiting to get blown up."<sup>36</sup> The extent of anarchy in Iraq had become so severe that, "even talk of the need for a strongman emerging to re-impose order through martial law no longer seemed far-fetched."<sup>37</sup> The Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), under the Department of Defense, failed to support and prepare the military to "respond to the security concerns that arose in the immediate aftermath of major combat operations."<sup>38</sup> This initial failure to respond to insurgency threats allowed these groups, who in 2003, "[were] not yet organized in any major fashion,"<sup>39</sup> to thrive and pose a major security threat to the state of Iraq and U.S. troops.

In regard to the rule of law and providing services, Don Eberly, a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) staffer in Iraq at the time, pointed out that there was a

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<sup>36</sup> Eberly, Don E. *Liberate and Leave: Fatal Flaws in the Early Strategy for Postwar Iraq*. Minneapolis: Zenith Press, 2009. pp. 22.

<sup>37</sup> Eberly, Ibid. pp. 22

<sup>38</sup> Brennan, Richard, et al. *Ending the U.S. War in Iraq: The Final Transition, Operational Maneuver, and Disestablishment of United States Forces-Iraq*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2013. pp. 23

<sup>39</sup> Committee on Armed Services, Ibid. Bremer response to Mr. Skelton.

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sequencing problem in the ways of securing the peace. He claimed that the rule of law cannot be established before the insurgents can be eradicated. He detailed the corruption and discrimination used by security forces that the United States trained.<sup>40</sup>

The economic end of reconstruction never bore much fruit in Iraq. The United States struggled to rebuild the infrastructure in Iraq and any progress made was often undone by the continued insurgency violence. Just as Bremer struggled to articulate a long-term strategy for bringing investment and sustainable growth to Iraq, so too, the United States struggled in implementing any ways and means on a large-scale effort. Much like how insecurity undermined the rule of law in Iraq, so too did insecurity undermine the growth and sustainability of the Iraqi economy.

The final end of creating a democratic government in Iraq was in many aspects the most complex, leaving ample room for major successes and failures within the ways and means. The United States succeeded in getting the Iraqis to write and ratify a constitution and hold elections in 2005, which was no small feat. Unfortunately, these institutions were not sustainable. This in large part was due to the Sunni majority that took power in those elections.<sup>41</sup> What the United States hoped would come from democratic rule in Iraq was harmony among the diverse ethnicities and religions in the region. What they were unable to do, however, was create a strong central authority and national identity to go with it. There were an estimated 112 political parties in Iraq as early as 2003<sup>42</sup> indicating the state-building effort was unable to create a sense of unity

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<sup>40</sup> Eberly, Ibid. pp. 19-20.

<sup>41</sup> Coyne, Christopher J. *After War: The Political Economy of Exporting Democracy*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Economics and Finance, 2008. pp. 160-161.

<sup>42</sup> Committee on Armed Services, Ibid. Bremer response to Mr. Hefley.

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and urgency from the Iraqi people as a whole. The power of identity in state formation is crucial.<sup>43</sup> The government that was elected in 2005 was unable or unwilling to get buy-in from the diverse stakeholders in Iraq, and the government struggled to maintain legitimacy. This lack of legitimacy created the political vacuum that would lead to the ensuing breakout of violence and essentially the state failure that exists in Iraq today.

**iii. Lessons Learned**

The goal of this paper is to assess what the United States did in Iraq from 2003 to 2011 and identify lessons that can be applied to U.S. policy going forward. This section identifies some of those lessons. There are four major takeaways from the literature. First, intelligence and the implementation of intelligence are crucial to mission success. Second, winning the war and winning the peace can require different ends, ways, and means. Third, liberal institutions do not equate to unconstrained institutions. Finally, history is a guide, not a rulebook.

There was a strategy for post-conflict Iraq and a large amount of intelligence gathered to inform that strategy. Unfortunately, that intelligence never made it to the policymakers' desks. The inability to apply intelligence to policy, particularly implementation policy, was a major factor in the failure of Iraq. "The effectiveness of [the Army's] operations [depends] to a great extent on the quality of the security analysis performed by the analysis prior to intervention."<sup>44</sup> The argument is frequently made that there was no effective security analysis going into the invasion of Iraq, but this simply was not the case. Leading up to the invasion, the Department of State provided an encyclopedia of analysis of the conflict, including the anticipated costs and

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<sup>43</sup> Ellis, Donald G. *Transforming Conflict: Communication and Ethnopolitical Conflict*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006. pp. 71-75.

<sup>44</sup> Stivachtis, *Ibid* pg. 44.



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estimated requirements for success.<sup>45</sup> When the authority for reconstruction was given to Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (under the Department of Defense), this plan was never applied to any security strategy. What Iraq teaches us is that the existence of the information does not inherently mean the implementation of the information. The lesson here then is twofold: it is important to have the in-depth political, security, economic, and sociocultural analysis, but it is null unless that information is implemented into the policies being carried out.

Furthermore, Stephen Hadley identified an important budgetary strategy that was not applied to Iraq. In 2004 the U.S. designed an implementation strategy for Afghanistan that should have been mirrored in Iraq. Hadley referred to it as a “prototype for how we do implementation.”<sup>46</sup> This strategy, designed within the Deputy’s committee at National Security Council, was “a series of initiatives to try to address political, economic, and social issues.” At the same time the Office of Management and Budget “ran an interagency process to find the funding for it so that when we presented it to the Principals and then to the President for approval, it was an implementation plan that had funding associated with it.”<sup>47</sup> The lack of such an implementation strategy in Iraq was an important component of the broader inter-agency implementation strategy that Hadley gave a failing grade in 2014.<sup>48</sup> “The failures of the interagency process, however, do not explain why the military was ill prepared to respond to

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<sup>45</sup> "New State Department Releases on the 'Future of Iraq' Project." National Security Archives. Published September 1, 2006. Accessed November 30, 2016. <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB198/>.

<sup>46</sup> Hadley, *ibid.* pp. 147.

<sup>47</sup> Hadley, *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Hadley, *Ibid.* pp. 146.

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security concerns that arose in the immediate aftermath of major combat operations.”<sup>49</sup> The success of military invasion shows importance of military planning in war, but a failure in planning for post-combat stabilization “left the military unprepared for the postwar task of winning the peace- the ultimate objective of the war.”<sup>50</sup> If the resources necessary for securing the peace had been requested from Congress, it is likely that the United States never would have gone into Iraq.

As previously described, state-building is all about managing contradictions. A lesson to learn from the democratization process is the importance of balancing the creation of “new institutions that are liberal, but constrain them so they do not become illiberal.”<sup>51</sup> As early as 2003, the Iraqis had formed over 100 political parties, and violent insurgents as well as national separatist movements still existed within the territory. The United States assumed that if they could “pull back the oppressive Ba’athist regime, there would be a bunch of little Lockean running around looking for self rule.”<sup>52</sup> This was evidently not the case. The diversity of the Iraqi people, Kurds, Sunnis, Shias, lacked a strong common identity as Iraqis. As Hadley points out, “there had to be a democratic outcome because that was the only way you could keep the country together...[everyone] working together in a common democratic framework.”<sup>53</sup> The U.S. needed to create a national identity to transform the cleft state into a member state.<sup>54</sup> To do this, the Iraqis needed to create, with American facilitation, robust and cross-cutting institutions to

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<sup>49</sup> Brennan, Richard, et al. pp. 23

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Coyne, Ibid. pp. 167.

<sup>52</sup> Blakely, Jason. Lecture, Foundations of Political Theory, Pepperdine University, Malibu, October 2013.

<sup>53</sup> Hadley, Ibid. pp. 150

<sup>54</sup> Huntington, Ibid. 135.

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interlay relationships and interests into common national interests. What the United States failed to realize was that a plethora of institutions does not mean robust institutions. “If the designing and building of effective schools and clinics poses problems, why should one expect that constructing an extended sustainable liberal democratic order will be any easier?”<sup>55</sup> The Iraqis were still struggling to provide basic human services and establish rule of law; the United States should have facilitated and emphasized the creation of these institutions to support and underpin democracy. This likely would have meant the United States exercising more authority over the institution building process than it did to ensure that liberal institutions did not become illiberal. If the United States requires an extraordinarily robust and mature set of institutions to constrain and implement democracy, then it was folly for the United States to believe that democracy in Iraq would work without those institutions.

The final lesson to learn is that history is a set of guidelines, not a rulebook for action. While the study of history is a necessary tool, it is not sufficient for foreign policy. Noah Feldman, who helped the Iraqis write their new constitution, painted a picture that illustrates this point quite poignantly. He describes the scene on the flight to Iraq in May of 2003: “I was in a military transport somewhere over the Mediterranean...most of the passengers were dozing...Those who were awake were reading intently... Not one seemed to need a refresher on Iraq or the Gulf Region. Without exception, they were reading new books on the American occupation and reconstruction of Germany and Japan.”<sup>56</sup> This is a chilling image foreshadowing how the reconstruction of Iraq would unravel.

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<sup>55</sup> Coyne, *Ibid.* pp. 169.

<sup>56</sup> Feldman, Noah. *What We Owe Iraq: War and the Ethics of Nation Building*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. pp. 1.

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In Iraq, the United States leaned too heavily on the model used after the Second World War. The major cultural and historical differences between Iraq and the Axis Powers would have major consequences for the U.S. Germany had the historical foundation, exposure to western philosophy, and experience in democratic governance to sustain a new U.S.-imposed democratic regime after World War II. Iraq, on the other hand, had no historical experience with self-rule and had fundamentally different interpretations of basic philosophical concepts that are essential to western-style democracy.<sup>57</sup> This made constitutional design and implementation difficult, but more importantly, it made creating legitimacy for the system nearly impossible, something that World War II reconstruction never taught the United States. In Japan, the same aspect of Japanese culture that made the war in the Pacific such a nightmare facilitated their occupation. The Japanese would fight until total defeat, which was a significant aspect of the decision to drop the nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But, when defeated, the Japanese were totally submissive to occupation. The insurgency and guerrilla warfare after the defeat of the Ba'athist regime in Iraq were the antitheses of occupations after World War II. Once again, the United States was woefully unprepared for winning the peace in Iraq, a calculation that was clearly influenced by their dependence on these historical examples.

### **IV. Implications for U.S. Foreign Policy**

The final step of this analysis is to prudently apply the lessons learned from Iraq to a strategy that would inform and advise U.S. foreign policy in successfully addressing potential threats posed by weak states. U.S. interests can be divided into three categories: vital, major, and

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<sup>57</sup> Rathmell, Andrew. *Planning Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Iraq: What Can We Learn*. pp. 1019-1020.

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peripheral. Vital interests are easy to identify; they pose a direct threat to the security of the United States. Addressing vital interests requires action that is usually plausible and well-supported. Similarly, peripheral interests are likely to be benign, meaning a laissez-faire policy is often pursued without major opposition. What is truly difficult, and what this section aims to address, are the major threats. These are the ones that pose a formidable, but not a vital threat to U.S. interests and typically bear a significant cost of action. A strategy is needed to address weak states that pose a major, but not vital, threat to the United States.

There is significant literature and historical examples discussing what ends should be pursued to rebuild a state, but what is insufficiently emphasized in the analysis is the prevention and maintenance of weak states. “To be able to design and implement effective preventative or conflict management policies, U.S. policymakers need to have a comprehensive understanding of the political and security situation in the states experiencing domestic strife.”<sup>58</sup> This comprehensive understanding can only come from a robust monitoring system of weak states, so that if intervention<sup>59</sup> is deemed necessary, the United States has the social, cultural, and historical intelligence that has been identified as crucial to success in state-building. Lessons cannot always be transferred across cultural and territorial boundaries; a comprehensive understanding of the region is required. Therefore, specific countries and regions of concern should be researched and briefed well in advance of U.S. military intervention. This ongoing monitoring should include detailed yet concise reporting of the following crucial elements:

- What the relationship between the state and the citizens is

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<sup>58</sup> Stivachtis, *Ibid* pp. 46

<sup>59</sup> In this section, intervention is to be understood as the involvement of U.S. military personnel in state-building, regardless of whether troops were used to resolve the conflict itself.

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- What are the competing sources of identity or loyalty
- How those groups relate
- What are the security concerns for those groups
- Do U.S. national security interests align with those security concerns
- Analysis of politics, economy, and culture both presently and historically<sup>60</sup>

Information from this monitoring program must be applied to a strategy that assesses the risks and benefits of intervening in conflicts that bear significant implications for U.S. security interests. Such a strategy must apply intelligence and monitoring to a broad understanding of security interests and implications. There are three steps to this strategic process. First, the U.S. must analyze the most up-to-date monitoring reports of the weak state. Next, the U.S. must calculate and assess the implications of intervention to United States security interests abroad, as well as the implications of maintaining the status quo (inaction). This would determine accurate costs of each situation and weigh them against the interests and security of the United States. It is pivotal that this assessment be as honest and complete as possible. Again, the implementation calculation for what an Iraqi invasion would require was incomplete and it left the United States woefully unprepared to address the realities of state-building. The last step is to apply moral, ethical, and political implications to those analyses. It is naive to assert that foreign policy is void of domestic politics; this must be an incorporated element of intervention in weak states. This step must be last because when political interests are put before national security interests, administrations are doomed to fail in protecting national security. The result of this process is an assessment of the implications of instability, the broader security interest the United States has in a country or region's success, as well as an accurate reporting of the costs of intervention. This is what national security well-understood demands. Had this strategic process been applied to Syria

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<sup>60</sup> Stivachtis, *Ibid* pp. 45-47.

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in 2011, for example, there would have been two reports. The first would assess the likelihood of Syria failing as well as a calculated estimation of what consequences that failure might bring. The second report would be a detailed account of the costs, economic and human, of intervention in Iraq to prevent failure. These two reports would be weighed against each other and against the political, ethical, and moral implications of action or inaction. This kind of process would allow the United States to act wisely with failed states. When the costs of action and inaction are weighed against the implications of state failure, the United States can put itself in only the state-building situations that are vital to U.S. interests and are winnable.

**V. Conclusion**

The U.S. attempt at state-building in Iraq provided policymakers and academics with an ample supply of lessons learned. The first is that failed states pose a threat to international stability and, in certain contexts, that instability can pose a significant threat to U.S. security and national interests. When the U.S. attempted to rebuild Iraq after the 2003 invasion, they found themselves woefully unprepared for winning the peace. There was a failure to match sufficient ways and means to the ends that had been set out, but even remedying this would not have been enough to redeem the reconstruction process. The analysis of this paper shows that the original sin of Iraq was a failure to accurately assess what would be required of the United States to rebuild Iraq. That lesson has offered valuable insight into how the United States should address international instability through weak states going forward. Iraq has taught us the imperative nature of a robust monitoring system and strategic process to determine the impact of weak states on national interests. With the implementation of monitoring and strategic processes, the United

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States can select only the missions that are within U.S. security interests and can be successful at an acceptable cost.



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