

#1267

4 Nov 2004

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## WHAT NEXT?

### SEEING OURSELVES ON THE ROAD TO DEMOCRACY IN IRAQ

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A PAPER PRESENTED TO THE SPHEX CLUB - - NOVEMBER 4, 2004

### INTRODUCTION

When the rest of you members of SPHEX are scheduled to speak, I know that each of you is confident in the selection of your topic and prepare your paper well in advance. Unfortunately, I must have inherited a genetic trait for procrastination. So when it came my turn to speak, as always I asked myself the sobering question "what next?". Once again I rummaged through periodicals, newspaper clippings, magazines, and postings on the internet for a topic. And, by far, the Middle East dominated the literature. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Americans have been feeling the psychological strain of a riskier world that was amplified by the presidential campaign concluded two days ago when President Bush was reelected. For the first time since the Vietnam era, foreign affairs and national security issues loomed larger than economic concerns in a presidential election. The September attacks and the two wars that have followed created deep divisions and conflicting sentiments over U.S. foreign policy in what we have to concede to be troubled times. (*The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press - August 18, 2004*) In an overview of polling conducted by The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press released on August 18, 2004, dissatisfaction with Iraq was found as shaping opinions about foreign

policy as much, if not more than, Americans' continuing concerns over terrorism. Both attitudes now influence the public's point of view of the U.S. role in the world. Tellingly, the poll found about as many respondents favoring a decisive foreign policy (62%) -- as supporting a cautious approach (66%). In reflecting an ever-widening partisan gap on foreign policy issues, Republicans assign higher priority to decisiveness than to caution, while Democrats do just the opposite.

But, back to the topic. Since Iraq is now the epicenter of world opinion and U.S. foreign policy, I concluded that some facet of our involvement there should be a topic for discussion. Although some of the following issues may be discussed later in the evening, I will not be dealing with such "simple" issues as: regime change; loss of international respect; the preemptive war doctrine; the unilateral versus multinational role of the U.S.; the "coalition of the willing"; effectiveness of the peacekeeping role of the U.N.; domestic anti-terrorism measures and any associated loss of civil liberties; or even the existence or nonexistence of weapons of mass destruction [that pesky little "WMD thing"].

Rather than being bogged down with those "simple" issues, the focus instead will be on where we are and where we are going on the political and ideological path to democracy in Iraq; in other words, "what next?". Tonight's paper is not intended to advocate any particular point of view but is offered in the spirit of discussion and debate on "what next?" for the U.S. and the people of Iraq, let's say, the unknown "X" in the acronym, SPHEX.

#### **OUTLINE OF IRAQ GOVERNANCE TO DATE**

In May 2003, the U.S. "Civil Administrator", Ambassador L. Paul Bremer, took charge of what became known as the Coalition Provisional Authority -- the American occupation

government. Bremer appointed a 25-member governing council to advise him. Like their British predecessors almost 80 years earlier, the Americans selected Iraqis with whom they were comfortable, drawing largely on western-educated Iraqi exiles -- many of whom, including the current interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, had long relationships with the CIA and British Intelligence. The U. S. administration favored secular Iraqis over religious leaders and insisted that women also be included. According to an internet article by NBC News correspondent, Richard Engel (June 28, 2004), the intention may have well been noble, but results were disastrous. Many Iraqis immediately accused the council of being foreign, corrupt, detached and self-serving. Militants assassinated female governing council member Akila Hashimi outside her home two months after she took office.

On June 30, 2004, the U.S. went through the formality of ending occupation of the Iraqi government by handing the reigns of power to Prime Minister Ayad Allawi who is described in the Richard Engel article as a little-known Iraqi exile. Allawi is a British educated, secular Shiite whom the CIA once considered an "asset".

Allawi is not intended to be a permanent solution for Iraq. He is to rule until the scheduled general elections in January 2005. A seven member Iraqi election commission is now largely in charge of the January elections to choose a 275 member national assembly. This assembly will then select a new government to replace the current, appointed leadership and oversee writing a new constitution for Iraq. After a constitution has been adopted, the plan is for a second vote to establish a new government under the new constitution by December 15, 2005. With respect to the elections, a Washington Post article posted on the internet on October 18, 2004, commented that the U.S.-led coalition had anticipated that the

United Nations would have the dominant role in Iraq's elections, as it has in democratic transitions around the world over the past quarter-century. A prominent U.N. role was also considered essential to confer legitimacy on the political transition, which has faced challenges both inside and outside Iraq because it has been widely viewed as controlled by the United States so far. The article continues by saying the U.S. and the United Nations are now caught in a diplomatic Catch-22 . . . . "The Bush administration is disappointed in U.N. reluctance to deploy more staff, while the U.N. is frustrated that the United States has not quashed the insurgency, leaving the country too dangerous for foreign election workers". (id.)

### **BRIEF HISTORY OF IRAQ - THE "MESOPOTAMIA QUESTION"**

A brief history of modern Iraq, let's say the "H" for history in the acronym SPHEX, is revealing on the question of "what next?" after the fall of Saddam Hussein. Iraq today was formed from Mesopotamia, an ancient region in which the world's earliest civilization developed. Mesopotamia included the area that is now eastern Syria, southeastern Turkey, and most of Iraq. The name "Mesopotamia" comes from a Greek word meaning "between rivers", the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. About 3500 B.C., the Sumerians had settled the region and began to build the world's first cities and develop its first civilization. About the same time, the Sumerians invented the world's first system of writing, called cuneiform. The region was invaded and conquered by a number of other empires including the Persians, the Greeks, Romans and Mongols. In the 1500's the Ottoman Empire began to establish control over the region and Mesopotamia remained part of the Ottoman Empire until the British occupied the area during World War I. With the help of Arab allies, the British toppled the Ottoman Empire and when the war ended, the British army was in occupation along with Arab

allies who had fought along side the legendary British officer T. E. Lawrence, known to the world as Lawrence of Arabia. Instead of the vision of Lawrence for an independent pan-Arab state, stretching from the Persian frontier [Iran] to the Suez Canal, the British had to contend early on with an Arab civil war between the Hashemite dynasty, the original custodians of the holy shrines of Mecca and Medina, and the house of ibn Saud, adherent of the puritanical Wahhabi sect of Islam. The house of ibn Saud took over Arabia by force and established Saudi Arabia, which exists today. What is now Lebanon and Syria wound up in French hands and the kingdom of Jordan was created, leaving the British prior to 1920 with occupation of what is now modern day Iraq. The British, just as the Americans today, were faced with the question of "what next?". The first step of the British was to impose direct rule, just as the U.S. has done. The British "civil commissioner", Sir Arnold Wilson, just as U.S. Ambassador Bremer, formed a 25-member consultative body, drawing from Baghdad notables, most of whom were Sunni Muslims who had benefitted under Ottoman rule and understood its operation. The effort of direct rule by the British came to an end in 1920 when the tribes of Iraq rose up in revolt against the British, who had not kept their wartime pledge to grant Iraq independence. This uprising was brutally contained by British troops and bombers and resulted in the British concluding that the cost of direct rule was too high. So, the British created an Iraqi monarchy, giving the throne to King Faisal, a Sunni Muslim little known in Iraq but to whom Britain owed a favor for his role in helping the British against the Turks. Ultimately, Faisal and his descendants ruled Iraq for nearly four decades until the monarchy was deposed by military coup in 1958 that eventually led Saddam Hussein to power.

It is instructive at this point to understand that Iraq is a nation created by the British from three distinct Ottoman provinces namely: Mosul in the north (consisting primarily of Kurds), Baghdad in central Iraq (consisting primarily of Sunni Muslims) and Basra in the south (consisting primarily of Shiite Muslims), all of which are regions which remain distinct today. These regions had existed for centuries under the Ottomans in what was then called Mesopotamia. Each region was under the separate control of a governor and had little in common with the other two. The Basra region included the Port of Kuwait and the “marsh Arabs” who dwelled in the wetlands of the great delta formed by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Basra was the trading city with strong ties to lands throughout the Persian Gulf. The Baghdad region was more closely tied to the Ottoman capital now known as Istanbul and was also one of the main Jewish centers of the Middle East. It is interesting to note that following the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, 120,000 Iraqi Jews abandoned Iraq, virtually en masse. The Mosul region in the north was only nominally subordinate to Ottoman rule and this Kurdish region is culturally distinct from the rest of Iraq. (see, *The Wilson Quarterly* Spring 2003). The desire for autonomy by the Kurds and the dominance of religion in the lives of Sunni Muslims and Shiite Muslims play a critical role on the path to democracy in Iraq. Iraq is a country the size of California with approximately 24 million people. Better than 60% of these are Shiite Muslims. Approximately 20% are Sunni Muslims with Kurds and other minorities making up the remaining 20%. Shiite or Shia - - the terms are used interchangeably and both mean “partisans” - - form one of the two great branches of Islam. About 150 million Shiites are spread around the world, most of them in Iran, Iraq, India and Pakistan. While the Sunni branch makes up the greater part of the global Muslim population

of more than a billion, Shiites form the majority in Iraq - - as many as 15 million out of a population of 24 million. Nonetheless, Shiites, although a majority, have never held power in Iraq nor fully participated in its government, and at times have been brutally repressed.

*(Smithsonian magazine, December 2003 issue)*

The future role of the Shiites is one of the most important issues facing Iraq. Now that their greatest oppressor, Saddam Hussein, who was a Sunni Muslim, is gone, they will no longer tolerate second class status (*id.*) At the same time, others in Iraq and elsewhere, including many in the United States, fear that a Shiite-dominated government might impose an Iranian-style fundamentalist Islamic regime. If a democratic Iraq is to emerge from the ruins bequeathed by Saddam Hussein, both the hopes of the Shiites and the fears of the non-Shiites will somehow have to be accommodated (*id.*). Since the Shiites account for the majority in Iraq, they stand to gain the most by elections. You might remember the influential Grand Ayatolla Ali Sistani, who is a powerful, aged Shiite moderate, wanted earlier elections in Iraq which the coalition forces rejected. On the other hand, the Sunni Muslims, who have historically been in power in Iraq, are resisting the January elections and the Sunni insurgents are fighting fiercely in the Sunni triangle around Baghdad including the fierce fighting going on now in Fallujah, 35 miles west of Baghdad.

The Sunni and Shiite branches of Islam grew out of a ferocious struggle to lead Islam after the death of the prophet Muhammad in 632 A.D. The Shiite faith originated with those Muslims who thought that the wrong side - - that lead by Abu Bakr, father-in-law of the prophet Muhammad - - won, unjustly usurping Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, Ali. (Sunnis believe that Abu Bakr was the rightful heir). Ali did finally become Caliph in 656 but was

assassinated five years later and buried in nearby Najaf (id.). You might remember that the shrine at Najaf was the scene of fierce fighting led by the young Shiite rebel cleric, al-Sadr. Shiites regard Ali's brief reign as the last period of legitimate and just rule on earth.

Iraqi Shiites are a diverse group. Some are educated and middle class, but most are poor Arabs living in rural southern Iraq or Baghdad's slums. They range from the deeply religious to the wholly secular. Their common bond is a memory of discrimination, whether in the form of the mass executions common during the reign of Saddam Hussein or simply in their exclusion from power throughout Iraq's history. Today, the Shiites are confident those days ended with the fall of Saddam Hussein (id. at 100). However, on the road to democracy, the impact of traditional religious and tribal leaders, especially the Shiites, is an unknown factor yet to be determined.

### **TWO VIEWS ON THE MISSION IN IRAQ**

In George H. W. Bush's 1998 memoir, *A World Transformed* (Knopf), the senior Bush explained why he didn't overthrow Saddam Hussein at the end of the Gulf War:

"Trying to eliminate Saddam. . . would have incurred incalculable human and political costs. Apprehending him was probably impossible. . . . We would have been forced to occupy Baghdad and, in effect, rule Iraq. . . . There was no viable 'exit strategy' we could see, violating another of our principles. Furthermore, we had been self-consciously trying to set a pattern for handling aggression in the post-Cold War world. Going in and occupying Iraq, thus unilaterally exceeding the United Nations' mandate, would have destroyed the precedent of international response to aggression that we hoped to establish. Had we gone

the invasion route, the United States could conceivably still be an occupying power in a bitterly hostile land.”

It can be reasonably assumed that when the senior Bush wrote the above passage, neither he nor the rest of America contemplated the terrorist attack that occurred on September 11, 2001. The current administration of George W. Bush decided to forcefully engage al Qaeda and terrorism on foreign soil. This engagement has taken the U.S. into Iraq and now we all must deal with “What next” in the violent and ravaged country of Iraq.

We said earlier the official “what next?” on the road to democracy are the elections in January 2005. As of last week, a major effort by coalition forces is underway in the Sunni triangle against insurgents trying to prevent elections and to drive coalition forces from the country. Whether or not the creation of a democracy in Iraq was an original goal of the coalition forces may be open for debate. I have found two opposing views on that matter which I would like to discuss briefly. The first view has been called the “Lewis Doctrine”, or the neoconservative approach to foreign policy, described in some detail in a February 3, 2004, article appearing in *The Wall Street Journal*. The Lewis Doctrine is named for an 87-year old British scholar named Bernard Lewis. Lewis has undergraduate and doctoral degrees in Mideast and Islamic history from the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London and then spent five years working on Mideast issues for British Intelligence during World War II. Lewis returned to the University of London after the war as a professor where he earned renown in Ottoman and Turkish history. He then went to Princeton in 1974 and soon became a mentor to many of those now known as “neoconservatives”. One internet writer has described neoconservatism as a “political agenda that concentrates on militarily

enforcing an aggressive U.S. foreign policy: (Erik Mattheis, *shockingelk.com*, May 14, 2003). After the terror attacks, political strategist Karl Rove, in the Bush administration, invited Lewis to address some White House staffers, military aides and staff members of the National Security Council. Lewis also met privately with Condoleezza Rice. According to the article, Lewis addressed the U.S. defense policy board and Lewis and a friend, Iraqi exile leader Ahmad Chalabi, argued for a military takeover of Iraq to avert still worse terrorism in the future. It should be noted that Ahmad Chalabi has since been discredited and arrested by coalition forces for allegedly selling secrets to Iran. Later, Lewis met in a private dinner with Vice President Cheney and explained why he was cautiously optimistic the U.S. could gradually build democracy in Iraq. Others influenced by Lewis were Paul Wolfowitz, who has served as Deputy Defense Secretary as well as other members of the Bush administration.

In brief, the Lewis Doctrine calls for seeding democracy in failed Mideast states to defang terrorism. Lewis makes the point that most Islamic countries have failed miserably at modernizing their societies which beckons outsiders, this time, Americans - - to intervene. This failure and Lewis' call for a U.S. military invasion to seed democracy in the Mideast have helped define the boldest shift in U.S. foreign policy in 50 years. The occupation of Iraq is putting this doctrine to the test. The article goes on to observe that terrorism has replaced Moscow as the global foe. And now America, having outlasted the Soviets to become the sole super power, no longer seeks to follow the outmoded doctrine of containing the ambitions of the Soviets and others but is now to confront, defeat and transform. How successful this policy is at remolding Iraq and the rest of the Mideast could have a huge impact on what sort of super power America will be for decades to come: Bold and assertive - - or inward,

defensive and cut off. The Lewis Doctrine says fostering Mideast democracy is not only wise but imperative. The outdated containment theory rested on the premise that even the most aggressive enemy, typically one easily identified, would not risk its own demise by provoking war with a powerful U.S. The Lewis Doctrine assumes no such rational thinking foe. The Doctrine envisions not a clash of interests or even ideology, but of cultures. In the Mideast, the font of the terrorism threat, America has but two choices, "Both disagreeable," Mr. Lewis has written: "Get tough or get out."

After September 11, a book by Mr. Lewis called "What Went Wrong?" was a best seller that launched the historian, at age 85, as an unlikely celebrity. He hit the talk show and lecture circuits, arguing in favor of U.S. intervention in Iraq as a first step toward democratic transformation in the Mideast. He said Iraq, with its oil wealth, prior British tutelage and long repression under Saddam Hussein, was the right place to start moving the Mideast toward an open political system. The article also notes that the Lewis Doctrine is not without its detractors and critics but I will leave it to others to decide how the Lewis Doctrine influenced the decision to start the U.S. on the road to democracy in Iraq.

The second view I would like to discuss was found in an internet article by George Friedman in the *Stratfor Weekly*, dated May 17, 2004. Friedman argues that the only virtue of the Iraq invasion was that it was the best available idea among a series of even worse ideas. In the spring of 2003, the U.S. had no way to engage or defeat al Qaeda. The only way to achieve that was to force Saudi Arabia - - and lesser enabling countries such as Iran and Syria - - to change their policies on al Qaeda and crack down on its financial and logistical systems. To do that, the U.S. needed two things. First, it had to demonstrate its will and

confidence in waging war -- something seriously doubted by many in the Islamic world and elsewhere. Second, it had to be in a position to threaten follow-on actions in the region. Friedman argues that Iraq's only importance was its geographic location. The U.S. needed it as a base of operations and a lever against the Saudis and others, but it had no interest -- or should have had no interest -- in the internal governance of Iraq. Friedman further argues that rather than focus on follow-on operations that had to be undertaken against al Qaeda, the U.S. has instead taken on the occupation and administration of Iraq with most of the burden falling on the U.S. military. More important, the U.S. has also dismantled the Iraqi government bureaucracy and military under the principle that dismantling of the Baathist party of Saddam Hussein had to be accomplished. Over time, the worse conceivable thing in a military operation has taken place: that is, mission creep. Over time, this mission creep has evolved into a new mission: the creation of democracy in Iraq. Mr. Friedman's suggested solution to this mission will be discussed in a few minutes.

### **SOME POSSIBLE SCENARIOS TO "WHAT NEXT?"**

Richard E. Crippes, Chief Market Strategist for Legg Mason Wood Walker, pointed out in an October 2004 newsletter that:

"The 'war' on terrorism is likely to be long-term vigilance of anticipating and thwarting attacks on the U.S. and our allies. As intelligence, criminal, and diplomatic agencies synchronize their efforts and coordinate with allies, an effective deterrent to terrorism will emerge. However, the threat of a rogue nation or small group to engage in a potentially devastating terrorist attack cannot be eliminated entirely. This risk, as it was with a nuclear threat in the Cold War, is a reality of the time in which we live".

So, given this reality of a riskier world, let's discuss a few possible scenarios to "what next?" in Iraq.

One question is to first ask ourselves is a democratic Arab world the solution. And, this depends on how we define the concept "democratic". If by democracy we mean free elections but also free press, free speech, a functioning judicial system, civil liberties, equality to women, free international travel, exposure to international media and ideas, laws against racial incitement and against defamation, and avoidance of lawless behavior regarding hospitals, places of worship and children, then yes, democracy is a solution. If democracy is just free elections, it is likely that a fanatic regime will be elected, the one whose incitement and fabrication are the most inflammatory. (excerpted from a paper entitled "A View From the Eye of the Storm, a talk delivered by Him Harare in April 2004). On the other hand, Mr. Harare comments that certain transition democracy, as in Jordan, may be a better temporary solution, paving the way for the real thing, perhaps in the same way that an immediate sudden democracy did not work in Russia and, he says, would not have worked in China (id.)

Arguing democracy is not a solution, one hard-line scenario to "what next?" appears in an interview posted on the internet on June 24, 2004, between Andrea Mitchell, a correspondent for NBC News, and a 22-year veteran of the CIA who has written a book entitled "*Imperial Hubris*". The author writes as "Anonymous" and argues that we have come to the place where the military is about our only option in spite of January elections and the pursuit of democracy in Iraq. He says the U.S. has not really discussed the idea of why we are at war with an increasing number of Muslims and also it is very hard in this country to debate policy regarding Israel, the sworn enemy of Islam. Iraq is for both Sunnis and Shiites the

second holiest place in the Islamic world. Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda and other of America's enemies in the Islamic world certainly saw the invasion of Iraq as a . . . [form of] . . . a Christmas gift they always wanted and never expected to get. It validated what they all said about American aggressiveness against Islam. It made us the occupiers of the second holiest place for Muslims in the world. In fact, now we are occupying, in the eyes of our opponents, the two holiest places, Saudi Arabia, (which incidentally has one-fourth of the world's oil reserves), and Iraq, and the Israelis are occupying the third, in Jerusalem. The reaction of the Islamic clerical community to our invasion of Iraq was uniformly negative. In response to a question to the writer about what the war in Iraq is to bin Laden, he responded that it is a proof of his thesis that America is malignantly inclined towards Muslims, that it is willing to attack a Muslim country that dares to defy it, that it is willing to do most anything to defend Israel. It's certainly viewed as an action which is meant to assist the Israeli state. It is in every way predictably, if you will, a godsend for those Muslims who believe as bin Laden does. The author also asserts that the real enemy is the radical form of Islam that bin Laden and his followers espouse. And he calls for escalating the level of military activity on a broader scale in the war against al Qaeda no matter what casualties, whether military or civilian, might result.

In the previously mentioned article regarding mission creep by George Friedman, his scenario to "what next?" is for the U.S. to recall its original mission, which was to occupy Iraq in order to prosecute the war against al Qaeda. He says the U.S. now cannot withdraw from Iraq. We can wonder about the wisdom of the invasion, he says, but a withdrawal under pressure now would be used by al Qaeda and radical Islamists as demonstrating their core point: that the United States is inherently weak and, like the Soviet Union, ripe for defeat.

Having gone in, withdrawal in the near term is not an option. However, Friedman also argues that the U.S. must abandon its mission of responsibility for security in Iraq after the invasion. Some might argue that this would leave a vacuum. He argues that there already is a vacuum, filled only with American and coalition targets. It is not a question of creating anarchy; anarchy already exists. It is a question of whether the U.S. wishes to lose soldiers in an anarchic situation. Noting that the bulk of Iraq's population lives in the Tigris and Euphrates valley. Friedman suggests a withdrawal from the river basins and have the U.S. forces relocate around the borders of Iraq. Iraq should then be encouraged to develop a Shiite-dominated government, which he feels is the best guarantor against al Qaeda and the greatest incentive for the Iranians not to destabilize the situation since most Iranians are Shiites. The fate of the minority Sunnis will rest in the deal they can negotiate with the Shiites and the Kurds -- and, as they say, that is their problem. Although this is certainly a psychological matter, there is a retreat. The U.S. would be cutting losses. But, Friedman argues, it has no choice. It will not be able to defeat the insurgencies it faces without heavy casualties and creating chaos in Iraqi society. He argues that creating American-styled democracy in the world is not a holy mission and that the nature of the Iraqi government to come -- or chaos to come -- does not affect the U.S. interests. What affects the U.S. interests is the al Qaeda and the key to al Qaeda is in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and in Islamabad, Pakistan. The invasion of Iraq was a stepping-stone to a policy change in Riyadh and it worked. And, he states that pressure must be maintained and extended to Pakistan. In other words, January elections as well as tribal chieftains and religious differences are internal matters for Iraq and the U.S. should get out of that quagmire and continue its real mission of fighting al Qaeda on a broader scale.

The last suggested scenario to “what next” is for the U.S. to stay the course in fighting insurgents in the Sunni triangle and elsewhere so that elections can be held in January 2005. The hope is that these elections will ultimately lead to some stabilized democratic form of government that will serve as an example for the rest of the Middle East. The vast majority of Iraqis are Shiite Muslims and it is to be expected that they will be the majority party in a new democracy. It remains to be seen whether or not the minorities in the new democracy will have a seat at the table or whether civil war will come. The recent turnout for elections in Afghanistan offers some encouragement that a government will be ultimately established in Iraq and allow an exit strategy for the coalition forces.

### **CONCLUSION**

We’ve discussed some of the history, the “H” in SPHEX, in the ancient and complex country of Iraq as well as several views on the U.S. mission in that country. Now the question is where America goes, or can or should go, from this point forward. In other words, “what next?” in ultimately settling what the British once called “the Mesopotamia question.”

Let’s talk about it.

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November 4, 2004

