

Mitchell Goulding

Professor Solomon Major

International Organizations

16 August 2007

UN and Iraq: The Weakest Coalition

As the United Nations plans to reintroduce itself into the political landscape of Iraq, many realists argue that the United Nations' intervention, much like the intervention of the United States, will fail. While the United Nations argue that the multilateral approach they offer is what Iraq needs, they also submit that the United States will still shoulder much of the responsibility in Iraq. For this reason, Iraq will react with the same fervor at the UN's interference as they do to the United States': mass bombings and civilian casualties.

While UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon argues that the organization of many foreign ministers to help initiate reform in Iraq will work, he also submits that the safety of his officials will remain "of paramount concern." The submission reveals the most important flaw in the United Nations' plan: Iraq has become overridden with violence ever since both the United States and the United Nations entered the war. In fact, following the United Nations announcement of intervention, the death toll of the "quadruple bombing in an area of mud and stone houses in the remote northern desert on Tuesday evening reached at least 250 dead" with "350 wounded making it the deadliest coordinated attack since the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003." (Glanz 2007) This is not a solitary occurrence; the news consistently runs stories of murders and bombings from Iraq every day of the week. Frequently, the United Nations resorts to public condemnations after such attacks occur that were aimed at its' organizations. The results

in these condemnations further solidify the argument that the United Nations' attempted humanitarian mission in Iraq will fail. One of the leading points of views regarding condemnations made by the United Nations contends that these "condemnations can antagonize states and harden their positions, leading to precisely the opposite of the intended effect." (Mingst and Karns 2004) Such examples are also presented by the condemnations against Israel. Following repeated condemnations on Israel for its policies and after "establishing the Special Committee on Israeli Practices in the Occupied Territories to report to the General Assembly on Israeli abuses, Israel remains defiant." (Mingst and Karns 2004). What makes Iraq different? Liberals will argue that human nature is inherently good and can improve its conditions of existence; through collective social instruction and reform, the states injustice and aggression can be mitigated. However, looking at the span of the entire US- Iraqi War, not once has United Nations intervention mitigated the aggression and internal strife between the factions of Iraq. Iraqi religious groups continue to struggle over solitary power over the other, an action explained by realists. The individual factions solely desire to act in order to protect their own interests; with any other group in power, the other faction feels threatened and insecure. Because security remains of utmost importance in the anarchical society we live in, these factions will continue to fight until the state of Iraq is separated, either by bloodshed or United Nations diplomatic intervention. Like liberals, social constructivists believe in an alternative means of reformation in Iraq. Social Constructivism holds the viewpoint that each state is shaped by its shared beliefs and socially constructed rules. While structural forces have minor influences, cultural practices affect behavior the most. Still, it remains impossible for the drastically different religious factions in Iraq to set

aside their differences. Social constructivists' desire to teach them to tolerate the other fails because of each faction's congenital desire to supersede their competition.

The United Nations and United States argue that quality of life has been improving in Iraq for both the Shi'as and the Sunnis; however, the reality lies in the concept of absolute vs. relative gains. While both parties have improved under the concept of absolute gains in regards to availability of services and in some aspects safety, once put into relative perspective, the gains become minimal if existent. To the Sunnis who were once dominant over the Shi'as in Iraqi politics, the rise of the Shi'as under Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki represents a failure and regression into the lower tier of Iraqi societal hierarchy. In the relative position, the Sunnis are in a worse place now than they were preceding the invasion of America into Iraq. Now out of political power, the Sunnis face the same persecution the Shi'as faced under Sunni rule. Not only is the safety and personal interests of the Sunni party at threat, but also the Shi'as have replaced them as the most powerful religious group in the country, causing the relative gains of the Sunnis to actually be a deficit. Not only has UN and US intervention increased the turmoil felt by both religious groups in the country, but it has also had large implications to the region surrounding Iraq. The internal action in Iraq has created problems for other regions surrounding which is a concept known as negative externalities. Described by Coglianesse as a "common problem in protecting common resources or public goods," (Coglianesse 2000) the implications of Iraq's new found independence has led to incompatible state interests and goals between Iraq and the United States. The minimal cooperation that has occurred in Iraq is referred to by Grieco as "epiphenomenal," meaning that the "cooperation phenomena observed is not causal" but "because the

opposing state held the same interests.” (Grieco 1988). The externalities caused by the non-cooperation that has occurred affects many states such as Israel, Pakistan, Syria, and Iran. The overflow of refugees and terrorists has given rise to what the United States was originally trying to avoid: more terrorist organizations in more countries putting the United States own realist goal of safety and security at further risk.

A final and important issue faced by the United Nations as it once again attempts to encroach upon the Iraqi state is its lack of legitimacy in the eyes of the Iraqis. Not only does the United Nations lack legitimacy in the normative perspective, “the validity of political decisions and orders given” are not followed, they also lack legitimacy in the descriptive perspective, a perspective in which the “focus is on societal acceptance of political decisions and political orders as well as belief of subjects rule legitimacy.” (Zurn 2004). Legitimacy of the United Nations is crucial if it desires to succeed in the tumultuous region of Iraq. The reason the United Nations faces such problems is due to the “absence so far of a fully developed transnational political community” which depends “at least partially on a political community built on trust and solidarity.” (Zurn 2004). The United Nations will have to wage a war for legitimacy for decades to come in the eyes of Iraqis. What the UN lacks most from Iraq is trust; no Iraqi can trust an organization so dominantly powered by the United States. Because of the United States’ unique role as the primary actor in the United Nations, any non-partisan citizen can come to the conclusion that any UN intervention involving America will fail. Because America still remains the shoulder of this operation, all attempts at reconciliation and reformation of Iraq for true improvement fall short. To make a difference, the almighty United States

must resign its role in Middle-Eastern politics, including its relationship with Iraq's enemy Israel.

While the United States and the United Nations remain optimistic of their success under the liberal idea that the corruption and aggression in Iraq is all due to misunderstanding and that cooperation can be met, realists meet the UN's decision to participate in Iraq again as fruitless and laughable. No matter how much money and supplies the United Nations—meaning the United States—pumps into Iraq, the situation will remain the same: internal strife and conflict will continue until separate countries are formed. The United States must let go of the idea of success in Iraq as many Americans have already abandoned the concept in favor of focusing the wasted funds on security domestically and social issues such as immigration, education, and healthcare. As liberals and the United States continue to promote their pending success in Iraq, realists should begin looking for alternative methods of supporting United States security and national interest in other regions.

## Bibliography

Coglianesi, Cary. 2000. The Design of International Institutions. *Governance in a Globalizing World*: 160-181.

Glanz, James. 2007. Baghdad: Iraq Toll at 250 in Deadliest Attack of War. *New York Times*. [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/16/world/middleeast/16iraq.html?\\_r=1&oref=slogin#](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/16/world/middleeast/16iraq.html?_r=1&oref=slogin#)

Grieco, Joseph M. 1988. Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism. *International Organizations* 42: 485-507.

Karns, Margaret P. and Karen A. Mingst, eds. 2004. *International Organizations: The Politics and Processes of Global Governance*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Zurn, Michael. 2004. Global Governance and Legitimacy Problems. *Government and Opposition*. 260-287.