

Iraqi Occupation and the Dynamics of Societal Risks

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Abstract

The article deals with the Iraq War of 2003, the post-war occupation and recovery efforts from the perspective of the risk society thesis, exposing the societal risks of post-cold war military strategies. It focuses on three mechanisms with which the United States-led Coalition Provisional Authority endeavored to manage risk: early elections, stable government, and development of civil society. The article finds that there are societal risks associated with the three mechanisms of risk control. It concludes that with the war in Iraq we can identify a new turn in security studies where risk is increasingly human-manufactured, and that it is not enough to cope with such risks through the established mechanisms of risk management.

Key Words: Risk society, securitization, Iraq, societal risks, human security

1. Introduction

On 30 January 2018, President Donald J. Trump in his State of the Union address to the Congress mentioned that migration is a grave threat to national security and that programs used to control migration “present risks we can just no longer afford” (Trump 2018). This speech reflects a trend of widening of the concept of security, which several authors have addressed since 1990s. Back then, responding to political developments such as the end of the Cold War, academic debates revolved around the nature of the unipolar world after the fall of the Soviet Union. Only few have talked about the fundamental transformation of security. Since then, litany of non-military issues have become perceived as potential risks and threats to the existence of a society. Environment, economy, politics, immigration are only the tip of the iceberg, but when they enter into public debate as risks or threats, they become matters of urgency and security, and thus, security issues.

President Trump did not address migration only to talk about risks and threats. He had an agenda, which would provide concrete measures to deal with such insecurities and manage such risks. He talked about Homeland Security Investigations Special Agent who, together with the Department, has “sent thousands and thousands and thousands of ... hor-

rible people out of this country” (2018). Proposals for instruments to counter such risks and insecurities generally accompany talk about risk management and security protection. Current debates about risk and security have also addressed this second aspect of risk and security, the drive for management and mitigation. They argue that in modern society, such a drive has further aggravated the risks it has been designed to mitigate.

What is the relationship between risk and response, and what is the nature of insecurities in today’s world? This article will attempt to address both of these questions drawing on the example of post-conflict management after the Iraq War. In the sections below, the article introduces the three stages of post-conflict risk management measures and their consequences in Iraq after the war of 2003.

2. Post-war Iraq: Risk Management and New Societal Risks

The Iraq War had from its inception been about risk management. It reflected Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld’s new U.S. defense strategy outlined in the Quadrennial Defense Review Report of 2001. The war was about balancing preparations for future risks and responses to present risks. The Iraq War would also test U.S. readiness to respond adequately to force-management risks, operational risks, future-challenge risks and institutional risks, outlined in the same Report (U.S. DoD 2001, 13, 58).

One way to assess U.S. readiness for the Iraq War, is examination of how it prepared for the war. During the planning phase, several U.S. agencies and policy think tanks concentrated on learning the lessons of successful cases of invasion and subsequent occupation (CIA 2002; Dobbins 2003; Dobbins 2008; Crane and Terrill 2003, 17). One lesson of successful occupational risk management was Japan, as reflected in the speech delivered by President George W. Bush on 30 August 2005 at the North Island Naval Air Station in California. Bush cited from a letter sent nearly 60 years ago by Sergeant Richard Leonard to his friend from devastated Hiroshima, “sure, we’ve got to occupy their country and watch them, but at the same time, we’ve got to help them and do everything possible to reconstruct them as a peace-loving nation” (Bush 2005; Carroll 2002, 317). For Bush, risk management meant reconstruction of the occupied country and turning it into an ally of the United States.

What the U.S. aimed at was a “quick-in-quick-out” scenario (Allawi 2007, 12). To achieve this, the U.S. would have to assess and manage risks as it conducted its operations. The best way to manage risk, however, was to deliver freedom and order, and appease the population. Realization of freedom and democracy through elections, and transfer of the sovereignty to the people would legitimize the new regime and, after all, bring stability to the country (Tripp 2007; Dawisha 2009; Marr 2012; Allawi 2007). Elections would satisfy people who had been long disaffected by the Saddam regime, and constitution with legitimate and capable government would bring order back to the society.

The occupation administration set out three ways how to mitigate risk in post-war Iraq: First was conducting early elections. In Japan, a quick move by MacArthur to call for elections was considered very positively by the government and the people, and the same was expectable for long disaffected Iraqis (Feith 2008, 419; Bremer and Connell 2006, 42; Ricks 2006, 158; Elkins, Ginsburg and Melton 2009, 199; Dobbins 2009, 330). Second was reliance on a stable but reformed government. Again, Japanese democratization reforms and constitutional revision, pushed for by MacArthur, would provide an excellent example (Bush 2005; Feldman 2004, 25; Diamond 2005, 39; Feldman 2003, 194; Serafino, Tarnoff and Nanto 2006, CRS-7; Dobbins 2003, 51; Packer 2005). Third was development of a vibrant civil society, which would bring transparency to the government and bolster democracy through engagement of people in public affairs.

What the planners did not give much weight to were societal risks arising out of the negative effects of the Iraq War (Gordon and Trainor 2006). These were new risks, which cropped up as negative consequences of measures taken to defeat Saddam, occupy Iraq and bring order and stability to the country. As seen above, societal risks and insecurities are about identity. Societal security concerns arise out of horizontal and vertical competition which was newly introduced with war. Horizontal pressures include influx of Western culture, as well as cultural impact from neighboring regional hegemons. Vertical pressures would account for ethnosectarian rivalries which developed along the lines of Sunni, Shia, Kurdi and other minority communities.

With the help of hindsight, we know that mechanisms which were supposed to mitigate post-conflict risks delivered the opposite. Elections were boycotted, governments were unstable, order was disrupted with insurgency, and democracy was challenged by re-

ligious extremism. (Schmid and Jongman 1988; Schmid 2011; Fontan 2006; Fontan 2007; Fontan 2009). What went wrong in Iraq? To answer such a question, we need to look into the key mechanisms of risk management, which were introduced after the war in Iraq, elections, government, and civil society, and the problems they embodied.

2.1. Elections

The Iraq War started with the “Operation Iraqi Freedom” which was launched on 20 March 2003, and military operations ended 6 weeks later on 1 May. What ensued was a vigorous move to the resumption of peace and order, starting with replacement of the pre-war and wartime U.N. Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) with the Allied occupation control under the newly constituted Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in Baghdad. Paul Bremer was designated directly by president George Bush to head the CPA, and was to exercise supreme authority in Iraq during the transition period of one year until June 2004, when Iraqis were promised they would regain sovereignty. Preparation for free and democratic elections was one of the main items on the agenda of the CPA. Elections were also closely linked to the drafting of the new Iraqi constitution. Elections and the drafting of the constitution were the two key mechanisms which would guarantee widest and most liberal participation from all corners of the country. They would legitimize the new postwar government (Dawisha 2009, 246; Marr 2011, 287; Allawi 2007, 284).

In mid-July, Bremer appointed a 25 member Iraqi Governing Council with limited authority to draft legislation, report to and advise him on the matters of governing. Bremer originally wanted to assign the responsibilities for drafting of the constitution to the Iraqi Governing Council, but this was vigorously opposed from outside of the government by Ayatollah al-Sistani, who issued a *fatwa* (an Islamic legal ruling) that it was unacceptable for any Iraqi constitution to be drafted by someone appointed by Bremer and not elected by the people (Bremer and Connell 2006, 96; Phillips 2005, ch. 16).

In response to al-Sistani’s intervention, Bremer’s Coalition Provisional Authority came up with an idea to draft a “fundamental law” (TAL, Law of Administration for the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period), which would serve as a provisional constitution until the time Iraq would regain sovereignty, and CPA and IGC are dissolved. Instead, Interim Iraqi Government (IIG) would take over to oversee elections, and elected assembly would then draft the constitution to be voted on by the people in referendum in autumn 2005. The tem-

poral sequence went as follows. First, termination of occupation; second, elections; third, drafting of the constitution; and fourth, referendum on the constitution. These would guarantee the expression of the genuinely free will of the people, and thus return peace and satisfaction to all interested (Dawisha 2009, 246; Marr 2011, 280).

The intervention of Ayatollah al-Sistani shows, that not all was as peaceful as it seemed. The power vacuum created by the war, and the postwar purges and general deterioration of order in public life provided fertile ground for traditional tribal authorities, religious cliques and military leaders to gain from the confusion, and vast quantities of weapons and explosives looted from Saddam's military arsenals guaranteed that local power holders would not stay calm. Security situation during the first half-year of the occupation was deteriorating week by week. Various local insurgent groups were aiming at subverting and disrupting occupation forces, eliminating Iraqi collaborators, but also addressing grievances and sectarian tensions in cities and localities through violence. Such confusion was symbolized by the overtaking of Fallujah by insurgent groups, or operations of Mahdi Army of al-Sadr in Najaf (Tripp 2009, 294; Dawisha 2009, 247; Allawi 2007, 273).

The preparation and execution of elections and drafting of the new constitution magnified this confusion. In November 2004, the interim prime minister Ayad Alawi declared martial law, and U.S. and Iraqi forces led a massive assault on Fallujah, leaving behind a ruined "ghost city" and a mass of internal refugees and radicalized insurgents. Iraqi Army's Shi'a and Kurdish troops were accused of deliberate targeting of Sunnis. As a result, most Sunni Arab political groups decided to boycott the election, which was one month ahead, and in more than 100 armed attacks, more than 44 people were killed at the day of the election. The results of the election were expectable (Poitras 2006; Allawi 2007, 391; Marr 2011, 287; Dawisha 2009, 246). They left Sunni Arabs with almost no representation in the new National Assembly, and thus minimal say in the Constitutional Committee. Thus the election was not a mechanism that would provide legitimacy and manage societal risk. To the contrary, elections were the cause for further fragmentation and escalation of tensions within Iraqi society. They manufactured risk and identity insecurities.

2.2. Government

Once the election was accomplished, the appointed prime minister Alawi was replaced by Ibrahim al-Jafari, and nothing was in the way of consolidation of properly functioning

government and of drafting the new constitution. However, al-Jafari was also considered as a caretaker prime minister, and ministerial posts were distributed primarily on factional basis. This meant, al-Jafari would have little control over operations of ministries, which became small fiefdoms of patronage, favoritism, and corruption. The ministry of interior, for example, was occupied by Shia Islamist political party called Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). Its leader and the new minister of interior Abdul Aziz al-Hakim was later accused of using the party's militia (the Badr Brigade) to terrorize Sunni communities and murder Sunni clerics. Sectarian conflict reached new levels again, and many were murdered around mosques simply because of their religious identity.

After pressure from the U.S., al-Jafari invited 16 new members into the Constitutional Committee. They were mostly Sunnis, and they would assure the Sunni community's consent to the final draft. However, this invitation only aggravated the disputes within the committee about the essential characteristics of the future state. For example, many Shia and Kurdish parties were favoring to a federal system, while some Shias, like Ayatollah al-Sistani, were opposed, and Sunnis, including powerful Muqtada al-Sadr, denounced it as a plot of Iranians and Americans to divide Iraq. The final draft of the constitution was a vague arrangement, stating that Iraq has a federal, democratic, parliamentary and republican system of government, that it would be a single independent federal state, with Islam as the fundamental source of legislation, and that no law that contradicts the principles of democracy would be valid. The constitution was passed into law in a popular referendum on 15 October 2005, but its vague language only fueled tensions around contentious issues (Tripp 2007, 300; Allawi 2007, 403; Feldman 2008, 121; Marr 2011, 296; Dawisha 2009, 246).

New elections were announced for December and Sunnis chose to participate this time. The new prime minister to replace al-Jafari was Nuri al-Maliki, determined to tackle issues of insecurity, insurgency, public utilities, unemployment and reconstruction. Although all institutions of truly independent sovereign and democratic government were in place, they still provided little answers to the tasks ahead. Ministers were reluctant to listen to al-Maliki, guarded their posts from the prime minister, extended their patronage and even used their own paramilitary units to achieve their ends. Federalism aided sectarianism and fragmentation, and entrenchment of corruption at the ministries navigated the country towards shadow economy (Dawisha 2009, 259). The country was fragmented by clientelism and corruption, a variety of mutually hostile local masters with their own mili-

tias, and they were confronted by nationalist and Islamist resistance fighters and community protection forces and vigilante groups. Those who benefitted little from U.S. financed reconstruction projects engaged in their obstruction and subversion. Baghdad and other cities had little electricity and water supply, hospitals were damaged, undersupplied and overcrowded, and unemployment rate skyrocketed (Tripp 2007, 288-289; Poitras 2006). Communal and sectarian violence was further escalated by attacks on sacred monuments, mosques and markets, and by a vicious cycle of reprisal and retribution. At the same time, the U.S. and Coalition forces were hermetically closed in the Saddam palaces of the Green Zone protected from the outside of Baghdad by a thick wall (Chandrasekaran 2006).

Introduction of a democratically elected government was supposed to provide a reliable guarantee of delivering public services, financed from the U.S. sources and Iraqi oil wealth. However, three years after the war, the democratized and liberalized country was on the verge of civil war. In this area too, risk management was replaced with ceaseless manufacture of new societal risks and insecurities.

2.3. Civil Society

The last mechanism of risk management was construction of vibrant civil society and, consequently, solidification of social trust, which would pave the way for pacification, democratization, and reconstruction of the war-ridden country. On 31 May 2003, in a speech in Krakow, President Bush emphasized the role of rebuilding Iraq by reviving its civil society. He said “we must help nations in crisis to build a civil society of free institutions. The ideology of terror takes hold in an atmosphere of resentment and hopelessness, so we must help men and women around the world to build lives of purpose and dignity. In the long term, we add to our security by helping to spread freedom and alleviate suffering” (Bush 2003). For long time, U.S. have been lukewarm in their Middle East policy towards emphasizing democracy, freedom, human rights and civil society. Iraq War seemed to bring a genuine change in the region.

Civil society is a concept particularly appealing to the promotion of democracy, because it is neutral. It refers to the voluntary associations beyond family or clan, which are at the same time separate from the state. These vary from interest and advocacy groups, labor unions, chambers of commerce, business associations, religious foundations, non-profit organizations, to less formal ones, such as societies, clubs, research circles, neighborhood

associations, or social and religious movements. After the fall of the Saddam regime, a number of studies have focused on the importance of associational life and civil society in Iraq (Carothers 2003; Davis 2005; Ross et al. 2003; Eisenstadt and Mathewson 2003; Mann, Bajraktari and Karam 2004; Allawi 2006; Allawi 2007; Ottaway 2004; Levine and Bishai 2010).

As a part of the effort to build democratic institutions in Iraq, civil society development figured substantially among the U.S. goals during the planning for invasion. When the short war ended and initial organizational turbulence settled down, Coalition Provisional Authority started to draft a Strategic Plan, Vision for Iraq, of July 2003, and placed civil society together with provision of essential services to the second place of priority, only after security. The ranking later changed, but putting emphasis on civil society was reflected in the administrative organization of the Authority, where the Governance Office would enjoy high status. The budget and staff number allocated to the Governance Office did not necessarily reflect the importance of the office, but its plans for engagement with people in localities were impressive.

The Governance Office set out to work on democratizing Iraq from below by drafting a wide-reaching program, which pledged to “train and assist Iraqi political parties, women’s groups, youth groups, and other civic organizations; fund civic education efforts in support of democratic values, the constitutional process and the November 15 agreement; build up the production facilities and professional capacity of the mass media” and four other points, which related to elections and the government (Diamond 2005, 71). What they aimed at, in essence, was teaching democracy to 25 million of Iraqis in the timespan of a few months. But this was not an easy goal, considering the dearth of personnel, time, and money, and the fact that the population did not speak English and looked at the invasion force with suspicion. Were Americans in Iraq just to teach Iraqis that democracy equals majority rule with minority rights, and that it depends on a culture of tolerance, negotiation, compromise, and restraint? Did they come to Iraq and hold Iraqis at a gunpoint, only to say that democracy is good?

As time went on, local programs became more established. The programs supported groups, which organized lectures and discussions, and drew posters and pamphlets emphasizing democratic values. Still later, the focus was shifted to the training of advocacy-based civil society organizations, which would organize forums or make appeals in local govern-

ments or councils. The more sustainable cases relied on professional groups, such as bar associations or doctor's associations, and those most effective were women's organizations. This was an ominous task, considering that they would have to do so sometimes in unstable regions, including Baghdad. But, despite the efforts, the evaluations were lukewarm (Brandstetter and Fontan 2005; Webb et al. 2007a; Webb et al. 2007b; Barbour, Brill and Swedberg 2012; Bowen 2009; Bowen 2013). Most organizations did not know how to raise funds themselves, and they believed that they would have to depend on local governments or international donors.

There was one more general and deeper concern within the civil society, which had to do with the credibility of the U.S. commitment. After all, almost all of the democracy rhetoric, when put in packages, sounds foreign to the people who live in remote localities. Advocacy of women's rights is fully justifiable, but when it comes packaged in Western values, it may, as well, produce the opposite effect in the community. When advocacy for freedom and democracy is met with public breakdown, drones, disorder, and sectarian violence, democracy activism may be mistaken for spreading propaganda. Working at a local level demands cultural sensitivity. The act of mutually acceptable engagement is much more important than the message being delivered. As Julia Fontan says, even benevolent acts of humanitarian aid, democracy promotion, and gender empowerment might be met with feelings of humiliation and resistance on behalf of the Iraqi people (2009, 4).

Family and community, and beyond all, honor is a paramount value to Iraqi culture. Badly justified occupation feeds into the feeling of shame that men and women were not able to protect their community. Divisive freedom and questionable material aid, no matter how benevolent, may contribute to the feelings of humiliation, not mitigate them. The Coalition Provisional Authority attempted to manage risk by capturing the "hearts and minds" of Iraqis. However, what it achieved was again, manufacturing of new societal risks and identity insecurities, which revealed themselves in the form of unprecedented anti-occupation insurgency and ethnosectarian violence (Fontan 2009; Diamond 2005, 301; Chirarelli and Michaelis 2005; Allawi 2006; Kilcullen 2009).

3. Conclusion

In the State of the Union address mentioned in the introduction, President Donald

Trump uttered words like security, danger, threat, and risk not only in relation to migration. Trump was talking about rival countries, rogue regimes, corrupt dictatorships and their reckless pursuit of missiles and nuclear weapons, all within the more traditional areas of security. He celebrated police, praised military, thanked veterans, and urged refurbishment of nuclear arsenal. However, he also referred in his speech to non-traditional security issues, such as floods and wildfires, school and public shootings, and crime and terrorism with the same rhetoric of threat, risk and danger as he used for the more traditional hazards. His speech reflects the growing public awareness about the changing nature of risk and security today (Trump 2008).

Such awareness existed at the outbreak of the Iraq War, and the reconstruction of Iraq was supposed to be the showcase of capable risk management. U.S. troops defeated Saddam's forces in a few weeks, and with plentiful aid and expert staff, Coalition Provisional Authority was charged with the task to show the liberated Iraqis the real get-up-and-go. High ideals of speedy democratization and reconstruction of the country soon dissipated with growing violence. With the help of hindsight, we can judge how successful the U.S. were with their ceaseless efforts in security management and risk control. An expert in counterterrorism David Kilcullen commented, "I likened President Bush's decision to invade Iraq to Hitler's invasion of Russia, and that's no exaggeration: the two blunders were exactly equivalent" (Kilcullen 2016, 16; Kilcullen 2009; Ricks 2006; Gompert, Binnendijk, and Lin 2014, 174, 179). The U.S. spent directly over 60 billion dollars for rebuilding the country, which was thriving on income from oil. Yet the country was without electricity, water was not running and infrastructure was falling apart. Instead of managing risks, the post-occupation Iraq encountered new societal risks and insecurities, which have remained there ever since.

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