

Chapter 11

Other Issues

Iraqi Public Opinion and the Occupation

Polling organizations have carried out many opinion surveys in Iraq since March 2003. The results of these polls, including those sponsored by the US¹ and UK² governments, show clearly that Iraqis are very critical of the foreign presence in their country.

A poll, carried out in mid-2006 for the US Department of State and reported by the *Washington Post*, found that “a strong majority of Iraqis want the US-led Coalition forces to immediately withdraw from the country, saying that their swift departure would make Iraq more secure and decrease sectarian violence.”³ The results in Baghdad, according to the *Post*, showed that nearly three-quarters of residents polled said “they would feel safer if US and other foreign forces left Iraq,” with 65 percent in favor of an immediate pullout.⁴

In September 2006, a World Public Opinion poll conducted by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland confirmed the conclusions of the State Department poll.⁵ According to the poll, 71 percent of Iraqis wanted their government to ask for the withdrawal of foreign forces within a year or less.⁶ Compared to previous polls, Iraqis’ urgency for withdrawal had grown and support for an open-ended presence had dropped considerably.⁷

Polls have consistently shown that a substantial majority believe that the presence of US troops has increased violence in Iraq. PIPA’s September 2006 poll found that Iraqis believe, by an overwhelming margin of 78 to 21 percent, that the US military presence is “provoking more conflict than it is preventing.”⁸ A survey conducted by the Iraq Centre for Research and Strategic Studies in November 2006 produced similar results, showing that nearly 66 percent of respondents thought the security situation would improve and violence would decrease if US forces were to leave.⁹ Such findings were confirmed by British research firm Opinion Research Business, according to which, a majority of Iraqis feels “the security situation in Iraq will get better in the immediate weeks following a withdrawal of the MNF.”¹⁰

A common theory heard in the streets of Baghdad is that the US military is deliberately creating a civil war in Iraq to have an excuse to stay.¹¹ In addition, a very large majority believes that the US will remain in the country, even if the Iraqi government asks it to withdraw, and that the US government plans to maintain permanent bases in the country – a view shared by all ethnic groups in Iraq.¹²

In 2005, a secret military poll by the British Ministry of Defence revealed that a large proportion of Iraqis (45 percent) believed attacks against US and UK troops were justified.¹³ After January 2006, the support for attacks against US forces increased

substantially and as of September 2006 had reached 61 percent, with strong majorities in support of attacks amongst both Shia and Sunni respondents.¹⁴ Approval for such attacks is highly correlated with the belief that the US plans to have permanent bases in Iraq.¹⁵ PIPA points out that “if the US were to make a commitment to withdraw according to a timetable, support for attacks would diminish.”¹⁶

It is interesting to compare these poll results with the widespread view, expressed by the US and Western media, that a Coalition withdrawal would lead to a great increase in chaos, bloodshed and misery in Iraq.¹⁷ The majority of Iraqis evidently do not agree.

Poll results also reflect Iraqis’ broad discontent with conditions in the country under the occupation. In 2006, PIPA estimated that 79 percent of Iraqis say that the US is having a negative influence on the overall situation in Iraq.¹⁸ A 2007 poll conducted by D3 Systems for the BBC, ABC News, ARD German TV and USA Today shows that, in addition to violence and the lack of security, Iraqis deplore their poor living conditions, including the lack of availability of jobs, clean water, electricity and medical care, and have low expectations that things will improve in the future.¹⁹ According to a British study in 2005, 71 percent of Iraqis say they rarely get safe clean water, 47 percent say they never have enough electricity, 70 percent say their sewage system rarely works and 40 percent of southern Iraqis say they are unemployed.²⁰

Cost of the War and Occupation

Iraq has sustained enormous costs during the conflict, yet economists have made little effort to estimate what those costs might be. Colin Rowat of the University of Birmingham has made a preliminary effort. He has used data from the International Monetary Fund and the Iraq Central Bank to study Iraq’s economic shortfall from expectable peacetime levels of GDP.²¹ Drawing on Rowat’s calculations, Anna Bernasek of the *New York Times* estimates Iraq’s economic losses in 2006 at roughly \$24 billion.²² During the four years of conflict, loss on this scale might have totaled \$100 billion or more. But the real cost for Iraqis is much higher than foregone GDP. It must also include the economic costs of the premature deaths, long-term injuries, brain drain, destruction of cities and infrastructure, massive displacement and relocation of people and many other factors. There is much more work to be done by economists on this subject, but in the end these tragedies cannot be measured in purely economic terms.

For the United States, the conflict has been extremely expensive – far more so than policymakers first estimated. Office of Management and Budget Director Mitch Daniels announced prior to the war that the cost would be around \$50 billion,²³ but as of December 2006 Washington had actually had spent approximately \$400 billion in direct government appropriations for the conflict. These budget costs are rising rapidly in 2007 and are likely to rise much further in the period beyond.²⁴

US federal war costs are buried in complex Pentagon budgets, but we know that they have risen from about \$4 billion per month in 2003 to more than \$8 billion per month in late 2006.²⁵ In fiscal year 2006 alone, Iraq war spending may have been as high as \$120

billion and estimates suggest that 2007 spending could reach \$170 billion.²⁶ To these costs must be added the budgets for Iraq reconstruction grants, the costs of building up Iraq's military forces, the cost of secret intelligence operations, and more.

Future costs of the Iraq conflict will depend on the number of troops deployed, the nature of the military operations and the length of the conflict. With Washington sending 20,000 or more additional troops in the first half of 2007, spending will certainly increase substantially and could rise beyond \$12 billion per month in 2007. So the budgetary cost may approach \$600 billion by the end of 2007 and could eventually approach \$1 trillion.

The US Federal budget figures, large as they are, greatly under-estimate the true cost of the war. Economists Linda Bilmes and Joseph Stiglitz point out that the budgeted costs do not account for the economic effect of military deaths and injuries (over 3,000 US soldiers have died and more than 23,000 have been wounded²⁷) for which death benefits, life insurance and medical treatment will be paid for long into the future.²⁸ Nor does it include the increased costs of armed forces recruitment, or demobilization. A real assessment of the costs, Bilmes and Stiglitz argue, should also take into account a wide array of other costs, ranging from the replacement and depreciation of military equipment²⁹ to macroeconomic costs such as higher costs of oil, interest paid on the national debt³⁰ and other long term negative impacts on the economy.³¹ Bilmes and Stiglitz put the estimated total cost in a range from \$1-2.2 trillion, an estimate they made prior to delivering the paper in January 2006.³² But in a subsequent version of the paper, published about nine months later, they concluded that the costs were running much higher and that a \$2 trillion estimate was "low."³³ The Iraq Study Group report, released in November 2006, used a \$2 trillion figure as definitive.³⁴

The costs incurred by other Coalition members for their contingents should also be taken into account, but the calculation exercise is exceedingly difficult, given the many small contingents and the hidden budget numbers for many participant governments. The biggest of Washington's partners, the UK, offers some glimpse of other Coalition costs. Though the UK government has hidden its Iraq expenditures and did not make them available to Parliament or the public, researchers using the Freedom of Information Act discovered that the UK had spent about £4.5 billion (about \$9 billion) for its military involvement in Iraq as of late 2005.³⁵ According to some estimates, and in spite of substantial draw-down of forces, each additional year in Iraq will cost the UK treasury an extra £1 billion.³⁶ So UK costs as of late 2006 would total about \$11 billion. Such budgeted figures do not take into account costs such as refurbishment or replacement of military equipment that the British Ministry of Defence will eventually have to cover.³⁷ Nor does it take account of the many other long-term costs including death benefits and health care costs for veterans.

These enormous and upwardly-spiraling war costs soak up precious national resources that could be spent on schools, hospitals, transport, alternative energy and many other citizen priorities. Since the US war costs are financed by Federal budget deficits, future generations will eventually be required to pay the bill.

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- ¹ US Department of State, *Iraq Civil War Fears Remain High in Sunni and Mixed Areas* (June-July 2006) The report has not been made public. The Washington Post obtained the report and described some of its findings in: Amit R. Paley, "Most Iraqis Favor Immediate US Pullout, Polls Show" *Washington Post* (September 27, 2006)
- ² British Ministry of Defence, *Secret Military Poll* (October 2005) The report has not been made public. The Sunday Telegraph obtained the report and described some of its findings in: Sean Rayment, "Secret MoD Poll: Iraqis Supports Attacks on British Troops" *Telegraph* (October 23, 2005)
- ³ Amit R. Paley, *op.cit.*
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ World Public Opinion Poll, conducted by the Program on International Policy Attitudes, University of Maryland, *The Iraqi Public on the US Presence and the Future of Iraq* (September 27, 2006)
- ⁶ *Ibid.* p.4
- ⁷ "Support for an open-ended commitment has dropped from 29 percent to 9 percent." See "Most Iraqis Want US Troops Out Within a Year" *WorldPublicOpinion.org* (September 27, 2006)
- ⁸ World Public Opinion Poll, *op.cit.* p.5
- ⁹ Iraq Centre for Research and Strategic Studies, *Public Opinion Survey in Iraq: Security & Political Situations* (November 2006) p.13
- ¹⁰ Opinion Research Business, *Public Attitudes In Iraq: Four Years On* (March 2007)
- ¹¹ Paley, *op.cit.*
- ¹² World Public Opinion Poll, *op.cit.* p.9
- ¹³ British Ministry of Defence, *op.cit.*
- ¹⁴ Most Kurdish respondents (85%) disapprove. See World Public Opinion Poll, *op.cit.* p.8
- ¹⁵ World Public Opinion Poll, *op.cit.* p.9
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ See, for example, Michael R. Gordon and Alissa J. Rubin, "Chaos Is Seen in Iraq Exit, But Experts Split on Degree" *New York Times* (May 27, 2007)
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ D3 Systems, *Iraq Poll 2007* conducted for the BBC, ABC News, ARD German TV and USA Today (March 2007)
- ²⁰ British Ministry of Defence, *op.cit.*
- ²¹ "Iraqi GDP Since 2003: Some Simple Calculations", draft text provided by the author dated March 30, 2007
- ²² Anna Bernasek, "An Early Calculation of Iraq's Cost of War" *New York Times* (October 22, 2006) This article was based on an earlier version of Rowat's paper.
- ²³ Cited in: US Department of Defense, *Donald Rumsfeld Media Stakeout* (January 19, 2003)
- ²⁴ James A. Baker III and Lee H. Hamilton et al. "The Iraq Study Group Report" *Vintage Books, New York* (December 2006)
- ²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 32
- ²⁶ Caren Bohan, "Costs for the Iraq War Approach Record – US Official" *Reuters* (December 19, 2006)
- ²⁷ US Department of Defense, *Personnel and Military Casualties Statistics* (February 2007)
- ²⁸ Linda Bilmes and Joseph Stiglitz, "The Economic Cost of the Iraq War: An Appraisal Three Years After the Beginning of the Conflict" Paper delivered at the *American Social Science Association* meeting, (January, 2006)
- ²⁹ According to the Washington Post, about 40 percent of US military equipment has been destroyed, amounting to a value of about \$17 billion. See Ann Scott Tyson, "US Army Battling to Save Equipment" *Washington Post* (December 5, 2006)
- ³⁰ Ironically, the US government pays for the war by deficit financing, which is covered by borrowing from international lenders and investors. Because of a lack of savings within the United States, the US government must borrow from such sources, deepening the net foreign debt of the country in a way that many economists see as potentially destabilizing.
- ³¹ Bilmes and Stiglitz, *op. cit.*
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 30.
- ³³ Linda Bilmes and Joseph E. Stiglitz, "Encore" *Melkin Institute Review*, Fourth Quarter (2006)
- ³⁴ Baker and Hamilton, *op.cit.* p. 32
- ³⁵ Cited in: Iraq Analysis Group, *The Rising Costs of the Iraq War* (March 2006)

³⁶ House of Commons, *Defence Select Committee, Sixth Report: Chapter 4, Challenges in Southern Iraq* (March 16, 2005)

³⁷ Iraq Analysis Group, *Rising Costs*