

# Rendering an Account on Iraq

By Colonel Daniel Smith, USA (Ret.) | March 18, 2004

The first anniversary of the beginning of the 2003 war against Iraq is upon us.

Like good and faithful stewards, it is time for the Bush administration to give an accounting to its employer, the U.S. public. Some questions relative to the Iraq war and the period following for those entrusted with the nation's future—and honest answers from them—might include:

What has been achieved over the past year?

- Saddam Hussein's brutal, self-serving, and surprisingly incompetent regime has been removed from power. Most of the former regime's key players have been killed or captured, including Saddam himself.
- Oil production has finally been restored close to the pre-war levels, but it remains below pre-1990 levels.
- Electric power, rationed before the war and completely lost during the U.S.-UK bombardment, is back on more than it is off.
- Schools have been rebuilt and re-opened, and hospitals are receiving medical supplies.
- At the provincial and local (town and village) levels, the Iraqi people are choosing councils to discuss and resolve local issues. Baghdad alone has 88 such councils. Civil society is beginning to emerge in many areas, but its development remains susceptible to the security situation.
- A "Law of Administration for the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period" has been adopted by the U.S.-appointed, 25-member Iraqi Governing Council. Due to go into effect July 1, 2004, it is to serve as the guide for elections of a National Assembly, the appointment of an interim government, the writing of and referendum on a new Iraqi Constitution, and the election of a full-fledged federal-style government. On the other

hand, it may only lead to divisive wrangling and the disintegration of Iraq.

What remains to be done? How long will it take?

- Find the weapons of mass destruction that the Bush administration said made Saddam Hussein an imminent threat to the U.S., the original justification for starting this war. The search may be scaled back by the June 30 transition of power from the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to the transitional government; it probably will end by December 2005 when the permanent government is to be elected.
- Obtain as soon as possible a full and public explanation of the use or abuse of information by the intelligence agencies in forming their judgments, and the use or abuse of intelligence by policymakers in their communications with the U.S. public and with other governments.
- Provide reliable, consistent physical security for the Iraqi population. The old regime had, at most, passing interactions with al Qaeda "adherents." Now Iraq has become a battleground not only involving disaffected Iraqis but also extremists targeting U.S. forces and Iraqis working with the U.S.-led CPA or foreign military forces. This may not be achieved for as long as five years, and certainly not until a better trained, reliable police force, border police, and regular army are available.
- Rebuild Iraq. While a start has been made, the remaining tasks are enormous. Other nations have pledged about \$14 billion for this effort; the U.S. contribution so far is more than \$20 billion. Estimates of the final cost vary, but most are in the \$75 to \$100 billion range, with some predicting as much as \$200 billion over the next decade.



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- Ensure to the extent possible a real and complete transition to democratic governance from the CPA to the transitional authority to the interim government to a permanent, popularly elected government by December 2005. The UN should exercise independent authority to help in this transformation.
- Assist nongovernmental organizations in their attempts to count Iraqi civilian fatalities, provide restitution to survivors, and compensate those Iraqis wounded by coalition forces for their injuries.

What has been fundamentally changed by this war?

- Iraqi society, but exactly how remains undetermined other than a change in leadership. Political, ethnic, religious, and gender relationships, rights, and responsibilities are all in flux. The new Constitution, yet to be written, if approved (which may be a major hurdle) will establish a framework on which these considerations can be arranged and woven into a national fabric. But how strong the fabric will be will not be known until it is tested—which might take years.
- Enmity toward the U.S. has increased in the Islamic world as a whole, even in Turkey, a NATO ally.
- The U.S. administration has enshrined—and, in invading Iraq, attempted to justify—as policy the concept of preventive war, which previous administrations had only “reserved the right” to use.
- Control of the Spanish government shifted. The Conservative government, one of three pro-war ruling parties in Europe, disregarded the Spanish public’s overwhelming opposition to the war, and lost the March 14 elections when it seemed to be trying to suppress evidence about the perpetrators of the multiple train bombings on March 11, 2004.
- U.S. military spending increases have accelerated, deficits have mushroomed, and the national debt and the annual cost to finance it have ballooned.
- For Fiscal Year (FY) 2005, the accelerating military budget—\$471 billion if a \$50 billion supplemental emergency spending bill is requested in January 2005, as expected—will rival the anticipated federal deficit of \$477 billion for FY2004.
- Interest payments on the burgeoning debt, driven largely by the two “policies of choice”—the war in Iraq and tax cuts—will increase dramatically under the Bush administration’s forecast. While military spending as a percentage of federal outlays is projected to drop from 18.8% in FY2005 to 17.1% in FY2009, net interest on the debt will climb from 7.4% of federal outlays in FY2005 to 10.5% in FY2009.
- Net interest is the only budget “superfunction” (the others are national defense, human resources, physical resources, and “other”) that is forecast to increase as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over the same time period—and that in the face of total federal outlays themselves decreasing as a percentage of GDP.
- Increased wariness among other states of U.S. unilateral motives for action, with a predictably less hospitable reception for U.S. suggestions and less support for positions favored by Washington.

What has been lost or placed in jeopardy?

- Lives: more than 565 U.S. military and civilians, including 15 military and 6 U.S. civilians in March alone.
- Lives: 59 UK military and more than 40 others from coalition nations.
- Lives: 21 UN workers.
- Lives: an estimated 10,100 Iraqi civilians and an unknown number of Iraqi military.
- Lives: 201 civilians in Madrid on March 11, 2004.
- Lives: all the physically and psychologically wounded, including the seven Iraq war veterans who committed suicide after their return to the U.S.

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- The positive image of the U.S. in the world and the credibility of U.S. intelligence among U.S. allies.
  - U.S. relations with NATO allies and other friends.
  - The economic well-being of future U.S. generations saddled with the increased debt.
  - Continued presence of Spanish troops (1,300) in the coalition force; these will leave by June 30 unless the UN passes a new resolution specifically endorsing the continued presence of foreign forces in Iraq. Others have indicated similar sentiments.
  - International law and the foundations of international law. So long as the U.S. elects to act unilaterally or with coalitions of “the willing” or of “the intimidated,” the development of viable international security structures will continue to be undermined.
- Democracy cannot be imposed by force or by an outside power.
  - In war as in all life, the law of unintended consequences governs. Reality has an iron law of its own: one never knows what one doesn't know until those unknowns reveal themselves.

Above all, war is not the answer.

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What was (or should have been) learned?

- Preventive (the administration's “preemptive”) war cannot be “justified.”
- In peace operations and nation-building (or rebuilding) endeavors, well-planned, swift responses are required to prevent the development of a security and public safety vacuum. It is less costly if the intervening multinational force is powerful enough to be unmistakably “in charge” vis-à-vis armed groups, which might otherwise try to intimidate the population or even seize control of the country in question.
- Building coalitions and obtaining the backing of the UN spreads the responsibilities, burdens, and costs of diplomatic and—where necessary—military actions. Strong coalitions, endorsed by the UN, by presenting a solid world front, can induce a retreat from confrontation by a state whose policies and actions are offensive to the majority of nations.
- The UN is, in general, better equipped to undertake the necessary tasks of political transition and democratic change than are individual nation-states.
- Diplomacy is less expensive in human and financial terms than war and war's aftermath.

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Published by Foreign Policy In Focus (FPiF), a joint project of the Interhemispheric Resource Center (IRC, online at [www.irc-online.org](http://www.irc-online.org)) and the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS, online at [www.ips-dc.org](http://www.ips-dc.org)). ©2004. All rights reserved.

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Recommended citation:

Col. Daniel Smith (Ret.), “Rendering an Account on Iraq,” (Silver City, NM & Washington, DC: Foreign Policy In Focus, March 12, 2004).

Web location:

<http://www.fpiif.org/commentary/2004/0403iraq-ann.html>

Production Information:

Writer: Col. Daniel Smith (Ret.)

Editor: John Gershman, IRC

Layout: Tonya Cannariato, IRC

**p. 4**

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