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# Enemy Images, Coercive Socio-Engineering and Civil War in Iraq

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# Enemy Images, Coercive Socio-Engineering and Civil War in Iraq

TOBY DODGE

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Previous attempts to explain US policy towards Iraq from 2003 onwards have understood US intentions and actions through a coherent, rational-utility-maximizing model of the state. This article seeks to de-centre this rationalist explanation by examining the ideational drivers that shaped the Bush administration's understanding of Iraq and hence its policy towards the remaking of its post-invasion politics. In order to gain ideational coherence, both the Iraqi Ba'ath Party and the Sunni community were understood through a 'diabolical enemy image' schema. As a consequence, an 'exclusive elite pact' was constructed, a post-war political system specifically built to exclude former members of the Ba'ath Party and marginalize the participation of the Sunni community. This policy of exclusion drove the country into civil war. One side, Iraq's new ruling elite, fought to impose a victor's peace, the violent suppression of former members of the old regime. On the other, those excluded launched an insurgency to overturn the post-war political order.

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On 15 December 2011, in a fortified compound at Baghdad International Airport, the US Secretary of Defence, Leon Panetta, oversaw the formal end of America's military presence in Iraq. The event marked the departure of US troops, eight years and nine months after the invasion.<sup>1</sup> A comparison to President Bush's 'Mission Accomplished' speech on 1 May 2003 is instructive. Bush's speech celebrated the invasion of Iraq as the personification of American virtue; 'we have fought for the cause of liberty and for the peace of the world'. For Bush, the moral purpose of the invasion was justified by the export of democracy to Iraq. In March and April 2003, Bush saw what he thought were Iraqis celebrating their liberation on the streets of Baghdad. For him this proved, 'the ageless appeal of human freedom', in this case a freedom delivered by the force of American arms.<sup>2</sup> By comparison, Panetta's farewell speech was a great deal more sober and downbeat. He certainly stressed the sacrifices that both Iraqis and Americans had made over the previous nine years. However, given that the Bush administration had placed the political and economic transformation of Iraq at the centre of their war aims, Panetta's description of what the mission had ultimately achieved was decidedly modest; Iraq now had the ability to 'govern and secure itself'. Given the outcome of the US-led invasion and regime change, Panetta's modesty is hardly surprising.<sup>3</sup>

For the Bush administration, America's commitment to a post-invasion Iraq was conceived within strict limits; in the aftermath of the war US forces were to

be rapidly reduced and Iraq's own oil revenues would fund the country's reconstruction. However, a rising tide of violence after the invasion put paid to such optimistic scenarios. By the summer of 2003, a resistance movement aimed at overturning the US-imposed new order had already begun to attack American soldiers. By April 2004, this insurgency had grown into outright rebellion. In 2004, the US suffered 849 military casualties, with its yearly losses peaking at 904 in 2007.<sup>4</sup> By 2005 and 2006 the tempo and scope of the violence had dramatically increased. After two nationwide elections in January and December 2005, Iraq entered a bloody intra-communal civil war. The death toll caused by this internecine conflict steadily increased, with 16,800 civilians killed in 2004, 20,200 in 2005 and 34,500 in 2006. Violence directed at the civilian population reached its peak in October 2006 when 3,709 were murdered in a single month.<sup>5</sup>

As the violence in Iraq spun out of control, there was a tendency, in both journalistic coverage and initial academic analysis, to stress the inter-communal nature of the conflict.<sup>6</sup> This 'primordialization' of Iraq both absolved US policy-makers of blame for the civil war but also played to deeper, longer running, Orientalist stereotypes of the Middle East. The United States had sought to bring democracy to Iraq but irrational, violent Arabs were more intent on killing each other than enjoying the benefits of American-delivered freedom and capitalism. A decade after the invasion a much more nuanced analysis of the causes of Iraq's post-war descent into violence is possible. This avoids the Orientalist idea of the inevitability of ancient hatreds leading to civil war. Instead, it is anchored in a detailed examination of the evolution of US policy towards post-war Iraq. This approach identifies the political settlement imposed upon the country by US policy after the invasion as the central driver of conflict. Iraq's new political settlement, initially constructed under the US occupation, then expanded and institutionalized by a group of formerly-exiled politicians empowered by their allies, was based around a 'victor's peace' and an 'exclusive elite bargain'. The new structures of governance and politics were deliberately constructed to exclude those thought to be members of or complicit with the old ruling elite. It is this victor's peace, deliberately created to exclude a section of society that drove Iraq into civil war. This article details the effects of this exclusive elite bargain but also explains its causes. The origins of Iraq's post-war political settlement can be traced back to the ideational understanding of Iraq shared by the dominant decision-makers in the Bush administration. George W. Bush, Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld and key advisers at the Pentagon, Paul Wolfowitz and Douglas Feith, all made sense of Iraq and America's role in the country by deploying a 'diabolical enemy image' schema. This allowed these key decision-makers to ideationally order a complex and alien society of which they knew very little prior to the invasion. It also shaped the moral sense of certainty that both propelled the US government to invade Iraq but also drove its post-war sense of mission. However, this schema also encouraged the United States to pick certain groups of people to form Iraq's new ruling elite, and more importantly to exclude others.

### Cognition, Enemy Images and the Historiography of US Involvement in Iraq

Given both the hubris and optimism that drove US forces into Iraq in 2003, scholarship on American policy in Baghdad needs to explain why, as Anatol Lieven put it, the US insisted on 'kicking to pieces the hill of which it is king',<sup>7</sup> the counter-productive policy decisions made during the first year of the occupation and the resulting escalation in violence from 2004 to 2007.

There has certainly been a massive volume of literature published on the US relationship with Iraq in the run up to the invasion and in its bloody aftermath. However, a curiously small amount has actually focused on trying to explain what drove the specifics of the US policy process from 2001 to 2011. Instead, the literature can be divided into three major categories. The first, is by eyewitness journalists explaining how the occupation and then civil war unfolded on the ground, the application of policy-making by the occupation authorities in Baghdad or the policy-making process itself in Washington DC. The best of these offers an invaluable source of information for further academic study, but were not written as deeply analytical or consciously academic texts.<sup>8</sup> The second set of works was written by US policy-makers once they had left government service. On the one hand, the vast majority of these works are acts of transparent self-justification, blame shifting and attempts to shape as positive a historical record of the protagonists' role as possible. On the other, they offer an invaluable source on actions taken and the intent behind them. As will become apparent below, these works of self-justification, once subject to critical analysis, are more revealing about the ideational drivers of policy than their authors had obviously intended.

The final set of works on US policy includes academic texts, of which, however, only a small number actually deal directly with what shaped the US policy-making process. The majority are instead exercises in international relations (IR), focusing on the large structural drivers of US policy. Raymond Hinnebusch's work, originating from a leftist position, represents the best example of this approach. However, a rationalist, utility maximizing intent is inferred from what are assumed to be the US hegemonic goals in the region.

The seizure of Iraq's pivotal oil fields would make appeasement of the Arabs superfluous; Iraq could be used to break OPEC and destabilize unfriendly Muslim oil states... the seizure of Iraq would allow the US to secure access to Arab oil without Arab alliances and consent and to remove the last remaining constraints on total US commitment to the achievement of 'Greater Israel'.<sup>9</sup>

There are three problems with such an approach. First, the United States is anthropomorphized, conceived of as a highly rational unitary actor. It is aware of the long-term threats to its global and regional position and deploys its unrivalled power to meet them. Second, evidence for this thesis is largely inferred from actions taken. Debates within the highest levels of government, the often incoherent policy-making process itself and unintended consequences are either left unexamined or taken for granted. Given the huge costs that the United

States suffered in Iraq, amounting to a major foreign policy defeat, these oversights are troubling.

A second academic approach to the foreign policy of the Bush administration and its attitude towards Iraq, places explanatory stress on the ideational drivers of policy. The best example of this is the work of Jean-Francois Drolet.<sup>10</sup> By focusing on the influence of ideology, this body of work escapes the limitations of more mainstream approaches within IR. However, it rarely follows through from archaeological investigations into the ideational roots of foreign policy behaviour to how those ideas actually shape the policy-making choices of key individuals within government. The result is a major disconnect between the ideational drivers of decision-makers, the decisions they ultimately take and the consequences.

A third body of academic literature does indeed focus on the policy-making process both in Washington but also in Baghdad.<sup>11</sup> However, the works that seek to do this from a leftist position have a tendency to reproduce a number of the underlying assumptions of Hinnebusch's approach. The US hegemon is perceived to be in dogged pursuit of its rationalist interest-maximizing goals. Depending on the degree of ruthless brutality assigned to US intent, the violence that accompanied the fulfilment of these goals was either an unintended outcome of policy incoherence or an acceptable cost.<sup>12</sup> Such a highly rationalist approach marginalizes the power that the ideational has in the shaping of foreign policy decision-making. The policy mistakes are attributed to either imperfect information or resource constraints. The fact that the decision-makers themselves may not be pursuing a rational strategy of utility-maximization is not countenanced.

In order to overcome these gaps in the historiography of the US involvement in Iraq, the powerful insights of the ideational approach to US foreign policy need to be combined with insights gained from foreign policy analysis (FPA).<sup>13</sup> Within IR and FPA, two separate and distinct approaches, the cognitive and constructivist, have placed the ideational at the centre of explaining decision-making. The combination of both approaches may yield a more coherent and detailed explanation for the on-going development of US policy in Iraq after the initial invasion and during the nine years that US troops occupied the country.

At first glance the combination of cognitive and constructivist approaches would appear intellectually counter-intuitive to say the least. The cognitive approach has an individualist ontology and a rationalist epistemology. Constructivism, on the other hand, stresses the causative power of ideational structures and the 'co-constitutive' relationship between structures and agents.<sup>14</sup>

Although different, both approaches suffer from their own intellectual lacunae. The cognitive study of decision-making, because of its individualist ontology, finds it difficult, if not impossible, to factor in the societal dynamics that ultimately structure collective meaning and shape an individual's approach to information processing.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, within constructivism, the individual level of analysis tends to be marginalized or disappear altogether, with a tendency to focus on the causative powers of the ideational.<sup>16</sup> The utilization of insights from both approaches, whilst recognizing the ontological and

epistemological tensions inherent in this, would allow for the study of ideational influences on individuals involved in the foreign policy decision-making process whilst tracing those influences back to the socially produced structures that give those ideas inter-subjective meaning.

At the decision-making level, the cognitive school argues that individuals are 'cognitive misers', enforcing a stable meaning on a highly complex and over-determined reality by subconsciously filtering out data that is considered superfluous.<sup>17</sup> Belief systems not only filter and prioritize information, they also impose normative appraisals on situations, imposing coherence through ideologically shaped judgment.<sup>18</sup> Once a belief system has been formed, it solidifies around the defence of 'cognitive consistency'.<sup>19</sup> Individuals defend the internal consistency of their belief system by discrediting information that does not make sense within its own boundaries. Ironically, this process of 'cognitive consistency' is likely to be much more rigid in expert policy-makers. By their very profession they process large volumes of information to make sense of situations and do so at speed.<sup>20</sup> Foreign policy decision-makers are likely to have a complex but also exclusionary belief system. In spite of the time spent by the cognitive school mapping the role and complexity of belief systems, the analytical dominance of an individualist ontology and rationalist epistemology means belief systems are seen as idiosyncratic, produced by each person's specific life experiences and education.

The constructivist approach, concerned with the mutually constitutive relationship between structure and agency, focuses on how inter-subjective meaning is created among a group of decision-makers and beyond that within a society and across the globe.<sup>21</sup> Jutta Weldes stresses the role of articulation in this process where:

[P]articular phenomena, whether objects, events or social relations, are represented in specific ways and given particular meaning on which action is then based. With their successful repeated articulation, these linguistic elements come to seem as though they are inherently or necessarily connected and the meanings they produce come to seem natural, to be an accurate description of reality.<sup>22</sup>

The *via media* between the individualist approach of the cognitive school and the constructivist approach that sees meaning as produced inter-subjectively, is the category of the 'other'. The cognitive school places the negatively defined other at the centre of an individual's belief system and the system's defence of its cognitive consistency. It helps reduce cognitive dissonance as the moral juxtaposition between self and other by simplifying information about other entities, categorizing them not only as allies or foes, but more simply as good and bad.<sup>23</sup> However, constructivism would focus on the inter-subjective societal processes where the other becomes the 'antithesis of core values and beliefs' for the whole country.<sup>24</sup> This allows a society, in this case the United States after 9/11, to be celebrated as morally superior, acting with unquestionable motives.<sup>25</sup> This is contrasted with the 'other', who is either sociologically 'immature' or morally degenerate.<sup>26</sup> If the others are categorized thus, then their motives are always

self-serving and negative. For this basic dualism to be ideationally sustainable, its meaning has to be anchored in a society's morality, its collective perception of itself, its place within international politics and its relationship to its others. From within literary theory Edward Said has labelled this 'Orientalism', 'European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self'.<sup>27</sup> From within FPA, Brett Silverstein and Robert Holt label it 'folk theory', where 'there is only this one type of war. There is always one right, justified, and innocent side—ours, even if we are committing unprovoked genocide—and the other side is always actuated by evil motives'.<sup>28</sup>

Following the cognitive school, the placing of a 'diabolical enemy image' at the centre of a belief system leads to an aggressive defence of cognitive consistency. The decision-making process becomes constricted, both perceptions and facts are blurred and appraisals of the enemy inflexible.<sup>29</sup> The enemy appears to possess all the traits of an ideal-typical enemy, new discordant information is denied once it has been processed from within an unchallenged and highly rigid belief system.<sup>30</sup> Following Said, the power of this diabolical enemy image is enhanced when it is anchored in cultural and racist stereotypes that have long shaped Western interactions with the 'Orient' and that have given violent intrusions into the non-Western world a sense of moral purpose and clarity.

It is the centrality of the 'diabolical enemy image' to decision-makers and the society which they claim to represent, that shapes the pursuit of a 'victor's peace'. In a victor's peace, the conflict winner continues to deploy violence after an official ceasefire with the aim of solidifying and guaranteeing its dominance. With the 'diabolical enemy image' at the centre of the victor's belief system, conflicts arising from a victor's peace are perceived by its protagonist as an ideological struggle between good and evil with success only achieved by total victory. Once the initial military struggle is over, state power is deployed to 'cleanse' society of the vanquished foe, purging the societal and political organizations associated with the old order.<sup>31</sup> The loser's peace, on the other hand, is a direct result of the enemy's exclusion. It is marked by an upsurge of grassroots, non-state asymmetrical violence. Here local elites, excluded by the victor's peace, have little choice but to deploy violence in an effort to gain a place at the governing table or overthrow the post-victory settlement in its entirety.

US policy in Iraq from 2003 onwards and its effects can be explained by the deployment of both the cognitive and constructivist approaches to foreign policy analysis. Iraq, as the key proving ground for the Bush doctrine, was to be coercively re-engineered. However, from within the belief system dominating decision-making in Washington and policy application in Baghdad, the 'hope of democracy, development, free markets, and free trade' could only be guaranteed by the complete defeat of the 'diabolical enemy'; the Ba'athist ruling elite that had run the state since 1968. It was this understanding of Iraqi politics and how to reform it that led to the unleashing of a victor's peace after regime change had been successfully carried out. The 'diabolical enemy image' and its victor's peace meant organized violence was deployed by both those now controlling the state to ensure their success and those excluded from any power to overthrow it.



### The Enemy Image and the Belief System of the Bush Administration

The role and power that Iraq as a 'diabolical enemy image' occupied in the administration's belief system underpinned the Bush presidency's reaction to the attacks in September 2001. Although it was quickly apparent that Osama bin Laden at the head of al Qaeda had been responsible for the attacks using a base within Afghanistan, Iraq was ushered into the policy discussions concerning the response. By 21 November 2001, 72 days after the attacks, Bush had already asked Rumsfeld what plans he had in hand to invade Iraq.<sup>32</sup> By January 2002, Bush lumped terrorists and their state allies into one 'axis of evil'.<sup>33</sup> In Bush's memoirs, he makes plain that Saddam Hussein gave coherence to his perception of Iraq as an enemy image by personifying Iraqi 'evil' in Bush's mind. Further, it was also 'his henchmen' and government that 'tortured innocent people, raped political opponents in front of their families, scalded dissidents with acid, and dumped tens of thousands of Iraqis into mass graves'.<sup>34</sup> He then quotes discussions with Elie Wiesel, a holocaust survivor, in which he compared Saddam Hussein's brutality to the Nazi genocide, with Wiesel advising the president 'you have a moral obligation to act against evil'.<sup>35</sup> Here the 'other' is defined in morally absolutist terms. The irrational evil of Saddam Hussein and his henchmen was such that any action against them was bathed in a moral absolutism, placed beyond reproach or suggestions of duplicitous or self-serving motives.

Beyond the president himself the 'diabolical enemy image' of Iraq was reproduced in remarkably similar fashion across the decision-making elite in Washington. By 2002, Iraq planning was dominated by the Department of Defence. Within the Pentagon, Rumsfeld designated the office run by Feith, Under-Secretary of Defence, as responsible for all post-war planning and security.<sup>36</sup> This was formalized in an executive order issued by Bush in January 2003.

For Rumsfeld, as for Bush, the Ba'ath Party was best understood through historical comparison to the Nazi Party in Germany and the Communist Party in the Soviet Union.<sup>37</sup> In the autumn of 2003, this historical analogy was powerfully deployed by Rumsfeld's deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, to stop any attempt to modify the victor's peace by more fully integrating the Sunni community into Iraq's post-war political process. He wrote three words on the policy proposal before returning it to Rumsfeld, 'They are Nazis!'.<sup>38</sup>

Feith was the most important individual in the government handling Iraq policy. It was his office that drafted policy for post-regime change Iraq and ensured it was implemented. In his memoirs, written shortly after leaving government in 2005, Feith laid out what is probably the most coherent description of the Ba'ath Party as a 'diabolical enemy image' at the centre of the administration's belief system, giving it both coherence and cognitive consistency. First, as with Bush, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz, the Ba'ath Party was compared to the Nazis in Germany. It 'had become a synonym for the Iraqi regime, more or less as the Nazi Party was the German regime under Adolf Hitler'. However, in Feith's mind, its sins were even greater because, whereas the Nazis 'had run Germany for a dozen years; the Ba'athists had tyrannized Iraq for more than thirty'.<sup>39</sup>

US decision-making power in Baghdad was even more concentrated than in Washington. For the first twelve months of the occupation, from May 2003 to April 2004, L. Paul Bremer III, the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), had paramount authority across the entire country.<sup>40</sup> The instructions he was given before arriving were minimal, nearly all oral and were not augmented while he was in Baghdad.<sup>41</sup> The enemy image at the centre of Bremer's belief system, laid out in his memoir of the year he spent ruling Iraq, is built around the same central schema that shaped the perceptions of Bush, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz and Feith. The Ba'ath Party was repeatedly compared to both the Nazis and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, with Saddam playing the role of Hitler but for three times as long.<sup>42</sup>

It was through these assertive coherent, inter-subjective schemas that the most influential US decision-makers understood Iraq, Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party: there was no room for ambiguity. Ba'ath Party members had no redeeming features. At best they had been the knowing and willing vehicles through which Saddam had unleashed horror on the Iraqi population. At worst their active involvement in torture, rape and murder went well beyond complicity. The reform programme put in place by Bremer in 2003 and 2004 was targeted against a party membership seen as no better than the Nazis in Germany. Their removal from power thus became a moral necessity. Once Saddam Hussein was safely in US custody in December 2003, it was the Ba'ath Party itself that became the main threat, target and obstacle to re-engineering Iraq; the party being then blamed for the rising insurgency. But the damning of a party whose peak membership comprised over two million Iraqis was highly problematic for US policy. How to interact with a state infrastructure populated, at its higher echelons, with a majority of former party members, and how to understand a society ruled by them for 35 years. What level of complicity does that bring to ordinary citizens beyond the two million people who joined the party itself?

However, as the Wolfowitz quote indicates, party membership or at least sympathy and fellow travelling were extended, explicitly and by inference, to the Sunni section of Iraqi society as a whole. Bremer, when briefing Bush on declining security in June 2003, described the 'Sunni heartlands' of west and north Iraq as containing '[l]ots of sore losers'.<sup>43</sup> Feith was repeatedly critical of those he saw as adopting 'the Sunni perspective' for being 'inclined to look somewhat benignly on Baathists' and favour cutting a deal with them: '[s]uch a deal might generally gratify Sunni Arabs, whose political predominance in Iraq the Baathists ensured'.<sup>44</sup> Policy was shaped by analytically collapsing the Sunni population of Iraq into the diabolical enemy image formed around the Ba'ath Party. Both were to be treated in the same way and defined as the enemy other, giving clarity to perceptions of Iraqi society and moral certainty to US policy.

These dominant perceptions of the Ba'ath Party, central to the US belief system of the main policy-makers working on Iraq, laid the groundwork for the victor's peace. As the examples of Wolfowitz, Feith and Bremer indicate, policy was drafted, accepted or rejected, by using the enemy image of the Ba'ath Party to gain coherence and defend cognitive consistency. Moreover, there is clear evidence that Iraq's Sunni community were cognitively categorized

with the Ba'ath Party and were fixed and dammed accordingly. The ramifications for US policy-making and its effects in Iraq are clear. **Not just the former ruling elite, but members of a mass party and a large religious group in society were to be actively excluded from power as a central pillar of US plans to transform Iraq and 'let freedom reign'.**

### Laying the Foundations for the Victor's Peace: **De-Ba'athification**

Given the central role that the demonization of the Iraqi Ba'ath Party played in the belief system of key members of the Bush administration it is little surprise that **political exclusion was the first policy to be enacted once the CPA was created.** The one explicit order, drafted by Feith in the Pentagon, which Bremer took with him for implementation in Baghdad, was the de-Ba'athification of Iraqi society. **The document banned the top four levels of the Ba'ath Party's membership from holding any government job. It also banned any former member of the Ba'ath Party from occupying jobs in the top three management levels of government institutions.**<sup>45</sup> Feith stressed that '[w]e've got to show all the Iraqis that we're serious about building a New Iraq'. **The policy was to be implemented 'even if it causes administrative inconvenience.'**<sup>46</sup> For Feith, de-Ba'athification was the cornerstone of building a new Iraq, the central role that the Ba'ath Party played in his belief system meant that the damage caused by purging them from the Iraqi state was of little concern compared with the greater moral good of their exclusion.

The de-Ba'athification of Iraqi society was specifically designed to drive the old ruling elite and those associated with it out of office and marginalize them in society. In an economy dominated by state employment, excluding large numbers of individuals from working for the government was tantamount to legislating for their forced impoverishment. **The effects went well beyond the costs of 'administrative inconvenience' that Feith had been happy to pay.** First, to quote Lt.-Gen Sanchez (Commander of Coalition forces in Iraq when the order was issued), de-Ba'athification: **'[e]liminated the entire government and civic capacity of the nation. Organizations involving justice, defense, interior, communications, schools, universities, and hospitals were all either completely shut down or severely crippled, because anybody with any experience was now out of a job.'**<sup>47</sup>

A second consequence had even greater impact on Iraq. In May 2003, just after the de-Ba'athification edict was issued, I conducted a series of interviews with mid-level and senior Ba'athists in the Baghdad suburb of Ghazaliya. The effects of the edict were easy to detect. At first there was bewilderment. A senior Ba'athist exclaimed, **'why can't he leave us alone? We are like the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, worn out and ideologically defeated'.** But within days of the edict the sense of defeat mutated into defiance and reorganization. De-Ba'athification was perceived as needless and vindictive persecution that went well beyond the party and affected the Sunni section of the population. **It triggered a concerted attempt at organization and then violent confrontation; the fight for a loser's peace had begun.**

### Politically Securing the Victor's Peace: The Exclusive Elite Bargain in Iraq

The formation of the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) in July 2003 was the first step taken by the US occupation to build a post-regime change political order, to be the cornerstone of a sustainable transformation of Iraq. **Given the influence of the enemy image in the belief systems of decision-makers it is little surprise that the IGC completely excluded anyone associated with the previous regime.** However, the ideational dynamics shaping the enemy image led to a Governing Council that also minimized the role of Sunnis in its ranks and indeed those who were resident in Iraq before 2003. **The political order represented an exclusive elite bargain between a small, and formerly exiled, group of returning politicians.**

Elite bargains are frequently placed at the centre of successful negotiations to end internal conflicts and move towards a subsequent consolidation of democracy. For these bargains to function as intended, the elites involved must be 'principle decision-makers' – politically, economically and militarily – and crucially have the ability to deliver the leadership of dominant social groups in society.<sup>48</sup> The bargain between them involves building a consensus around 'the basic procedures and norms by which politics will henceforth be played'.<sup>49</sup> Inclusive settlements integrate as broad a section of the existing national elites as possible into a ruling coalition. This gives the organizations they represent access to the state's institutions, jobs and largesse. The politicians can then use state resources, rents and employment opportunities as patronage to sustain a strong base of support in society for the settlement.<sup>50</sup>

**However, when applying the notion of elite bargains to conflict-prone states, Stefan Lindemann makes the perceptive distinction between elite bargains that are inclusive and hence promote stability and those that are exclusive and prone to driving countries back into conflict.**<sup>51</sup> Exclusive bargains involve a narrow set of elites, excluding key politicians and the groups they seek to represent, thereby fostering 'antagonism and violent conflict'.<sup>52</sup> In Iraq, the post-invasion political settlement was shaped by the perception of the Ba'ath Party and beyond that the Sunni community as enemies to be excluded. It was hence designed to exclude key indigenous political elites from any role in government. This, combined with a campaign of violent persecution, drove sections of those elites underground and then into open rebellion against the new political settlement and those it empowered to run the state.

Moves towards forming the IGC began at the end of May 2003. **In the aftermath of a United Nations Security Council resolution on Iraq, Bremer sent Rumsfeld a memorandum committing the CPA to building an interim government consisting of about 30 Iraqis. Bremer set out his ambitions to make the government 'broadly representative of all major strands of Iraqi society (internal and exiles, Shia, Kurd, Turkman, Christian, tribal, men and women)'. The 'representative' categories Bremer mentions are instructive; in this first iteration they certainly include gender, some religious and ethnic groups, but notably exclude Sunnis.**<sup>53</sup> Bremer's Anglo-American governance team then spent six weeks identifying 'women, tribal, and religious leaders we could consider for the

membership'.<sup>54</sup> During this process Bremer acknowledged the need 'to find effective, patriotic Sunni members'. However, this new search brings Bremer and his team 'face to face with a major structural problem inherent in Iraq's post-Liberation politics: a lack of credible Sunni leaders. Almost all politically active Sunnis had been co-opted into Saddam's security services, of Baath Party, or killed as traitors'.<sup>55</sup> Bremer's comment indicates his belief system and the place the Ba'ath Party occupied in it. First, by inference, the only politically active Sunnis still alive in Iraq were previously co-opted into the security services or Ba'ath Party. Second, if they had been co-opted, they could not be considered credible leaders. From this perspective Iraq's Sunni community was either not politically active, dead, or tainted by Ba'athist co-option.

When the membership of the IGC was announced in July 2003, the effect of the enemy image at the heart of Bremer's decision-making was easily detected. First, of the five members of the IGC identified as Arab 'Sunni', only two, Naseer al-Chaderchi and Mohsen Abdel Hamid were members of any organized political party.<sup>56</sup> Al-Chaderchi was 70 when asked to join the IGC. His party had been set up by his father in the 1950s and 1960s, but quickly lapsed into political irrelevance after regime change. Hamid, conversely, was Secretary-General of the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP). The IIP's role in the IGC and every government it has served in since was to deliver a tame and neutered 'Sunni vote', to bring that section of the population, from which the former ruling elite was meant to have originated, into the new post-war political settlement on a fractured and subservient basis.

A great deal of evidence suggests that from 2003 onwards the IIP singularly failed to play this role because it was not representative of the social constituency assigned to it by Bremer's team. The IIP's close association with the US occupation and the new governing structures meant it was repeatedly out-flanked by more autonomous and representative political forces in the struggle to mobilize the Sunni section of society. Beyond the IIP, the six parties that gained prominence in exile by allying themselves with the United States took control of the council.<sup>57</sup> Finally, 14 of the 22 council members were long-term exiles or had lived in the Kurdish Regional Government enclave outside Iraqi state control from 1991 onwards.

The exclusive elite bargain placed by Bremer at the centre of the IGC quickly dominated the Iraqi state. On 11 November 2003, in the face of increasing violence and an approaching US presidential campaign, Bremer was summoned to Washington where it was decided that sovereignty would be handed back to Iraqis no later than June 2004. What became known as the 15 November Agreement (the date the IGC was told about the plan and gave its assent), would give interim power to a new government ahead of national elections. This hasty transition plan triggered vocal opposition from Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the most powerful religious authority in the country. Al-Sistani, aware that in Iraqi history 'temporary' unelected governments had a tendency to transform themselves into permanent dictatorships, demanded that any sovereign government of Iraq must be directly elected.

At this moment a decision-maker with a radically different understanding of Iraqi society was called in to break the impasse between the US government and al-Sistani. In early 2004, UN diplomat Lakhdar Brahimi was asked to negotiate a compromise between al-Sistani, the Coalition Provisional Authority and the IGC that would allow the hand-over of sovereignty to take place. Brahimi's approach to Iraqi politics stood in stark contrast to that of Bremer and his governance team. On three extended research trips to Iraq, Brahimi's team went to great lengths to consult with as diverse and representative a cross section of Iraqi society as possible.<sup>58</sup> The conclusions Brahimi reached after his first trip in February 2004, indicated the extent to which Iraqi politics had become dangerously polarized:

In the Sunni community and among the secular elite, there are perceptions that they are witnessing a decisive shift in the balance of power as a result of which they will lose in the new political arrangements that are being put in place... minority groups feel that a majoritarian system will put them at a huge disadvantage, while women's groups are concerned that the gains made under the secular regimes of the past are under threat from a new system dominated by religious-based parties.<sup>59</sup>

Brahimi made clear the outcome if Iraqi politics were allowed to develop as they had under the US occupation: 'I have appealed to the members of the Governing Council and to Iraqis in every part of Iraq to be conscious that civil wars do not happen because a person makes a decision, "Today, I'm going to start a civil war"'.<sup>60</sup>

To avert this outcome Brahimi drew up a transition plan that would have directly challenged the effects of the enemy image at the centre of US decision-making. It was specifically designed to unpick the exclusive elite bargain, bring in the now fractured and excluded Sunni community and hence rework and broaden the nascent elite bargain. First, Brahimi recommended that a new caretaker government, comprising many former Ba'athist technocrats, should be selected. They would manage the government during the interregnum before elections in 2005. This would force the IGC to switch its energies from government to society, making all political groupings build national political organizations that would act as a channel for public opinion, linking as much of the polity as possible to its government. Finally, Brahimi wanted to convene a national conference, consisting of 1,000–1,500 delegates. This would start the process of national dialogue, instituting consultative channels between society and the state. It would also provide a venue within which those who had been excluded by the US occupation could be brought into the political process, integrating the more radical and alienated voices in the run up to elections.<sup>61</sup>

Unsurprisingly, because Brahimi's plan ran directly counter to their enemy images, US policy-makers favoured its rejection.<sup>62</sup> Brahimi's choices for the new government's prime minister and president were vetoed by Bush, because there was a danger that they would not 'stand up and thank the American people for their sacrifice in liberating Iraq'.<sup>63</sup> Instead, the premiership was given to a long time exile and habitué of Washington, Iyad Allawi, the head of one of the six formerly exiled parties that had dominated the IGC. The



vice-presidencies went to another two of the six parties, Ibrahim al-Jaafari, head of the Dawa Islamic Party and Rowsch Shaways, senior member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party. Ministerial posts were then liberally divided among the other leading parties on the IGC.

In spite of Brahimi's best efforts and his warning of an imminent civil war, the parties empowered by the United States and placed at the centre of the exclusive elite bargain negotiated in July 2003, had successfully secured their grip on power, thereby committing themselves to furtherance of a victor's peace. Those excluded by the enemy image and targeted by the victor's peace were deliberately drummed out of government service and pushed to the political and economic margins of Iraqi society. The extent and content of the 'diabolical enemy image' that gave coherence to US perceptions of Iraq meant the exclusions went well beyond Ba'athists to include swathes of the Sunni community itself.

### Conclusions: The Consequences of a Victor's Peace: Iraq's Civil War

The looting that dominated Baghdad in the immediate aftermath of the war reflected US coercive weakness, its inability to impose the ideational vision dictated by the belief systems of its key decision-makers. This vacuum in both governance and security was exacerbated by the decision to pursue such a thoroughgoing de-Ba'athification process. If the looters in Baghdad took away the fixtures and fittings of the Iraqi state, US policy similarly destroyed what was left of its institutional memory. The de-Ba'athification was an attempt to drive what was left of the old governing elites, their technocratic allies and the Sunni community out of state institutions – a direct result of the way Iraq was ideationally ordered from within the American decision-makers' belief system. Beyond the ideational, neither the US occupation nor the nascent new Iraqi state were materially strong enough to impose this post-war settlement, and the civil war it triggered was a struggle between those seeking to impose a victor's peace and those fighting for a loser's peace.

The first political group to exploit the US military's inability to control the country were the insurgents, a disparate movement of independent groups fighting to drive the US out and overthrow the victor's peace. The motivation that mobilized and united these separate groups was their collective exclusion from the post-war political order. As such, US troops were initially their main target, but as these were redeployed to decrease their vulnerability and political visibility, insurgents increasingly focused on Iraqis who served in the new police force and army. By August 2003, car bombs became a weapon of choice, with the increasingly sectarian mass casualty attacks driving Iraq towards civil war. The dynamic of alienation and exclusion fuelling an increasing spiral of violence, was accentuated from 2005 onwards by al Qaeda in Mesopotamia taking control of the movement. They exploited and exacerbated political exclusion by using the language of sectarian extremism. By using mass casualty attacks targeted at Iraq's Shia population, al Qaeda achieved its aim of driving the country into a sectarian civil war.<sup>64</sup>

On the other side of the equation, the formerly-exiled political parties placed at the centre of the exclusive elite bargain by the US, used their election victories in 2005 to violently impose a victor's peace on the whole country. Between 2005 and 2006, the Ministry of Interior became the main vehicle for imposing a victor's peace. At this time the Ministry of Defence and the Iraqi army were perceived by Iraqi politicians in government to be under US control. The Ministry of Interior, on the other hand, appeared to be independent of US scrutiny and it controlled the Special Police Commandos (later renamed the National Police), judged to be the most effective fighting force in the country.<sup>65</sup> Through 2005–06, the commandos acted as a sectarian death squad, frequently resorting to extra-judicial execution and torture.<sup>66</sup> Complaints reached their peak in November 2005, when US forces raided a Ministry of Interior 'detention facility' and found 170 detainees (166 of whom were Sunnis) 'held in appalling conditions'.<sup>67</sup> Following this several confirmed cases of secret detention facilities and the widespread use of torture came to light.<sup>68</sup>

The struggle between a victor's and loser's peace reached its height in 2006, when the 50,000-strong militia, the Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM) Muqtada al-Sadr's military organization, became the main group murdering Sunnis in Baghdad. From mid-2006 onwards, its death squads used Sadr city, a slum of two million people in eastern Baghdad, as a platform from which to drive the Sunni population out of Baghdad. Each night JAM members would sweep across the north and west of Baghdad in a pincer movement, which bore all the hallmarks of a well-planned operation, to attack the Sunni-dominated areas of western Baghdad. Under the cover of darkness, convoys of armed men would leave Sadr city moving into mixed or predominately Sunni neighbourhoods. As many as 60 men at a time would be seized. Their bodies, bearing the signs of torture, would be dumped the next morning on the city's periphery.<sup>69</sup> The ultimate aim was to drastically reduce the numbers of Sunni residents in Baghdad. Previously affluent suburbs on the western side of the Tigris such as Mansour and Yarmouk were targeted for violent population transfer. The militia campaigns of murder and intimidation coincided with the withdrawal of banking services and health-care provision from Sunni residential areas on the west bank of the river. There is strong evidence to suggest that government services were withdrawn as part of a coordinated campaign to drive Sunnis from Baghdad.<sup>70</sup>

The death and destruction wrought on Iraq after Bush declared an end to the invasion in May 2003, clearly qualifies as a civil war. By June 2012 that conflict has cost at least 107,000 civilian lives.<sup>71</sup> Media punditry and governmental responses to such wholesale carnage have tended to deploy primordial explanations for the violence. An emphasis on the ethno-sectarian divisions in Iraqi society shifts the blame away from those who invaded the country and encouraged the bloody aftermath of regime change by their imposition of a victor's peace and an exclusive elite bargain. Such attempts at absolution are anchored in the dominant Orientalist stereotypes that provide easy, if racist, explanations of complex situations. However, a close examination of how the Iraqi civil war started decentres ethno-sectarian divisions; seeing them as at best second-order explanations. In their place, as a central cause of post-war violence was the



deliberate exclusion of a section of Iraq's society, driven by the dominant enemy images that shaped US decision-making in 2003 and 2004. These policies gave rise to the exclusive elite bargain imposed on the country by the United States and its formerly exiled Iraqi allies and then to the civil war that ripped the country apart after 2005.

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#### NOTES

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