

Is Iraq Worth the Investment?

by **Robert L. Caslen**

In contrast to the murderous vision of violent extremists, we are joining with allies and partners around the world to build their capacity to promote security, prosperity, and human dignity.

– President Barack Obama

The Financial and Human Costs

The United States' initial Operation Iraqi Freedom assault successfully dethroned Saddam Hussein and removed his regime, but it also triggered an 8½ year insurgency that was hugely expensive to the United States in terms of American and Allied lives and wealth. There are numerous sources recording U.S. killed and wounded, but according to the U.S. Department of Defense Casualty Status as of this writing, the U.S. lost 4,614 military lives in Operations Iraqi Freedom, New Dawn, and Inherent Resolve and sustained over 32,000 wounded.¹ In addition, according to the Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs in Brown University, the United States lost 3,793 contractors.² Iraq losses are staggering and according to the Wikipedia Casualties of the Iraq War, losses range from as low as 110,000 to as high as 460,000.³ In terms of costs, or often expressed as our national treasure, the 8½ years of Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom cost American taxpayers over two trillion dollars. In light of these astonishing financial and human costs, it is fair to question whether the effort was worth the incredible sacrifice made by our service members, contractors, diplomats, coalition partners, and the American public.

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Pre-Emption and Why We Went to War in Iraq

The United States went to war in Iraq to prevent the world's most dangerous people from threatening the United States and others with the world's most dangerous weapons. Specifically, the mission was to prevent Saddam Hussein from acquiring weapons of mass destruction, and then threatening to use them against the United States and others.⁴

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In the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C., the Bush Administration assessed further attacks on the Homeland as highly likely, not only by those who had already attacked us, but also by others who saw an opportunity to advance their interests at the expense of the United States. Topping the list of adversaries was Saddam Hussein and his Iraqi regime, who threatened the balance of power in the Middle East, as well as the safety and security of the U.S. allies and partners in their region. The threat from Saddam, real or perceived, forced the administration to change its strategy for dealing with Iraq, and for the first time in our history, we began a *pre-emptive* war to eliminate the threat, rather than a reactive war in response to an attack that had already occurred.

The new U.S. strategy came with some reputational costs—this precedence was not only pre-emptive, but “we shattered international assumptions about America’s own commitment to international law in overthrowing a UN member state government, regardless of how reprehensive it was.”⁵

Positive Outcomes

It is difficult for anyone to assess victory or defeat in Iraq, as complex as it is, but aside from the negative outcomes, there are some positive outcomes. The brutal dictator Saddam Hussein, mass murderer of over 500,000 of his own citizens, was dethroned and tried by an Iraqi tribunal in a manner consistent with international law. He was subsequently convicted and executed. The risk that a nuclear-armed totalitarian state would threaten Middle Eastern stability was drastically reduced. However imperfect, Iraq is the only predominately Arab nation to have a representative government. Iraq’s oil reserves are the world’s fifth-largest at 145 billion barrels and have been added to the global supply. Although they are only 8 percent of global reserves,⁶ they have the potential to service over 45 percent of the world’s petroleum demand.⁷ With the help of the United States and its allies, the radical ethnic and sectarian groups that attempted to seize power after the fall of the regime were contained and eventually defeated.

Incremental, Difficult, and Time-Consuming Progress

Perhaps most positive was Iraq’s transition to a democratic representative government, one that would resolve differences through dialog rather than through corruption and brutal authoritative means. With Iraq finding itself at the cusp of three critical ethnic and political divides—Sunni/Shi’a, Kurd/Arab, and radical Sunni/moderate Sunni—where grievances and differences are centuries old and generations apart, having impacted Iraq as well as the entire Middle East for centuries and generations, the potential of a democratic nation that could resolve these issues through dialogue and representation held enormous potential. Frankly, the United States may have opened a Pandora’s box with the removal of Saddam’s authoritative governance, but it also created one of the greatest opportunities in the history of the Middle East.

Key to its success would be Iraq's ability to see the potential and commit to its success.

However, not everyone was as optimistic with the prospect Iraq would resolve centuries of ethnic differences with this new democratic "experiment." Ambassador Jeffrey's assessment at the end of his time in Iraq was modest at best. "Thinking we could heal Iraq's ethnic/religious wounds or fix its collapsed economic and governance structures in a few years was not realistic."⁸ But those on the other end who would write Iraq off as a lost cause are both foolish and irresponsible.

The U.S. approach to South Korea serves as a noteworthy example of the benefits of strategic patience and long-term effort. It took decades of effort on the part of thirteen different administrations, but some sixty-nine years after the 1953 Armistice Agreement, South Korea is the tenth largest economy in the world run by a duly elected government and largely self-reliant in providing for its security. Germany, seventy-five years after the end of World War II, has the world's fourth-largest economy and is a key leader within the European Union. In both of these cases, progress was incremental, difficult, and time consuming; but, this long-term commitment on the part of the United States included military security and assistance and set the conditions for eventual success. Also, a part of these conditions was a security apparatus that protects against both internal and external threats and provides the security necessary for a fledgling democracy to build its institutional base. The difference in Iraq was that it did not have the security that both South Korea and West Germany had at war termination. Nor would it tolerate a continued U.S. presence given a middle east religious culture that abhors western presence.

So, the alternative was to maintain a diplomatic presence and to establish the Office of Security Cooperation–Iraq (OSC-I) whose mission was to train and equip the Iraq Security

Forces. Whether it takes another sixty or seventy years to build a secure and prosperous Iraq or not remains an issue. But if Germany and South Korea provide any indication of what it takes, then keeping Iraq secure and its government from falling back into a corrupt authoritative regime could prove to be a significant challenge.

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The Stakes are Enormous

The stakes are enormous for Iraq, the broader Middle East, and the United States.⁹ If ethnic groups in Iraq continue to feel disenfranchised as the Kurds and Sunni felt soon after the 2011 U.S. military withdrawal, then a moderate but disenfranchised Sunni sect could provide the safe haven for radical Sunni right wing groups to mobilize, recruit, plan, and execute continued attacks against the Iraq government and its Shi'a majority.

I served as the chief of OSC-I during and after all U.S. forces withdrew out of Iraq at the end of 2011, where I remained until the spring of 2013. During the time I was in this position, we saw the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) with the fall of the Sunni Iraqi cities of Fallujah, Ramadi, Hawija, and Mosul and the ISIS establishment of the self-proclaimed caliphate in northern Iraq. It took the Iraqi Maliki government to request and approve the return of U.S. military forces to ultimately defeat ISIS in Iraq, but Iraq knows for sure this radical ideology is still around and exists in cyberspace as much as it physically exists in northern Iraq.

The Kurds in Iraq, Syria, Iran, and Turkey are the largest ethnic group in the world without their own country. When lines were drawn after World War II, the Kurds "drew the short straw" and ended up sharing their home across these

four nations as an ethnic population without a home. As a result, they desire their own country and are keen for independence. After my departure from Iraq in 2013, they did indeed claim their independence, but certainly read the wrong tea leaves, and the central government of Iraq squashed it quickly and hard. So, the Kurds have settled, for the time being, for their semi-autonomous government and “invisible nation.”¹⁰ That does not mean they are content with this arrangement. The existing drivers of instability between the Kurds and the Iraqi Arabs are significant, and if the opportunity exists, and the timing is correct, I am certain they will make another effort to establish their own nation and government. Given this, Iraq’s best deterrent is to keep their government representative, to embrace their grievances and issues, and through dialog, to work diligently to resolve them. Easier said than done, but the alternative is not healthy for a long-term unified Iraq.

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The representative and transparent governance experiment

Historically, Iraq dealt with rival and disenfranchised groups through force and intimidation. Prior to the 2003 U.S. invasion, peaceful transitions of power were virtually non-existent in Iraq. Saddam effectively kept the ethnic groups in order, but he did so via significant human rights abuses, which resulted in over 500,000 Iraqi citizens losing their lives in one capacity or another. Prime Minister Maliki dealt with the disenfranchised Sunni and Kurdish populations in much the same way he attempted to consolidate power shortly after the U.S. military withdrew, although with considerably

less brutality and ruthlessness than Saddam. The challenge for Iraq is to keep the government representative, which limits the ability of any one individual or group to seize control of the country, to keep the lines of communication open, and to address and resolve differences through dialogue. Representative and transparent governance builds trust, which is currently absent and must be rebuilt if Iraq is to live up to its potential and succeed as a democratic nation.

A secure and reliable oil reserve infrastructure

The other enormous stake in creating a stable and unified Iraq is the ability to build a secure and reliable infrastructure for their enormous oil reserves. Which have the potential to meet the needs of 45 percent of the global demand. A significant secure and reliable petroleum reserve is a game changer for Iraq and its economy. But it requires an infrastructure that can successfully move oil from almost anywhere in the country to their respective transfer terminals. The southern oil fields near Basra, for example, pump their oil to the oil transfer tanker terminals some twenty miles out into the Persian Gulf off of the port city of Umm Qasr. I had the opportunity to sail out to Iraq’s oil pumping transfer facility that pumps oil directly into the oil tanker ships and it is an impressive operation. However, even with my naïve eyes, it was clear the transfer terminal was in desperate need of maintenance and repair. On the terminal I was visiting, which was built to simultaneously pump into four oil tankers, only two of the four transfer pumps were operational.

Although often inoperable, in the 1970s Iraq built The Iraq Strategic Pipeline that ran from Basra south to the Persian Gulf transfer terminals, as well as from the Kirkuk reserves north into Kurdistan, and then into Turkey to the Mediterranean. Today, 80 percent of Iraq crude oil goes south into the Persian Gulf and its northern transfer route is mostly inoperable. As a result, because much of Iraq’s oil goes

through the southern Persian Gulf route, any crisis, whether violence, mechanical, or natural disaster, could collapse Iraq's economy and significantly impact world-wide energy markets. Therefore, the key to Iraq's economy is to keep this infrastructure secure and operational. Iraq understands the level of criticality in preserving the Persian Gulf route and has contracted with oil companies world-wide. However, these efforts could take years of repair and expansion in order to meet Iraq's capacity and global demands. In addition, building distribution redundancy inherently creates a more secure infrastructure. During my time in OSC-I, Iraq was looking to repair the northern pipeline, and in January 2022, Iraq announced the construction of a pipeline to transfer Iraqi crude from Basra to Jordan's Awaba port in the Red Sea.¹¹

Nevertheless, Iraq still had lousy electrical service, and it has been challenging over the years for Iraqis to live and work while receiving only a few hours of dependable electricity each day. Oil is important for Iraq's economic development and is the source of its electrical power. Its unreliability, however, is simply an issue of infrastructure, management, and governance, which has been challenging for the Iraqis since my early involvement with Iraq. Not having a reliable electrical grid and infrastructure are examples of Iraq's failure to fully capitalize on the massive potential they have within their oil reserves.

Oil profit distribution across provinces

Iraq's oil wealth is not only important for its economy, but the distribution of its profits across the Iraqi provinces risks significant internal disputes and conflict. Iraq distributes its generated revenue across all the provinces based on their population percentage. The four Kurdish provinces are 17 percent of Iraq's overall population and would therefore expect to receive 17 percent of Iraq's generated revenue. The problem is that Kurdistan is also an oil

producer, and both the Iraqi Central Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government claim ownership of the Kurdish crude oil production and its profits. This issue was to have been resolved in a hydrocarbon law years ago, which still has not occurred, thus keeping this driver of instability front and center.

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U.S. and Iraq National Interests

Any assessment of whether Iraq was worth our investment certainly requires a look at our national interests and the interests of our allies and partner nations. And any policy framework that addresses our relationship with Iraq must certainly begin with an understanding and communication of our national interests.¹² President Obama articulated those interests in his February 2009 address to the Marines at Camp LeJeune. Both the Americans and Iraqis had an interest in an Iraq that was sovereign, stable, a self-reliant Iraqi government that was just, representative, and accountable and provided neither support nor safe haven to terrorists, and an Iraq that would contribute to peace and security of the Middle East region. The United States also had an interest in Iraq's ability to protect the rule of law, confront corruption, and deliver basic services. Likewise, it was in America's interest to "establish a new framework that advances not only Iraq's security but security across the Middle East region."¹³

Economic Prosperity

From an economic perspective, the United States had and continues to have an interest in

Iraq's prosperity. A thriving Iraq, where wealth is distributed systematically and to the benefit of all, contributes to internal stability, improved standards of living for Iraqi citizens, and stronger representative government. With 85 percent of its gross domestic product coming from the nation's vast oil reserves, an Iraq that contributes millions of barrels a day to the global oil supply benefits American citizens and businesses by helping to keep the price of oil down. Given Iraq's potential to service as much as 45 percent of the world's crude oil demand, instability in Iraq risks increased economic peril in the global economy.¹⁴

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But building an Iraq that is sovereign, stable, unified, and politically and economically self-reliant can only happen if the Iraqis can counter the centrifugal forces that will pull it apart. Ethnic populations like the Kurds, who are itching for independence, are one of these centrifugal forces. So are radical Sunni groups, like ISIS, who want a caliphate in the north. A divided Iraq can only create increased instability, which can create ungoverned safe havens where terrorist organizations reside and grow. These organizations not only threaten their host nation, but those with global capacity can (and have) threaten(ed) our own national interests, as well as other western nations.

Polarizing Adversaries

During my time in Iraq as the OSC-I Director, it was clear Iraq had significant work to accomplish. In the OSC-I assessment I published at the end of my first year as the OSC-I Director

in January 2013, I forwarded my observations and assessment of how the Iraqi government was functioning. In my letter I stated,

PM Maliki rules from his Shi'a base, although the Shi'a themselves remain fragmented. Leadership is through crisis and intimidation, and as a result sectarian and ethnic interests remain higher priorities than national identity and patriotism. Iraq's Parliament contributes only marginally and fails to take on the tough issues, and its judiciary is widely viewed as politicized. Although AQI [al Qaeda in Iraq] is Iraq's most existential threat, the most dangerous threat to Iraq's long-term democratic institutions is its inability to share power.¹⁵

Unfortunately, the actions of Iraqi government leaders, Kurdish leaders, various tribal and ethnic groups, the Iranian regime, and even the U.S. government have detracted from the pursuit of these interests. For example, as a result of Prime Minister Maliki's efforts to consolidate power when U.S. forces withdrew, he created a polarized Sunni sect that embraced the radical leadership released from Camp Bucca, which welcomed back the Sunni foot-soldiers who left Iraq during the Awakening and the Surge. Sure enough, they attacked key cities in the Sunni provinces, and under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, they established the first caliph of the Islamic State in northern Iraq with Mosul as its capital while Iraqi soldiers fled away for their own safety. This occurred in June 2014, a year after my departure, ultimately leading to a situation where Iraq requested the return of American firepower to defeat this existential threat. The United States responded and we did indeed defeat the threat that occurred in 2019—at least physically. This threat still exists, as we have not defeated their ideology, which is pervasive on-line, continues to radicalize Sunni extremists, and will be an on-going risk to a stable Iraq.

Building ISF Capacity

Nevertheless, in 2013 we at OSC-I saw this coming and knew that countering a resurgent Islamic State would become a significant national interest. As a result, Iraq would require significant counter terrorism and Iraqi Security Force (ISF) assistance. Thus, enter the OSC-I, which is by doctrine and by design perfectly equipped to help Iraq build the security apparatus necessary to counter this threat and others. The OSC-I's strategic objective was to build a stable, self-reliant, and regionally integrated Iraq through a U.S. military to Iraqi military (often referred to as "mil-to-mil") partnership as the cornerstone of our overall United States-Iraq relationship. And as Iraq's economy improves, so should its ability to fund their ISF deliveries, thus relieving the American taxpayers of the financial burden. Foreign military sales (FMS) have proven to be a very effective means for influencing behavior. It is a long-term program with a long-term focus that has significant potential to strengthen relationships with security officials.

Reducing OSC-I as ISIS Threats Increase

Unfortunately, our Department of State leadership felt OSC-I had to continue a glidepath to further reduce its manpower and capabilities in order to transition towards a state of post-war normalization, which is the configuration of any other security assistance organization in any other nation that is not at war. Even though we tried to make the case that Iraq was still at war, there were still existential threats Iraq would have to defend and defeat such as a resurgent ISIS. The Iraqi security forces were unable to do that on their own and our investment in Iraq to this point was significant. We needed the resources to help build a security force that could provide for the security Iraq needed; unfortunately the initiative fell on deaf ears and we went on the glidepath to reduce.

The reduction's impact would allow us

to continue to provide armament with limited operator and maintenance training, but less of it. Collective training as a combined arms team (i.e., armor training with artillery) would not occur, and we would cease leadership development, professional military education, and staff training. Although the ISF would continue to receive key equipment and arms, they would maintain only a limited capability against external threats because of deficiencies in collective training, maintenance and sustainment. They would sustain their capabilities with Counter Terrorism operations, but an ISIS/AQI resurgence will stress Iraq's elite counter-terrorism forces. Although this support is substantial, it was woefully deficient to deal with the threats Iraq was facing, specifically the resurgent ISIS, as we saw in 2014-19.

The OSC-I's strategic objective was to build a stable, self-reliant, and regionally integrated Iraq through a U.S. military to Iraqi military...partnership.

Independent Strategic Orientation in the Midst of Foreign Influence

Another key national interest was for Iraq to maintain an independent strategic orientation. As mentioned previously, Iraq is the epicenter of a number of Middle East regional fault lines (Sunni/Shi'a, Kurd/Arab, radical Sunni/moderate Sunni) that are drivers of instability, and many believe that how goes Iraq, goes the Middle East. In other words, if Iraq can rise above the noise, and build partnerships instead of polarizing each other, many believe the region will follow. But to do so, Iraq will have to maintain an independent focus and orientation.

An independent strategic orientation is critical to another key national interest, which is to counter China and Russia's influence in

Iraq. For example, China imports approximately 20% percent of Iraq's petroleum export and has invested over twenty billion dollars in Iraq's energy sector to develop power plants throughout Iraq.¹⁶ It is also important to counter Iranian regional influence. As a Shi'a majority democracy, where many of the Iraqi Shi'a political leaders (including Maliki) sought refuge in Iran during the Saddam years, Shi'a Iran has found a long-term and influential relationship with Iraq. Shi'a Iraqi politicians advocate their Arab identity over the Persians, but in reality, Iran has established influential leverage over the Shi'a Iraqi political base.

Other regional nations observe this Iraq-Iran relationship, and specifically, Iran's influence over Iraq. When I asked the Minister of Defense from the United Arab Emirates to consider a joint exercise with Iraq's army, he was adamantly in denial, calling Iraq a surrogate of Iran. Quite simply, a weak Iraq increases Iranian influence, thus decreasing Iraq's relationship with its regional partners.

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Iranian influence in Iraq also impacts U.S. national interests. We have other political, economic, and security partners in the Middle East, such as our energy producing partner Saudi Arabia and Israel, to whom we have pledged a commitment of security. Iran has not only attacked Saudi's oil infrastructure in 2019,¹⁷ but has also vowed to destroy Israel.¹⁸ And with their imminent acquisition of nuclear weapons, this could certainly affect Middle East stability.

But if Iraq is to remain solvent both with internal political rivals and regional rivals, it must continue to make political progress to support its democratic development. Elections

must be held on time and they must be genuine and credible. We do not direct or influence outcomes, but our comparative advantage is to ensure a legitimate and independent electoral process. The difficulties Iraq has encountered with numerous internal protests and boycotts during their 2021-2022 parliamentary elections was a sign that they still have significant progress to make. And the more reason the U.S. should remain engaged as well as encourage and support.

*Iraq National Security Advisor
Falih al-Fayyadh*

I was encouraged about the role the United States would play in Iraq's future from a meeting I attended with General Mattis and the Iraqi National Security Advisor, Falih al-Fayyadh. Reflecting about United States-Iraqi relationships, Fayyadh was complementary about the United States presence over the past nine years. He said what solidified Iraq's relationship with the United States was the fact that the United States did withdraw as they said they would. He said not many Iraqis believed the United States would leave, but when they did, the United States "won the respect of all Iraqis." He said that Iraq opposed the United States at first, but "you worked hard and earned our trust."¹⁹

Fayyad was also very complimentary of OSC-I. Maybe it was because General Mattis was my military boss, and he wanted to be sure Mattis knew OSC-I was doing well, but he was generous with his praises of the work we were doing in building Iraq's military and the training of its troops and leaders. "Ask General Caslen," he said, "early on, times were difficult, but as we tried to understand each other, we learned to trust him and all of OSC-I."

Trust is perhaps the most important ingredient in any relationship, and certainly necessary for effective leadership. Having spent a number of years living in Iraq working

with Iraqis, Iraq simply does not trust just for the sake of you being there. Trust is earned—and with trust, much can be accomplished. So, if the United States was to assist Iraq in its sovereign journey as a fledgling democratic nation in the middle of the Middle East, Iraq would have to trust that we had their interests at hand. Fayyad, as a senior Iraqi leader in their government, indicated that was the case, and his endorsement meant a lot with what the United States had accomplished over the last nine years and what OSC-I had accomplished as the U.S. DoD remnant over the past one year.

General Odierno and General Babiker Meeting

General Babiker was Iraq’s Chairman of their Joint Staff, and we were able to get him back to the United States a few months before my departure. One of the most insightful visits was his session with the Army’s Chief of Staff General Ray Odierno. Odierno saw the importance of Iraq as a stable factor inside the Middle East. Because the ethnic divides are so influential within the Middle East, and those same divides find themselves within Iraq, if Iraq could resolve their differences through dialog in a representative government, it brings great hope to the remaining Middle East that they, too, could live in respect and harmony among nations with ethnic differences. You can say, “so as goes Iraq, so goes the rest of the Middle East.”

Odierno was smart enough to know Iraq’s importance goes far beyond its ability to just resolve political differences. He discussed the fact that Iraq’s vast oil reserves, which are the fifth largest oil reserves in the world, put Iraq in a position to have the potential to stabilize the world’s energy market and economies. Given our investments in Iraq up to this point, we clearly need to assist them in developing their infrastructure to enable their production to become more stable and therefore more secure. But it is an investment that carries tremendous

world-wide potential.

Finally, Odierno recognized that if we were to guarantee greater security both within Iraq, and within the Middle East, we would have to find Iraqi politicians who would be more open and cooperative. He believed the greatest threat to Iraq was not the resurgence of the Islamic state, but their inability to share power.²⁰

[U.S. Army Chief of Staff General Ray Odierno] believed the greatest threat to Iraq was not the resurgence of the Islamic state, but their inability to share power.

General Dempsey, CJCS, Meeting on Return

On my return to the United States after twenty-two months in Iraq as the OSC-I Director through the U.S. forces withdrawal and beyond, I presented my out-brief throughout the Pentagon and the Department of State. One of the more insightful meetings was with General Marty Dempsey, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the most senior military person in uniform. Dempsey asked for my assessment of Iraq’s governance, security, regional integration, and economy. What I told the Chairman about Iraq’s governance trends was that I observed the Prime Minister becoming more authoritative. The arrests of his opponents and Iraq’s challenges in putting a government together after an election were indications of the work we still had to do. Their Parliament’s effectiveness was also going in the wrong direction, as they were challenged gaining consensus on key issues. The consensus was that their Judiciary was politicized and President Talabani was a moderating influence, but his illness, which led to his removal was a loss.

Iraqi security was also becoming more politicized along sectarian and ethnic lines.

Replacing Sunni and Kurdish general officers and marginalizing the Sunni and Kurds only created mistrust within their security. There was also concern about the Kurdish brinkmanship breaking away to establish their own nation and the on-going insurgency in neighboring Syria could certainly have spillover into the Sunni-Shi'a divide in Iraq. Iranian influence continued.

Picture a Middle East where ethnic groups resolve differences through dialog, radical terrorist groups cannot find state sponsorship or safe-haven, and a region that contributes energy security to global economies.

What was encouraging in this area though was the Kurd-Arab divide. Maliki's agreement to continue the meetings, the Department of Defense to provide the personnel for Northern Affairs, and the State to finally approve their presence resulted in significant progress simply based on the quality conversation that addressed issues of difference.

Unfortunately, regional integration spread across Sunni and Shi'a ethnic lines while Sunni nations in the Middle East viewed Iraq as a subsidiary of Iran. Rather than the opportunity for Iraq to be a 'uniter,' moving across ethnic lines made them a 'divider.'

One attribute of Iraq's economy, predominantly influenced by their increase in oil production and international sales, was that it contributed to the increase in infrastructure improvements, which were in dire need of repair.

With such an investment in lives and money, I am sure General Dempsey was hoping for greater progress in their governance, in particular resolving differences between Sunni and Shi'a ethnicities. But certainly, neither Germany or South Korea made the progress everyone was hoping after their first year post-war. We

concluded it is way too early to "throw in the towel," but also acknowledged there was still work to do.

Living a Life Worthy of Their Sacrifice

This intense dialogue of national interests, risks, enormous stakes, and pros and cons leads to an answer to the question, "Is Iraq Worth the Investment?" I am sure that using any perspective to examine this problem set, you can come up with any answer you want. In his notes after his departure, Ambassador Jim Jeffrey felt that the end state strategic objectives were too ambitious, and suggested that the end state should have been better defined as, "Push and help the Iraqis to develop themselves the skills and plans to deal with their political and economic development, while the U.S. provides much needed security."²¹ I would agree that this is indeed a more realistic end state, but it is important to look at Iraq's potential, not only internally as a nation, but also in the region.

Indeed, a unified Iraq has the potential to impact one of the most wealthy but volatile and deadly regions in the world; a region that can directly impact the world's economy while simultaneously becoming a direct threat to our (and many other western nations') homeland security and national interests. The potential of having a unified Iraq that can resolve its differences through dialog in a legitimate representative government, is strong enough to counter transnational extremist groups, and can maintain oil production and exports to provide significant energy security to international economies is immense. But to accomplish this, Iraq requires international assistance. Building their security apparatus with the help of the U.S. OSC-I is but one way to ensure the efforts to achieve these enormous strategic goals. In other words, OSC-I has proven to be worth the investment.

The more potent idea is that whatever Iraq

can accomplish, could impact the entire Middle East. Picture a Middle East where ethnic groups resolve differences through dialog, radical terrorist groups cannot find state sponsorship or safe-haven, and a region that contributes energy security to global economies. That may be unrealistic, but if there is ever going to be progress towards this end state, we must begin with Iraq simply because it owns crude oil that meets up to 45 percent of global demand and owns the fault lines of numerous ethnic groups who have lived with generations of mistrust. But with support and inclusion, mistrust can be replaced with trust and the strategic opportunity of having a Middle East with this potential would certainly make Iraq worth the investment.

Finally, we owe it to the 4,614 American service members and numerous American diplomats and contractors who gave their lives for a democratic Iraq and for this vision and opportunity. Their sacrifice matters. It is incumbent on us, the living, to carry out the promises they gave their lives to achieve. We owe it to their sacrifice to continue to pursue these possibilities. **IAJ**

Notes

- 1 United States Department of Defense Casualty Status, as of June 13, 2022.
- 2 Neta C. Crawford and Catherine Lutz, *Costs of War* (Providence, RI: Watson Institute of International and Public Affairs, Brown University, 2019).
- 3 “Casualties of the Iraq War,” Wikipedia, accessed June 2022.
- 4 Douglas J. Feith, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, *War and Decision, Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 2008), 231.
- 5 Quotation taken from notes written by Ambassador Jim Jeffrey, Assessment of U.S. presence in Iraq after his departure from Iraq in 2012.
- 6 U.S. Energy Information Administration, *Iraq*, February 24, 2021, <https://www.eia.gov/international/overview/country/IRQ>
- 7 Jeffrey. Information and examples in these two paragraphs are taken from notes written by Ambassador Jim Jeffrey, Assessment of U.S. presence in Iraq, after his departure from Iraq in 2012.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Brett McGurk, American diplomat, currently coordinator for Middle East and North Africa at the National Security Council.
- 10 Quil Lawrence, *Invisible Nation: How the Kurds’ Quest for Statehood Is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East* (London, UK: Walker Books, 2009).
- 11 “Iraq Approves Framework Agreement to Install Basra-Aqaba Oil Pipeline,” Asharq AL-awsat, accessed March 8, 2022, <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/3407901/iraq-approves-framework-agreement-install-basra-aqaba-oil-pipeline>.
- 12 A source for the discussion of U.S. national interests was a paper written by American Diplomat Brett McGurk, when he was assigned to the United States Department of State, *The Next 12-24 Months in Iraq: Report and Recommendation*. January 15, 2013.
- 13 President Barack Obama, “Responsible Ending the War in Iraq” (speech, Camp LeJeune, NC, 27

February 2009).

14 A discussion on national interests throughout this chapter was with COL John Hall. John was my executive assistant during my second year as the OSC-I Director. Prior to that, he served from 2008 to 2011 as the Chief of the Joint Staff J5's Iraq Division. During that time John and his team had four roles related to foreign military sales (FMS) cases for the Iraqi Security Forces. First, they ensured every proposed FMS case was in line with existing national level policy and strategic guidance. Usually that meant validating that FMS cases did not give the Iraqis capabilities that would upset regional power balances or other regional dynamics like the ongoing Arab-Israeli peace discussions. Second, they assisted OSD and DSCA in interagency coordination of ISF cases, mostly with the State Department and NSC staff. Third, they served as an advocate for USF-I and MNSTC-I when concerns regarding individual cases arose in Washington. Last but not least, they kept the Chairman, Vice Chairman, and other Joint Staff senior leaders current on the status of Iraqi FMS cases, and Iraq related hearings on the Hill.

15 LTG Robert Caslen, "2012 Year End Assessment and Way Forward Into 2013," January 1, 2013.

16 Salam Zidane, "Iraq-China Launch 'Oil for Reconstruction' Agreement," Al-Monitor, October 8, 2019), <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2019/10/iraq-china-india-oil-construction.html>

17 Patrick Wintour and Julian Borger, "Saudi offers 'proof' of Iran's role in oil attack and urges U.S. response," The Guardian, U.S. Edition, September 18, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/18/saudi-oil-attack-rouhani-dismisses-us-claims-of-iran-role-as-slander>

18 TV7 Israel News, Iran's Khamenei vows to destroy Israel, May 25, 2020

19 Caslen personal notes from Fayyad-Mattis meeting, November 2012.

20 Caslen personal notes from Babaker-Odierno meeting, February 2013.

21 Jeffrey.