

13. Resolving the UN Dilemma

DEPENDING ON WHOM YOU TALK TO, the UN is either an obstacle to more effective security and reconstruction efforts in Iraq or an opportunity to advance precisely these goals.

Adherents of the view that the UN is an obstacle cite the UN's propensity for dilatory political wrangling, semantic hairsplitting, and diplomatic horse-trading—all much in evidence in the two months required for the United States to obtain Security Council approval on October 16 of an artfully worded resolution endorsing an accelerated process of security, reconstruction, and movement toward a sovereign Iraqi state. Like other UN endeavors, this one involved U.S. negotiations not only with the 4 other veto-wielding permanent Security Council members, but also with the 10 rotating members who, in turn, engaged in discussions with others of the remaining 176 members of the General Assembly.

Adherents of the view that the UN provides a significant and valuable opportunity present a very different perspective. They argue that the Security Council process is essential as both in-

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ducement and political cover if several countries are to be politically enabled to provide military and paramilitary forces and other assistance in Iraq. Some of those countries—including India, South Korea, Bangladesh, and perhaps Russia and Indonesia—disagreed with the coalition’s original decision to invade Iraq in March and thus would need the endorsement of a Security Council resolution to change course now. So, the argument goes, the Security Council process is an opportunity to obtain the participation and assistance that we seek.

In the U.S. policy community, protagonists of the obstacle view are concentrated in the Pentagon, whereas adherents to the opportunity view populate the State Department.

In any event, there may be a way to resolve this dilemma—a way that can reinforce and add muscle to the Security Council resolution. This alternative lies in directly expanding the role of a select few of the UN’s specialized agencies to pursue in Iraq the humanitarian and reconstruction activities in which they are competent and experienced. This approach not only complements the UN resolution of October 16 but also constitutes a more effective means of inducing other countries to provide military and paramilitary forces to strengthen security in Iraq.

The UN consists of nearly two dozen specialized agencies, some of which have highly creditable track records for providing effective as well as efficient services, despite the fact that others are cumbersome, cost-ineffective bureaucracies. The high-performance agencies include the World Health Organization, the Food and Agricultural Organization, the UN International Children’s Emergency Fund, the UN Development Program, the UN Industrial Development Organization, and the International Telecommunications Union.

Now suppose the Coalition Provisional Authority and Iraq’s Governing Council, together with such other financially able governments as those of Japan, Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark,

Poland, perhaps South Korea, China, and others, proposed to UN secretary-general Kofi Annan to augment significantly the core budgets of these agencies—say, by 20 percent—to support resumption and expansion of their reconstruction efforts in Iraq: for example, by children’s vaccination and nutrition programs, technical assistance in agriculture and water supply, rehabilitation and repair of electricity and telecommunication systems, and training telecom technicians.

The annual budgets of the six UN agencies referred to above amount to approximately \$2.6 billion. So, shared among the financially able donors, the annual costs of the proposed 20 percent increased UN effort would be about \$500 million—whose U.S. share would fit within, rather than add to, the \$18.3 billion for Iraq’s reconstruction that the Bush administration has obtained from Congress.

In light of the unanimous and permissive resolution 1511, it is likely that the secretary-general would be inclined to accept this proposal, both because it would advance reconstruction in Iraq and because it would ease the UN’s budgetary woes—a matter that Annan frequently bemoans, both inside and outside UN corridors. In the wake of the tragic August 19, 2003, bombing of the UN compound in Baghdad, Annan’s acceptance would no doubt be conditional on assurance of enhanced security for UN personnel.

Anticipation of such a substantial expansion of the UN presence in Iraq would constitute a more powerful *de facto* UN mandate than does resolution 1511 alone, thereby facilitating the provision by certain key countries of military and paramilitary forces to enhance security on the ground. Providing these forces would undergird an expanded UN role in Iraq’s reconstruction, as well as being vindicated by that expanded role. In effect, the expanded UN role in Iraq’s reconstruction would constitute a

strong political rationale and justification for providing military and paramilitary forces, as well.

Acceptance of the proposal would, of course, also carry with it retention by the UN of its authority and responsibility to ensure that the expanded role of the selected UN agencies was exercised in full conformity with the UN's established humanitarian and nation-building missions.

Thus, the expanded UN activities would palpably reinforce the case for additional forces to enhance security for the conduct of these activities.

The result would be a compelling synergy. Expansion of the UN role in Iraq's reconstruction would encourage contributions of military and police forces to enhance security in Iraq, and the improved security would contribute to a more effective UN role in Iraq's reconstruction.

POSTAUDIT

The basic idea of explicitly linking part of the U.S. (and other countries') financial contributions to the relatively effective and high-performing specialized agencies of the UN is appropriately analogous to the notion of conditionality in foreign aid. That the idea would be distinctly unwelcome in the UN Secretariat was amply demonstrated in a seminar I gave to several dozen senior UN officials in New York in 2003 shortly before this was published. I think this cool reception might have been a good and sufficient reason for pursuing the idea further at the time.