

Learning from Fallujah

Lessons identified
2003 - 2005

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What if different decisions had been made?

Before answering the question in the title, this discussion paper reviews what happened in Fallujah since April 2003 and then, stage by stage, indicates alternative actions that could profitably have been followed. In each of the six stages, we have included the views of informed Iraqi and non-Iraqi specialists as to what other courses of action – unused options - could more effectively have addressed the situation in Fallujah and reduced violence. The objective is not only more humane forms of military activity in any part of the world, especially in insurgency situations, but also more effective restoration of conventional civil life. The final section summarises the options into 5 main categories and offers lessons identified that could be put into practice in insurgency situations.

Methodology: Following a period of research drawing on a wide range of different sources, including international media, governmental and non-governmental reports, film footage, eye witness accounts as well as detailed questions put to military diplomatic religious and civil society experts on Fallujah, an initial report was drawn up. It formed the basis of a one day seminar in London in June 2005, the purpose of which was to engage those with extensive experience in the fields listed above in critiquing our findings and adding new insights and perspectives. This document has benefited greatly from their contributions.

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Background: the situation in Fallujah

Fallujah (Arabic: **فجولف**; sometimes transliterated as **Falluja** and less commonly **Fallouja**, **Falloujah**, **Faloojah**, **Faloojeh**) is a city of between 350,000 and 500,000 inhabitants (about the size of Edinburgh) in the Iraqi province of Al Anbar, located roughly 69km (43 miles) west of Baghdad on the East bank of the Euphrates. Within Iraq, it is known as the "city of mosques" for the 200 or more mosques found in the city and surrounding villages; as well as places of worship, these mosques were schools of language, Islamic history and law. It is one of the most important places to Sunni Islam in the region. Since the establishment of the Iraqi state, many eminent Fallujans have served as ministers, army leaders and professors, and two Iraqi presidents – Abdul Salam Aref and Abdul Rahman Aref – were from Fallujah¹.

Between 1970 and 2003 some fundamentalist imams were imprisoned by Saddam, but Fallujans in general supported the government because they benefited from developments in education, housing, and health. The sheiks had a relatively minor role before the occupation because the government and its civil institutions handled internal affairs. After the April 2003 invasion and the dissolving of most institutions the vacuum that opened up was filled by tribal and religious sheiks.



Map showing position of Fallujah

The town of Fallujah measures 3k wide x 3.5k long. It was there, early in the **1991 Gulf War**, that a British jet intending to bomb a bridge dropped two laser guided bombs on a crowded market. 276 civilians died² and many more were injured. Yet Fallujah was not hostile to American-led efforts to remove Saddam from power.

¹ "The US Treatment of Fallujah: the Fallujan View" report by Naji Haraj, Former Iraqi diplomat at the UN Geneva, (1999-2003) and resident of Fallujah, May 2005.

² Naji Haraj, May 2005, p.2.

The town is in the al-Anbar province, part of the so-called 'Sunni Triangle'. A Fallujah resident says "you will find people with their last names according to their tribes, like: al-Aisawi, al-Janabi, al-Zouba'i, al-Mohammadi, al-Alwani, al-Jumaily, al-Kubaisy." These tribes are branches of al-Dulaim, one of the biggest tribal federations in Iraq, and the main tribe in al-Anbar province. The Los Angeles Times described the local power structure "as the product of alliances between fiercely insular tribal clans, a growing Islamic movement and former Ba'ath Party businessmen and intelligence officers, who have helped bankroll the insurgency and plot some of its more sophisticated attacks."³ Those closely involved in negotiations say that early in 2003 members of the Wahhabi and Salafi sects were moving into Fallujah, almost as though this were part of a Ba'athist strategy. The main opposition in Fallujah was described by the Sydney Morning Herald as 'former regime loyalists and anti-American foreign fighters loyal to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian-born insurgent believed linked to al-Qaeda'.

A counter view is given by Dr Muhammad al-Hamadani, a Fallujan resident, who told Aljazeera.net on 19 July 2004 he had no knowledge about any non-Iraqi fighters in the town. "As a Falluja citizen, and head of the Falluja Scientific Forum, I can tell you that I have never seen or heard anything about non-Iraqi fighters in Falluja. We hear about al-Zarqawi in the media, but have never seen or felt his presence or any of his followers in Falluja".

However many diplomats assert that right from the beginning Fallujah attracted individuals who were not open to any form of negotiation and whose strategy was to provoke precisely the series of actions engaged in by the Coalition in Fallujah.

Milestone 1: March/April 2003 Invasion

Due to its social and religious structures, there was no looting or civil disorder in Fallujah during the initial invasion, as there was in Baghdad and elsewhere. Local leaders selected a governing council who took responsibility for keeping security and running the main services in the city. When U.S. forces entered the town on 23 April 2003, they chose the former headquarters of the Ba'ath Party, in the outskirts of the city, as their HQ.

As at June 2005, Camp Buhaira is now the closest US base to Fallujah and located about 2 miles southeast. Sitting near a palm-tree-lined, artificial lake, the location was once a Ba'ath Party retreat called Dreamland frequented by Saddam Hussein's sons. The lake also sports a waterside amphitheater from where Saadam's sons could reportedly watch boat races. An island connected to the shore by a stone bridge with white lamp-posts sits in the middle of the lake.

On 26 and 27 April 2003, some American troops from the 82nd Airborne moved from their headquarters to the al-Qa'id primary school in Nzal residential area and converted it to a military base. From their perspective there were surely operational reasons for doing this, and it is not known whether they explained their reasons to

³ Alissa J Rubin, The Los Angeles Times, 7.4.04

local leaders. On 28 April, about 400 people - most of them school students, relatives and teachers - came out in a demonstration near the American main base and then moved to the front of the school to express their opposition to the takeover of their school. Reports indicate that this was a peaceful demonstration to try and make the US leave the school they had occupied, by people wanting their children to be able to continue attending school. Prior to that there had been no resistance to the occupation. When the demonstration came close to the outer wall of the school, the US army opened fire. A total of twenty people were killed; three of them children under the age of 10, with more than 85 wounded⁴. Thousands of people joined a second and third demonstration on 29 and 30 April, condemning the US acts and demanding the immediate withdrawal of American forces.

From a US perspective, the demonstrations may have seemed part of a pattern of unrest after the invasion, in a city that was seen as an ex-Ba'athist stronghold. A particularly robust approach possibly appeared necessary as an example to Sunni resistance in other parts of the triangle.

From a Fallujan perspective, militancy intensified as house arrests increased and people were disappearing into Abu Ghraib prison, some 30 km away. The detention and treatment of the Abu Ghraib prisoners, many of them from Fallujah, became a significant factor in the unrest in the city. House raids seem to exhibit a general pattern, summarized in a February 2004 report by the International Committee of the Red Cross, based on its investigation of reported incidents:

“Arresting authorities entered houses usually after dark, breaking down doors, waking up residents roughly, yelling orders, forcing family members into one room under military guard while searching the rest of the house and further breaking doors, cabinets, and other property. They arrested suspects, tying their hands in the back with flexicuffs, hooding them, and taking them away. Sometimes they arrested all adult males in the house, including elderly, handicapped, or sick people. Treatment often included pushing people around, insulting, taking aim with rifles, punching and kicking, and striking with rifles. Individuals were often led away in whatever they happened to be wearing at the time of arrest - sometimes pyjamas or underwear... In many cases personal belongings were seized during the arrest with no receipt given.... In almost all incidents documented by the ICRC, arresting authorities provided no information about who they were, where their base was located, nor did they explain the cause of arrest. Similarly, they rarely informed the arrestee or his family where he was being taken or for how long, resulting in the defacto disappearance of the arrestee for weeks or even months until contact was finally made.”⁵

Some negotiation was tried, with the broad aim of splitting the hard core from the broader Sunni community. The problem, according to an experienced British diplomat, was that US military tactics used during the invasion and in seeking to secure the country had killed and injured many Iraqis, particularly in Sunni areas

⁴ Associated Press International 29.4.05.

⁵ *On the Treatment by the Coalition Forces of Prisoners of War and Other Protected Persons by the Geneva Conventions in Iraq During Arrest, Internment and Interrogation*, Geneva: International Committee of the Red Cross, February 2004.

where the resistance was strongest. This reinforced the perception among the Sunni community of the Coalition as a hostile invader no better than the regime it had swept away. The post invasion chaos, failure to restore and improve services, abuses at Abu Ghraib, US Administration rhetoric and its wider Middle East policies, particularly on Israel, amplified in the Arab press and satellite television (Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya) added to the hostility.

In May 2003 Iraqi military personnel, police and security services were disbanded, with their weapons, “and for 10 months Iraq’s borders were left open for anyone to come in without even a visa or a passport”.⁶ The mass dismissal of government and army personnel (informed estimates say that 1million people were involved) disproportionately affected Sunnis generally. "De-Baathification" measures have fallen most heavily on Sunnis, including many who are recognized as leaders or prominent individuals in their communities.

Unused Options

1.1. Systematic actions could have been taken to prevent violence erupting: **the borders could have been closed early on, ammunition dumps could have been secured immediately, and the army and the rest of the administrative apparatus could have been retained not disbanded.**

1.2. There would then have had to be a **systematic outreach to the Sunni population**; instead there was too much reliance on the Shia opposed to Saddam. The absence of hierarchy within the Sunni religious community, meaning that there was no figure equivalent to Al-Sistani with whom agreements could be made and then implemented, made this more difficult.

Detailed plans could have been drawn up before the war of how to engage the key Sunni tribal and religious leaders early on. Before the war, the United States had an opportunity to co-opt or neutralize the al-Dulaimi tribal federation through a working relationship with the Kharbit tribe, a major force in the federation. With an estimated two million members, the Dulaimi had been pillars of the Hussein regime. Their strongholds were Falluja, Ramadi, Qaim, and others towns of the Sunni triangle. Leaders of the Kharbit had been meeting with and assisting US intelligence operatives in Jordan. They were key in facilitating prewar special operations in Western Anbar province.⁷

1.3. At this early stage, **credibility could have been earned and lives saved by listening to sheiks and imams** - they are the community leaders and it is they who have the invisible influence on how and when things happen. If local leaders could have been persuaded, for example, of the strategic importance of soldiers being

⁶ Ghazi al-Yawer, Iraq’s first interim president, quoted in “*Vicious Circle: The Dynamics of Occupation and Resistance in Iraq*” Carl Conetta, Project on Defense Alternatives, May 2005.

⁷ Ibid, p.17. Drawn from Rod Nordland, Tom Masland and Christopher Dickey, "Unmasking the Insurgents," *Newsweek*, 7 February 2005; Paul McGeough, "Fatal collision with tradition," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 July 2004; Amatzia Baram, *The Iraqi Tribes and the post-Saddam System, Iraq Memo #18* (Washington DC: 8 July 2003, Brookings Institution); and, "Saddam's spy chief tried to meet US," *United Press International News Update*, 22 April 2003.

situated in the school, then the demonstration that led to the shootings might never have happened. Relationships with Sunni tribal leaders should have been carefully undertaken from April 2003: it takes time to build such relationships and to overcome suspicions. It also requires a cadre of Coalition officials with good Arabic language skills and knowledge of the society and culture. The decision to dismantle the Iraqi army made the task still more difficult, since potentially useful interlocutors in the upper ranks were alienated.

1.4. The shooting of civilians at the school was undoubtedly a mistake. However, when it happened, **US forces could immediately have established an investigation, with the mayor of Fallujah and local leaders, to determine what happened. If there was illegal behaviour, and if the US had apologized, taken disciplinary action and offered help to the families of victims, the damage could have been minimised.** A British journalist with extensive experience of Iraq says that even if a senior US representative had spoken in the right way to redress the sense of grievance and injustice after the deaths of civilians at the school, the attacks on US contractors a year later could have been prevented.

1.5. The occupation forces could have set up **Centres of Listening and Documentation (CLDs)** responsible for a number of activities including documenting severe abuse and violations of human rights. This format has worked well amid the seething ethnic rivalries in Kirkuk, where such a centre – the Citizens' Liaison Centre – was set up in July 2004 by a British Iraqi, Sami Velioglu. The Centre has dealt with over 3,000 cases, often acting as intermediary between the inhabitants and the US forces.

1.6. The theme of **humiliation** recurs throughout reports and opinion surveys. A 15 March 2004 poll sponsored by *ABC News* found that, at the time, 42 percent of Iraqis thought the war had liberated Iraq, while 41 percent thought it had humiliated Iraq. What may be isolated incidents – the act of scrawling an obscene insult "Fuck Iraq and every Iraqi in it!" on a bedroom mirror during a house raid – may not seem like much, but a single act of this sort can affirm nationalist tendencies in an entire neighbourhood and colour its perception of the American mission.⁸ The Economist reports another example where Marines in Ramadi, searching for insurgents, randomly kicked in the doors of houses to shout at the women inside: "'Where's your black mask?' and 'Bitch, where's the guns?'"⁹ Humiliation and degradation are ancient and explosive weapons of war. Conversely, to redress and reduce violence requires systematic training, for soldiers and all those involved in conflict, in the **necessity for respect for other cultures**. This means not only learning about customs and religious sensitivities and at least the basics of the language concerned, but also education in awareness – understanding why respect is so important. The whole of Iraqi society is based on concepts of honour and respect, especially of tribal and religious leaders. **Occupation troops could have proved to the population their commitment to human rights by respecting their dignity and avoiding humiliating them.**

1.7. **The inter-religious tensions that preceded the invasion were never properly addressed by the Coalition.** The US overplayed links with the Shia, giving ex-Sunni

⁸ Ibid, p 12. quoting from Ali Fadhil, "City of Ghosts," *The Guardian (UK)*, 11 January 2005.

⁹ "When deadly force bumps into hearts and minds," *Economist*, 1 January 2005.

houses to them – for example Sayed Jamal Adin, when he returned from exile in Dubai, was given a huge mansion. **Meetings of religious leaders of all denominations were called, but certainly in one case disintegrated when British diplomats attempted to prescribe the terms of an agreed statement.** Such meetings could have produced an influential outcome if the leaders had been allowed the time to have the arguments they had been unable to have under Saddam, and gradually to reach agreement on their own terms.

Milestone 2: Killing of US contractors, 31st March 2004

The city became militant and resistance grew from the time of the shootings at the school; several informed observers say that the deaths led directly to the killing of four American contractors a year later. Fallujans became suspicious of any foreigner entering their city, and the US gradually lost control of most of the city.

- ❑ On 6 January 2004 two French nationals working for US companies were killed and a third wounded in a drive-by shooting in the city. A US Apache helicopter was shot down west of Fallujah, near Habbaniya.
- ❑ On 9 January, nine US soldiers were killed when their Blackhawk helicopter was shot down in the city.
- ❑ On 13 January, four civilian protesters including an elderly woman were killed by US forces, and five others were seriously wounded.
- ❑ On 13 February 2004 the head of US Central Command in the Middle East, General John Abizaid, escaped an assassination attempt in Fallujah, in an attack by rocket-propelled grenades.
- ❑ On 15 February a police station was attacked and about 100 prisoners freed.
- ❑ On 20 March 2004 the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force¹⁰ (IMEF) commanded by Lt. General Conway took over responsibility in al-Anbar province from the Army's 82nd Airborne Division commanded by Major General Swannack.

From the US perspective, therefore, the situation in Fallujah even before the killing of the contractors, seemed to pose an increasing threat and require special action. On 31 March 2004 the four U.S. civilian contract employees were killed, their mutilated corpses dragged through the city and hung on the bridge. Shock waves reverberated through US media, and U.S. military officials vowed a major response.

From that point, Fallujah was sealed off by US troops and off-limits to Westerners. On 5 April Associated Press reported that U.S. troops closed off entrances to Fallujah with earth barricades ahead of the planned operation, code named "Vigilant Resolve." Iraqi police in the city visited mosques, dropping off Arabic leaflets from the U.S. military, telling residents that there was a daily 7 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew. It ordered them not to congregate in groups or carry weapons, even if licensed. It instructed people that if U.S. forces enter their homes, they should gather in one room and if they want to talk to the troops to have their hands up.

¹⁰ The IMEF Accountability Code reads: "I am accountable for my Marines/Sailors. I am accountable for my equipment. I am accountable for my actions. I am accountable for my lack of action." IMEF Daily Self Assessment reads: "Who did I teach today, and what did I teach them? What did I learn today, and who did I learn it from? Who did I make smile? "

The Los Angeles Times reported that “Working through the cold and windy desert night, under a large moon, Marines set up camps for detainees and residents who might flee.... Before dawn, several Marine positions on the fringes of town were hit by mortar rounds and rocket-propelled grenade fire; one Marine was reported killed.... At daylight, Marines in armored Humvees began distributing leaflets asking residents to stay in their homes and help identify insurgents and those responsible for last week's killings. They also took over the local radio station and used bullhorns to get the message out. "We are going to stop the anarchy inside this city," one announcement said; another asserted that insurgents were violating the peaceful tenets of Islam.... Marines said they had no plans to conduct random door-to-door searches; they instead intended to work from a list of addresses where intelligence suggested suspects might be hiding and weapons might be stored. “Marine officials said the cordon of Fallujah will last as long as it takes to clear the town of weapons caches and a long list of suspected insurgents.”

There were indications on 2 April that anti-coalition forces were preparing for a fight in the city. One source with close ties to the anti-U.S. resistance forces told United Press International (UPI) that fighters from throughout the region had begun slipping into Fallujah in preparation for what they assume will be a significant U.S. military operation. One such fighter - who normally operates in Baghdad - told UPI he would leave immediately to join a cell in Fallujah and that fighters were also entering the city from the neighbouring city of Ramadi. "Fallujah is where we fight the invaders," a source familiar with the workings of the resistance told UPI through an intermediary Friday. "Ramadi is where our leadership and operations are based. They are moving (resources) into Fallujah for this fight. We will make Fallujah the graveyard of America."¹¹

Seen from the perspective of US leadership, news of such resistance build-up must have heightened tension, and provided the basis for a substantial military operation to attempt to destroy the opposition concentrated in one city. US military commanders would have been in receipt of reports such as the following: "It is part of the ritual of manhood for some people now, that you have to have killed an American soldier to be respected. The guys who killed the guards disappeared straight away: teenagers attacked the bodies afterwards to try and say, 'I am a man.' "Nobody will hand them over to the Americans, though: we will just give them a talking to and tell them 'not again'." ¹²

A March/April 2004 *USA Today* poll found 58% of all Iraqis saying the troops had behaved very or fairly badly, 34% saying very or fairly well.

Unused Options

2.1. The possibility of neutral peace-keeping troops was not explored and tested sufficiently. The US could have withdrawn from Fallujah, allowed an independently led coalition of Muslim troops, under a UN banner, to tackle the issue of security in the

¹¹ The Iraq Body Count Fallujah Archive is derived from nearly three hundred selected news stories on the April 2004 siege of Fallujah.

¹² Colin Freeman, Daily Telegraph, 4.4.04.

country, and the United Nations could have observed elections. It would have to have been very clear that the US was not in command. The people of Fallujah asked for this in their second letter to Kofi Annan.

2.2. After the killing of the contractors, negotiations were initiated by a US Marine General who persuaded a former soldier from Fallujah to negotiate with the local power structure to set up a local police force drawing on locals, working with the community. Washington discovered this and disowned the process by suggesting the soldier was a former Ba'athist. The General was replaced with a US General from Baghdad unknown in Fallujah who insisted that US soldiers parade in the streets. He thus lost his legitimacy.

2.3. An alternative approach used by other forces was to build relationships in the local community, to build communication and confidence. This requires a high level of visibility, contact in the street, wearing berets and not helmets, sitting on carpets drinking coffee with local leaders, so the population gained some sense of the soldiers being there to protect them.

2.4. In such pivotal moments (the killing of the contractors) in any conflict, the desire to use overwhelming force needs to be measured against the potential to provoke more violence. At moments of provocation, a deep sense of fear can be stimulated, in this case in the US Marines, and all their training in containment is challenged. The natural response is to desire some kind of revenge or retribution for the humiliation. It takes enormous self-restraint and wisdom to pause and think of non-violent responses to acts of provocation. However, to seek revenge will only unleash a further cycle of violence. Mature democracies need to find ways to model the capacity to be reflective and contain the violence in moments of fear.

As an illustration of how difficult these decisions can be, the British faced a similar situation in Basra, when 6 Military Police were killed in an attack on a police station. The Divisional Commander considered the option of going in, finding the perpetrators and bringing them out. He felt that he could have done this very quickly but there would be many Iraqi casualties as a result. Instead he decided that the right action would be to let the situation simmer down and then meet the community leaders and discuss what went wrong and how to identify and punish the perpetrators.

This was not a straightforward decision. It was difficult to explain to relatives that no immediate action was taken to avenge the deaths. Even the local leaders found it hard to understand the British response, saying that the perpetrators were walking around the souk boasting of their success.

2.5. An Iraqi aid worker states: "The US should have set up very strict monitoring teams to see fair play in every aspect of Iraqi life because Iraqis can't trust anyone after what's happened to them. They should have set up recourse mechanisms for those afflicted during the invasion; offering a derisory \$160 compensation for a man shot by mistake is seen as an insult by his family."

Milestone 3: US assault on Fallujah - 5/6th April 2004

On 5 April Operation Vigilant Resolve was launched. U.S. warplanes firing rockets destroyed four houses in Fallujah. Dr. Salam Hussein al-Ali said 26 Iraqis, including women and children, were killed and 30 wounded in the strike¹³. Marines waged a fierce battle for hours with gunmen holed up in Jolan, a residential neighbourhood of Fallujah. The military used an AC-130 gunship to lay down a barrage of fire against the gunmen, and commanders said Marines were holding an area several blocks deep inside the city. At least two Marines were wounded. Heavy fighting also occurred between Marines entrenched in the desert and guerrillas firing from houses on Fallujah's northeast outskirts. The only operating hospital in Fallujah was hit by US tank and missile fire overnight¹⁴. Al Jazeera also reported that Jolan inhabitants said US forces used cluster bombs and missiles against them.

Channel 4 News reported¹⁵ that Fallujans were prevented from leaving the city, and that US forces closed bridges leading to the hospital. Hospital sources said at least 45 Iraqis were killed and 90 injured in attacks the next day¹⁶; among the casualties were a family sitting in a car parked behind the Abd al-Aziz al-Samarai mosque when it was bombed by a US airplane. American forces initially said those killed in the attack on the mosque were fighters taking refuge. But a Marine officer later admitted that US forces had failed to find any bodies. "When we hit that building I thought we had killed all the bad guys, but when we went in they didn't find any bad guys in the building," Lieutenant Colonel Brennan Byrne told reporters.

From the US perspective it appeared that several mosques were being used by the insurgents as places to strategize or even to fire at Marines. Outside one particular mosque the Marines apparently allowed Fallujans to come in to take the insurgent wounded away. But instead, people with rocket-propelled grenades, jumped out of the ambulances and started fighting with the Marines. The Marines called in air power. A helicopter dropped a hellfire missile and then an F-16 dropped a laser-guided bomb on the outside of the mosque. But when the Marines examined the mosque and went in and went door-to-door in the mosque and floor-to-floor, they found no bodies, nor did they find the kind of blood and guts one would presume if people had died. "The Marines were quite willing to kill everybody in the mosque because they were insurgents. They had been firing at people, at Marines. And as the lieutenant colonel who ordered the strikes said, this was no longer a house of worship; this was a military target."¹⁷

"Some of the fighters are young guys, the equivalent of dope peddlers, who do this for money. Others are holy warriors willing to die for a cause," said Capt. Will Dickens, another company commander whose troops were fired on repeatedly. "The die-hard [suicide fighters] just stand up in the open, fire from the hip and stay there until they kill or are killed."¹⁸

¹³ API 6.4.04, confirmed by the Guardian.

¹⁴ Dr Kamal Al Anni, head surgeon of the main hospital, was shown having to operate in makeshift quarters in a film shown on Channel 4 News on 27.5.04.

¹⁵ 'Fallujah Forensics' Tara Sutton for Guardian Films, broadcast 27.5.04.

¹⁶ API 7.4.04.

¹⁷ PBS Radio, Gwen Ifill and Tony Perry, 7.4.04.

¹⁸ Pamela Constable, Washington Post, 7.4.04.

The US perspective was summed up by Lt Colonel Brennan Byrne: "This is not retribution. This is not vendetta. This is about making the city liveable so people don't have to live in fear of the thugs who have taken over the city.....This city has long been a haven for smugglers and bandits, a dumping ground for foreign fighters and bad guys. No one ever took the time to clean it out properly."

From the Fallujan perspective the defence of their city was paramount against an invasion using overwhelming firepower. They were outraged at the shelling of their only operating hospital – not only their only source of emergency medical help but also the only source of figures on numbers of Iraqis killed and injured – and by the reported use of cluster bombs and missiles against civilians. Associated Press reported that U.S. warplanes opened fire on groups of Iraqis in the street. On 9 and 10 April fierce confrontations left over 300 dead and 500 wounded.

Unused Options

3.1. A sheik from Ramadi told a British source that he was part of a negotiating team of sheiks from the Anbar province who proposed to the US forces that if they withdrew to their bases and stayed there, that they could guarantee a peaceful situation. Instead a number of sheiks were arrested, including Mahrouth al-Hathal, sheik of one of the biggest tribes in al-Anbar, on 15 Sep. 2003.

Since Iraqi society bases its system on a structure of respect and good manners, it was important that sheiks and imams be respected; to treat them with disrespect is offensive to the whole community. **Rather than arresting the spokesman for the sheiks, much more effort could have been put into talking to them, listening, and acting on their suggestions and requests.** An informed British observer with years of experience in Iraq believed that there were particular religious and tribal leaders who could have had more potential in finding a solution.

There are plenty of precedents. For example in Somalia in the early 1990s the Borama Process of traditional peace processes was used to bring about peace charters and a new government. In Kenya in 1992 clan elders were used to restore peace after 1,500 had been killed in inter-tribal warfare.¹⁹

Negotiating in Iraq also raised US internal issues that 'included multiple agendas, lack of communication between different players within the Coalition, and the 'bigger boss' syndrome. Also the difficulty of getting beyond thinking in terms of good guys and bad guys. Moving beyond black hats and white hats to thinking in terms of grey hats was essential. At the same time it would have raised moral dilemmas which still persist, about talking to the politically violent.'²⁰

3.2. A profound problem faced US troops. **Their mission was to subdue the city by force, while trying to protect themselves against an angry population as well as**

¹⁹ For details, see *War Prevention Works* Oxford Research Group, 2002.

²⁰ An expert on military negotiations, personal communication 29.6.05.

to decrease the level of animosity. Their difficulty managing it is captured in *Knight-Ridder* reporting on the 3/4 Cavalry. The article²¹ records one sergeant reporting "Every time we kill one of them, we breed more that want to fight us. We end up turning neutral people against us." His final conclusion conveys both the dilemma posed by the occupation and his effort to cope with it: "It's not really our fault, though, because I have to defend myself."

A similar ambivalence is evident in the recollections of Lt. Gen. James Conway (USMC), who led the first major assault on Fallujah in April 2004. Conway initially opposed the attack, preferring other methods for pacifying Fallujah. Looking back, he says: "When we were told to attack Fallujah, I think we certainly increased the level of animosity that existed."²²

Another appraisal of the US military's dilemma in Iraq is offered by the US Army reformer, Col. Douglas A. Macgregor (ret.):
"Most of the generals and politicians did not think through the consequences of compelling American soldiers with no knowledge of Arabic or Arab culture to implement intrusive measures inside an Islamic society. We arrested people in front of their families, dragging them away in handcuffs with bags over their heads, and then provided no information to the families of those we incarcerated. In the end, our soldiers killed, maimed and incarcerated thousands of Arabs, 90 percent of whom were not the enemy. But they are now."²³

3.3 Attempting to use superior force against enraged insurgents is unlikely to succeed in bringing down the temperature to the level necessary for negotiation.

A more effective way to deal with furious people is to show respect, because this disarms them more quickly than force. But it demands exceptional courage.

Here is an example of this kind of courage on the part of an American officer, described by Dan Baum in the *New Yorker*:
"During the early weeks of the Iraq war, the television set in my office was tuned all day to CNN, with the sound muted. On the morning of April 3rd (2003), as the Army and the Marines were closing in on Baghdad, I happened to look up at what appeared to be a disaster in the making. A small unit of American soldiers was walking along a street in Najaf when hundreds of Iraqis poured out of the buildings on either side. Fists waving, throats taut, they pressed in on the Americans, who glanced at one another in terror. I reached for the remote and turned up the sound. The Iraqis were shrieking, frantic with rage. From the way the lens was lurching, the cameraman seemed as frightened as the soldiers. This is it, I thought. A shot will come from somewhere, the Americans will open fire, and the world will witness the My Lai massacre of the Iraq war. At that moment, an American officer stepped through the crowd holding his rifle high over his head with the barrel pointed to the ground. Against the backdrop of the seething crowd, it was a striking gesture-almost Biblical.

²¹ Ken Dilanian and Drew Brown, "Angry Iraqis tell of U.S. troops fatal errors," *Knight Ridder*, 10 September 2003.

²² Rajiv Chandrasekaran, "Key General Criticizes April Attack In Falluja; Abrupt Withdrawal Called Vacillation," *Washington Post*, 13 September 2004, p. 17.

²³ Douglas A. Macgregor, "Dramatic failures require drastic changes," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 19 December 2004. All the above quoted in 'Vicious Circle...' above.

"Take a knee," the officer said, impassive behind surfer sunglasses. The soldiers looked at him as if he were crazy. Then, one after another, swaying in their bulky body armor and gear, they knelt before the boiling crowd and pointed their guns at the ground. The Iraqis fell silent, and their anger subsided. The officer ordered his men to withdraw.

"It took two months to track down Lieutenant Colonel Chris Hughes, who by then had been rotated home. He called from his father's house, in Red Oak, Iowa, en route to study at the Army War College, in Pennsylvania. I wanted to know who had taught him to tame a crowd by pointing his rifle muzzle down and having his men kneel. Were those gestures peculiar to Iraq? To Islam? My questions barely made sense to Hughes. In an unassuming, persistent Iowa tone, he assured me that nobody had prepared him for an angry crowd in an Arab country, much less the tribal complexities of Najaf. Army officers learn in a general way to use a helicopter's rotor wash to drive away a crowd, he explained. Or they fire warning shots. "Problem with that is, the next thing you have to do is shoot them in the chest." Hughes had been trying that day to get in touch with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, a delicate task that the Army considered politically crucial. American gunfire would have made it impossible. The Iraqis already felt that the Americans were disrespecting their mosque. The obvious solution, to Hughes, was a gesture of respect."²⁴

Milestone 4: Stalemate, April 2004

On 9 April the U.S. military offered a cease-fire deal to allow peace talks between Iraqi officials and insurgents. The Fallujan leaders wanted the US Marines to withdraw - at least partially. They also wanted to deploy a locally recruited police force. Iraqi mediators said the two sides had agreed in principle to give ground on some of their demands. By this time it was reported that the offensive had killed five Marines and more than 600 Iraqis, mostly civilians, according to hospital sources.

For Iraqis, as reported by New York Times correspondent Edward Wong on 22.4.04, Fallujah had become "a galvanizing battle, a symbol around which many Iraqis rally their anticolonial sentiments." He interviewed "the kind of middle-class Iraqis that Americans are relying on to help them rebuild the country, with livelihoods already rooted in the principles of free-market capitalism. Yet their sense of kinship with Iraqis in Falluja, Najaf and elsewhere runs deeper than any pull toward abstract notions of democracy offered by the Americans - notions that to them appear increasingly hypocritical given the reliance of the occupiers on overwhelming force as a means to an end." "Four American people were killed in Fallujah," said Omar Farouk, the owner of a convenience store. "Because of that, 500 people were killed in Fallujah. The message of the Americans is that 'we have the power.' Iraqis will never accept that."

From the US perspective the situation looked grim. On 22 April 04²⁵ senior US military officers estimated there were about 2,000 hard-core insurgents in the town, including about 200 foreign fighters, mainly from Syria and Yemen; former members

²⁴ BATTLE LESSONS; What the generals don't know. New Yorker 17.1.05.

²⁵ New York Times, Eric Schmitt, 22.4.04.

of the Iraqi Special Republican Guard and security services; Islamic fighters; and former members of the Fedayeen militia. On 28 April Ali Allawi, the Iraqi Defence Minister, said that a second unit of the Iraqi armed forces has mutinied at Fallujah after being involved in heavy fighting with insurgents. "Part of the 36th battalion of the paramilitary Iraqi Civil Defence Corps revolted last week after the unit had been fighting in the besieged city for 11 days..... At the start of the siege of Fallujah three weeks ago, one of the five battalions of the newly formed Iraqi army refused to go to the city because many of its soldiers were not prepared to fight fellow Iraqis."²⁶

After the huge numbers of casualties, on 29 April the US agreed to withdraw to the circumferences of Fallujah, the centre of which then became a stronghold for insurgents. US forces handed control to an Iraqi militia force – the Fallujah Brigade – under General Jasim Mohammed al-Mohammadi, composed mainly of native Fallujans. Lt General Conway, commander of the 1st Marines Expeditionary Force, told a news conference on 1 May that they were banking on the Iraqi force to douse the resistance in the city.

Throughout the summer and autumn the US military launched air strikes on the city. U.S. forces claimed that these were targeted, intelligence-based strikes against houses used by the group of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, an insurgency leader linked to Al-Qaeda. The Guardian reported later that this "was used to create a climate of acquiescence in the US-appointed Iraqi government. Shia leaders were told that bringing Fallujah under control was the only way to prevent a Sunni-inspired civil war. Blair was invited to share responsibility by sending British troops to block escape routes from Fallujah and prevent supplies entering once the siege began. Warnings of the onslaught prompted the vast majority of Fallujah's 300,000 people to flee. The city was then declared a free-fire zone on the ground that the only people left behind must be 'terrorists' ...no reporter could get anything like a full picture. Since the siege ended, tight US restrictions – as well as the danger of hostage-taking that prevents reporters from travelling in most parts of Iraq – have put the devastated city virtually off-limits."²⁷

From the Fallujan perspective they were being punished not only for the deaths of the contractors but for "being the symbol of an uprising that had shaken the US occupation of Iraq to the core. The majority of Iraqis, whether Shiite or Sunni, are uniting around a common demand—that the American military get out of their country. The entry of thousands of Shiite fighters into active resistance on 4 April, alongside the long running guerrilla war being fought in predominantly Sunni areas, has forced US and allied forces to retreat inside fortress compounds in many parts of the country"²⁸.

"On 12 September, at his change-of-command ceremony, the outgoing Marine general Lt. Gen. James Conway, gave tragic voice to what thousands of servicemen throughout Iraq have believed for months. He announced that the April assault on

²⁶ Independent, Patrick Cockburn, 29.4.04:

²⁷ Jonathan Steele and Dahr Jamail, Guardian 27.4.05

²⁸"The US Treatment of Fallujah: the Fallujan View" report by Naji Haraj, former Iraqi diplomat at the UN Geneva, (1999-2003) and resident of Fallujah, May 2005.

Fallujah had been an overly aggressive mistake.”²⁹ Another Marine commander said the Fallujah Brigade, a local force given control of the town while Marines pulled back, had turned out to be a "fiasco". Marine officers have said assault rifles, vehicles and radios given to the Brigade by American forces ended up in the hands of insurgents.³⁰

In July Fallujans began staging sit-ins to demand compensation for property destroyed during the April US military offensive. Carrying banners reading: "Rebuild our houses from our oil revenues", demonstrators acknowledged that some aid has reached the town, but they told al Jazeera's correspondent it is "nothing in comparison to the cost of the damage already inflicted by US warplanes".³¹

Unused Options

4.1. A leading UK expert with many years experience in negotiations in Iraq says that many forms of negotiation were attempted with those in Fallujah, starting from April 2004 until the up scaling of the conflict in November. "Many Iraqis tried to set themselves up as possible mediators/negotiators. Often negotiation started with the wrong people in Fallujah who did not have the power or influence to deliver a settlement. However because some attempts did not work does not mean that all of them would have failed. **We believed that there were particular religious and tribal leaders that could have had more potential in finding a solution. One of the senior religious leaders in Iraq was willing to go in to negotiate for peace** (in a similar way to what al-Sistani did in Najaf). This attempt had the support of many key Americans. But any of the alternative solutions would probably have taken far longer than the Americans wanted."

4.2. US haste in Fallujah was driven by the Iraqi election timetable and the perception that Fallujah was the last trouble spot that needed to be 'sorted out'. However, in the view of seasoned negotiators the situation could, even at this stage, have taken a different turn if a prominent US figure had understood the need to show respect to Iraqis in their city, and had come to discuss with local leaders what the US was trying to do. **If this approach had been taken, it could have been possible gradually to identify those with the authority to calm the fighters, and to sit down and negotiate with them, or to do that through intermediaries.** This kind of approach has worked in many similar situations, for example in Mozambique, where an Italian NGO was able to act as go-between in a guerrilla war that had taken thousands of lives, between FRELIMO and RENAMO, and achieve a cease-fire in 1992³² which has lasted to this day.

4.3. A lateral approach could have been tried, **to get to the heart of the problem that in Fallujah there was undoubtedly a group whose main motivation was to stoke hatred and lethal resistance.** Such an approach proved effective in Yemen:

“When Judge Hamoud al-Hitar announced that he and four other Islamic scholars would challenge Yemen's Al Qaeda prisoners to a theological contest,

²⁹ David Morris, Salon.com, 16.9.04.

³⁰ "General criticises Fallujah strategy" NewsTelegraph, Toby Harnden in Baghdad, filed 14.9.04.

³¹ Al-Jazeera, 19.7.04.

³² See *War Prevention Works* Oxford Research Group, 2002.

Western antiterrorism experts warned that this high-stakes gamble would end in disaster. Nervous as he faced five captured, yet defiant, Al Qaeda members in a Sanaa prison, Judge Hitar was inclined to agree. But banishing his doubts, the youthful cleric threw down the gauntlet, in the hope of bringing peace to his troubled homeland. "If you can convince us that your ideas are justified by the Koran, then we will join you in your struggle," Hitar told the militants. "But if we succeed in convincing you of our ideas, then you must agree to renounce violence."

The prisoners eagerly agreed.

Now, two years later, not only have those prisoners been released, but a relative peace reigns in Yemen. And the same Western experts who doubted this experiment are courting Hitar, eager to hear how his "theological dialogues" with captured Islamic militants have helped pacify this wild and mountainous country, previously seen by the US as a failed state, like Iraq and Afghanistan. "Since December 2002, when the first round of the dialogues ended, there have been no terrorist attacks here, even though many people thought that Yemen would become terror's capital," says Hitar, "364 young men have been released after going through the dialogues and none of these has left Yemen to fight anywhere else."³³

4.4.A British intelligence officer with extensive experience in the Middle East says that **if the US aims were to make an example and demonstrate their supremacy, this proved to be a flawed strategy.** They may have intended violence reduction and then negotiation, which would be 'front-loaded' negotiation i.e. "You accept our presence, we march around your town, then we'll talk." He said that **this is humiliation, not negotiation, and especially does not work with Iraqis.**

Milestone 5: 8th November 2004 US forces and Iraqi allies storm into the city, launching 'Operation Phantom Fury'

The US decision was to subdue the city by force. US troops closed all roads in the area and put the city under total siege. On 7 November 04 the Iraq interim government declared a 60 day state of emergency in preparation for the assault, as insurgents carried out several car bomb attacks in the Fallujah area which killed Iraqi army and police, U.S. soldiers and Iraqi civilians. The next day Prime Minister Iyad Allawi publicly authorized an offensive in Fallujah and Ramadi to "liberate the people" and "clean Fallujah from the terrorists". He said he made this move after all peaceful means to solve the problem had not worked out.

"The offensive in Fallujah is one of the most telegraphed military operations in history. That is by design, said Pentagon officials. The city normally has a population of about 300,000. With all the warnings, officials estimate that between 50,000 and 60,000 people are left in the city. Even so, Multinational Force Iraq officials report terrorists in the city are preventing families from leaving Fallujah. According to residents, terrorists plan to use citizens as human shields, then claim they were

³³ James Brandon, The Christian Science Monitor, 4.2.05.

attacked by friendly forces”.³⁴ Officials estimated between 5,000 and 6,000 insurgents and foreign terrorists were in the city. Residents of Fallujah however were telling TV satellite channels that there were no foreigners in the city, and US forces admitted after the invasion that the percentage of foreigners in Fallujah was very low - about 2 per cent.

“Multinational Force Iraq officials had received reports that terrorists in Fallujah were building a system of tunnels joining mosques and schools within the city. The tunnels reportedly would be used to transport weapons and ammunition throughout protected sites in the face of the Multinational Force assault. Under international law, mosques are granted protected status because of their religious and cultural significance. However, such sites lose their protected status when insurgents use them for military purposes.”³⁵ Fallujans say that the tunnels idea was part of the propaganda to justify attacking mosques; linking mosques and schools by tunnels would apparently be an impossible task. The previous government had tried to expand the sewerage system in the city during early nineties, spending billions of Iraqi dinars and using hundreds of trucks and bulldozers, but failed because the underground water is very close to the surface.

On 8 November US Marines and the Iraqi 36th Commando Battalion secured two bridges across the Euphrates, seized a hospital on the outskirts of the city and arrested about 50 men in the hospital. About half the arrested men were later released. A hospital doctor reported that 15 Iraqis were killed and 20 wounded during the overnight incursions. The only other clinic was hit twice by US missiles and all its medicines and equipment destroyed. Dr Sami al-Jumaili, who was working in the clinic, says the bombs took the lives of 15 medics, four nurses and 35 patients. Whether the clinic was targeted or destroyed accidentally, the effect was the same: to eliminate many of Fallujah’s doctors from the war zone. As Dr Jumaili told the Independent on 14 November: "There is not a single surgeon in Fallujah."

The Economist (13.11.04) said that the reason for early capture of the hospital was because it was “the source of damaging reports, last time round, that hundreds of civilians had been killed.” The New York Times reported in similar vein. The only journalists allowed into Fallujah were embedded with US military units, and were limited in what they could report.

A British churchman who was in Baghdad reports that the most senior people in the CPA did not know what was happening in Fallujah; “I was with them...we were watching CNN and BBC in Baghdad trying to find out. The CIA had made all the decisions.”³⁶

By nightfall on 9 November, the U.S. troops had reached the heart of the city. U.S. military officials stated that up to 6,000 insurgents were believed to be in the city, but they did not appear to be well-organized, and fought in small groups, of three to 25.

³⁴ Jim Garamone, American Forces Press Service, Washington, Nov. 8, 2004.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Personal communication 12.5.05.

Many insurgents were believed to have slipped away amid widespread reports that the U.S. offensive was coming.

There have been first-hand reports of the U S military using white phosphorous, cluster bombs and napalm-like weapons in Fallujah, and of aid convoys being barred from entering the city. With the military maintaining strict control over who entered Fallujah, the truth of what weapons were used remains difficult to ascertain.

On 13 November a U.S. Marine was videotaped shooting a wounded, unarmed alleged insurgent to death in a mosque. The incident created controversy throughout the world. From the US perspective, every person remaining in Fallujah was suspect. Some of the tactics used by the insurgents included wearing civilian clothing while attacking, playing dead and attacking, surrendering and attacking, rigging dead or wounded with bombs, and other acts. In the 13 November incident mentioned above, the US Marine apparently believed the insurgent was playing dead.

Unused Options

5.1.If US objectives were to restore calm to the city, experts on Iraq agree that **all the alternative options outlined above, used methodically from April 2003 onwards, could have rendered this attack unnecessary.**

5.2 **If a slower approach had won political backing**, then the November operation might have followed a sequence as follows:

- Full use of the political process to engage the Sunni population
- Negotiation with tribal chiefs and the mayor
- If necessary, a siege, as with Samarra, to ensure that the insurgents were kept in Fallujah
- Maximum use of intelligence so that insurgents could have been captured in focussed raids

5.3.Given what happened, **immediate apology** should have been made for the shooting of the wounded Iraqi in the mosque, and with appropriate punishment for the soldier concerned.

5.4.**The US military should have respected the Geneva Convention regarding identification of the dead in war, but should immediately have made available to relatives the bodies of those killed** rather than leaving them in the street to be eaten by dogs. In Muslim and Arab tradition the dead must be washed and buried within a day, and to deliberately flout this tradition is a provocative act that will invite retaliation.

5.5.**Compensation** for those whose non-combatant relatives were killed should have been immediate, in accordance with international law, as well as to those whose houses were destroyed.

Milestone 6: After the November 2004 attack

The Fallujah Study Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (SCHRD) reports thousands of casualties, saying that as late as 25 and 26 December the emergency teams of Fallujah hospital removed 700 bodies from only 6 (out of 28) residential quarters, including 504 children and women and the rest old and middle-aged people – all Iraqis. Many bodies appeared to have been burned with chemicals. US forces announced 1200 bodies kept in a refrigerated store.

According to the official estimate “almost thirty six thousand houses have been demolished, nine thousand shops, sixty five mosques, sixty schools, the very valuable heritage library and most of the government offices. The American forces destroyed one of the two bridges in the city, both train stations, the two electricity stations, and three water treatment plants. It also blew up the whole sanitation system and the communication network”³⁷.

“Fallujah... is now 70% estimated to be bombed to the ground, no water, no electricity. People who want to go back into that city have to get retina scans, all ten fingers fingerprinted, then they're issued an ID card. People inside the city are referring to it as a big jail. It is a horrendous situation, and we still have hundreds of thousands of refugees as a result. And the goal of the mission of besieging Fallujah as announced by the U.S. military was to capture the phantom Zarqawi and to bring security and stability for the elections, and what's left is a situation where Fallujah is in shambles, and the resistance has spread throughout the country.”³⁸

In a Defense Department Briefing on *Progress of Reconstruction Work in Iraq; Plans For Reconstruction in Fallujah* on 19 November, Bill Taylor, State Department Iraq Reconstruction Management Office, said that the money available for reconstruction in Fallujah “could get into the order of a hundred million dollars or so.” However, very little of that money appears to have been spent. Dr Fawzi, an engineer who owns a cement factory in Fallujah, said in May 2005 that the southern districts of Fallujah remain closed, and only 10% of the buildings and homes destroyed have been rebuilt by residents themselves. Fawzi was involved in negotiating compensation for residents of the city, and presented a figure of US\$600 million to the US military, who agreed to pay the amount. But the Iraqi government did not agree. In the same report³⁹ Dr Abraham Aziz said that only 10% of the promised compensation had been paid out to date, and added that the health situation was “horrible, we are now having cholera outbreaks”. Recent drinking water tests performed by SCHRD found that there was no potable water available inside Fallujah.⁴⁰

The SCHRD reported that on 27 December 2004 350,000 refugees were living in Al-Saqlawiya, Al-Habbaniya tourist city and camp, Al-A'meriya complex, Al-Khaldiyah, Al Karma, Khan Dhari, while others went to Al-Anbar province and Baghdad. In Al-Karma and Al-A'meriya complex the density was 25-30 people in one flat. Monthly

³⁷ Statement by Engineer Hafid al-Dulaimy, chairman of Fallujah Compensation Committee on 23 March 2005.

³⁸ Dahr Jamail, a US citizen who spent many months in Iraq as one of the only independent, unembedded journalists there, interviewed by a US radio station, Democracy Now! on 28.4.05.

³⁹ The Failed Siege of Fallujah, Dahr Jamail, Asia Times, 3.6.05.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

quotas of foodstuffs (from the Trade Ministry) were withdrawn from Fallujah residents for September, October and November, meaning that prices sky-rocketed. Refugees are living in garages and stores and are seriously short of medical services – diseases such as diarrhea, scabies and asthma have spread.

As of June 2005 Fallujan residents say that approximately 100,000 people are still refugees, unable to return to their homes, many of which no longer exist.⁴¹ “Roughly 60% of the houses and buildings inside the city sustained enough damage to make them inhabitable. Most people continue to live in tents, or amid the rubble of their homes.”⁴²

On 24 June the lethal ambush of a convoy carrying female US troops in Fallujah suggested that insurgents may have regained a presence in the city. The suicide car bomb and ensuing small-arms fire killed at least two Marines and four others were missing and presumed dead. At least one woman was killed and 11 of 13 wounded were female. The terror group al-Qaida in Iraq claimed it carried out the ambush, one of the single deadliest attacks against the Marines - and against women - in Iraq so far.⁴³

On 26 June the London Sunday Times reported a series of meetings earlier in the month between insurgent commanders and American officials, in the hope of negotiating an eventual breakthrough that might reduce the violence in Iraq. Preparations were supervised by Ayham al-Samurai, a Sunni Muslim and former exile who had lived in the US for 20 years. On the rebel side were representatives of Ansar al-Sunna and the Islamic Army of Iraq, and the US team included senior military and intelligence officers. The Iraqis became irritated with questioning that some saw as a crude attempt to gather intelligence. The meetings reached an inconclusive end but the two sides agreed to keep talking.

Unused Options

6.1. **Urgent action for refugees** – medical aid, shelter and food –and proper compensation for destroyed property. The US forces should have encouraged humanitarian agencies to go to the refugees camps and give relief.

6.2. **Mental health support** for those who have experienced killing, bombardment, lost relatives and are traumatised. If such problems remain untreated “a violent reaction will take place and revenge will spread...” There is (as of June 2005) apparently no sign of help of this kind.

⁴¹“The US Treatment of Fallujah: the Fallujan View” report by Naji Haraj, former Iraqi diplomat at the UN Geneva, (1999-2003) and resident of Fallujah, May 2005.

⁴² Dahr Jamail, Asia Times, 3.6.05.

⁴³ Frank Griffiths, Associated Press, 25 June 2005

Summary of lessons identified

The options put forward in the six sections above fall into 5 main categories. This section offers proposals to improve understanding of other insurgency situations, and render actions more effective.

A central theme that has emerged from discussions with military and diplomats, which has to be understood as the backdrop to all these options, is the urgent need to move from emphasis on ‘hardware’ or equipment, to emphasis on ‘software’ or human intelligence. The growing and now extreme imbalance in the physical force available to Coalition forces, as compared to those they are fighting in Iraq for example, was pointed out. One illustration is the amount of ordnance used. In the 1991 Gulf War the equivalent of 75,000 SCUD missiles were fired by the British in Iraq. In the summer of 2004 in a relatively ‘quiet’ time in the Al-Amarra region, the battle group involved fired 600,000 rounds of small arms ammunition⁴⁴.

The impact of the availability of overwhelming force can translate into:

- A sense of impunity and invulnerability on one side **leading to the use of force simply because it is possible**
- A sense of powerlessness on the other side leading to acts of desperation.

Lessons identified:

1.Address inter-religious tensions

Detailed plans could have been drawn up before the war on how to engage the key Sunni tribal and religious leaders early on. Instead there was too much reliance on the Shia traditionally opposed to Saddam, and the de-Baathification process alienated many Sunni leaders whose antagonism intensified in the Fallujah region. A **systematic outreach to the Sunni population** through their leaders could have circumvented support for extremists in Fallujah. More extensive meetings and conferences of religious leaders of all denominations, providing them with the time and support to settle old scores through discussion, could have led to a broader spectrum of agreement among Iraqis on how to marginalize those intent on violence.

Proposals:

1.1 Establish civil/military partnerships tasked to deepen understanding of inter-religious tensions in different parts of the world

1.2 Develop code of practice for the process to be used in facilitating inter-religious dialogue

1.3 Convene conference of religious leaders of all denominations in Iraq, professionally facilitated.

2.Open a dialogue: understand the point of view of your ‘enemy’

Robert MacNamara, US Defence Secretary at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, said it was “essential to empathise with your enemy. By understanding what Khrushchev

⁴⁴ Personal communication 29.6.05.

needed to be able to say to the Russian people, we were able to make the right decision” (a decision that effectively avoided a nuclear war between Russia and the US). MacNamara went on “in the case of Vietnam we didn’t know them well enough to empathise.”⁴⁵

In Iraq there was the opportunity to get to know the key people in and around Fallujah. If time had been taken immediately after the invasion, and even at later stages, to sit down and understand what local leaders needed in order to isolate those whose main motivation was to stoke hatred, their support could have been pivotal. Such relationships take time to build, but in an insurgency can prove to be the best investment of time, since local people know what’s going on. If a mutual goal or set of goals can be established with them, with suitable end results and advantages for their community built in, their networks can prove much more effective than force in undermining the professionally violent.

In this context, angry people are an opportunity. For example, when residents were so incensed about the occupation of the school, there was an opportunity to try to create dialogue. What they say about customer service – a customer who complains and is then satisfied is much more loyal than someone who has not complained - applies here. The people who take the initiative to lead protests of that kind have the community’s respect and should be cherished as potential allies.

Going further, the Yemen example and British experience in N.Ireland suggest that daring to open a dialogue with fundamentalists committed to killing can produce profound results. It can break cycles of violence, and start the process of re-establishing order.

Proposals :

2.1 Demonstrate the case for dialogue as a necessary precursor to any military action. Make the endgame clear:

- **To bring dissident factions into the political/constitutional process**
- **To identify and overcome misunderstandings**
- **To begin the process of resolving issues**

2.2 Accord appropriate status to liaison officers trained in the relevant culture, language and mediation skills

2.3 Pre-deployment training for all senior officers in the results that can be expected from consultation and mediation

2.4 Recognise Track II civilian/inter-religious mediation as a mandatory part of strategy to avoid the use of force

2.5 Accept mandate that early action is to contact local leaders and develop relationships

2.6 Assure consistency of personnel and honouring of agreements made.

2.7 Commit long term resources for negotiation recognizing that results may not be achieved quickly

2.8 Co-ordinate different dialogue processes.

⁴⁵ Film ‘The Fog of War’ on general release.

3. In inflamed situations, when the intention is to restore order and calm, employ respect rather than force

Experience in the different regions of Iraq demonstrated that certain types of behavior on the part of soldiers generate more positive responses, especially when things are tense, for example keeping weapons pointed at the ground, wearing berets rather than helmets, taking off sunglasses when talking to people, offering greetings in Arabic, not playing loud western music. Soldiers must be taught in advance what cultural taboos are not to be violated, for example that in Iraq a man's honour will be abused (and require retaliation) if his wife is seen by soldiers in her nightdress.

Some of these issues could be dealt with by different kinds of operational rules of engagement. But others would require a radically different kind of approach, based on a root and branch overhaul of the way that soldiers are selected, trained and socialised. **This raises the question of military policy being influenced by a set of beliefs about human behavior**, in this case that the use of force, threats and generating fear in the end induces submission, versus the idea that respect, consultation, inclusion are more likely to produce co-operation.

An increasing amount of data is now available on effective strategies for preventing and reducing the use of terror to pursue political and territorial conflicts. A new publication by the think-tank Demos⁴⁶ argues that such strategies are successful when they methodically address the full range of factors that influence the use of terror and fuel cycles of violence over time, including the emotional and psychological effects of violence and humiliation. To address this broader range of factors requires a different repertoire of methods, (set out in the new publication) to prevent conflict, strengthen human security and redirect the cycles of violence through which terrorism and repression flourish.

Proposals:

- 3.1 Stimulate debate in military alliances and training institutes on the effectiveness of prioritising human security considerations during insurgencies**
- 3.2 Commission reports and training materials on the factors influencing the use of terror and fuelling cycles of violence**
- 3.3 Design military/civil society collaboration on effective measures for addressing political violence**
- 3.4 Train soldiers in what is culturally unacceptable and in the need to earn respect rather than instil it. For ordinary soldiers, respect can be promoted as a 'simple tool of survival.'**

4. Modelling fair play

Any force dealing with insurgents must set and keep standards for the kind of fair treatment regarded as mandatory in a democracy:

- Investigation of misbehavior by troops, punishment of offenders
- Compensation for military damage to civilian property
- Observation of the Geneva Conventions
- Humanitarian aid for refugees.

⁴⁶ 'Hearts and minds: human security approaches to terrorism and political violence' DEMOS, London, forthcoming 21 July 2005.

The popular legitimacy of an occupying military depends on its using its power much as a good police force would - that is, in ways tightly constrained by law, restrictive rules of engagement, and strict accountability to recognized authority.

Mechanisms can be set up by civil society in the absence of functioning judicial systems to monitor fair play and address civilian problems in conflict, for example the Centre of Listening and Documentation modelled in Kirkuk, which documents property damage, disappeared relatives, rape cases, and wrongful arrest and attempts to arrange redress.

Proposals

- 4.1 Research why standards are abandoned under certain conditions**
- 4.2 Establish specific military sectors responsible in each engagement for code of conduct, infringements and compensation**
- 4.3 Provide resources for citizen liaison centers to record and address civilian problems in conflict areas**
- 4.4 Convene consultation with leadership in Fallujah today on what is needed.**

5. Prioritise comprehensive post conflict reconstruction strategies based on consultation with the local population

One of the problems in Iraq has been the failure to achieve a switch from the military lead to post conflict civilian reconstruction. The plans initially laid down envisaged a switch after six months, but the transition from ‘military primacy’ to ‘political primacy’ has even now not been achieved. There is a widespread view, particularly among the military, that this has given responsibilities to military personnel for which they are simply not trained.

This transition could have made use of the detailed work undertaken in the UK and in the US State Department for ‘post-conflict Phase 4’ planning and would have led to a greater focus on the issues of concern to ordinary Iraqis such as policing, addressing damage resulting from the conflict, functioning utilities and employment. This in turn would have started to win hearts and minds and thus reduce the level of violence. A detailed understanding of existing Iraqi civil society organizations, to assist implementation, would have been essential.

Proposals:

- 5.1 Inculcate in those who order the deployment of military force a better understanding of the limitations (as perceived by the military themselves) of what can be achieved by military means.**
- 5.2 In any conflict intervention prioritise planning for the post-conflict reconstruction phase.**
- 5.3 Consult in the most visible way possible with the local population on priorities and approaches to reconstruction.**
- 5.4 Recognise the crucial importance of employment in turning people away from violence, make maximum use of local contractors and facilities in reconstruction.**

5.5 In advance of any intervention, research a detailed annotated list of existing civil society organizations and their competencies, drawing on local knowledge.

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