

Insecurity for all

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Eight months after the “official” end of war, the general feeling among Iraqis was that the US forces were doing nothing but obsessing about their own security. In the mind of the public the US presence in the country is as illegitimate as Saddam's regime. Iraqis today almost unanimously believe that the Bush administration wants to perpetuate the military occupation by maintaining chaos, exacerbating violence and promoting divisions among Iraqis. The facts seem to confirm this perception.

While the term human security may be of recent origin (it was first used by the United Nations in the early 1990s), the ideas that underpin the concept are far from new. For over a century - at least since the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the 1860s - a doctrine based on achieving security for people has been gathering momentum. Core elements of this doctrine were formalised in the 1940s in the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Geneva Conventions. Since the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, however, the concept of human security has changed from simply meaning ensuring the security of the state to including the security of individuals. It is now widely accepted that human security involves the human rights of civilians and also contains many other dimensions relating, for instance, to the environment, food and development. More importantly, the state is no longer considered to be solely responsible for providing for and defending human security; all national and international organisations involved in humanitarian, development or other aid work are also regarded as key actors.

In essence, human security now means safety for people from both violent and non-violent threats. It is, then, an alternative way of seeing the world, taking people as its point of reference, rather than focusing exclusively on territorial or government security. And like other security concepts - national security, economic security, food security - it is about protection. Human security entails taking preventive measures to reduce vulnerability and minimise risk, and taking remedial action where prevention fails. In other words, human security provides the conditions under which people can enjoy freedom from fear and want and enjoy equal opportunities to develop their full potential.

The range of potential threats to human security should not be narrowly conceived. While the safety of people is obviously at grave risk in situations of armed conflict, a human security approach is not simply synonymous with humanitarian action. It highlights the need to address the root causes of insecurity and to help ensure people's future safety. Therefore, in a country as complex as Iraq it is difficult to provide a precise description of the security situation or to identify the obstacles to achieving human security, especially when there is a serious lack of information and statistics.

Post-war insecurity

The war on Iraq “officially” ended on 1 May 2003. But almost eight months later, the United States and Britain were forced to admit on more than one occasion that the security situation in Iraq remained “serious”. For example, a recent CIA assessment of Iraq warns that the security situation will worsen right across the country, not just in Baghdad but in the north and south as well.

Naturally, the security referred to here is, primarily, that of the occupying forces, and “Westerners” in general. British Defence Minister Geoff Hoon stressed that his priority was “the security of British forces”, and many US officers made similar comments. But since the “official” end to the war, security for Westerners has only meant insecurity for the locals, and the “honeymoon” between the occupying

forces and the Iraqi population seems to be over, due to the fact, among other reasons, that their aspirations have not been met and there has been no improvement in their lives.

The continuing high level of insecurity, first and foremost, has a negative impact on the lives of ordinary Iraqis, who cannot access basic services, especially safe drinking water and health care, and whose personal safety is endangered when they venture out of their homes to do simple things such as going shopping or to work, or taking children to school. One particularly negative effect of the fear of kidnap or assault has been the restriction of women's and girls' freedom of movement, which reduces their ability to participate in education and employment. Furthermore, a considerable number of families have not yet sent their children back to school because of similar threats at universities and schools.

The current state of insecurity also entails a high degree of risk for humanitarian workers, at a time when humanitarian aid is still desperately needed in almost all sectors. Threats include possible injury or death due to bombings, crossfire, banditry, car-jacking and looting. This has a detrimental effect on aid delivery and reconstruction. Many international NGOs and humanitarian agencies (UN and ICRC) have moved their operational headquarters to the Jordanian capital, Amman, and suspended some of their projects in Iraq, evacuating foreign staff and replacing them with locals, who for the most part are not professionals and lack appropriate skills. Many embassies (such as Spain, Italy, Australia, etc.) have also reduced their international staff and a few have closed down their offices in Baghdad (the Netherlands and Bulgaria, for instance), after some received threatening phone calls or letters, or direct physical threats.

Another dimension of insecurity are the ethnic tensions (between Arabs and Turkmen, Arabs and Kurds and inter-tribal conflict) that are increasing in the northern part of the country, in addition to the tensions surfacing between the Shi'ite and Kurdish communities. In the Kirkuk area, for instance, the Dibi District Council decided to demolish 70 houses belonging to Arab families who were settled there by the former Iraqi regime under a government programme to "Arabise" this oil-rich area. Actions like this, although minor and not given serious attention (small clashes have so far killed a few dozen civilians), may ultimately have disastrous results or a huge impact on the balance of social forces in the country. One should not forget, however, that the US had tried (and failed due to the strength of feeling of national unity) to heighten tensions between Shi'ites and Sunnis in an attempt to provoke a civil war prior to invading, as well as supporting the Kurds in an openly provocative manner.

In this grim scenario, now more than ever there is an urgent need to ensure law and order. Health care is a good example: WHO said it had received disturbing reports from Baghdad that the ability of hospitals to do their work was being severely curtailed by the lack of civil order, and it was "extremely concerned" that this would have a very serious impact on health and health care in the capital.

The following facts are of relevance to the issue of human security in post-war Iraq:

- Even before the war Iraq's infrastructure was extremely fragile due to two wars and prolonged economic sanctions first imposed by the UN in 1991.
- Sixteen million Iraqi civilians are completely dependent on government food handouts.
- The UN estimates that 5 million Iraqis do not have access to safe water and sanitation. The country's main source of water, the Tigris, receives half a million tons of raw or partially treated sewage every day.
- Half of all sewage treatment plants do not work and of those that do, one-quarter do not meet Iraq's own environmental standards. According to UNICEF reports, only 45.7% (compared with 75% before the 1991 Gulf War) of homes have piped water of which 65% is not treated.
- One child in every eight dies before the age of five and under-five mortality rose from 56 per 1,000 live births in the late 1980s to 131 per 1,000 a decade later.

- One million (one-third) of Iraqi children suffer from malnutrition, which has risen by 160% in the last decade.
- Seven out of 10 infant deaths are from diarrhoea or acute respiratory infection linked to polluted water or malnutrition.
- According to USAID, there were only 9,400 doctors for a population of 25 million before the war.

The civilian cost of war

Shortly before the eruption of hostilities, the UN Secretary-General stated that the use of force without the Security Council's endorsement would "not be in conformity with the Charter". Similarly, many legal experts described the US-UK attack as an act of aggression, violating international law. Experts also pointed to illegalities in the US conduct of the war and violations of the Geneva Conventions by the US-UK with regard to their responsibilities as an occupying power. Indeed, Coalition forces have committed grave violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), of which the widespread use of cluster munitions has the most serious implications in the aftermath of the war. US Central Command reported that it used 10,782 cluster munitions, containing at least 1.8 million submunitions. The British also used some 2,170 cluster munitions containing around 113,190 submunitions. In addition, the invading forces' flawed targeting strategy and the bombing of "dual-use" targets, compounded by a lack of effective assessment, significantly increased the damage incurred (all 50 acknowledged attacks targeting Iraqi leaders failed, while killing dozens of civilians).

Wartime violations on the Iraqi side were no less serious. Iraqi forces not only did not take adequate measures to protect civilians, but, as Human Rights Watch reports, repeatedly violated IHL in the following ways: by using human shields; using anti-personnel landmines; abusing Red Cross and Red Crescent emblems and wearing civilian clothing; and locating military targets in civilian and protected buildings such as mosques and hospitals.

These violations by both Iraqi and Coalition forces caused extra civilian casualties that could have been avoided. Although an accurate assessment of total civilian casualties was almost impossible, some attempts to quantify the dead have been made. The Associated Press canvassed 60 of Iraq's 124 hospitals immediately after the end of major combat operations and calculated that at least 3,420 civilians died. The *Los Angeles Times* also did a survey of 27 hospitals in Baghdad and found that at least 1,700 civilians died and more than 8,000 were injured, in the capital alone. However, it is commonly acknowledged that the ground war caused the vast majority of deaths.

The civilian cost of the war was extraordinarily high. Apart from direct deaths, other losses involved the destruction of already deteriorated civilian infrastructure with a devastating long-term impact. These included:

- Electrical power facilities (in Nasiryya, for example);
- Media installations (3 media facilities were hit by US air strikes: the Ministry of Information, the Baghdad Television Studio and Broadcast Facility and Abu Ghraib Antennae Broadcast Facility);
- Civilian telecommunications facilities. US attacks virtually wiped out Iraq's telecommunications infrastructure (the main telecommunications gateway switches and a number of telecommunications exchanges in Baghdad), eliminating all long-distance calling capacity from Iraq to the outside world;
- Government facilities and buildings.

UXO and landmines

Having experienced three major conflicts in as many decades, Iraq is badly affected by the legacy of these wars. Estimates of the number of landmines in the country range from 8 to 12 million, not

including unexploded ordnance (UXO) or other debris. The majority were laid during the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988. Additionally, a number of landmines and pieces of UXO remain from internal conflicts during the 1960s and 1970s and from the 1990-1991 Gulf War. Some of the explosives were even left behind after World War II.

The largest minefields are in northern Iraq (also called Iraqi Kurdistan) and along the country's borders with Iran and Kuwait. Baghdad, the capital, is also heavily mined, as is the southern city of Basra. In fact, the lack of minefield records has made the exact locations of many minefields extremely difficult to identify.

In addition to posing a threat to people's lives, landmines and UXO are a significant impediment to economic growth, especially in relation to foraging, cattle farming and agriculture. Mines are commonly found near water sources and in rural farmland, which complicates everyday activities. Minefields also hinder access to a number of important roads, ports, irrigation canals and power plants.

The landmine crisis was serious enough before the recent conflict, which has only served to exacerbate the situation. Saddam Hussein littered thousands of landmines around the key northern city of Kirkuk, as well as on main roads. Former Iraqi troops also mined stretches of the southern Persian Gulf in order to keep out Coalition ships and, in many cases, left mines behind when retreating from key areas, often near important locations such as wells, oil fields and major roadways. In addition, unexploded cluster bombs dropped by the Coalition forces present a grave threat because curious children often play with them and people try to take them apart to sell the metal.

Despite being an ever-present danger, mines and cluster bombs are not the biggest immediate peril for the population. According to the Mine Advisory Group (MAG), the primary threat (particularly south of Baghdad) comes from the large number of ammunition stockpiles, weapon systems and missile sites that were located within cities and civilian residential areas by the former regime. Looting has exposed and mixed up these stockpiles, and many of the weapons are unstable. While adult males and boys are most at risk of injury from such weapons, stockpiles and munitions caches are a serious threat to the population as a whole. One example is the case of the two children killed and two wounded when a device exploded in a classroom in Kerbalaa on 19 November 2003. Reports stated that it was not clear whether the explosion was the result of a deliberate attack or whether one of the children had brought a piece of UXO into school as a toy.

Large numbers of weapon caches, light and heavy weapons, ammunitions and explosive ordnance are being discovered every day all over the country. Even before the war, the UN Secretary-General estimated that clearing Iraq's minefields could take "anywhere from 35 to 75 years". Now, with the added effects of the recent conflict, the task of ridding Iraq of mines and UXO is a daunting one.

Weapons

Immediately after the war, the shocking sight of street-sellers trading weapons, among a range of other objects, was fairly common. All kinds of weapons were available on the black market: hand weapons, machine guns, hand grenades, etc.

Despite the disarmament campaigns conducted by the Coalition forces, Iraqis prefer to remain heavily armed, a decision they justify with reference to the climate of insecurity. We should not forget that Saddam's Ba'thist regime did not surrender; it retreated from Baghdad with many of its best weapons intact. According to the official US military count, only 123 pistols, 76 semi-automatic rifles, 435 automatic rifles, 46 machine guns, 11 surface-to-air missiles and 381 grenades have been collected in an appeal for the citizens to hand over their weapons. If we compare this to the fact that 6 million weapons were distributed by the Ba'th Party among the population before the war started, and a Romanian-made Kalashnikov can be bought on the Baghdad black market for less than USD 20, it is easy to imagine the high level of threat to the lives of Iraqi civilians.

Terrorist attacks

There has been a steady increase in attacks against the occupying forces in central Iraq (the Sunni triangle). In fact, pressure from anti-Coalition forces (basically former regime loyalists and extremist groups) is growing, as is the number of their successful operations. Coalition forces find themselves increasingly vulnerable and they cannot feel safe anywhere. This adds to the tension for Coalition soldiers who are already tired, which could lead to them reacting impulsively.

While most incidents so far were isolated and directed at individuals, or were the result of criminal actions, recent attacks reportedly appear to have been well-planned and are increasingly directed against foreigners. For instance, a large-scale explosion (diesel truck bomb) took place on 12 November 2003 at the Headquarters of the Italian Carabinieri in al-Nasiryya (a Shi'ite area), killing 8 Iraqis and 17 Italians (15 soldiers and 2 civilians) and leaving around 100 wounded.

Following the use of Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPG7) and mortars, new means of attack have recently appeared: "truck bombs" (especially garbage trucks) and UVIED (Under Vehicle Improved Explosive Devices). Another new tactic identified involves women carrying IED disguised as a baby while trying to enter hospitals (two hospitals were targeted in Baghdad in early November 2003 using this tactic, and so far reports claim that five women have attempted this kind of action).

Obviously, vehicle-bombs and suicide bombings, which have become the commonest forms of attack, are the most destructive. One of the most infamous incidents of this kind was the attack on UN headquarters in which the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative, Sergio de Mello, was killed together with 20 other leading UN officials. At that time this type of attack could be carried out due to a relative lack of security (physical protection barriers, security screening processes, etc.). Now most compounds are well protected, which reduces the "threat capability", although the "weapon capability" is still high. In any case, reports state that many police cars and ambulances have been stolen, and could be used for similar terrorist actions.

Other sorts of attack include sniper attacks and assassinations of Iraqi local authorities appointed by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), as well as of people "collaborating with the Occupation", such as interpreters. There have also been several cases of kidnapping. The first foreign target was a Portuguese journalist kidnapped on 14 November 2003. However, it appears that in most cases the primary motive for the kidnapping is extortion (the Portuguese journalist mentioned above was released after 36 hours on payment of a ransom).

Naturally, people living close to police stations and Coalition forces' bases are threatened and targeted. Now, however, new civilian targets are being chosen (Iraqi judges and officers, US contractors, etc.) apparently due to their close relationship with Coalition forces, and international organisations (ICRC offices, UN headquarters, CARE International offices) and civil facilities (hospitals, hotels, roads and railways) are also being targeted. In fact, the perceived links between the UN and some international NGOs and the Coalition forces may make it difficult to provide adequate security for staff working for the UN or these organisations.

According to statistics issued by the NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq (NCCI) on 6 November 2003, the distribution of attacks was as follows: 72% against Coalition forces; 11% against Iraqi police; 8% against government facilities; 2% against diplomats; 2% against the international community; and 5% unknown. There are currently almost 20,000 private contractors in the country, which is about the size, if not larger, than the UK army presence. In addition, at present there are 132,000 US personnel and 23,000 non-US soldiers.

Assaults on Iraqis also increased. A large nationwide demonstration condemning terrorism was held on 10 December 2003. Nonetheless, more Iraqis are rushing to join the ranks of the guerrillas, many of whom are Sunnis who had previously been on the sidelines but now believe they can "inflict bodily harm" on the US forces. Ammunition is readily available, making it much easier to mount attacks. There are also reports of greater organisation and coordination among foreign insurgents (extremists including but not limited to al-Qaeda and Hezbollah) and members of the ousted regime.

The quest for governance

Any discussion of human security in post-war Iraq cannot avoid addressing political questions such as the US military occupation and the role of the UN. Will the US rule Iraq directly for a long period through a military occupation government or will a UN-sponsored authority take over sooner or later for a transition period? If the UN is involved, will it be subordinated to US priorities or relatively independent? Will US companies seize the lion's share of the oil and reconstruction contracts? There is also the issue of how ordinary Iraqis respond to and resist the occupation, and how they assert their democratic rights in the turbulent post-war context.

The primary responsibility for meeting humanitarian needs and providing security lies with the government of any country. A representative and accountable Iraqi government will ultimately ensure that Iraqi people are able to use their own considerable resources to build a better future. In the meantime, the CPA bears legal and moral responsibility for these. However, the imperative to defeat Saddam Hussein's government and to find and decommission weapons of mass destruction (which were not found) was so all-consuming that a local-level security vacuum was created. Local policing and security are unlikely to be priorities for the US military, and little Iraqi policing capability has survived the overthrow of the government. This has created instability at the local level impeding effective relief and reconstruction efforts. As a result civilians do not enjoy proper protection and are unable to resort to the law when their rights are violated.

In addition, the lack of a functioning infrastructure means that essential services are not delivered, which has a particularly devastating effect on the most vulnerable. The needs of reconstruction are enormous due to 20 years of neglect and corruption in the economic, environmental and services infrastructure, and also as a result of public money being spent to support the armed forces and maintain the regime in power, in addition to the devastating impact of armed conflicts and international sanctions which led to deteriorated living standards for the Iraqi people. The cessation of the Oil-for-Food programme and the subsequent transition to the Public Distribution System is a clear example. As nearly half the population were completely dependent on government handouts, there are serious concerns that this change may have a severe negative impact on poor families, including increased malnutrition and possibly starvation.

The IMF and the World Bank have estimated that the Iraqi economy will shrink by 22% in 2004, compared with 21% in 2002 and 12% in 2001. Average per capita income fell from USD 3,600 in 1980 to USD 530 by the end of 2003. According to the UN and the World Bank, it will further decrease in 2004. Iraqi Minister of Finance Ali al-Kelani mentioned in the last meeting of the International Forum in Dubai that the budget deficit for 2004 could reach USD 600 million, pointing out that some 500,000 government employees have not been paid. It is worth mentioning that the World Bank has stated that even if the International Community offered USD 35 billion, which is claimed to be the amount needed for the reconstruction of Iraq during the next four years (other estimates reckon USD 50-75 billion), it will not be possible to spend more than USD 5 billion due to the Iraqi State's lack of institutional capacity. This assessment of reconstruction needs, however, did not include such items as culture (a separate assessment was conducted by UNESCO), environment, human rights, security, etc.

Unemployment is the biggest problem facing the Iraqi economy today. Ministry of Labour figures show that as many as 12 million Iraqis are unemployed. Some estimates even claim that around 50% of Iraq's 24.5 million-strong population are either completely jobless or have part-time jobs, taking into account that 30% of the population were employed by the government prior to the war. According to Nouri Ja'far, the Ministry of Labour's deputy at the Governing Council, the main reason for the high unemployment rates is the dissolution of the army and police forces as well as the freezing of allocations to ministries and government institutions. Coalition forces have now started to re-construct the Iraqi army and have so far appointed one battalion with just 700 soldiers. The size of the army is ultimately projected to reach, at most, 40,000 soldiers. The CPA has also begun to fund 340,000 "urgent jobs" with salaries of USD 3 a day.

It may be one of Iraq's paradoxes that the World Bank - historically the principal sponsor of globalisation - has warned against the accelerated closure of 192 government institutions that are due to be privatised in 4 or 5 years' time. The World Bank's assessment emphasised that the priorities for reconstructing Iraq must contain three important items: enforcing independent, transparent and well-managed government institutions; reconstructing vital infrastructure and services which were

destroyed or eroded throughout years of mismanagement and conflicts; and providing support in a transitional stage that would create possibilities of economic growth and social care.

The current feeling among the Iraqi population is that the US forces are doing nothing but obsessing about their own security. Thus, in public opinion US inertia is inevitably becoming associated with Saddam's regime: their presence is illegitimate, they are living in a bunker, exclusively dedicated to their own selfish interests and, when faced with dissidence, they react with brute force. Iraqis today almost unanimously believe that the Bush administration wants to perpetuate the military occupation by maintaining chaos, exacerbating violence and promoting divisions among Iraqis. The facts seem to confirm this perception.

The long road to recovery

Human security means building security from the bottom up. To use an analogy from economic theory, it is micro-security. Looking down the road 30 or 40 years, one can probably imagine the emergence of another mega-threat or two. But at least for now, it is the myriad of micro-conflicts and injustices that demand our attention. Therefore, we see national security and human security as two sides of the same coin: neither threatens global stability, but each entails unacceptable human suffering.

Hence, support for the re-establishment of civil society is of critical importance for the development of a stable and secure Iraq. This will mainly include support for the training and capacity-building of Iraqi NGOs.

Unlike in Afghanistan, there are very few NGOs and no UN agencies outside of Baghdad, especially in southern and central Iraq. This will pose extreme difficulties in providing humanitarian relief to vulnerable populations. Additionally, many NGOs still complain that the US licensing restrictions prevent agencies from providing an adequate humanitarian response. They believe that military forces should not engage in humanitarian assistance unless there is no other way to meet life-threatening needs and that relief and reconstruction efforts must be turned over to a civilian authority, as soon as possible, to ensure impartial humanitarian action in Iraq.

Operation *Iraqi Freedom* (the invasion and occupation of Iraq by the US and its coalition partners) embodies a new approach to post-conflict humanitarian action. This approach unifies security, governance, humanitarian response and reconstruction under the control of the Department of Defence. Humanitarian action is unilateral in character and linked inextricably to the US security agenda in the context of the global war on terrorism. UN agencies and NGOs, traditionally the coordinators and implementers of humanitarian assistance and post-conflict reconstruction programmes, are expected to play supportive roles within an effort managed by the Pentagon. The Pentagon's Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) excluded the UN and NGOs from its pre-war planning on the grounds that its plans were part and parcel of the war effort and therefore had to be confidential. With no policing capacity and the military unable to establish law and order, ORHA has been slow to restore basic services and perform what was supposed to be its top objective: establishing a legitimate Iraqi authority that could govern locally while a national political dialogue was prepared. As a result, the lack of local-level security has plagued the reconstruction effort from the outset and has deeply disappointed the Iraqi people who yearn for a sense of normality in their country.

Faced with the immensity of its task, ORHA is finally turning to the UN and NGOs for assistance. The problem is that roles and responsibilities are being defined on an ad hoc basis throughout the country, in the face of immense practical difficulties, rather than having been planned collaboratively in advance.

With the hope of eliminating fear and restoring a sense of security to the Iraqi people, a number of NGOs, both local and international, have actually begun to take on this responsibility. Indeed, NGOs are making significant progress in terms of security in comparison with previous experiences. For instance, unprecedented attempts are being made to monitor and report violations of IHL, share and exchange security information, and issue precautions and safety reminders, etc. Nonetheless, these

NGOs do not have the capacity to pick up the full workload that the UN has been unable to deal with, nor play the same role as the government in the reconstruction of the country.

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Notes:

¹ Editor's note: targets, such as electrical power facilities, that impact on both military operations and civilian lives.

² Human Rights Watch. *Off Target. The Conduct of the War and Civilian Casualties in Iraq*. New York: HRW. December, 2003.

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Iraqi Al-Amal Association is a non-political, non-sectarian association of volunteers actively engaged in projects for the benefit and well-being of the Iraqi population.