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# Under the Surface: The United States' Failure to Effectively Communicate and Gain Credibility with Iraqis

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## Introduction:

The three largest sectarian groups in Iraq, the Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds, have withstood a troubled past, filled with violence and oppression. When the United States invaded Iraq in 2003, the entire world watched as the country fell under sectarian violence. This capstone thesis focuses on the short-term effects of the United States' occupation in Iraq. My main argument is that the United States negatively impacted the Iraqi environment in the short-term because of their failure to effectively communicate and gain credibility with Iraqis. This led to a violent reaction to the occupation and a deepening sectarian divide.

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The breakdown of communication and credibility was due to six variables:

(1) the U.S.'s lack of knowledge about Iraqi history, (2) preexisting anti-Western political culture, (3) the U.S.'s removal of local elites and the Iraqi army, (4) inadequate media outreach, (5) reactionary violence, and (6) the U.S.'s inability to fulfill all their promises to the Iraqi population.

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First, the United States had a lack of knowledge about Iraq's history. The U.S. did not understand the Iraqi culture, which made it difficult for the U.S. to communicate and gain credibility with Iraqis. Similarly, the United States did not understand the impact of the preexisting anti-Western political culture. These anti-Western sentiments hurt the United States' image throughout the occupation, which created communication and credibility gaps between the U.S. government and the Iraqi people.

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Third, after the invasion, the United States removed all the local elites and army personnel in the de-Baathification process, the U.S. thereby lost the ability

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to negotiate with the Iraqi people through leaders. The U.S. removed people who could assist in the country's changes to a democracy. This made it difficult for the U.S. to communicate with the Iraqi people or gain credibility because all credible (and non-credible) leaders were removed from power.

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Fourth, the United States did not understand how to adequately reach out to the Middle Eastern media during this crisis. The United States even tried to create its own media source in Iraq through the al-Hurra television station, but it was just seen as biased. The U.S. lost credibility because of its failure to properly reach out to the Arab media and could not communicate because of its failures.

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Fifth, reactionary violence added to the United States' failures to communicate and gain credibility in Iraq. The reactionary violence came in several waves, first as a movement against the occupation, and then among Iraqi sectarian groups. The history of violence in Iraq set a precedent for this type of violence. The United States' inability to stop the violence hurt the credibility of the country and its ability to communicate with the Iraqi people.

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Lastly, the United States failed to fulfill promises with actions. The United States promised to bring stability and freedom to the Iraqi people, but could not deliver on that promise. After promises were broken at the beginning of the occupation, some Iraqis reacted through violence. The U.S. promised peace and freedom when it arrived, but it could not deliver. Therefore, many Iraqis did not believe in the United States' commitment to democratic ideals, causing a breakdown in communications and credibility.

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Although the United States did positively impact Iraq by supporting the political electoral process, removing major obstacles to democratization, enforcing equality, and expanding Kurdish autonomy in the north, these positive effects were overshadowed by the violence in Iraq, drawn from the lack of communication and credibility. In the end, this thesis emphasizes that the United States successfully contributed to democratic efforts in Iraq, but the lack of communication and credibility made it difficult for the U.S. to successfully help Iraqis.

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The thesis begins by describing Iraq's background through an overview of its sectarian makeup and history and of important factors (such as Islam and territorial issues) among the three groups. The second section focuses on the six variables causing the lack of communication and credibility between Iraqis and the United States. Next, this thesis describes five key events during the occupation that exemplify all of the six variables that caused the breakdown in communications and credibility. This section describes each event, the reaction to the event, and the United States' mistakes that increased issues in communication and credibility. The third section discusses the United States' positive impact by paving the way for democracy. Lastly, I conclude with a recommended public relations campaign that aims to emphasize democratic ideals and positive relationships among the Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds.

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## Part I: Iraq's Background

An examination of the sectarian make-up and history of Iraq, and other important factors (such as Islam and resources) show how deep the divide is. The United States only propelled these issues forward through the occupation. Iraq's troubled past created a perfect storm for destruction during the U.S. occupation, because the groups had violently opposed each other for many years. The United States may not have understood the history behind Iraq, which is why the it had a hard time communicating with Iraqi civilians.

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## Sectarian Makeup

The sectarian make-up involves general differences among the Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds. This background information provides quick facts that are important in the full study.

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The Sunnis represent a strong minority of 32-37% of Iraq's population (Middle East: Iraq 2009). Many Sunnis live in the urban areas of Baghdad and Mosul and in the "Sunni triangle," north and west of Baghdad, located between the Kurds and Shiites. Despite this seemingly vulnerable position, the Sunnis controlled most of Iraq throughout much of its history. As a minority, the Sunnis have had a difficult time adjusting to the democratic elections.

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The Shiites represent 60-65% of Iraq's population (Middle East: Iraq 2009). The majority of Shiites are located in the southern part of the country, though there are many dispersed in diverse areas such as Diyala and Baghdad in the eastern center of Iraq. Despite their majority status, the Shiites were

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persecuted by the ruling factions throughout most of Iraq's history. Today, due to their majority status, Shiites control a large part of the government.

The *Kurds* represent 15-20% of the Iraqi population (Middle East: Iraq 2009), or about 4 million people (O'Hanlon 2009). Many Kurds subscribe to Sunni Islam, but some believe in mystical practices, such as Sufi Islam, as well. The majority of Kurds live in northern Iraq, which has been semiautonomous since Operation Desert Storm in 1991, the first Gulf War. Under this degree of semi-autonomy, the Kurds operate their own democratic government and military (the Kurdish Peshmerga), and control their own oil revenues. However, the Kurds want to expand their territory into other provinces south of the "green line border" that separates the semi-autonomous Kurdish land from the rest of Iraq. Kirkuk is especially contested because it includes rich oil fields surrounding the city (O'Hanlon 2009). This topic continues to cause tension throughout Iraq; therefore, the discussion has been postponed. Originally, the Kurds were greatly persecuted, but their semi-autonomous state gives them more ability to operate.

The sectarian makeup has a larger role in Iraq's history. Differences in location and population play an important part in the Iraqi society.

## History

Iraq's history describes how the deep divisions in the relationships among the Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds developed. The United States did not create the divisions during the invasion in 2003. The borders within the Middle East are permeable, these ethnic and religious divisions exist throughout the region;

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however, the British mandate and Saddam Hussein's regime specifically impacted the Republic of Iraq. Saddam Hussein's regime created deeper divisions that continued to separate the groups. Therefore, these two parts set the stage for understanding why Iraq was propelled into deep violence during the U.S.

occupation. The conflicts in the past impinged on recent events and exacerbated the negative impact of the U.S. in the short-term.

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### *The British Mandate*

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Despite the fact that the Middle East has a shared history of ethnic and religious divisions, the British Mandate in 1920 largely changed Iraq by introducing the Western culture of economically stable nations. These impressions of Western cultures reflected on the Iraqis impressions about the United States.

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Sunnis ruled 80%-90% of the Ottoman Empire, which controlled a large part of Southeastern Europe, Western Asia, and North Africa until just after World War I. The empire expanded into much of the Middle East, including Iraq, before the British Mandate began. Iraq's Ottoman leaders included Sunni officers and bureaucrats who fought off the British power; the Sunnis and Shiites worked together during this war, although they were separated by military station.

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Regiments were separated, and Sunnis tended to hold higher level positions (Otterman December 2003). The British decided that it was easier to uphold the Sunni dominance in Iraq's political structure. The Sunni leaders who ran the Ottoman Empire before the British colonizers arrived remained in charge, despite the fact that they represented only 15% of the population, while the Shiites

represented half of the state (Sluglett 2007: 214). Therefore, the Sunnis continued as leaders over the majority of the population.

The British colonizers were Iraq's first interaction with Western society. Both Iraqi resources and state finances were under British control throughout the colonization and for a time afterward. The British even manipulated Iraq's governmental affairs by controlling specific offices and monetary goods (Slugglett 2007: 179). This treatment began to brew the hatred that Iraqis feel for Western powers and the controlling nature of foreigners. The only interaction that Iraqis encountered were controlling powers bent on abusing Iraq's resources. This issue created dissatisfaction with the Iraqis and created a stereotype of Western people. The historic significance adds to the negative short-term violent problems that Iraq faces today. People are unhappy with a controlling and occupying force, which creates more hatred and violence. Therefore, the United States should have communicated better with the Iraqi people to separate themselves from the past impositions of Western powers.

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### *The Baathist Party and Saddam Hussein*

After several years of coups and violent wars, Saddam Hussein's regime created many of the problems that expanded the divides among Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds. Saddam held the last government before the invasion and the first democratic elections in 2005, so many Iraqis only compare the current government with the dictatorship of Saddam's regime. The vast difference in regime strategy makes it difficult for Iraqis to understand a nonviolent

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government. The terror that was inflicted on Iraq's civilians deepened the group divisions throughout the country by singling out specific groups for destruction.

The humanitarian atrocities that Saddam committed during his regime created

lasting hatred on the part of Shiites and Kurds for the Baathist party and the Sunnis. The hatred can be seen in dramatic de-Baathification soon after the U.S. invasion. Violence was brooding throughout this era, and the United States walked into a scene of hatred and fear before the occupation even began in 2003.

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Hussein's Baathist regime from 1968-2003 used many Sunnis to fill the ranks of the Republican Guard, Iraq's elite ground forces, when the Baathists took control of the country through a coup in 1968. The Baathists appealed to the Sunni population, and they continued to receive preferred treatment for being an elite group. Sunni officers were in charge, while Shiites filled the lower ranks of the army (Otterman December 2003). Although at times Sunnis were targeted for crimes against the state, they did not face the same amount of persecution as the Kurds and Shiites. People were usually targeted when they started to turn against the regime (Otterman December 2003). Otherwise, many were able to live respectable lives, despite the fact that their neighbors were suffering.

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Iraqi nationalism also became intensely important to the Sunni population because of their high status. Therefore, the Sunnis' high position before the U.S. occupation added to the short-term negative problems during the 2003 war, since many Sunnis expected an elite position. However, their minority status gave them little room for power over the majority once the democratic elections began in 2005. Therefore, much of the Sunni violence that ensued during the U.S.

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occupation was due to anger against the United States for lowering the Sunni position and against the majorities for gaining control.

On the other hand, Saddam Hussein created a need for vindication within the Shiite community. Beforehand, there was oppression, but Saddam held a tight fist around the Shiites and tried to entirely control the group. Whenever opposition cropped up, the Baathist party would make night arrests, torture people in Abu Ghraib, or conduct assassinations. Any word of opposition to the Baathist party could bring someone into a prison (Tripp 2007: 212). Influential Shiites, especially clerics, faced threats of assassination or exile during this time.

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There were waves of riots throughout Saddam's regime that tried to break the oppression. Repression from previous protests sparked more protests throughout the regime. In 1979, the Baathist party placed Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr under house arrest, and Shiites reacted through mass demonstrations to show support. Hussein's forces violently arrested nearly 5,000 people and executed some Shiite clerics (Tripp 2007: 212). In 1980, Hussein hastily executed Ayatollah al-Sadr (the father of Moqtada al-Sadr), and he expelled 40,000 people from Iraq to control the population (Tripp 2007: 221). Saddam Hussein's regime completely destroyed many people's lives, especially those within the Shiite population and their supporters.

Despite the fact that the Shiites represent the majority of Iraq's population, they have been greatly persecuted throughout the country's history. This plays a huge role in the psychology of the Shiites. They felt underrepresented for years

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and specifically targeted for crimes. However, the elections in 2005 allowed Shiites to obtain more power and improve their own position within the country (Tripp 2007: 215). Therefore, the Shiites were also negatively influenced in the short-term by Saddam's regime because of the hatred for Sunni power and the Baathists. They violently acted against the other sects because of old hatred. Another reaction in the short-term comes from Moqtada al-Sadr, the son of the executed Ayatollah. Al-Sadr became a leader for the Shiite insurgents and exercised violence in the community against Sunnis, which shows how his father's death influenced his actions. Therefore, these instances created many problems that impact today's occupation, and prompted violent short-term effects.

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Hussein also discouraged and destroyed relationships with the Kurds. The Kurdish Democratic Party held an agreement for power-sharing with Saddam Hussein when he was Vice President in the 1970s (A Chronology). Afterwards, the Iraqi's tried to assassinate the Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani. During the next several years, there were factional breaks within the Kurdish parties. The United States helped supply the Kurdish Peshmerga as a guerrilla group, until communication collapsed, the Kurdish Democratic Party broke up, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan was created in 1975 (A Chronology 2010). These internal issues made it difficult for Kurdistan to put real pressure on Iraq.

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Saddam Hussein also persecuted the Kurds throughout this time. During the 1960s, the Baathists started to recruit Arabs and Turkomans, who attacked the Kurds (Talabany 2007). Within twenty years, the "Baathist regime destroyed 779

Kurdish villages in the Kirkuk region—razing 493 primary schools, 598 mosques, and 40 medical clinics. In order to prevent the return of the Kurds, they burned farms and orchards, confiscated cattle, blew up wells, and obliterated cemeteries. In all, this ethnic cleansing campaign forced 37,726 Kurdish families out of their villages” (Talabany 2007). Given their large families, the Baathist regime probably expelled over 200,000 Kurds from the Kirkuk area alone (Talabany 2007). Within Kirkuk, only Arabs could purchase property and new residences. IN 1988, Hussein used chemical weapons in the Kurdish village of Halabja to kill thousands of men, women, and children. (A Chronology 2010). The Kurds and Shiites revolted after Kuwaiti supporters defeated Iraq, but the military destroyed the uprising and forced many Kurds to flee for the mountains. They remained in this state until the United States supported northern Iraq by establishing no-fly zones over northern Kurdistan in 1991 (A Chronology 2010). By 1999, the Iraqi government had 900,000 people displaced throughout the country (Talabany 2007). The Arabization dramatically changed the demographics of the area and made it difficult for the Kurds to live a quality life.

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The Kurds also faced hardships throughout Saddam Hussein’s regime. Movements for, and then against, autonomy made it impossible for the Kurds to trust the Arabs. They were forced into submission and reacted with violence and opposition in the short-term during the U.S. occupation. The destruction created deeper divides that seem impossible to close. The Kurdish people are trying to separate themselves from the rest of the country because of the divides that separate the ethnicities. However, the Kurdish issue also shows a long-term

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positive impact. The Kurds position changed after Saddam's fall; they were able to gain more autonomy and capabilitiy under the guidance of the United States.

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### Other Important Factors: Islam and Resources

Islam, land and resources are highly influential factors in the Middle East.

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Islam influences Muslims in different ways. Issues over land and resources also

impact the Iraqis because of their connection to power, money, and sustainability.

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Competition for land and resources further separate these groups. Each factor

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involved these factors, which added to the short-term negative events when Islam

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and disputes over resources were used as a justification for destruction.

#### Islam's Role

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Islam plays an important role throughout the Middle East. Organizations under Islam hold power over large groups of people. Due to the sects breaking up in the early stages of the religion, the sides cannot agree on very specific issues. These disagreements create more anger and frustration that add to the negative short-term reactions that hurt communication and Iraqi civilian relationships.

Both Shiites and Sunnis are considered Muslims, but the disagreement between the two groups came from the succession to the Prophet Muhammad after his death in 623 AD (Blanchard 1). The Sunnis wanted to give the position to the most qualified and pious individual, while the Shiites believed that the

successor should go to the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, Ali ibn Abi Talib, who also played an important role throughout the Prophet Muhammad's life.

However, Ali was younger than the Prophet's companion who took the position, Abu Bakr. The Shiites considered Abu Bakr to be illegitimate, along with Umar and Uthman, the Caliphs who followed him. Ali was finally named Caliph when Uthman was assassinated by Shiites in 656 AD (Blanchard 2006: 1). Ali was soon assassinated in 661 AD, and his son Hussein was killed in a battle against the Sunni caliph forces in 680 AD. Sunnis and Shiites disagree about these events;

each group claims that the other is wrong and does not consider the other group true Muslims.

Originally, despite the different sects, there were many mixed marriages in Iraq between Sunnis and Shiites, especially among the urban and educated community; however, soon after Saddam Hussein fell from power, insurgent groups began targeting each other. A year later, Iraq's first elections completely separated the groups politically. By this time, many of the mixed couples had left Iraq to live somewhere else (Ghosh 2007: 3). Soon after the election, the insurgents began targeting each other, and it became a blood bath of vengeance.

At this point, sects were distinctly seen in neighborhoods, and people began moving into places where their sect would be the majority (Ghosh 2007: 3).

The religious differences between these two groups are not the only reason for terrorism and violence within Iraq. These divides are not just built upon the divisions that started fourteen hundred years ago. Political, social, economic, and class differences separating these groups built frustrations that eventually led to

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the short-term violence and anti-relationship attitude that the world sees today. At times, both Sunnis and Shiites have collaborated within Iraq for their own self-interests, but influences from outside organizations and countries, such as Al-Qaeda and Iran, have further separated the two groups (Blanchard 2006: 2).

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Problems within Iraq became religious issues rather than just societal problems.

Sunnis were seen as religious oppressors. Attacks and counter attacks created more hatred for the opposing side under the label of religion.

Many Sunnis became more secular during Saddam Hussein's regime, despite the government's pressure for institutional Islam. Many Sunni Imams held official positions as Mufi or Grand Sunni Authority, paid by the Ministry for Religious Endowment (Otterman December 2003). The Baath Party controlled or employed many mosques, which taught specific lessons of submission and patriotism to students and communities (Otterman December 2003). Saddam wanted a secular state, but he allowed Islam as an outlet for people.

During Saddam's regime, many Sunnis believed that the country was moving in a positive direction. Although they were aware of the horrors that Saddam was implementing, they believed that the society was becoming more secular rather than radically Islamic from 1968-1990s (Otterman December 2003). After the first Gulf War, Saddam began to encourage people to become engaged in more Islamic traditions, such as women wearing the hijab. However, much of the younger population was turning to radical Islam, and after Saddam's regime, more Fundamentalist Islamic Movements, especially Wahhabi factions, were developing when outside countries offered money to help the newly

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impoverished clerics. This moved to a more political Islam, which pushed for the state to be run by Sharia law, and eventually developed more Muslim militias who called for jihad against the occupying force and the West (Otterman December 2003). Therefore, people began to go against the occupying powers through violent means underneath the Sunni insurgency.

After the United States ousted Saddam Hussein from power in 2003, only organized religious groups remained. Therefore, people started to join insurgent groups controlled by the once-ruling authority. At first, many Sunnis accepted the Americans, but they were soon seen as an occupying force, commanding the country that the Sunnis had once ruled (PBS). Many of the ruling Sunnis reacted against the Americans because they had been ousted from power. The public institutions and government authority disappeared, and people needed to look somewhere for guidance. Therefore, some religious Sunni insurgencies became popular among people who blamed the United States occupation and Shiites for the Sunni misfortune. They considered many Shiites and Kurds to be traitors to Iraq for collaborating with the Americans. Therefore, other sites were targeted, such as the Golden Mosque in Samarra, where the insurgents began to move against the Shiites (PBS). Lastly, many of those who were being arrested by American troops were innocent, so the prisons became breeding grounds for insurgents (Lynch 2004).

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Islam has played an even greater role for Shiite Muslims than for Sunnis. The cleric's role increased after the Baath regime because there was no strong secular party to lead the Shiites in the new government (Shuster 2007). Religion



led many of the insurgent groups until the first election in 2005, when many of the groups decided to turn to politics rather than continue in opposition. Therefore, religion has been playing a large role in the organization of the government.

Shiites wanted to institute Islamic law in some parts of the Constitution, as well as organize religion within the state.

Many people can impact the Shiites, but no more than their most influential figure, Ayatollah Sistani, who pushed for elections after the United States arrived in 2003. He has consistently called to end violence in Iraq and usually holds moderate views. However, he does have a large opposition, and many people fear that he is influenced by Iran because of his Persian origin (Who's who in Iraq 2004). Even among Shiites, he faces opposition by more radical parties, such as Moqtada al-Sadr's militia group, called the Mahdi Army, named for the hidden Imam. After an attack or devastating event, many Shiites run to Sadr's mosque for guidance. When the occupation began, Sadr tried to pressure Sistani to leave the country, but he refused (Who's who in Iraq 2004).

Overall, the conflicts within the Shiite community are often centered on religion, and religious figures can greatly influence the people in Iraq, especially since they are now involved in politics.

Religion is mixed with the rest of society in Iraq. Therefore, it is a very important factor throughout the country. Sadr and Sistani use religion as a way of justifying many violent actions and counter-actions.

*The Land and Resources*

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Another huge factor in Iraqi history comes from land and resources in the region. For example, Kirkuk presents a particular problem between the Kurds and the Arabs. The Kurds and the greater minority, the Turkomans, hold historical claims to the city, dating back to the Ottoman era (Talabany 2007). The Kurds tended to politically lead Kirkuk until the Baathist and late Ottoman era came, when the Turkomans began to take power, along with Arab mayors. After violence overtook the Kurds during the Baathist regime, many Kurds were internally displaced to northern Iraq, and they blame the Arab majority for their position and loss of resources in Kirkuk (Talabany 2007).

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Although the Kurds are not unified in northern Iraq, most believe that the group remains separate from the Arabs of Iraq and the rest of the state. The Baathists regime expanded the ethnic differences that separated the groups, so an Iraqi identity failed to be recognized. The Kurds want to be separate from the rest of the country, and keep themselves economically stable through Kirkuk's oil resources (Talabany 2007). Therefore, the Arabs are nervous because of the Kurdish demands. However, many Arab Iraqis do not trust Kurds to be in control of the large amount of oil in Kirkuk. The Arabs do not want to lose these resources in the north or the contested ground between the provinces.

The sectarian violence has been sporadically continuing throughout the recent months, due to the withdrawal of the United States troops, although the security situation in the north has become more stable. However, even with few terrorist attacks, the security situation remains the same in the Kurdish areas, such as Sulaymaniyah, Erbil, and Dohuk (Travel Warning: Iraq 2010). The U.S. State

Department estimates that the sectarian violence between Arabs and Kurds will continue from insurgent groups over Kirkuk and the north. Places, particularly around Kirkuk, are still violent due to the unstable relationships and insurgent groups (Travel Warning: Iraq 2010). The conflict is growing between the Peshmerga units and the Iraqi Army. The Kurds want to use their close relationship with the US to improve their position within Iraq and give them the edge, but as the US pulls out, this special relationship will be less relevant (O'Hanlon 2009).

Therefore, the United States occupation has exacerbated problems regarding land and resources because of the contested ground. The violence shows a negative short-term effect among the groups' relationships; however, the U.S. has also created a long-term positive impact by providing more autonomy for the Kurds. These two circumstances create counter-reactions among the groups because of anger over contested ground; therefore, violence ensues.

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## Part II: The Breakdown in Communications and Credibility

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President George W. Bush made many promises to the Iraqi civilians as the United States began to prepare for war in Iraq. In President Bush's March

2003 "Address to the Nation," he directly spoke to the Iraqi citizens:

As our coalition takes away their [Baathist regime's] power, we will deliver the food and medicine you need. We will tear down the apparatus of terror and we will help you build a new Iraq that is prosperous and free. In a free Iraq, there will be no more wars of aggression against your neighbors, no more poison factories, no more executions of dissidents, no more torture chambers and rape rooms. The tyrant will soon be gone. The day of your liberation is near. (Bush 2003)

The United States envisioned a peaceful and democratic Republic of Iraq.

The president made promises to ensure freedom within Iraq. "Unlike Saddam Hussein, we believe the Iraqi people are deserving and capable of human liberty" (Bush 2003). These promises of freedom and democracy gave hope to the Iraqi people, especially after the regime collapsed from the Western assault.

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The United States fully defined their goals in "National Strategy for Victory in Iraq" by the National Security Council in 2005. The document outlined three stages of victory: in the short term, the medium term, and the longer term:

- **Short term**, Iraq is making steady progress in fighting terrorists, meeting political milestones, building democratic institutions, and setting up security forces.
- **Medium term**, Iraq is in the lead defeating terrorists and providing its own security, with a fully constitutional government in place, and on its way to achieving its economic potential.
- **Longer term**, Iraq is peaceful, united, stable, and secure, well integrated into the international community, and a full partner in the global war on terrorism. (National Security Council 2005)

The United States wanted to help defeat terrorists in Iraq and build a democratic state that respected civil rights. The strategy outlined political,

security, and economic tracks that the U.S. led to ensure its goals (National Security Council 2005). However, this strategy did not account for communication issues between the United States and the Iraqi people. It did not take the Iraqi people into account when outlining the full plan; therefore, the United States' goals were aimed correctly, but they missed a vital step for victory.

These ideals and plans became a faint memory in the Iraqi civilian mindset, as violence and sectarian divisions impacted the Republic of Iraq. Communication and credibility began to break down between the Iraqis and the United States. The Iraqi people saw the United States as a source of violence, rather than the remover of violence. Almost every action from the U.S. ended up creating more upheaval between the civilians and the occupying forces. The United States' lack of knowledge about Iraq, the preexisting anti-Western political culture, the removal of local elites and the army, inadequate media outreach, the impact of reactionary violence, and the inability to fulfill all the U.S.'s promises to the Iraqi population expanded problems in credibility and communication.

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### Lack of Knowledge about Iraq

The United States entered Iraq with some knowledge of Iraqi history, but little understanding of the culture within the country. The United States was criticized for only focusing on the military aspect of the Iraq War at the beginning of the occupation (Coaching US Troops 2007). Many Marines did not understand the Iraqi culture. There were communication issues on a daily basis between Marines and Iraqis.

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One of the largest problems in Iraq was the lack of fluent Arabic speakers. As of 2007, only 260 of 200,000 soldiers in the Reserve Army knew how to speak Arabic. Also in 2007, “the U.S. is not just sending people to Iraq with under par language training, in most cases they have been schooled for months in a kind of Arabic that few ordinary Iraqis speak” (Stein 2007). Most of the people could not even properly speak the language after being trained for several months. Many of these soldiers learning Arabic were expected to act as translators after the program. However, the translators did not understand the basics of Arabic and could not carry on a conversation (Stein 2007). There was no accountability for their abilities (Stein 2007).

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The soldiers were learning to speak Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), but this form of Arabic was merely created to connect all the different dialects around the Arab world. It is meant to facilitate communication, but most native Arab speakers cannot communicate with MSA. It is spoken and written in the press, which creates another barrier to communication (Stein 2007). The messages were being translated several times when Arabs heard from the media; they were translated from English, to Modern Standard Arabic, and then to a local dialect from an actual Iraqi speaker. Therefore, many messages and cultural meanings could be lost in translation (Stein 2007). The United States did not understand the issues with language and culture. Their knowledge of Iraq was too limited to be able to understand the barriers in communication that would develop after troop deployment.

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Another one of the problems that stemmed from the United States' failure to understand Iraqi culture involved the troops. The soldiers knew nothing about the Iraqi culture. In 2007, the United States began to coach troops on Iraqi culture. This change shows the gap in education among the United States troops in Iraq. The United States "lacked knowledge of Iraqi laws and traditions" for the first four years of the Iraq War (Coaching US Troops 2007). These issues caused communication problems between the Iraqi people and the United States. The lack of knowledge upset Iraqis because many soldiers did not understand that they offended the Arab culture during routine searches of homes and even when speaking to families.

### Preexisting Anti-Western Political Culture

The overbearing British mandate reminded many Iraqis about the stereotypes of Western culture. The British mandate terrorized and controlled many Iraqis before Iraq gained its independence in 1932. Jonathan Glancey from *The Guardian* commented that the British mandate had used Iraq as a "useful testing ground for newly forged weapons of both limited and mass destruction, as well as new techniques for controlling imperial outposts and vassal states" (Glancey 2003). Iraqis were used and mistreated during this time.

Therefore, the United States faced the preexisting Anti-Western sentiments. These sentiments made it difficult for the United States to communicate with Iraqi civilians. The United States had little credibility when they arrived in 2003. The previous anti-Western political culture made it

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seemingly impossible for the United States to gain full credibility during the Iraq invasion and occupation.

### Removal of Local Elites and Army Officials

On April 16, 2003, the United States began removing all members of the Baath Party within Iraq. It removed all leaders from their positions and banned these members from the public sector. All the individuals who held positions within the “top three layers of management in every national government ministry, affiliated corporations and other government institutions (e.g., university and hospitals),” were placed under investigation for possible criminal conduct and risk to United States’ security (Bremer 2003). People could be removed from junior as well as the senior party ranks. All insignias of the Baath Party were removed and prohibited after the United States began the de-Baathification process (Bremer 2003).

During de-Baathification, about 30,000 people were dismissed from their positions in the government (Otterman 2005). All of the high level military officers were removed from work, and about 100,000 members of Iraq’s intelligence services. The U.S. removed all 500,000 members of the Iraqi army with this de-Baathification. Finally, the party’s leaders were also dismissed; 5,000 to 10,000 were not allowed to appeal the charges (Otterman 2005). This removal aimed to secure Iraq for the United States’ arrival, but it also removed anyone in power who could have helped bring quick stability to the government. It put most power and responsibility for the country into the hands of the United States

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government. Some believed that the dismissal of Baathists and the Iraqi army was to blame for the increased insurgency (Otterman 2005).

About a year later, around half were allowed to return to work. L. Paul Bermer admitted that the de-Baathification was “poorly implemented” and “unevenly and unjustly” applied to the government (Otterman 2005). There were many people innocent of all charges. Many of the people wished to play a role in the Iraqi reconstruction. They had the experience and background to help the United States government. Dismissing the leaders made it difficult for the United States to peacefully lead the nation. There was no legitimate Iraqi government in charge, and only the United States ruled by force. However, some Shiite politicians attempted to remove Baathist Party members from the 2010 elections in an internal de-Baathification (Ottaway November 2010).

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The removal of local elites and the army from power made it difficult for the United States to appear credible to the Iraqi people. The United States appeared as an occupying force ousting another government. Without any sort of credibility behind the United States, the Iraqi people could not fully believe what the U.S. government told the public. There was a communication gap between the Iraqis and the Americans. The United States could not credibly control the Iraqi government because of the full dismissal of the Iraqi leaders.

### **Inadequate Media Outreach**

The representation of the United States of America is shown through many different lenses throughout the world. The media in the United States used self-censoring and excluded certain information to protect United States’ interests

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and the war effort (Ghosh 2003). At the beginning of the occupation, the media also focused the news on terrorists, the horrors of Saddam Hussein's regime, and accusations of weapons of mass destruction, but hardly showed civilian casualties (Ghosh 2003). These descriptions are common in American media because of the quick identification of the "evil doers" vs. the United States. Much of the media avoided harsh pictures and videos of bloody and tragic civilian circumstances because the American public avoids these depictions. The Iraqi representation within their news sources was very different because of the strong hold of the government. The government originally censored these sources. Before the occupation, the Western forces were often shown in a negative light because of the government. Afterward, many of the sources could have changed, but the media continued to be negative because of the violence in Iraq (Ghosh 2003).

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Finally, the Arab media impacted the Iraqi view of the occupation. Al-Jazeera largely influences the Middle Eastern public. The station showed the "barbarism of the US attack" through civilian and American casualties (Ghosh 2003). This medium negatively impacted the United States by pointing out errors in the war and focusing on the impact on the innocent. Parallels to Palestine and humanitarian suffering were constantly depicted as the war was described as "neutralizing Iraq for Israel" (Samei 2010: 89). Therefore, the focus was on the civilians rather than the U.S.'s difficulty of targeting terrorists when civilians were using other civilians as shields (Ghosh 2003). This focus showed the inability of civilians to impact, protect, or influence their own country; instead, civilians' only power was death (Samei 2010: 87). Al-Jazeera became a highly

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influential voice in Arab media, because they were willing to broadcast Osama bin Laden's videos and spotlight Arab leaders in interviews (Samei 2010: 85).

This earned them more civilian attention than other sources.

All media tended to focus on the short-term effects of the occupation. The casualties, bombings, and fear created high ratings. The U.S.'s failure to properly communicate with the Iraqi people or the media allowed the long-term positive effects, such as democracy, to be overshadowed by the violent attacks. However, the U.S. news outlets tended to avoid using disturbing photos. The difference between the Arab news outlets and the American outlets comes from the Arab channel's willingness to show more brutal dead bodies in pictures. The U.S. media avoided this and thought it was tasteless. However, the government should not have ignored this fact when dealing with Arab channels. It needed to understand their journalistic style, rather than protest against it. The negative short-term fueled this type of journalism, and the media covering the Iraqi occupation used on this style.

#### One Failed Attempt at Media Interaction

The United States launched its biggest public relations hiccup with al-Hurra in 2003. This station was supposed to broadcast shows about cooking, fashion, entertainment, geography, technology, documentaries, and news to 22 Arab countries, but it soon became an obvious source of propaganda (Samei 2010: 91). There was an obvious credibility problem within the network, the news, and entertainment shows. These programs lacked credibility by being biased toward the United States' perspective without considering the Muslim or Arab perspective (Samei 2010: 92). The information was not objective or

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newsworthy. Therefore, the United States lost more credibility, because it appeared hypocritical in one of its most attractive rights, freedom of speech (Samei 2010: 92). The broadcasters ignored the Arab world and only focused on United States' propaganda. The staff and broadcasts did not represent the pan-Arab balance; most commentators appeared to be Lebanese Christians rather than people throughout the Middle East (Samei 2010: 95). Therefore, Al-Jazeera gained more credibility for showing multiple sides of the conflict, respecting the region's culture, and appearing to be objective. Since the U.S. did not always try to appeal to Al-Jazeera, the communication efforts failed to alleviate the emphasis on the short-term issues.

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Although the United States attempted to have good intentions for the Middle East in 2003, these failures within their own campaigns made it difficult to seem benevolent and free. Instead, the United States appeared arrogant and unipolar in its movements and tactics (Nye 2004: 63). This made it difficult to impress the Iraqi civilians when the country appeared hypocritical against its so-called "American values." More important, the United States' foreign policies opposed the campaign. The unilateralist tendencies showed that the United States did not care about foreign impressions (Nye 2004: 64). Therefore, every move that the United States made in attempt to connect with the Iraqi people ended up taking several steps back because of the perceived hypocrisy and militarization within Iraq.

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## Reactionary Violence

Reactionary violence occurred throughout the U.S. occupation. The United States was not the only force at fault for this reactionary violence; sectarian tension and anti-Western sentiments existed years before the United States arrived in Iraq. However, after the United States entered Iraq, violence became a main source of the separation between the Iraqi people and the United States government. Communication and credibility became difficult when people blamed the United States for the violence.

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At first, the reactionary violence may have been because of Baathists resisting the United States occupation, but as the occupation continued, the people were reacting to the entire situation through violence. Soon the reactionary violence resulted in continued violence. The entire situation has become a long chain of violence begetting more violence.

One study showed that Iraqis of each sectarian group believed that the United States occupation was the “primary root of the violent differences among them” (DeYoung, 2007). The reactionary violence may not have been caused by the United States, but it caused some problems with communications and credibility. The violence throughout the occupation continued to hurt the relationship between the United States and the Iraqi people. Overall, the United States could not gain proper credibility with Iraqi citizens, and it could not fully communicate with the Iraqi citizens because of the Iraqi attitudes toward reactionary violence.

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## Inability to Fulfill Promises

In 2003, the Iraqi electrical system did not work, the sewage plants could not treat waste, and the phones lines were unavailable (Baker 2003). The situation did not become much better for many years. People were vacated from their homes by the Iraqi government after just two weeks. These problems remain key issues in Iraq in 2010 (Gentile 2010). The people were promised a stable and peaceful government and fundamental rights. However, these rights have not been fully delivered since Saddam Hussein was removed from power in 2003. People reacted with anger and sometimes violence because of their frustrations with unfulfilled promises. The United States faced issues with communication and credibility because it could not act on all its promises.

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However, it was not possible for the United States to fix all these problems. The United States was placed in a chaotic and unfortunate situation at the beginning of the occupation. The complicated history and culture of Iraq made it difficult for progress to quickly occur. Despite these difficulties, the Iraqis blamed the United States for many of the problems that occurred in the country today. They expected quicker actions and reactions from the United States and Iraqi governments. Therefore, the United States' inability to communicate partly stems from its failure to quickly fulfill its promises to the Iraqis.

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Despite the lack of communication and credibility because of these six variables, the United States occupation positively impacted Iraq by bringing democracy. It improved political participation to Shiites and the Kurds. The U.S.

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helped instill democratic elections in Iraq and allowed for the majority, the Shiites, to take a stronger role in the country. The United States also made it possible for the Kurds to become a significant force within Iraq, despite the fact that there are still many issues surrounding oil and Kurdistan's state of autonomy. The Kurds have autonomy over much of the northern region and have expanded their powers through democratic institutions. With the rise of a multiparty system and various coalitions, such as State of Law Coalition, ~~the~~ Iraqiya Coalition, and ~~the~~ Shiite Iraqi Unity Alliance, Shiites and Kurds have benefited from developments in Iraq since 2003.

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This thesis discusses both the lack of communications and credibility because of six variables: (1) ~~the~~ United States' lack of knowledge about Iraqi history, (2) the preexisting anti-~~W~~estern political culture, (3) ~~the~~ removal of local elites and ~~the~~ army, (4) inadequate media outreach, (5) ~~the~~ impact of ~~f~~reactionary violence, and (6) the inability to fulfill all ~~its~~ promises to the Iraqi population.

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This lack of communication and credibility led to the violence and continued sectarian divide in Iraq. The United States walked into a desperate and unfortunate situation. Violent divides separated the three main groups, and the United States could not appease all at once.

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The next section looks ~~more deeply into~~ how the United States specifically impacted the contending forces in Iraq through five case studies of separate events throughout the U.S. occupation. I will argue that every variable can be seen throughout these events. The five following sections, ~~on~~ (1) the capture of Saddam Hussein, (2) the Abu Ghraib abuses, (3) Iraq's first election, (4) the

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destruction of the Golden Dome, and (5) the U.S. troop pullout, describe in each  
case the event, the reactions of the Iraqi people, and the event's impact on the  
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