

**The Boston Globe**

## **Enlisting Iraqis to Rebuild their Country**

**by**

**Laurence J. Kotlikoff**

**April 11, 2007**

FOUR YEARS, more than 26,600 American casualties, more than 100,00 Iraqi casualties, 2 million refugees, and \$410 billion later, large parts of Iraq and a vast majority of Iraqis are stuck in an unmitigated hell, with no end in sight. The routine massacres of scores of innocent people, the bombings of schools, hospitals, mosques, and universities, the grizzly tortures, and now the gas attacks and use of children as bomb delivery systems are resulting in the mutual assured destruction of the Iraqi people.

If Iraqis are engaged in competitive genocide, the United States is engaged in staticide -- the maintenance of a suicidal status quo. The United States has not committed and will never commit enough troops to achieve security given its tactics.

Many Americans and Iraqis suspect that the presence of US soldiers is making the security situation worse and exacerbating whatever carnage our inevitable departure will engender. This is why the majority of both Americans and Iraqis think it's time for the United States to withdraw.

In the meantime, the Iraqi government should implement a policy that will put an end to its Armageddon. The Iraqi government should institute a draft of all Iraqi men between the ages of 18 and 35. This is the demographic most responsible for the violence. The removal of these 3 million men from the cities and countryside to army barracks would likely bring an immediate end to Iraq's horrific nightmare. Any men older than 35 suspected of involvement in terrorist or insurgent acts would also be enlisted in the Iraqi army.

The role of the enlarged Iraqi army would not involve bearing arms or training in the use of arms. Rather the role would be to reconstruct the country. All army units would be assigned specific reconstruction tasks and be jointly commanded by a Shia, a Sunni, and a Kurd who would make unanimous decisions. If any threesome can't agree, they would be replaced by a threesome that can.

Inductees would be taught the skills needed for their assigned reconstruction tasks, receive general and practical educational instruction, and learn respect for diversity and human rights. They would be paid well, by the United States, for their national service. Annual per capita income in Iraq is now roughly \$3,000. This is also the base salary paid to Iraqi soldiers.

Were the United States to pay 3 million Iraqi soldiers \$10,000 yearly, the bill would be \$30 billion. This is a small amount relative to the savings it would accrue from leaving the country. It would also make service in the Iraqi army highly desirable and spur voluntary enlistments.

Eventually, the country's oil revenue would be used to cover these premium payments to Iraqi soldiers and provide a precedent for distributing oil revenues directly to Iraqis -- something that is long overdue and would eliminate much of the basis for the sectarian violence.

The current Iraqi military would be assigned to train and supervise the new recruits, including enforcing discipline and arresting and prosecuting deserters. Upon induction into the Iraqi armed services, each inductee would be given a polygraph to determine if he had been involved in terrorist/militia/insurgency activity. Those who fail the test would be assigned to reconstruction details with a much heavier presence of officers and military police.

Conscription would be for three years or longer depending on the security situation. The new recruits would be permitted short-duration home leave with no advance notice and on a randomized basis. This would limit the chance of coordinated violence by disaffected soldiers on leave.

A 3 million-man Iraqi army would be large compared with other regional militaries. But this would be an almost entirely unarmed, reconstruction army, not one training for war. Instituting a draft is hardly a radical proposal. Scores of countries, including many in the region, have compulsory military service.

Enlisting young Iraqi men to rebuild their country would permit Iraqi children to attend school in safety, let the country rebuild its infrastructure, and let Iraqi women and older men work, shop, and pray in peace. And it would let the US military leave Iraq with a real sense of mission accomplished.

***Laurence J. Kotlikoff*** is a professor of economics at Boston University. ■