

A Complex Systems View of America's 'Misadventure' in Iraq

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Please do not misinterpret my views

- I have always been against foreign interference in Iraq, before 2003 and since.
- National sovereignty, independence, oil, and unity of Iraq are primary issues of concern.
- **But *at this point* there are even more important matters that *Iraqis* need to address.**
- **Iraq is not finished. It simply needs to regroup.**

In summary: *key questions and answers*

- Was 2003 invasion an isolated ‘misadventure’?
 - ◆ No, it was part of a deliberate, long process.
- How did Iraq sink to its present dire condition?
 - ◆ Organised adversaries and muddled Iraqis.
- Why did Iraq become a target? Oil and location.
 - ◆ But its leaders made the task much easier.
 - ◆ **The past provides lessons that must be learnt.**

In summary: *flexibility and pragmatism*

- I will suggest, on ‘scientific’ grounds, that:
 - ◆ A nation is the architect of its own fortunes.
 - ◆ Reliance on *any type* of dictator is damaging.
 - ◆ Reliance on an external power is even worse.
 - ◆ Success requires focus on current essentials.
- What happens next is up to the Iraqis.
- Adversaries will hinder but that is the real world.

Simplified view of systems:

- To make progress we have to understand systems.

Mechanistic systems
(car, rocket, table)



Behaviour: → Fixed

Events: → Reversible

Prediction: → Easy

Complex systems

(person, nation, economy)



Local 'chaos', stable patterns

Irreversible: no rewind button

Limited

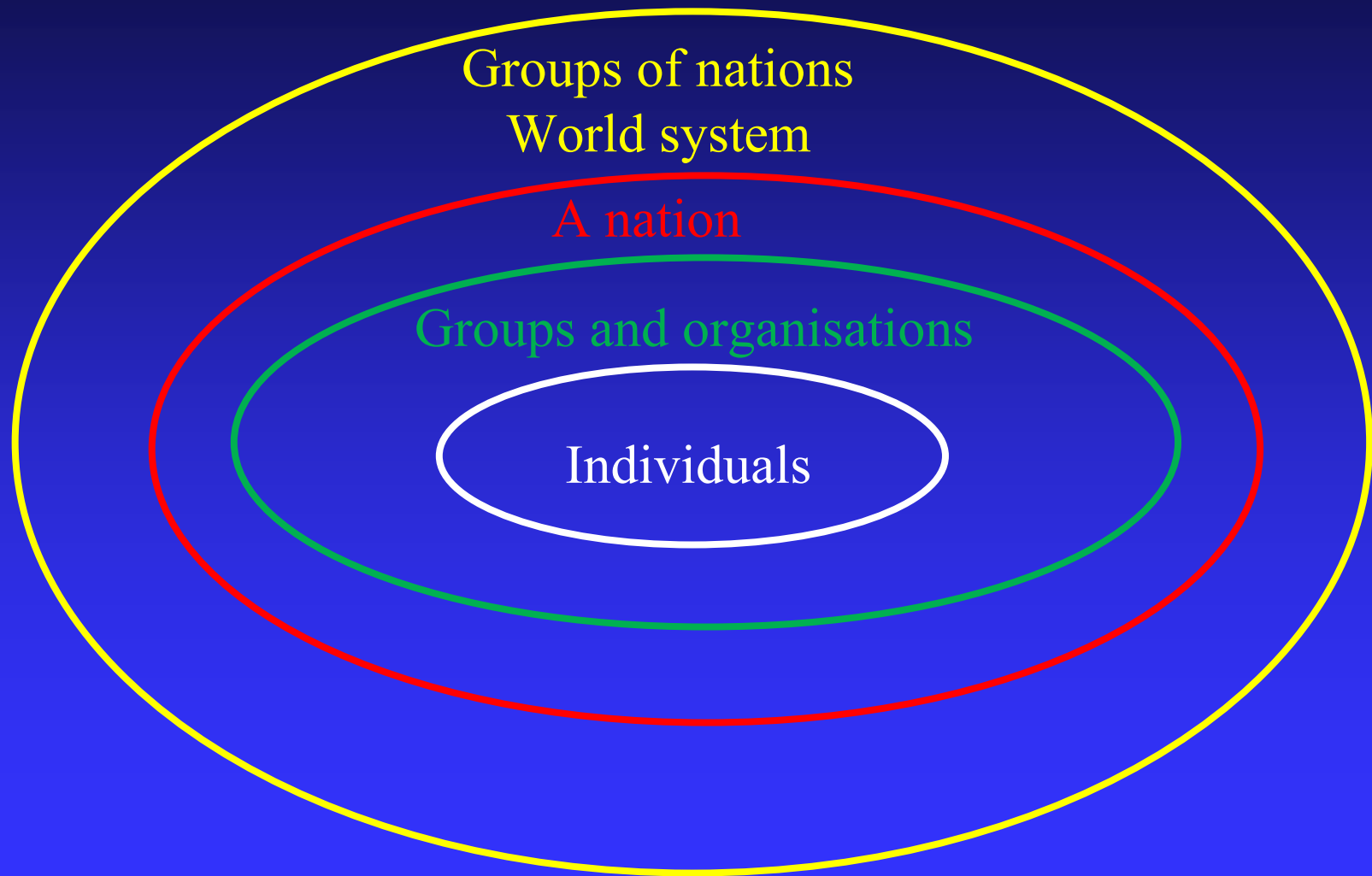
Complex systems: unintended outcomes

1. Made up of many interacting elements.
Causes and effects are not easy to link.
2. Interactions largely determine global behaviour.
'Health' of a complex system can be gauged by the nature of the interactions taking place inside.
3. For system-wide stability interactions must proceed in accordance with simple rules.
(A game of chess with thousands of pieces!)

Several types of complex systems

- Some physical phenomena; vortex in a bathtub...
- Plants and animals; able to 'learn' and evolve.
- Human beings; with *consciousness* in addition.
- Social, political and economic systems. Nations.
- Nation's fortunes depend largely on its citizens: polar extremes to avoid are *paralysis* or *chaos*.

Social complex systems: often 'nested'



Social complex systems: unpredictable

- “I claim not to have controlled events, but confess that events controlled me.”
Abraham Lincoln, 1860s
- “The Third Reich will last a thousand years.”
Adolf Hitler, 1930s
- “Events, dear boy, events.”
Harold Macmillan, 1960s
- “Mission [in Iraq] accomplished.”
George W Bush, 2003

How *not* to manage a complex system

- Command-and-control from the top (dictators, religious dictates, etc.) is counterproductive.
- Might work for a short while but *brute force has to be applied continuously*. USSR?
 - ◆ In the long-term interactions reduce and the system's activity slows to a trickle. USSR?
- Knowledge of how nations, as complex systems, behave could be used for good or bad.

Beneficial use of complex systems

- *'A Voice for All'*, Canadian Institute of Governance, 1998, www.iog.ca.
- *'Wicked Problems'*, Australian Government Public Service Commission, 2007.
- *'Citizens as Partners'*, OECD, 2001, www.oecd.org.
- *'Working in Systems'*, UK Department of Health, Modernisation Agency, 2005.

Iraq was damaged as a complex system

- Successive dictatorships, wars, sanctions, 2003 invasion, and recent divisions resulted in:
 - ◆ Restricted interactions: minimal freedom (rule by force...) or ability (health, education...).
 - ◆ Too few accepted rules of behaviour (laws as well as conventions) to regulate interactions.
 - ◆ **Accident or design? Domestic or imported?
A bit of both, I suggest.**

No conspiracy: all part of a day's work!

- *Realism* as one of the leading schools of international relations could not be clearer.
 - ◆ See Ibn-Khaldun, Machiavelli, Kissinger...
- States promote their interests. Self-evident! If allowed they try to weaken a target country:
 - ◆ **Damage its ability to resist: target assets.**
 - ◆ **Use mind-making (propaganda) as an aid.**

They shouted it from the roof tops!

- ‘We will reduce Iraq to a pre-industrial age’, said James Baker, in 1991.
- Madeleine Albright said the sanctions that killed over one million Iraqis were acceptable.
- Condoleezza Rice said, “the investment in US lives and dollars will be worth it.”
- ◆ **Were/are Iraq’s leaders and citizens listening?**

‘Sinking fast’: Iraqis can make it better

- “Iraq now ranks as the world’s second most unstable country, ahead of war-ravaged of poverty stricken nations such as Somalia, Zimbabwe, Ivory Coast, Congo, Afghanistan, Haiti, and North Korea, according to the 2007 Failed States Index, issued yesterday [18 June 2007] by the Fund for Peace and Foreign Policy magazine.”

(Iraq, ‘Sinking Fast’, Washington Post 19 June 2007)

- “...ultimately: only Iraqis can make Iraq better...”
(The Iraq Commission Report, 2007, published by the Foreign Policy Centre)

Scourging of Iraq predates 2003

- ◆ Simons, G. (1998) *The Scourging of Iraq*, London: Macmillan

- Iran/ Iraq war up to one million died. “Whenever one side seemed in sight of victory Washington would begin secretly helping its opponent.”
 - ◆ Heikal, M. (1992: 65) *Illusions of Triumph*, London: HarperCollins

- Actually 50 countries supplied arms; 22 of them even-handedly armed both sides!
 - ◆ Adams, J. (1990: 128) *Trading in Death*, London: Hutchinson

 - ◆ See also: www.globalcomplexity.org/Iraq'sHolocaust.htm

UN sanctions (1990 -2003)

- Harvard team: shocking report in late-1991. Iraq's leaders got richer but the killing went on.
- UN, FAO, (1995): "more than one million Iraqis have died- 567,000 of them children- as a direct result of the economic sanctions..."
 - ◆ See: www.globalcomplexity.org/Iraq'sHolocaust.htm
 - ◆ But for another viewpoint see *Containing Iraq: Sanctions Worked*, 'Foreign Affairs' July-August 2004

2003 war simply continued the process

- Looting of archives and museums.
- Systematic damage of infrastructure.
- Army and top civil servants eliminated. (US did what 'patriotic' leaders did in previous years!)
- Religious and ethnic divisions encouraged.
- Kidnap and murder of academics and doctors.
 - ◆ See Mr I. Jalili, FRCS, FRCOphth in www.globalcomplexity.org/PlightofIraqiacademics.htm

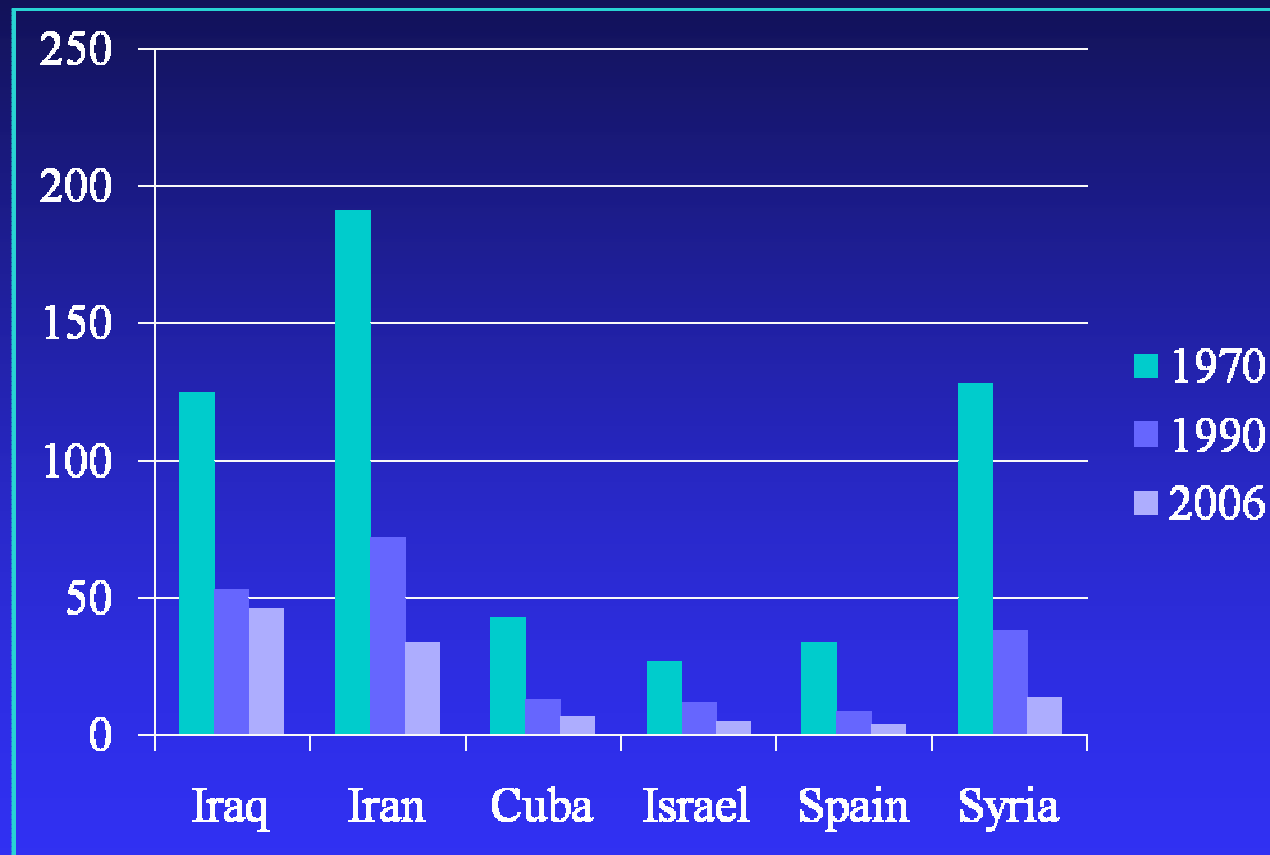
For greatest damage to a complex system

- Strike at the top of the tree and at the roots.
- “According to official Iraqi sources, more than 2,200 doctors and nurses have been killed and more than 250 kidnapped since 2003. Of the 34,000 doctors registered in 1990, at least 20,000 have left the country.” **Critical loss.**
(Iraq: No Let-up in the Humanitarian Crisis, International Committee of the Red Cross, March 2008)
- The under-5 (upcoming generation) were also hit: lack of health and education services.
Just as critical a loss.

Not oil, or sovereignty, or security but...

- “Under-5 mortality rate is a leading indicator of ... overall development in countries.” WHO said, and UNICEF and UNDP agree.
- Iraq’s performance since 1990 is in line with that of sub-Saharan Africa.
(UNICEF, State of the World’s Children 2000.)
- Worse, under-5 mortality Average Annual Rate of Reduction between 1990 and 2006 was 0.9%.
Iran, 4.7%, Syria, 6.1%, Israel, 4.1%!

Catastrophic end result: focus on that!



Progress in under-5 mortality
UNICEF: State of the World's Children, 2008

Mind-making was also used: divisions

- “The CPA never used the term Iraqi people...[preferred] ‘Kurds’, ‘Turkmen’, ‘Arabs,’ ‘Sunnis,’ ‘Shias,’ etc...Of the different prime ministers who took office between 1920 and 2003, eight were Shia and four were Kurds. Out of eighteen military chiefs of staff, eight were Kurds...The majority of the leadership of the Baath party were Shia,...Out of the fifty-five people on the “Wanted List” that the occupying authority published, thirty-one were Shia.”

◆ www.globalcomplexity.org/DrHaseeb'slecture.htm

Mind-making: give them a bad image

- George W Bush on 11 September 2001:
“They hate progress, and freedom, and choice, and culture, and music, and laughter, and women, and Christians, and Jews and all Muslims who reject their distorted doctrines.”
(New York Times, 4 January 2004)
- "Nobody, nobody should believe that somehow we can opt out of the war against Islamic terrorism." Jack Straw, British Foreign Secretary

It is essential for Iraqis to realise that

- Iraq was reduced to its present condition despite:
 - ◆ Forty years of nationalised oil.
 - ◆ Fifty years of so-called independence.
 - ◆ A series of all powerful and ‘wise’ dictators.
 - ◆ Years of ‘decisive’ wars against the ‘enemy’.

Global system: too much for Iraqi leaders

- 'US government' is a vast complex system.
- There were/ are other complex systems at work:
 - ◆ Economic globalising lobby.
 - ◆ Oil companies and defence industries.
 - ◆ Israeli interests.
 - ◆ Other regional powers in the Middle East.
 - ◆ Diverse Iraqi interests with different agendas.
 - ◆ And last but not least, an Iraqi nation that has been crippled by years of mismanagement.

To restart Iraq as a complex system

- Enable citizens to function. Health, education, water, electricity, culture, etc. are the key tools.
- Promote rules of interaction that command popular acceptance (laws, values, customs...).
- Set only a general and pragmatic direction of travel and then be flexible and pragmatic.
- And avoid dictatorship (of any type) at any cost.
 - ◆ **All else is secondary.**

VERY serious issues of concern, but...

- Hydrocarbon and security agreements will be accepted by the Iraqi side. They are ‘battles’.
- Agreements (and bases) are important issues. But they should not divert focus from the ‘real war’.
- Education, health, water, sanitation, electricity, social divisions, insecurity, non-existent civil society, corruption,... That is Iraq’s ‘real war’.
 - ◆ **These were the weapons used against Iraq.**

Corruption in Iraq: an example

- Corruption is evident worldwide. However, in most countries it is kept within 'acceptable' limits.
- Corruption has always been popular/ tolerated/ admired in Iraq for many decades. Authoritative reports suggest corruption on a vast scale has now become normal practice in Iraq. The country scored 1.9 (out of 10) equal to Myanmar and only just above Haiti in last position.

(Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index 2006:
www.transparency.org/surveys/#cpi)

Education and health in Iraq: an example

- “Only 28 percent of Iraq’s 17 year olds sat their final exams in summer, and only 40 percent of those sitting exams achieved a passing grade (in south and central Iraq).”
- “Only 20 percent outside Baghdad had working sewerage in their community, and access to safe water remains a serious issue.”
 - ◆ UNICEF News Note 21 December 2007.
 - ◆ UNICEF News Note 17 June 2008 gave equally depressing news.

Cuba succeed while Iraq failed!

- After years of punitive sanctions that devastated the economy and a large US military base.
 - ◆ Cuba has a health (and education) system that is the envy of other richer countries. Public health and social services were treated as complex systems and the impact was unmistakable.
- Its over-centralised and regulated regime in other issue areas is now being relaxed as well.



No magic bullet: a spray gun approach

- Three points should be highlighted:
- No magic formula to uplift Iraq's fortunes.
- Actions will take time to produce tangible results.
- An approach on a wide front is needed.
 - ◆ A radical change in Iraqi attitudes ('system culture'). Crusade led by Iraqi thinkers that has already started. A source of real optimism.

No magic formula: awareness raising

- There are more writers and websites publishing excellent opinions and views about Iraq than at any time in the past. This is a big step forward.
 - ◆ The balance could be changed possibly. There is more about oil, the security agreement, federalism, etc. than on education, health, corruption, ethnic and religious divisions, ‘negative culture’, etc.

No magic formula: let Iraqis be open

- Make it absolutely clear that those who promote divisions (ethnic, religious, or whatever) are working actively (but possibly unintentionally) with Iraq's adversaries.
- The same applies to those who take part in terrorism against innocent civilians, academics, etc. They are not patriotic and they are helping to provide a justification to prolong the occupation.
 - ◆ **This message needs to be widely spread.**

No magic formula: be aware of image

- Mind-making is used against Iraq with devastating effect. It succeeds because in part Iraqis provided easy evidence to support the image portrayed.
 - ◆ Examples: extreme religious interpretations, random suicide bombing, role of women...
- Lack of voice in the media is blamed on Western or Zionist influence: never on disorganised and lacklustre effort by the Iraqis (and Arabs).
(See Wealth But No Political Power, Gulf Daily News, 15 May 2008)

No magic formula: better civil society

- Academic, arts, sport, and other groups (including IACIS and Association of Iraqi Academics, AIA) are the prototypes of active civil society.
- Many have emerged in the last few years. More are needed of course. Again, room for optimism.
- They will provide a network of people that will act as a voice that could not be not easy to ignore by governments in Iraq and others outside.

In conclusion: I suggested that

- Iraq is a complex system: it needs different means of management from past practices.
- There are orders of priority in addressing Iraq's pressing problems. Iraq needs to win the 'war' not just a 'battle' here and there.
- The most urgent task is to restore the ability of most Iraqis to interact. Iraq must have functioning citizenry. Not easy, but omens are encouraging.