

## The Insider

A key Iraqi leader argues that America was too timid after the fall of Saddam Hussein.

Reviewed by Rajiv Chandrasekaran

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*THE OCCUPATION OF IRAQ*

*Winning the War, Losing the Peace*

By Ali A. Allawi

Yale Univ. 518 pp. \$28

It was almost four years ago that L. Paul Bremer made a decision that may have doomed U.S. attempts to create a new Iraq: The American proconsul issued his infamous order banning many mid-level members of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party from working for Iraq's largest and most coveted employer, its government. In the following months, the Sunnis who had dominated the old ruling elite argued that postwar national reconciliation depended on modifying the decree. Meanwhile, leaders of Iraq's once-oppressed Shiite majority insisted on keeping the policy intact. In recent months, desperate to promote peace among Sunnis and Shiites, the Bush administration has reentered the fray, calling for Iraq's Shiite-led government to allow more ex-Baathists to return to their old jobs.

In all of the back-and-forth, nobody of any stature has suggested that Bremer's approach toward the Baathists was too *soft*. But now, in a compelling, detailed history of the occupation, Iraq's first postwar civilian defense minister makes just that argument. In the first major account from an Iraqi insider, Ali A. Allawi contends in *The Occupation of Iraq* that one of Washington's principal mistakes was that Bremer's Coalition Provisional Authority did not go far enough in dismantling the Baathist structure of Iraq's bureaucracy.

"The CPA did not demolish the state that it had inherited and then start to rebuild it along the lines that it prescribed," Allawi writes. "The unwillingness to treat the Ba'ath legacy for what it was -- a totalitarian state with a privileged elite -- and therefore in need of a radical overhaul, made the CPA reforms essentially tentative and nominal. It was as if a huge, decrepit building had been struck unevenly by a demolition ball that succeeded in inflicting only minor damage to the edifice." Saying that Bremer didn't go far enough is a striking and controversial argument. Allawi -- a former banker who left Iraq to study at MIT in 1964, lived in exile until 2003, and later served as the country's postwar finance minister -- maintains that Bremer's "blunderbuss approach" to de-Baathification was too focused on high-ranking officials; Allawi laments that Bremer's occupation government did not do enough to root out Baathists and their network of sympathizers from important mid-level positions in the government. Allawi's hard-line views on de-Baathification aren't shared by many of the Americans who have been involved in crafting Iraq policy. There's a growing consensus, even at the White House, that Bremer's policy needlessly alienated anxious Sunnis and helped fuel the insurgency.

But Allawi, a secular Shiite who still advises Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, has a real-world basis for his argument: He ran three different Iraqi ministries, where he encountered firsthand the dysfunction of the country's corrupt, lazy and nepotistic bureaucracy. Although Bremer's CPA has been knocked for focusing on minutiae --

rewriting Iraq 's traffic law and tax code, for instance -- instead of more quickly handing over sovereignty to the Iraqis, Allawi wishes the Americans had tinkered with more, not less. It wasn't just de-Baathification that he thinks was too timid; he contends that the CPA should have overhauled state-owned businesses by pushing for more free-market reforms. It is understandable that former exiles such as Allawi would seek an even more aggressive overhaul of Iraq 's government, but it's difficult to imagine that many Iraqis who stayed put during the Baath tyranny would have tolerated an American occupation that sought to do so.

Indeed, Allawi's lament is shared by many former Iraqi exiles who returned to their country after Hussein's fall, dreaming of modernizing their homeland and sharing all they had gleaned in their years overseas. But the Iraq they encountered was very different from the one they left: It was decrepit and dangerous, riven by ethnic and religious tension. In the end, Allawi is just as critical of his fellow Iraqis as he is of the Americans. It is his countrymen, he concludes, who have failed to put aside their sect and work for the common good.

Thankfully, Allawi's book is not simply a polemic. It is a thorough account of the effort to govern and reconstruct Iraq as told by an Iraqi who was deeply involved in the process. Though dense at points, *The Occupation of Iraq* is packed with fascinating details for those who have closely followed America 's misadventure in Iraq , and it's a valuable primer for those who haven't. His insider account of the past four years -- and his views of what the United States should have done differently -- adds a valuable new voice to the ongoing debate about Iraq . .

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