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Who made Iraq a trap for United States

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There was no "imminent threat" to the United States from Iraq. Then there was no strategy for building a new Iraq. "Hubris and ideology" ruled. Now, "Iraq is more dangerous to the US potentially than it was at the moment we went to war".

These are the reluctant judgments of one of the key US officials who participated in the highest levels of decision-making of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA). Both interviewed by me and in a forthcoming article in Foreign Affairs journal, Larry Diamond offers from the heart of the Green Zone an unvarnished first-hand account of the unfolding strategic catastrophe.

Diamond, a scholar at the Hoover Institution, a conservative think tank located on the Stanford University campus, was personally recruited to serve as a senior adviser to the CPA by National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice, once provost of Stanford. When he arrived in Baghdad, Diamond observed "a highly centralized decision-making process. There were weighty Americans with decades of experience in the region who were not consulted or integrated into decision-making. Foreign Service officers up to the level of ambassadors." The neoconservatives in the Pentagon were in charge, and CPA head Paul Bremer "was the agent more of the Pentagon than the State Department". The Pentagon cut out State because the neocons viewed it as "not on board" ideologically.

The British were regarded as warily as was the State Department. British ambassador to the United Nations Jeremy Greenstock was systematically shut out. "In terms of the final decision-making on key issues I never saw

much evidence that (the British) had the opportunity to weigh in." When British officials in Basra urged conducting local elections there "they were vetoed", Diamond told me. "It would have helped. If the British had been listened to it might have been better. They had a history with this country."

The UN was considered

Brahimi appeared this February, he negotiated the standoff between Shiite leader Ayatollah Sistani and the US.

"The reasons there are six women in the Cabinet, corrupt members were jettisoned, why the ministers are regarded as able and serious, has a lot to do with the UN team," said Diamond. "It's indicative of what we could have accom-

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only useful as a rubber stamp to approve the flawed decisions. After the Aug. 19 bombing that killed 22 UN personnel, "the organization felt that they suffered this trauma and for what? They were so ignored, they felt used. The combination of the risk and the trauma with the lack of impact and consultation left the organization feeling wounded." But when UN representative Lakhdar

plished.

"There are so many bungled elements. We haven't had a strategy for the beginning for dealing with Moqtada Al-Sadr. We were flying blind from the start. The result was we didn't neutralize him early on."

In Fallujah, after the murder of four American contractors, the US military pounded the city and withdrew. "We now have a terrorist base in

Fallujah. The Bush administration looked at the political cost, at what would have been necessary to destroy this terrorist haven. A country not an imminent threat to the security of the US is now in some areas a haven of the most murderous, dedicated enemies of the US, including Al-Qaeda."

In Iraq, the US cannot escape from its own trap without even more ruinous consequences. "If we walk away the place falls apart disastrously. Americans are not only a bulwark against civil war. They are a stimulus for nationalist and Islamic fundamentalist mobilization. We need to reduce that stimulus and provocation without robbing the new Iraqi state of the bulwark it needs. "We have been dealt a bad hand by mistaken decisions, going to war, in prewar planning and in the first few months after the war ended. A lot of negative things are difficult to alter because of mistakes that were not inevitable. There are really no good options."

Fallujah remains under terrorist control; insurgents run rampant even beyond the Sunni triangle; the number of US soldiers killed spirals toward 1,000; the Iraqi Army, disastrously disbanded by the CPA, is being reassembled and trained. The American campaign is consumed with false-charges made by a Republican front group about the medals that John Kerry earned in a war more than 30 years ago. The arrogant and incompetent blunders of the Bush administration in Iraq are not debated. On the eve of the Republican convention, Bush burnishes his image as a prudent and reassuring leader. The lethal realities of his "hubris and ideology" are for the moment off the screen. Mission accomplished.