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## Power and Peril

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**B**AGHDAD, Iraq

I tagged along the other day with Bernard Kerik, the dynamo former New York City police chief who is in Baghdad retraining the Iraqi cops. We sat in on a class where a U.S. police trainer and his translator were going through the basics of how to start an interrogation. The Iraqi policemen, who four months ago thought removing a suspect's fingernails was how to start an interrogation, dutifully took notes in their U.S.-provided notebooks.

What struck me most, though, was the new "mission statement" for the Iraqi police, posted next to the blackboard in English and Arabic. It said: "We the Iraqi Police Force protect human rights and uphold our laws by serving our citizens and community for the unity and freedom of Iraq."

That statement exemplifies just how radical and revolutionary the U.S. nation-building project in Iraq is. Half the words in that statement were meaningless here four months ago. Human rights? Laws? Citizens? They still have no meaning, but the intent to endow them with some is what is radically new. For 50 years, Iraq, and the Arab world generally, has seen only the status quo side of U.S. power: American power used to buttress the old authoritarian order. Iraqis and other Arabs are now being treated to something radically new: our ideas, the revolutionary side of American power. They still don't quite believe it.

Unfortunately, the same Bush Pentagon that had the audacity to undertake this revolutionary project in Iraq did not prepare either itself or the U.S. public for such a vast undertaking. I worry that we're not going to have the time, money or people to finish this job right — for several reasons.

First, there's a word I've heard here that I did not hear on two previous visits since the war: "humiliation." This is an occupation. It may have come with the best of intentions, but nobody likes to be occupied. I just watched a scene at the checkpoint at the July 14 Bridge, which leads to the huge U.S. compound in the heart of Baghdad. U.S. soldiers kept telling Iraqi women — who were coming to work for the U.S. forces! — that they could not enter because no female U.S. soldiers were available to search them. It is 120 degrees here. To wait in line for 30 minutes and then be told you have to go across the city to a different gate produces humiliation and rage, and eventually grenades tossed at Americans. I saw it in the eyes of those Iraqi women and their husbands as they drove away.

Second, America's real enemies in Iraq are exacerbating the situation by cutting electricity lines, which the U.S. does not have enough troops to protect, so many Iraqis today have less electricity (read: air-conditioning) than they had a month ago. The electricity cuts are disrupting oil production and refining, which leads to gasoline lines, soaring prices, more unemployment and more looting.

I was in a five-car convoy that was robbed in broad daylight on Monday morning just outside Baghdad.

We were on the only highway linking Iraq to Jordan — the country's lifeline — when several BMW's with masked men, armed with AK-47's, ambushed us under a bridge. These "Ali Babas" blocked the road, pointed guns at our faces and demanded our cash (no credit cards!). They made off with thousands of dollars, which maybe they'll just keep, or maybe they'll use to pay people to kill U.S. soldiers. Who knows? I do know we drove for two more hours before we ran into the soldiers of a U.S. patrol and told them what had happened.

"Sorry," the sergeant said, "we just don't have enough people."

It's a travesty that four months after the fall of Saddam, the main road in and out of the country is still not safe. It underscores how much the Pentagon's ideological reach exceeds its military grasp. All of America's friends in Baghdad say the same thing: I love your ideas, but my daily life — salary, electricity, security — is worse since you came, not better.

"If you have an animal in the zoo who is fearful, angry and hungry, how can you train him?" Imad al-Tamimi, a college student who works for U.S. forces as a translator, asked me. "But if you secure him, caress him and give him some food, he will be obedient. The Iraqi people, if you secure their lives, give them a minimum level of good living, they will be your friends without your even asking them to be your friends. But that's not what's happening."

We have planted many good ideas and programs here, but the ideas will not be heard and the programs will not flower without more money to create jobs, more troops to protect the electricity and more time to train Iraqis so U.S. troops can get off the streets, and without a U.S. advisory team here dedicated to stay. There is no continuity. U.S. advisers come for a few months, then leave, and their replacements have to start all over.

It would be a tragic irony if the greatest technological power in the history of the world came to the cradle of civilization with its revolutionary ideas and found itself defeated because it couldn't keep the electricity on.