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tution permitted, because they have been persecuted in the past, and most would rally around their religious leaders. But a Shi'ite-dominated Iraq would not be acceptable to the US, because of the close relations it would likely forge with Iran, the only other Shi'ite state. This was one reason George Bush Sr failed to support the Shi'ite uprising after the first Gulf war.

Some sort of federal structure is therefore likely, but one in which regional autonomy is carefully circumscribed. The Turks and Iranians would oppose any de facto independence for Iraqi Kurdistan. Moreover, the Americans would like the Kurds to play a significant role in Iraqi national politics because they are Sunni, and thus natural allies of the Sunni Arabs, to balance the Shi'ite influence.

Another consideration is that within both the Kurdish and Sunni Arab populations there exists an educated class

that tends to be more secular, separating government from religion as much as possible. These are people, many of them educated in the West, whom the Americans can work with, though many also are staunch nationalists associated with the Ba'ath Party.

Coping with the cross-currents of Iraqi politics will test American skills and patience, and this is not a patient administration. There will be a temptation to cut the process short by backing a new strongman, someone the Americans can "do business with" and who would take account of US interests, both strategic and economic.

Such an Iraq would hardly be a model of democracy, but then beyond the level of rhetoric this was never really an American reason for going to war.

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## After the war, the trouble starts

// If the 'coalition of the willing' knows how to control a post-war Iraq, it's yet to show it, writes **Martin Stuart-Fox**

**T**HE war in Iraq, we're told by the US military, is going according to plan. That is, though it may take a little longer than first thought, it will be over in the near future, and President George W. Bush's goal of "regime change" will be achieved.

But this scenario hides a multitude of questions.

First, how will we know that the war is over? When Saddam Hussein and his entourage are dead, or have fled the country? When security has been restored throughout Iraq? When a new regime is in place? Or simply when the "coalition of the willing" declares victory?

Second, how will regime change be implemented? Will there be an interim American military administration? If so, how long will it remain in place and what will it be responsible for? Will the United Nations have a role, and if so, what?

Third, in the longer term, what kind of government is likely to emerge in Iraq? Will it be stable? Will it constitute a model of democracy for the region? What continuing influence will the US want to have?

No plan has been released, by Washington or anyone else, that goes anywhere near answering these questions. This may well be deliberate: Contingencies will be dealt with as they arise. Or it may be that the Americans do have some definite plans, which they are keeping to themselves. At present, however, there is an ad hoc feel about the outcome of this war that does nothing to reassure the world community.

Take the problem of how the war will end. This is not just a frivolous concern. As Saddam is unlikely to flee Iraq, let us assume he is killed and the coalition declares victory. This in itself is unlikely to restore order. Reprisals will be likely against those identified with Saddam's apparatus of repression. There are debts of blood to pay. We can expect widespread extra-judicial killing, not just of those directly linked to Saddam's regime, but to family members as well. How will this be controlled?

More serious for the army of occupation is that we also can expect continuing opposition from remnants of the Saddam regime, from Iraqi nationalists who resent the presence of foreign forces on Iraqi soil, and from Islamists determined to expel the infidel.

Such opposition is likely to grow if American occupation is prolonged. Already extremists across the Middle East are calling for suicide bombers to attack coalition troops.

And then there is the possibility of civil conflict on a larger scale, between opposing militia forces. It will take time to

rebuild an Iraqi national army and police force. In the meantime, political parties will recruit their own militia to add to the two major Kurdish forces – which will probably remain in their own northern semi-autonomous region, but may well fight each other, as they did in 1995-96 – and the Shi'ite militia armed and backed by Iran, elements of which already have moved into Iraq.

An American military administration, even of brief duration, will have to deal with all matters of security. At the same time it would have to begin the task of reconstruction, which would require increasing numbers of civilians – soft targets for anti-American terrorism. Most importantly it would have to create the conditions for new Iraqi institutions of government and administration.

This is likely to be a slow process. There are dozens of Iraqi opposition parties and organisations which, judging by previous attempts, will find it hard to agree on much. Many of these lack any support inside Iraq and probably will fade away, but that will still leave the significant players, notably those representing the Shi'ite Arab majority (60-65 per cent), the Sunni Arabs who have suffered least under Saddam Hussein (15-20 per cent), and the Sunni Kurds (15-20 per cent).

There will have to be a new constitution, one that puts in place a federal structure allowing a degree of regional autonomy for the Kurds in the north (already enjoying regional autonomy thanks to the northern no-fly zone) and for the Shi'ites in the south (one of the demands of the strongly religious Supreme Assembly for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, an organisation that, despite its name, now claims to support a democratic Iraq).

Politics in Iraq will be complicated post-Saddam, not only by divisions between Arabs and Kurds and between Sunni and Shi'ites, but also between secular nationalists (main supporters of Saddam's ruling Ba'ath Arab Socialist Party) and religious fundamentalists who want to establish an Islamic state. Undoubtedly arms will be twisted – not least by the Americans – deals done and political compromises arrived at.

But all this will not happen overnight, and the longer a US administration stays, even if masked by the UN, the more its presence will be resented.

So what sort of regime will eventuate? It is unlikely to be a pure democracy of the "one person, one vote" variety. This is because the Shi'ite Arabs comprise a majority of the population and so could always control the government. This they would be likely to do if the consti-