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GCC Relations with Post-War Iraq:
A Strategic Perspective

Edited by
Omar Al-Ubaydli and Andrea Plebani

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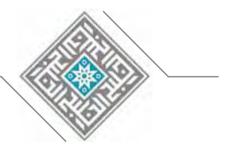
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By publishing this volume, the Gulf Research Center (GRC) seeks to contribute to the enrichment of the reader's knowledge out of the Center's strong conviction that 'knowledge is for all.'

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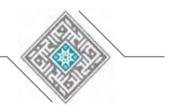
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About the
Gulf Research Center

The Gulf Research Center (GRC) is an independent research institute founded in July 2000 by Dr. Abdulaziz Sager, a Saudi businessman, who realized, in a world of rapid political, social and economic change, the importance of pursuing politically neutral and academically sound research about the Gulf region and disseminating the knowledge obtained as widely as possible. The Center is a non-partisan think-tank, education service provider and consultancy specializing in the Gulf region. The GRC seeks to provide a better understanding of the challenges and prospects of the Gulf region.

Contents

Preface

The nine chapters in this volume were originally contributions to the 2013 Gulf Research Meeting workshop entitled "GCC Relations with Post-War Iraq: A Strategic Perspective." In light of the workshop's quality papers and lively discussions, we were very pleased when the Gulf Research Center offered us the opportunity to produce this volume. During the editing process, we favored a hands-off editing style: our goal was to make the volume a forum where each author could put forward arguments and views directly to the reader with minimal interference from intermediaries. Beyond copy-editing support provided by GRC, our suggestions focused on ensuring that typical academic standards were maintained, specifically those pertaining to correct referencing and well-articulated arguments. This was particularly important in light of the often controversial nature of some of the key issues discussed.

We also insisted that in place of conventional abstracts to summarize the papers, the authors should provide two sets of key strategic recommendations that flow from their paper: one directed at GCC policymakers and the other directed at Iraqi policymakers. The aim here was to maximize the value of the volume to arguably the most important component of the target audience: senior policymakers in the GCC and Iraq.

In light of our relatively laissez-faire editing style, the reader should be aware that the editors do not necessarily agree with the claims and arguments put forward by the authors in the volume. We see this as a strength of the volume, as a key

goal of the workshop was to gather a diverse range of well-researched opinions on what is manifestly a topic of considerable importance. As should be apparent from the author bios, the diversity is at least partially the result of the diversity in backgrounds, with a variety of disciplines and geographical locales represented in the author lineup.

Introduction

The papers in this volume examine the history and future of the often fractious relationship between Iraq and the GCC countries. The backdrop is the US dominance of security arrangements in the Gulf region for most of the post-war period. Prior to the new millennium, the region's major security threat was perceived to be the mounting rivalry between the GCC-US camp on the one hand and the Iranian camp on the other. Some semblance of equilibrium had been achieved through the late 1990s, but the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 created new fault lines. In the invasion's aftermath, regional peace was maintained by the overwhelming presence of US troops both in Iraq and in the GCC more generally.

There is a broad consensus among the contributions in this volume that a state of disequilibrium emerged in the wake of the 2011 withdrawal of US troops from Iraq. The contributions are also in agreement over the need for a more inclusive and multilateral approach to regional security, and for any such approach to be spearheaded by the region's principle stakeholders, i.e., Iraq, Iran and the GCC countries. This is partly out of necessity, since the global recession has affected the US ability to unilaterally enforce security in the region, and there are major doubts over the effectiveness of soft military units as a replacement for a hard military presence; and partly because the new socio-political forces unleashed by US military activity and the Arab Spring have altered the previous dynamics and denuded the suitability of the prevailing security arrangement.

The contributions show much more discord over the precise nature of a potentially successful new common security strategy. Among the areas of contention is the extent of Iranian influence in Iraq: those perceiving it to be large regard it as a driver of regional sectarian polarization and therefore a barrier to the emergence of a common security strategy, while those dismissing it regard Iraq as a potential bridge between the GCC and Iranian camps. A closer examination of the process of constructing Iraq's federal architecture post-2003 demonstrates the oft-underestimated complexity of Iraq's ethno-sectarian composition and the subtlety required to forge lasting and productive relations between the GCC countries and Iraq. Certainly there remains much controversy over what Iraqi policies that reflect "the will of the Iraqi people"- a particularly nebulous concept - might look like.

Frequent reference is made to the rising tide of sectarianism in the GCC countries themselves and how this has impeded the emergence of successful regional security cooperation. The Arab Spring and the advancing medium of the Internet have combined to open the political arena for previous depoliticized religious clerics, while raising the ceiling and widening the horizons (nationally and internationally) for those who were already engaged in the political process.

Despite the recognized need for a common regional security strategy, the prospects for its emergence remain dim due in large part to questions pertaining to Iran's nuclear program, persistent instability in the broader Middle East (especially Syria), and Obama's posturing over "pivoting to Asia." The overarching uncertainty means that the parties are yet to reach the point where they feel that they have no alternative to constructive rather than adversarial trips to the bargaining table.

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Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait: Post-2003 Challenges and Opportunities for the Iraqi Federal Architecture

Andrea Plebani

Recommendations for GCC and Iraqi Policymakers:

- Challenges and opportunities presented by Operation Iraqi Freedom to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait
- Iraqi federal debate implications for Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iran
- Iraqi-Saudi-Kuwaiti triangular dynamics: an assessment

Recommendations for Iraqi Policymakers:

- The quest for regional autonomy in Basra and in the Iraqi Arab-Sunni heartland: historical and socio-economic roots
- The new Iraq and its path towards socio-political and economic reconstruction
- No more a battleground for conflicting interests: Iraq's difficult struggle to reassert its role in the region

Introduction

This chapter aims to examine the complex triangular relations between Baghdad, Kuwait City, and Riyadh focusing on the obstacles still hindering their rapprochement and the positions of the Saudi and Kuwaiti leaderships towards the new Iraq.

In this framework, after an introduction that delves into the historical aspects, the analysis will describe the effects Operation Iraqi Freedom had at the regional level, underlining, in particular, the challenges (and opportunities) it presented to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The chapter will then examine the debate related to Iraqi federalism and the formation of new autonomous regions, focusing on its internal and external implications, especially concerning Saudi and Kuwaiti interests.

While the relations between Riyadh and Kuwait are shaped by a solid alliance and by close geo-political interests, their approach towards the "new Iraq" presents significant divergences. The year 2012 marked a significant turning point for Iraq and Kuwait, resulting in a series of meetings as well as in the presence of a high-level delegation headed by the Amir of Kuwait at the Arab League summit in Baghdad. Such events paved the way for a potential rapprochement, which, despite the existence of significant obstacles, could positively alter the relations between the two countries. On the other hand, Riyadh-Baghdad positions are far more strained. Their division is deeply rooted in the sectarian strife that haunts the Iraqi system as well as in the struggle taking place at a regional level. Adding to this gloomy picture is the manifest lack of confidence between Iraqi and Saudi leaderships, which, de facto, remains one of the major factors limiting any possibility of implementing a broad and effective dialogue and a long-term rapprochement.

Mesopotamia, Kuwait and Arabian Peninsula: Relations before and after the Emergence of Modern States

The ousting of the Saddam Hussain regime represented a major turning point for the Gulf region. Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) set the stage for the liberation of Iraq from tyranny and for its reconstruction on a more democratic basis, but at the same time it also unleashed the demons of sectarianism and civil war in the country. OIF also had deep implications at the regional level, marking the end of the US hegemonic order and the ascendance of a bunch of state and non-state actors whose interests and conflicting objectives are deeply influenced by the strengthened Iranian influence over what King Abdullah of Jordan called the "Shia Crescent."[1] The fall

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1. Kayhan Barzegar, "Iran, New Iraq and the Persian Gulf Political-Security Architecture,"

of Baghdad also represented a milestone for Kurdish aspirations, strengthening the Kurdish hold over northeastern Iraq and laying the base for a historical cooperation with Ankara, destined to significantly alter the dynamics of the whole area.

It is difficult then not to consider the fall of Saddam Hussain as a watershed moment which completely altered the previous equilibrium, launching a new and completely different era. However, as the long and difficult years which followed the fall of the Iraqi regime demonstrated, even the most dramatic transformation cannot result in a tabula rasa, and the new Iraq presents important elements of continuity with the "old" one. The fall of Baghdad unleashed tensions and dynamics that had been frozen for decades and favored the re-emergence of paths of cooperation and competition presenting significant analogies with the pre-twentieth century Middle East. It is important therefore not only to focus on the post-2003 scenario or the period immediately preceding it but also to place these dynamics in a framework that takes into account relations and tensions predating the establishment of the contemporary Gulf States.

Patterns of Relations and Competition in the Northern Gulf Subsystem during the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

The nineteenth century Gulf regional scenario was much more fluid and fragmented than in present times, with several sheikhdoms and local potentates coexisting with (and in some cases affiliated to or under the formal authority of) the major British, Ottoman and Persian superpowers of the time. The areas stretching from the eastern parts of the Arabian Peninsula to Mesopotamia and southwestern Persia had a particular socio-political and commercial sub-system well integrated into a commercial network connecting the Ottoman and Safavid main centers to the Indian sub-continent.[2] Thanks to its strategic position, commercial activities, and significant wealth (deriving not only from trade but also from the fertile lands of the province and its world-renowned date palm groves), Basra emerged as one of the cornerstones of this system, becoming the recipient of significant investments from the wider region and the seat of communities of diverse origins and ethno-religious affiliations. Though part of an environment deeply affected by frequent bouts of instability stemming from tribal infighting and rivalries, the city and its immediate

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Iranian Journal of International Affairs 20, no. 1 (Winter 2007/8): 100.

2. See Lawrence G. Potter, *The Persian Gulf in History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) and Hala Fattah, *The Politics of Regional Trade in Iraq, Arabia and the Gulf, 1745–1900* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1997).

environs, thanks to their important linkages with prominent tribal actors, their key geo-political position, and the presence of a significant Ottoman garrison, did not face any existential threat from tribal marauders and were not even touched by the numerous Wahhabi expeditions launched till the early twentieth century against the 'atabat.[3]

These factors allowed Basra to establish a series of strong relations and alliances with a broad set of actors in and around the Gulf sub-system and to exploit such connections to influence the local socio-political and economic scenario, even against Ottoman and Safavid interests. A clear example of such cooperation is represented by the solid ties established since the end of the nineteenth century by the notables and political leaders of Basra (under Ottoman authority), Kuwait (under formal Ottoman authority but de facto enjoying significant independence and, after the secret treaty of 1899, the protection of the British Empire) and Muhammara (a semi-independent Persian principality).[4] Their position along the porous Persian-Ottoman borders provided them with significant leverage over their patrons as well as the opportunity to benefit from the loopholes of their weak local administrations. The importance of such connections became particularly evident in the first quarter of the twentieth century, when both the shaykh of Muhammara, Khaz'al Al-Ka'bi, and the Amir of Kuwait, Mubarak Al-Sabah, did not hesitate to support Sayyid Talib Al-Naqib (one of the leading Basrawi notables belonging to the city's most prominent and influential family) in his bid to get substantial autonomy (and later on independence) for the southern vilayet of Basra.[5] Such bonds were obviously based not only on personal relations but also on deep geopolitical interests, as attested to by the significant influence both Kuwait and Muhammara continued to exert over Basra even after the formation of the Iraqi state and long after Sayyid Talib Al-Naqib was exiled to Ceylon.

Gradually, but inevitably, new modern states replaced old political entities and deeply altered the traditional regional balances: Basra and Muhammara, as

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3. Literally means "thresholds." The term indicates Shia holy shrines based in Iraq in the cities of Najaf, Karbala, Kadhimain and Samarra. See Rudi Matthee, "Boom and Bust: The Port of Basra in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *The Persian Gulf in History,* Lawrence G. Potter, 109-121, and Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 28.

4. Reidar Visser, *Basra, the Failed Gulf State: Separatism and Nationalism in Southern Iraq* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005), 33–52.

5. Eliezer Tauber, "Sayyid Talib and the Young Turks in Basra," *Middle Eastern Studies* 25, no. 1 (January 1989).

well as al-Hasa, Zubayr, and several other lesser local actors lost their traditional autonomy in favor of new or reconstituted political units in Iraq, Persia, and Saudi Arabia. But even the sheikhdoms of the Arabian Peninsula that had not fallen under Saudi authority had to completely redesign their external relations, sacrificing growing swaths of their autonomy to secure the protection of London. These events contributed to the gradual disruption of the informal sub-system revolving around the Gulf potentates but did not destroy its ancient cultural, economic and political ties, which remained significant all through the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries.

The Post–World War Gulf Order and Its "New–Old" Dynamics

The new regional outlook altered the old patterns of cooperation and competition which had dominated the area for centuries and contributed to sparking a series of claims over areas located on the edges of the new political entities, creating conflicting dynamics destined to shape the views of the Khalijis and of the actors gravitating around the Gulf. These processes, while present during the interwar period,[6] became particularly evident after the Second World War, when London had to cope with the gradual decline of its hegemony in the area and the ascendance of other regional and non-regional powers. The revolutionary Iraqi regime which overthrew the Hashemite monarchy in 1958 was one of the first to overtly challenge the Gulf balance, responding in an extremely hostile way to the 1961 Kuwaiti declaration of independence. The official claims over the emirate presented by the Iraqi prime minister Gen. Abd al-Karim Qassim, while not followed by an immediate military threat (deterred by the presence of an important British contingent in the emirate, later replaced by an Arab League military force[7]), brought the issue of the redefinition of Gulf boundaries and dynamics back to the fore. But Baghdad was not the only state actor interested in altering the Gulf equilibrium: to varying degrees, all the main regional powers projected their interests in the area,

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6. A few months before his death, King Ghazi launched in March 1939 a series of formal claims over Kuwait even inciting the population of the emirate against the al-Sabah. See Majid Khadduri, *Republican Iraq: A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 167, and Ibrahim al-Marashi, "Iraq's Gulf Policy and Regime Security from the Monarchy to the Post-Ba'athist Era," in *Security in the Gulf: Historical Legacies and Future Prospects* edited by Matteo Legrenzi (London: Routledge, 2011), 117–19.

7. Mustafa M. Alani, *Operation Vantage: British Military Intervention in Kuwait 1961* (Surbiton, Surrey: LAAM, 1990).

issuing formal claims over lesser political entities or peripheral areas considered part of their ancestral territories or – more subtly – supporting proxies operating inside the territory of their regional competitors.[8]

Far from being confined by modern state boundaries, the inner fluidity of local relations and dynamics re-emerged with the outbreak of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979: its destabilizing potential, its appeal to disgruntled Shia communities all over the area, and its assertiveness in trying to export the revolution represented the most serious threat to date to the post World War Gulf order. This event, coupled with the effects of the Egyptian-Israeli peace accords and the ousting of Egypt from the League of Arab States, led to a gradual rapprochement between Baghdad and the Arab regimes of the Gulf, laying the foundations for a renewed tactical alliance bringing together many of the actors that composed the old northern Gulf sub-system. This fragile entente consolidated during the years of the Iraq-Iran war, when the Arab monarchies (and in particular Saudi Arabia and Kuwait) provided Baghdad with huge economic support in order to stem the rising Persian threat. Notwithstanding its significance, the alliance's inner unsustainability emerged at the end of the conflict, when the downgrading of the Iranian threat (and the worsening economic scenario) led the Arab Gulf monarchies to reduce their economic support to Baghdad and to distance their agendas from its grand regional objectives. But, even before the end of the conflict, differences inside the Arab axis emerged, as proven by the decision not to include Baghdad in the 1981 Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf[9] (aka Gulf Cooperation Council – GCC). At the same time, while Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and – albeit to a lesser extent – Bahrain provided significant support to Saddam, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates maintained strong commercial relations with Iran.[10] It is against this background that the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait took place.

The economic and geopolitical implications of the Iraqi challenge were not lost on Riyadh and Washington, resulting in the formation of an international coalition which demolished the military basis on which Baghdad's hegemonic dreams rested. The long and terrible years following Desert Shield and Desert Sabre weakened

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8. See F. Gregory Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 16–25, and Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Basra, Southern Iraq and the Gulf: Challenges and Connections," Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States, February 2012, 2.

9. David Priess, "The Gulf Cooperation Council: Prospects for Expansion," *Middle East Policy* 5, no. 1 (January 1998): 22–24.

10. Ulrichsen, "Basra, Southern Iraq, and the Gulf," 6–7.

Saddam's hold over the Iraqi and the regional systems, but did not result in his ousting. It was only with Operation Iraqi Freedom that the regime was removed from power, sparking a regional crisis whose evolution and long-term consequences are, even now, difficult to predict.

The Region after the Fall of the Saddam Hussain Regime

Operation Iraqi Freedom represented the most important turning point the region had to face after the Islamic revolution in Iran. The ousting of the Baathist regime affected all the main regional players and particularly the Sunni Arab regimes aligned with Washington, which had to cope with an Iran "liberated" from its Iraqi nemesis. With the notable exception of Kuwait (which had a clear and direct interest in thwarting the Saddam Hussein regime[11]), they were the first to condemn the attack and the US grand strategy behind it.[12] While they did not trust Saddam, they were aware that his hold on the Iraqi system was one of the few factors limiting Tehran from reasserting its hegemonic bid over the Gulf. They were also equally disappointed by the much-trumpeted neo-conservative vision of a new Middle East reshaped by the influence exerted by the Iraqi democratic system. Apart from representing an extremely destabilizing threat for most of the US allies in the area, such a position was also considered as the manifest meddling of an external (albeit allied) power in Arab affairs. Furthermore, it was not lost on the Sunni Arab side that the creation of a stable, democratic, and Western-oriented Iraq could result in a downplaying of old US alliances (and especially its "special relation" with Saudi Arabia).[13] All in all, their positions were fairly represented in a statement by Prince Saud al-Faisal in February 2003, in which he said that toppling Saddam Hussein through violent means would result in "solving one problem and creating five more."[14]

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11. Kenneth Katzman, "Kuwait: Security, Reform and U.S. Policy," *CRS Report for Congress,* December 6, 2012.

12. Kristian Ulrichsen, "Gulf Security: Changing Internal and External Dynamics," working paper, Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States, May 2009, 13.

13. Richard Weitz, "Iraq and Saudi Arabia: The Politics of Frustration," Second Line of Defense, August 18, 2012, available at: http://www.sldinfo.com/iraq-and-saudi-arabia-the-politics-of-frustration/.

14. "Saudis Warn US over Iraq War," BBC, February 17, 2003, available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/2773759.stm.

Saudi Arabia's Relations with the "New Iraq"

While most Arab Sunni leaders gradually came to terms with the new regional order and realigned with Washington (albeit reluctantly and only under significant US pressure), Saudi opposition remained strong during the years following the US-led occupation of Iraq. The Kingdom did not limit itself to condemning the attack but also the measures implemented after the end of the hostilities, and in particular the disbanding of the Iraqi army and the de-Baathification process, which excluded most of the Iraqi Sunni Arab elite from the levers of power.[15] This marginalization, together with the heightened Iranian influence in the country, and the risks posed to the Kingdom by the fallout from Iraqi instability were at the core of Saudi dissatisfaction. Due to the importance of the special relationship between Riyadh and Washington (and to the deleterious effects 9/11 had on it), the Saudi establishment decided, especially in the initial years following the ousting of Saddam, to refrain from playing a direct role in Iraqi affairs and to adopt a passive stance aimed at insulating the Kingdom from the crisis affecting the country.[16]

While it cannot be denied that several Saudi clerics called for an armed jihad against the military occupation (and the plight of the Iraqi Sunni community) and that a significant number of foreign fighters operating in Iraq came from the Kingdom,[17] Riyadh refrained from supporting such positions and even implemented ad hoc measures to limit them. The construction of a 500-mile long fence along the Saudi-Iraq border and the public calls against the participation of Saudi citizens in

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15. Joseph McMillan, "Saudi Arabia and Iraq: Oil, Religion, and an Enduring Rivalry," USIP *Special Report* 157 (January 2006), 11.

16. While Riyadh maintained lines of communications with a series of Iraqi actors, it refrained (especially in the first years following the fall of the Baathist regime) from nurturing the same relations Tehran forged with a wide array of Iraqi groups. As indicated by F. Gregory Gause III, this "passivity was related to Saudi desire to avoid any complications in its relations with the United States […] [since] any Saudi effort to establish direct patron-client relations with Arab Sunni groups or factions in Iraq might place them in the very uncomfortable position to supporting people who are killing Americans." See F. Gregory Gause III, "Saudi Arabia: Iraq, Iran, the Regional Power Balance, and the Sectarian Question," *Strategic Insights* 6, no. 2 (March 2007), 1.

17. See Michael Gabbay, "Mapping the Factional Structure of the Sunni Insurgency in Iraq," Combating Terrorism Center, *CTC Sentinel* 1, no. 4 (March 2008), available from: http://www.ctc.usma.edu/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Vol1Iss4-Art4.pdf; and Brian Fishman-Joseph Felter, "Al-Qaʻida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq: A First Look at the Sinjar Records," Combating Terrorism Center, January 2, 2007, available at: http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/al-qaidas-foreign-fighters-in-iraq-a-first-look-at-the-sinjar-records.

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the Iraqi civil war[18] are clear examples of such policy, aimed not only at countering allegations that it was spreading instability in Iraq but also at preventing the possible "blowback effect" returning jihadists would have brought back home once military operations in Iraq ended.[19]

This initial stance, especially after the 2005 elections (dominated by a tactical alliance between the main Kurdish and Shiite parties) and the outbreak of the civil war, came under heightened pressure. Riyadh realized that the continuation of its passive stance would not protect the Kingdom from the effects of the Iraqi crisis, nor would it limit the growing marginalization of the Arab Sunni community in Iraq and the increasing Iranian influence in the region. The Kingdom was particularly concerned by the federal architecture enshrined in the Iraqi constitution due to the consequence it could have on its own complex social fabric and especially on its restive eastern provinces. While maintaining its adamant opposition towards Operation Iraqi Freedom (even challenging its legitimacy, as declared in March 2007 by King Abdullah,[20]) the decision to refrain from overt meddling in Iraqi affairs gradually led the way to a more proactive Saudi role.

The turning point came between 2008 and 2009 when the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) set the date for the withdrawal of US security forces and Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki obtained a significant (and quite unexpected) victory in the 2009 provincial elections.[21] The prospect of having to cope with an Iraq devoid of a significant US presence and under the leadership of an assertive Prime Minister with strong ties to Tehran pushed Riyadh to "enter" the Iraqi arena: old ties with key Arab Sunni politicians, tribal shuyyukh and religious leaders were renewed, and new relations established with a broad set of actors averse both to the increasing polarization of the Iraqi system along sectarian lines and to the growing influence of Prime Minister Al-Maliki. In this context, Riyadh threw all its weight into the Iraqi political scenario, exploiting its influence and resources to limit the fragmentation of the Arab Sunni community and support the secular Iraqiyya bloc, led by former Shiite Prime Minister Iyad Allawi.[22]

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18. See F. Gregory Gause III, "Saudi Arabia," 3.

19. Paul Aarts and Joris van Duijne, "Saudi Arabia after U.S.-Iranian Détente: Left in the Lurch?" *Middle East Policy* 6, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 3; and Joseph McMillan, "Saudi Arabia and Iraq."

20. Aarts and van Duijne, "Saudi Arabia after U.S.-Iranian Détente."

21. See Kenneth Katzman, "Iraq: Politics, Governance and Human Rights," *CRS Report for Congress,* January 15, 2013, 5–7, available from: http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/204085.pdf.

22. Weitz, "Iraq and Saudi Arabia."

Notwithstanding Iraqiyya's victory at the hustings (the movement was backed by most of the Arab Sunni community and obtained two more seats than State of Law, the party led by Mr. Al-Maliki), the group could not build on this result: Iraqiyya's affirmation pushed the main Shia-backed parties to put aside their differences and to forge a tactical alliance resulting in their becoming the major political group in the parliament. After 10 months of protracted (and largely unsuccessful) meetings, the so-called Erbil Agreement paved the way for Mr. Al-Maliki's second term. Despite Riyadh's efforts, Iraqiyya was de facto sidelined and the Erbil agreements not fully implemented.

In this situation, and against the backdrop of the instability in Bahrain in the wake of the 2011 Arab Spring (with its potential spillover effects especially towards the eastern Saudi provinces[23]), Riyadh somehow limited its involvement in Iraqi affairs in order to focus on more pressing problems at home and in its immediate "neighborhood."[24] Obviously, the Kingdom did not sever its ties with its Iraqi allies, but opted for a less overt role, leaving the "spotlight" to Qatar and Turkey. While in February 2012 a non-resident ambassador to Iraq was appointed and in March of the same year a cooperation agreement aimed at enhancing border security and counterterrorism was signed, the Saudi establishment did not hide its opposition to the Al-Maliki government, as demonstrated by the low-level delegation it sent to the Arab League summit held in Baghdad in March 2012 and by the decision not to open a serious dialogue over Iraqi debt cancellation and the reopening of the Iraqi pipeline through Saudi Arabia.[25]

Kuwait and the "New Iraq"

Kuwait's relations with post-2003 Iraq were driven by a set of intertwining (albeit, to a certain extent, conflicting) purposes. The possibility of ousting a regime that

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23. See Joshua Teitelbaum, "The Shiites of Saudi Arabia," *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology* 10 (August 2010), available at: http://www.currenttrends.org/research/detail/the-shiites-of-saudi-arabia; and Haytham Mouzahem, "Saudi Arabia Clamps Down on Dissent," *al-Monitor*, May 3, 2013, available at: http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/05/saudi-arabia-represses-shia-dissent.html.

24. The Kingdom was the main supporter of the military intervention conducted by the Peninsula Shield forces in Bahrain to quell the uprising and guarantee the hold of the al-Khalifa over the country.

25. The reopening of the pipeline connecting Iraq to the Saudi port of Yanbu on the Red Sea (expropriated by Riyadh in 2001 following Baghdad's refusal to pay its debts) would allow Baghdad not only to rely on an outlet with a capacity of around 1.5 million barrels per day but also to reduce its dependence on the Strait of Hormuz. Robert Tollast and F. Gregory Gause III, "Iraq in the Middle, Part I," *Small Wars Journal* (May 23, 2012): 1.

was still perceived as being an existential threat was the main reason for Kuwait's full support for the US-led military operations leading to the fall of Saddam.[26] But equally important was the possibility of reframing the relations between the emirate and its northern neighbor on a new basis built upon interdependence, proximity to the West, and mutual respect. The success of the Iraqi reconstruction process was then perceived to be as important as the elimination of its arch enemy both for its own long-term stability and for the regional order. This was exactly the element differentiating Kuwait from its Arab Sunni fellow countries: it had no interest in maintaining the status quo and viewed the establishment of a new, democratic, and stable Iraq as more of an opportunity than a threat. Therefore, the Al-Sabah regime not only pledged significant humanitarian, financial, and technical assistance to the Coalition and the nascent Iraqi institutions, but also used its diplomatic channels to create a framework for regional dialogue aimed at limiting the deleterious effects resulting from neighboring countries meddling in Iraqi affairs. While condemning some of the major mistakes of the US-led occupation, Kuwaitis remained staunch supporters of the US presence in Iraq and looked at the withdrawal of American troops from its northern neighbor with particular concern.

Kuwait's support for the ousting of the Saddam Hussain regime and its geopolitical position made it much more exposed than its neighbors to the protracted Iraqi instability as well as to the heightened Iranian influence in the region (as demonstrated by a string of minor attacks allegedly carried out by Shia extremist groups[27]). These considerations deeply influenced the Kuwaiti stance towards the "Iraqi file" resulting in a nuanced strategy based both on engagement and competition. On the one hand, Kuwait strengthened its political, economic and cultural ties with Baghdad, as demonstrated by the visit paid by the Amir in March 2012 on the occasion of the Arab League summit and by the bilateral agreements which led to the historic decision taken by the UN Security Council on June 2013 to remove some of the sanctions placed on Iraq after the 1990 invasion of Kuwait.[28] On the other hand, it eschewed a total rapprochement, demanding

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26. Kuwait not only abstained from condemning the invasion of Iraq (as most of the Sunni regimes of the area did) but contributed directly to the military operation, hosting a large part of the US forces in the months leading to the war, providing significant financial support, and allowing the Coalition to use its main terrestrial, sea and air infrastructures to stage the attack. See Katzman, "Kuwait: Security, Reform and U.S. Policy," 15.

27. Katzman, "Kuwait: Security, Reform and U.S. Policy," 19.

28. UN News Center, "UN Security Council Eases Some Sanctions on Iraq over 1990 Invasion of Kuwait," June 27, 2013, available at: http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=45287&Cr=iraq&Cr1=kuwait#.UfkhB21nXIU.

payment of the significant debt the "new Iraq" inherited from the previous regime and proceeding with the construction of the Mubaral al-Kabir naval port – a project which could result in whittling down the importance of the port of Umm al-Qasr and the proposed Grand Faw mega-port.[29] While such stances are also driven by internal calculations, they reflect Kuwaiti willingness to establish solid ties to Iraq maintaining, at the same time, a significant leverage over its leadership in order to lay the basis for a long-term strategic cooperation, while preventing the re-emergence of a strong and hostile northern neighbor.

Iraqi Federalism and Regional Schemes: Internal and External Implications

It is within this framework that the Iraqi federal debate (with all the implications related to the establishment of new autonomous regions) became part of the broader conflict caused by internal rivalries and fissures as well as by the different agendas of Iraq's neighboring (and non-neighboring) countries.

The preamble of the Iraqi constitution approved in October 2005 defines Iraq as a "republican, federal, democratic, pluralistic system." The federal nature of the Iraqi state should have allowed it to overcome its legacy of central authoritarianism, enabling its different communities to prosper in a framework with multiple decision-centers based at the central, regional and provincial levels. The significant autonomy reserved for the regions[30] represents one of the most important (and contested) innovations of the constitution: while it enshrined the protection of the special status acquired by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), it also laid the basis for a dynamic institutional structure which could have resulted in the creation of new regional units.[31]

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29. Camilla Hall and James Drummond, "Port Rivalry Tests Iraq-Kuwait Relations," *Financial Times,* September 14, 2011, available at: http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/13e087f4-dc4e-11e0-8654-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2S31kzy00; and Mona Sukkarieh, "Mubarak al-Kabir vs. Al-Faw al-Kabir: What Impact on Kuwait-Iraq Relations and on Regional Stability?" *Middle East Strategic Perspectives,* June 12, 2012, available at: http://www.mestrategicperspectives.com/2012/06/12/mubarak-al-kabir-vs-al-faw-al-kabir-what-impact-on-kuwait-iraq-relations-and-on-regional-stability/.

30. See Jonathan Morrow, "Weak Viability: The Iraqi Federal State and the Constitutional Amendment Process," *USIP Special Report* 168 (July 2006), available at: http://dspace.cigilibrary.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/4664/1/Weak%20Viability%20The%20Iraqi%20Federal%20State%20and%20the%20Constitutional%20Amendment%20Process.pdf?1.

31. According to art 119 of the constitution "one or more governorates have the right to

This option was approved amidst stiff internal and external opposition. At the Iraqi level, it was widely considered by the nationalist circles and the overwhelming majority of the Arab Sunni elites as an intolerable threat to the unity of a country they swore to protect. On the other side, it was perceived by the main Kurdish parties as well as by significant Shiite players like the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, as a way of preserving their influence over their constituencies, at the same time limiting the resurgence of a strong central government. On the regional level, and especially among most of the Arab Sunni regimes, the Iraqi federal framework was seen as a potential threat which could lead to the partition of the country. Furthermore, it was not lost on them that the Iraqi federal debate could spread beyond Iraq's borders, directly affecting their internal affairs. This factor appeared to be particularly significant for Riyadh, whose highly centralized system was considered as "particularly vulnerable to contestation from groups and communities excluded and marginalized during the process of state formation, including Shiites in the Eastern Province, Ismailis in Asir and Hijazis in western Arabia."[32]

Above all, an Iraq divided would have been an easier prey for Iran, which could exploit the significant religious and cultural ties linking the two countries. Since the beginning then, the debate over the Iraqi federal architecture represented an issue that was far from being limited to Iraqi internal affairs; instead it was also viewed through a series of prisms reflecting the interests of the main regional players.

Notwithstanding such general assumptions, the Iraqi federal debate presented a high level of differentiation as well as distinct patterns of support and opposition. In this context, it is possible to classify the different proposals in three main categories: i) plans based on macro sectarian criteria; ii) models built on distinctive local dynamics and relations not necessarily aligned with sectarian considerations; iii) projects drawing their *raison d'etre* not from sectarian or local distinctiveness but from an apparently irremediable opposition to the central government.

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organize into a region based on a request to be voted on in a referendum submitted in one of the following two methods: a) a request by one-third of the council members of each governorate intending to form a region; b) a request by one-tenth of the voters in each of the governorates intending to form a region." Once the request is approved, the Council of Ministries has to submit it to the Iraqi Independent Electoral Commission (IIEC) in order to proceed with the organization of the referendum.

32. Ulrichsen, "Gulf Security," 11; and F. Gregory Gause, "Saudi Arabia's Regional Security Strategy," working paper presented to the International Relations of the Persian Gulf workshop organized by the Center for Regional and International Studies, Georgetown School of Foreign Service in Qatar, January 8-9, 2009, 2.

Soft Partition

The regional schemes which met the fiercest opposition were the ones associated with the "soft partition" formula and its underlying sectarian outlook: the Biden-Gelb tripartite model,[33] the 5-region model,[34] and the macro-Shiite regional proposal supported by the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq.[35] Despite their different origins

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33. Joseph Biden and Leslie Gelb were the first in 2006 to present a project which became widely known as "soft partition." Assuming that Iraq was composed of three homogeneous communities (Arab Shia, Arab Sunni, and Kurd), the authors proposed to create three main semi-autonomous regions under the authority of the central government of Baghdad. In their own words: "The idea, as in Bosnia, is to maintain a united Iraq by decentralizing it, giving each ethno-religious group — Kurd, Sunni Arab and Shiite Arab — room to run its own affairs, while leaving the central government in charge of common interests. […] The Kurdish, Sunni and Shiite regions would each be responsible for their own domestic laws, administration and internal security. The central government would control border defense, foreign affairs and oil revenues. Baghdad would become a federal zone, while densely populated areas of mixed populations would receive both multisectarian and international police protection." Joseph R. Biden and Leslie H. Gelb, "Unity through Autonomy in Iraq," *New York Times,* May 1, 2006, available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2006/05/01/opinion/01biden.html?pagewanted=all.

34. While several authors supported this idea, the more detailed and articulated scheme is the one presented in 2007 by the former Iraqi National Security Adviser, Mowaffaq al-Rubaie. According to this position, the country's administrative structure should have been articulated in five macro-regions: i) a "Kurdistan province" including Kurdistan and surrounding areas; ii) a Mosul province including Mosul and the upper Tigris and Euphrates valleys; iii) a "Kufa province" to be built around middle-Euphrates governorates and the Karbala-Hilla-Najaf triangle; iv) a "Southern province" carved out around Basra, Nassiriya and the lower Tigris and Euphrates valleys; and v) a "Greater Baghdad" province which could have included the capital as well as parts of the Diyala and Salah al Din governorates. The plan aimed at diluting the sectarian criteria associated with the tripartite model in favor of an approach more respectful of distinctive socio-political, cultural and economic dynamics. Such a scheme (which was also more articulated than the tripartite one and which should have been inserted in an articulated federal structure) would have resulted also in a more economically and demographically balanced system since, except for the Greater Baghdad province (which would have included around 7 million people), the other regions would have shared a similar demographic weight (4-5 million people each). According to the scheme, the Kurdistan province should have a special status similar to that of the Canadian province, Quebec. See Mowaffak al-Rubaie, "Federalism, Not Partition," *Washington Post,* January 18, 2008, available at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/01/17/AR2008011702240.html; and "Democratic Regionalism," paper presented at the workshop *Où va l'Irak. Le processus de reconstruction économique et politique: état des lieux, problèmes et perspectives, Institut Kurde de Paris,* March 5, 2004, available at: http://www.institutkurde.org/conferences/ou_va_l_irak/Mowaffak+al+Rubaie.html. See also Liam Anderson and Gareth Stansfield, "The Implication of Elections for Federalism in Iraq: Toward a Five-Region Model," *Publius* 35, no. 3 (2005), 376.

35. The project aimed at uniting the nine Shia-majority provinces of the country under a single

and outlook (as well as their apparent theoretical purity, the important positions held by their proponents, and the significant support they obtained especially in some Western circles), all these plans had to face formidable internal and external opposition. Far from representing the "silver bullet" capable of defeating the sectarian monster which threatened to tear Iraq apart, they were perceived by most Iraqi people as a nightmare which would have destroyed a country still professing (at least in its main Arab component) a strong sense of national unity.[36] Furthermore, given the mixed nature of the Iraqi social fabric, the very idea of a division along sectarian lines was considered impossible to realize, unless through mass deportations and the disruption of the country's ancient demographic basis. Finally, even in case such plans could have been realized without shedding more innocent blood, the Iraqi Sunni community would have been cornered in a part of the country devoid of historical and cultural coherence, as well as of any significant economic infrastructure and hydrocarbon resources.

Equally harsh were also the reactions of a wide array of regional players aligned with Washington (and especially the Sunni Arab Gulf monarchies): for them the partition of Iraq would have signified the rupture of the fundaments on which the

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region. Since adherence to Shiism constituted its main *raison d'etre* and it could not count on any significant historical/geographical precedent, it was named "Shiastan" by most of the Western media and *iqlim janub Baghdad* (region South of Baghdad) or *iqlim al-wasat wa al-janub* (region of the center and of the south) by the Iraqis. The initiative was officially launched on August 2005 by 'Abd-al-'Aziz al-Hakim, head of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq. According to its proponents, the creation of the region would have allowed the formation of local security forces which would have severely limited the violence affecting central and southern provinces (as the *peshmerga* did in the north). Furthermore, it would have accelerated the withdrawal of the Coalition forces (a factor considered as one of the main drivers of the insurrection) creating the conditions to repeat the "KRG success story." Once stabilized, the region would have been able to tap into its significant economic potential, exploiting both the huge oil reserves of Southern Iraq and the significant revenues provided by the pilgrims visiting the 'atabat. See Reidar Visser, "Debating Devolution in Iraq," Middle East Research and Information Project, *Middle East Report* 268 (March 10, 2008), 1, available at: http://www.merip.org/mero/mero031008; and International Crisis Group, "Shiite Politics in Iraq: The Role of the Supreme Council," *Middle East Report* 70 (November 15, 2007), 18.

36. See in this regard Fanar Haddad and Sajjad Rizvi, "Fitting Baghdad In," in *An Iraq of Its Regions: Cornerstones of a Federal Democracy?* edited by Reidar Visser and Gareth Stansfield (London: Hurst, 2007). See also ABC News, USA Today, BBC and ARD polls conducted between 2004 and 2007 ("Iraq: Where things stand," March 19, 2007, 8, available at: http://abcnews.go.com/images/US/1033aIraqpoll.pdf). According to these polls, even at the height of the civil war, only 14% of the people contacted declared support for the partition of the country.

whole regional equilibriums rested and the unleashing of a bitter competition over long suppressed territorial and geo-political claims. According to them, with the formation of a Shia region in central-southern Iraq, Tehran would have been able to exert a decisive influence over the *'atabat,* the Persian Empire desired for centuries, and over the oil-rich areas around Basra. It would have also extended its reach over the northern shores of the Arabian Gulf, following which it could have posed an even more existential threat for the Sunni Arab monarchies of the area.

Such schemes would have also had important implications for a series of other significant regional actors: "soft partition" would have empowered the never suppressed aspirations of the Kurdish people not only in Iraq (where it could count on a northern autonomous region de facto falling short of real independence) but also in Turkey, and – even if to a lesser degree – Syria and Iran.

Local Particularism as an Alternative to Sectarian Criteria: The Basra Federal Scheme

Apart from internal and external opposition, the macro-visions based on overt sectarian criteria had to face the challenges stemming from competing federal schemes based on distinctive economic, social, and cultural dynamics as well as on local grievances towards the central government. As happened in the first quarter of the last century, it was in Basra that a series of proposals based not on ethno-sectarian affiliation but on communal economic and cultural ties materialized.[37] The first of these plans[38] was presented in early 2004 by the governor Wa'il 'Abd Al-Latif and limited to the province of Basra alone *(iqlim al-Basra,* region of Basra). Underlining its commercial and international vocation as well as its key strategic position and its longstanding ties with the main Gulf commercial hubs

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37. Reidar Visser, "Basra, the Reluctant Seat of 'Shiastan,'" Middle East Research and Information Project, *Middle East Report* 242 (Spring 2007), 4.

38. A second regional scheme centered round Basra but including also the governorates of Maysan and Dhi-Qar (and named *iqlim al-Janub* - region of the south) was presented a few months later. As for the *iqlim al-Basra* project, the initiative was essentially built on a set of distinctive social, economic and cultural traits which – according to its supporters – significantly differentiated the area from the rest of the country. Notwithstanding such premises, the southern region project failed to represent a real alternative to the Basra-centered scheme, lacking its popular and political support. Yet, it constituted a potential alternative to *iqlim al-Basra* and, even more important, the demonstration that regionalism in Iraq has not been necessarily based on sectarian criteria only. International Crisis Group, "Where Is Iraq Heading? Lessons from Basra," *Middle East Report* 67 (June 25, 2007), 4–7, available at: http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/iraq-iran-gulf/iraq/067-where-is-iraq-heading-lessons-from-basra.aspx.

and political centers, Al-Latif proposed to grant Basra a status similar to the one enjoyed by Dubai in the UAE.[39] In this way the province would have been able to manage its own resources and avert a deterioration considered deeply related to the negligence of the centralized systems that had managed the country for decades. The initiative also represented an opportunity for the local Basrawi community to preserve its historical autonomy and distinctiveness from the growing role played by some Shia political-religious circles gravitating around the *'atabat* (in particular, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq) and their project to extend their influence over all the Shia-majority governorates of central-southern Iraq. In this context, the analogies between Al-Latif's motivations and the ones presented by the proponents of the twentieth century schemes are evident and underline the ancient roots of Basra particularism.[40] Notwithstanding its moderation (the project never aimed to wrest control of the significant oil resources of the province from the central government[41]) and the significant support the project obtained especially among the Basra political elites (which were able to push the provincial council to approve the regional petition in August 2011[42] after a first referendum proposal failed to obtain the amount of signatures required[43]), the opposition emanating from nationalist circles (and especially from Prime Minister Al-Maliki), resulted in the "freezing" of the *iqlim al-Basra.* The government used all the tools at its disposal to avoid the risk of "losing" one of its most important provinces[44] and Al-Maliki demonstrated all his political skills exploiting the internal divisions of the federal group.[45]

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39. Visser, "Basra, the Reluctant Seat of 'Shiastan'," 1.

40. The analogies are particularly evident if we examine the claims over which rested the 1920 scheme: "the pro-British atmosphere in Basra since the occupation in 1914, […], the special position of Basra as a cosmopolitan port with a strong mercantile character, and the belief that Basra's progress would be different in kind and speed from that of Iraq." Visser, *Basra, the Failed Gulf State,* 74.

41. Author's interview with Dr. Kamal Field Al-Basri, former Deputy Ministry of Finance and founder of the Iraq Institute of Economic Reform (IIER), in April 2013.

42. Ahmad Wahid, "Officials in Basra Renew Their Claim to Establish an Independent Region," September 13, 2012, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2012/09/basra-federal-region.html.

43. Saleem al-Wazzan, "Basra's Bid for Autonomy Fails," *Niqash,* January 29, 2009, available at: http://www.niqash.org/articles/?id=2369.

44. In particular, the Prime Minister promised to address the most pressing popular needs of the area as well as to ease the control exerted by the central government over its provincial authorities. Author's interview with Dr. Kamal Field Al-Basri, former Deputy Ministry of Finance and founder of the Iraq Institute of Economic Reform (IIER), in April 2013.

45. Waheed Ghanim, "Escape from Centralism: Iraq's Basra Postpones Bid for Independence,"

While the proposal had to face fierce internal opposition, at the regional level the reactions were far more nuanced. The Basra region would have been naturally oriented towards the Gulf and to the opportunities deriving from the exploitation of its ancient ties with the Khalijis. Its formation would have assuaged most of the Kuwaiti fears of the resurgence of the old Iraqi claims on its territory and would also have also laid the basis for the strengthening of the already significant economic, social and political ties linking Kuwait to the Basrawi community. At the same time, an *iqlim al-Basra* restored to its traditional Khaliji "vocation" (and closer to the Arab power nodes of the Gulf) would have contributed to halting Iranian influence in the area, representing a sort of buffer zone breaking the continuity of the arc of influence Tehran exerted over the Gulf.

Regionalism as a Reaction against Overcentralization and Discrimination

While the Basra scheme was the first to be shaped by local particularism and not by sectarian considerations, it did not constitute the only alternative to models based on sectarian considerations. Especially during Al-Maliki's second term, areas widely considered as strongholds of Iraqi nationalism and anti-federal sentiments began to register significant support for the creation of one or more autonomous regions. These projects were significantly different in origin and purpose both from the "macro-sectarian" and the "local" models: far from demanding the creation of new regions because of sectarian premises or alleged cultural, religious or economic distinctiveness, these schemes were mainly rooted in the grievances of the Sunni Arab community and in its steady opposition towards a central government it perceived as sectarian and inherently hostile.[46] In this regard, after the defeats sustained by the insurgency, the marginalization of its main political blocs and the waves of arrests and disqualifications that targeted the Sunni community, the creation of one or more autonomous regions out of the direct reach of Baghdad came to be seen as one of the last options at its disposal. Such a correlation is evident when considering the path leading Diyala and Salah al-Din to take recourse to article 119 of the constitution. The timing of the requests coincided with an extremely delicate moment, shaped not only by a series of arrests and interdictions from state positions issued against hundreds of Sunnis, but also by the fears connected with the withdrawal of the US forces from Iraqi soil (since they were seen as a bulwark

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Niqash, February 3, 2012, available at: http://www.niqash.org/articles/?id=2984&lang=en.

46. Author's interview with Dr. Mouayad Al-Windawi, Professor of Iraq Policies at Iraqi Strategic Center for Political Studies in Amman and former political advisor to UNAMI, April 2013.

against the potential hostility of the Shiite-led central government).[47] The arrest warrant issued in December 2011 against Iraqi Vice-President Tariq Al-Hashimi[48] contributed even more to inflaming the local situation and prompted calls for transforming the al-Anbar and Nineveh governorates into autonomous regions too. In this regard, while the Diyala scheme fell through (due to internal divisions between its main proponents, strong opposition from Baghdad, and widespread protests[49]), the Salah al-Din regional movement was able to endure as demonstrated by the declaration of autonomy issued by the provincial council in late 2011 and by the reiteration of the regional petition both in 2012 and in early 2013.[50] The arrest in December 2012 of the bodyguards of Finance Minister Rafi Al-Issawi were read as another attack launched by the central government against a leading Arab Sunni politician and sparked a series of protests in the provinces of Al-Anbar, Nineveh, Salah al-Din, Diyala, and even Kirkuk. Far from a simple outburst of popular anger, there were prolonged sit-ins, blockade of the main highway connecting Iraq and Jordan, and major clashes with Iraqi security forces which caused casualties and scores of arrests.[51] While essentially popular-driven, these protests were soon supported by leading Sunni politicians and clerics, some of whom explicitly took recourse to overt sectarian discourses reminiscent of the heyday of the civil war. In this context, religious and religiously affiliated movements close to the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) were the most supportive of regional bids aimed at replicating the KRG success in the north. Far from being anathema for the previously anti-federal stance of these groups, the establishment of one or more Sunni-majority regions came to be widely considered as not only the price to be paid to exert further pressure over the Al-Maliki government, but also as a potential long-term solution, as attested

47.   Katzman, "Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights," 19.

48.   Following the arrest of Al-Hashimi's bodyguards and their confessions aired on TV (remembering Saddam times but even the infamous Mahdawi Court under Qassim regime), the Iraqi vice-president left the country and found refuge in Turkey. He was sentenced to death in absentia for terrorism.

49.   Joel Wing, "Push to Make Iraq's Diyala Province an Autonomous Region Fades," *Musings on Iraq,* December 28, 2011, available at: http://musingsoniraq.blogspot.it/2011/12/push-to-make-iraqs-diyala-province.html.

50.   See Salah Nasrawi, "Break-Up of Iraq?" *Al-Ahram* 1072, November 17-23, 2011, available at: http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2011/1072/re3.htm; and Suadad al-Salhy, "Islamists Pursue Own Agenda in Iraq's Sunni Protests," Reuters, January 4, 2013, available at: http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/04/us-iraq-protests-idUSBRE9030MT20130104.

51.   See Cordoba Foundation, "The Sunni Uprising," *MENA Report* 3, no. 1 (March 2013), 17–20, available at: http://www.thecordobafoundation.com/attach/iraqmena_report_final.pdf.

to by the statement of the senior Sunni cleric Shaikh Taha Hamid Al-Dulaimi: "Sunnism is our slogan and a region is our goal."[52]

In this context, while it is difficult to ascertain the real popularity of these regional bids and their feasibility (both concerning the economic basis on which the region/regions should be based and the fate of the other Arab Sunni communities dispersed over the Iraqi territory[53]), it is evident how external and internal players not belonging to the Sunni Arab community deeply influence the situation on the ground. At the internal level, while Baghdad perceives these regional schemes as a menace for Iraq unity (and to its hold over the country), Erbil sees them as a positive factor strengthening its autonomy as well as its position vis a vis the central government.[54] On the regional level, the increased support for the creation of one or more autonomous regions in Sunni-majority areas appears to be also significantly influenced by spillovers from the Syrian crisis, both in terms of growing coordination between the Iraqi and the Syrian insurgents (a phenomenon confirmed not only by intelligence reports, but also by the public endorsement given to the protestors by senior Al-Qaeda and Baathist leaders) and of the regional implications resulting from a new Sunni-dominated Syrian regime.[55]

While Saudi Arabia and the other Sunni Arab countries did not publicly endorse the regional bids in Sunni-majority governorates, the success of these bids (especially if coupled with the fall of the Assad regime) could represent an important opportunity both to project their influence over an area which Damascus was able to influence for years and break the territorial continuity of the Shia crescent.

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52. Moyad al-Haidari and Charles Recknagel, "Iraq's Sunni Protests Challenge Establishment," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, January 14, 2013, available at: http://www.rferl.org/content/iraq-sunni-protests-continue/24823754.html; and Suadad Al-Salhy, "Islamists Pursue Own Agenda."

53. Author's interview with Dr. Mouayad Al-Windawi, Professor of Iraq Policies at Iraqi Strategic Center for Political Studies in Amman and former political advisor to UNAMI, April 2013.

54. Denise Natali, "The Limits of Alliance between Iraq's Kurds, Sunni Arabs," *al-Monitor*, May 2, 2013, available at: http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/05/maliki-kurdish-alliance-tactical-issues-remain.html?utm_source=&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=7125.

55. See Zayd Alisa, "Saudi Arabia and Qatar Ratchet Up Sectarian Tensions in Iraq," February 27, 2013, and Marisa Sullivan, "Iraq Moves toward Civil War," Institute for the Study of War, *Iraq Weekly Update* no. 4c, January 31, 2013, available at: http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/2013-iraq-weekly-update-4c-iraq-moves-toward-civil-war.

Conclusion

The fall of the Saddam Hussain regime significantly altered the dynamics of the Gulf region and provided the basis for a redefinition of geo-political equilibriums and relations which will affect the region for years to come. After long years of internecine conflict and hundreds of thousands of victims, institutions of the new Iraq have succeeded in establishing their control over most of the country and in limiting the meddling of outside powers in Iraqi internal affairs. Notwithstanding continued allegations regarding the influence exercised by foreign actors over the multiple Iraqi power centers, Iraq cannot continue to be considered only as a battlefield for conflicting external interests.[56] While still afflicted by significant instability, corruption, mismanagement, and endemic insecurity affecting key geopolitical areas, Iraq is struggling to proceed with its political, economic and institutional reconstruction and to reassert its role in the region. The country is by no means "out of danger" and the fragile equilibrium reached after 2008 is threatened by bouts of crisis which have hit the country since the beginning of Al-Maliki's second term.

Amidst rising violence, heightening ethno-sectarianism, chronic political impasse, and intensifying tensions between the central government and the regional/provincial administrations, the debate over the federal architecture of the new Iraq is back to the fore and with it, the destabilizing potential of old and new cross-boundary patterns of cooperation and conflict. It is in this framework, then, that demands for local autonomy, opposition towards the concentration of power in Baghdad (and in particular in the office of the prime minister), and accusations of sectarian discrimination converge in a regional scenario shaped by spiralling instability and heightening tensions between the main Gulf powers. Whether based on distinctive socio-political, cultural and economic patterns, macro-sectarian considerations, or opposition towards the central government, the success of the Iraqi regional schemes could represent a watershed for the new Iraq. But their implications would go beyond the borders of the "land of the two rivers," contributing to the redefinition of a regional order whose fundaments appear shaken and at stake as never before.

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56. Safa Rasul al-Sheikh and Emma Sky, "Iraq since 2003: Perspectives on a Divided Society," *Survival* 53, no. 4 (2011).

2

Iraq and the Security Situation in the Gulf Region: Advantage or Threat?

Ashraf Mohammed Kishk

Recommendations for GCC and Iraqi Policymakers:

- To find a formula through which Iraq could be connected to the GCCs
- To end the contentious issues between Kuwait and Iraq, especially that of maritime borders demarcation
- To support efforts to achieve a national reconciliation in Iraq
- The GCCs should contribute to rebuilding Iraqi institutions, especially in the security sector

Recommendations for Iraqi Policymakers:

- The ruling elite in Iraq should make efforts to build trust with the GCC countries in general and with Kuwait in particular
- Iraq must have a clear stance concerning Gulf issues
- There should not be exclusion or marginalization of certain political parties, due to religious considerations, for this is the main cause of sectarian clashes in the region

- Building well-established Iraq-Gulf relationships should be a first step towards a wider regional Gulf security arrangement

Introduction

Despite the political, economic, and social disparities between Iraq and the countries of Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (or the Gulf Cooperation Council – GCC), Iraq is an integral part of the security structure in the region that also includes the six GCC states, Yemen and Iran, and therefore impacts it and is, in turn, affected by it.

Iraq's slide towards civil war or partition will be considered a challenge to the security of the Arab states of the Gulf. Likewise, if Iraq reverts to its previous high level of defense build-up, it would be perceived as a new threat to the security of these countries, given that there are still issues pending between Kuwait and Iraq resulting from the Iraqi invasion in 1990, related mainly to debts, reparations, prisoners, missing persons, and border demarcation.

While acknowledging that 1990 was a watershed year in the history of Iraq's relations with the Gulf in general, and with Kuwait in particular, the US withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, the current internal situation in Iraq, and the ongoing regional transformations also constitute important issues in Gulf-Iraq relations.

Additionally, the major regional changes resulting from the shifts in the Arab world since 2011 and international transformations have had an impact on the security situation in the region which is closely intertwined with the global security.

This chapter aims to answer the following questions: Is Iraq a threat to the Arab states of the Gulf? Is Iraq a challenge or an opportunity for the regional security of the Gulf? What are the responsibilities of the Gulf toward Iraq?

The Political, Economic and Security Situation in Iraq after the US Withdrawal in 2011

Iraq is facing political, economic, and security challenges that represent serious obstacles to its domestic progress and to its playing a significant role in the region.

The Non-Existence of a Unified National Vision

Although the removal of the former Iraqi regime and the Baath Party ushered in numerous political parties in Iraq, this development had a sectarian aspect, which meant that there was no popular consensus on the outlines of a common national project.

This is obvious in the confrontations between the government and the Sunni community whose top leaders, including Vice-President Tareq Al-Hashemi (who is facing a death sentence), and Finance Minister Rafie Al-Issawi, were targeted and accused of supporting terrorism. There is also the rising tension with the Kurdish leaders around the disputed areas of Kirkuk and parts of Diyala and Mosul.[1] There is a split between the ruling Dawa party (Shiite) which aims to take revenge on Sunni and secular parties. The sectarian conflict is a symptom of the imbalance that plagues the political process in general deriving from the Iraqi constitution drafted in 2005.

The constitution has two major problems. The first lies in the right to establish territories in accordance with Article 115 thereof, which stipulates that "One or more governorates shall have the right to organize into a region based on a request to be voted on in a referendum." The request can be submitted in two ways: by one-third of the council members of each governorate intending to form a region or by one-tenth of the voters in each of the governorates intending to form a region.

This article of the constitution led to the growth of separatist tendencies in some provinces of Iraq prompting the government to launch a campaign of repression and arrests in those provinces.[2]

The second problem was that the articles of the Constitution had not been drafted in a clear-cut manner, allowing room for controversy. Most of the articles had the phrase "as regulated by the law," and therefore they left issues open-ended. These include the oil and gas draft law submitted by the government to the House of Representatives in 2007. As yet, this has not been approved. Despite this, Baghdad has granted four licenses to international companies in southern Iraq, though international oil companies continue to work in the Kurdistan region without explicit approval from the central government.[3]

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1. Abdulaziz bin Othman bin Sager, "The Gulf Cooperation Council Countries and Regional Security Challenges," Gulf Research Center, January 2013.

2. The announcement by the Salah al-Din Province, inhabited by a majority of conservative Sunnis, of a referendum for an administratively and economically independent province on October 27, 2011 was refused by the central government in Baghdad. Members of the Diyala Province Council in northern Iraq, inhabited by a majority of Sunnis, joined calls by other provinces to form an independent region. They said that they had collected the signatures of 15 of the 29 members to go ahead with the official procedures. The Council of Al Anbar Province collected 16 of 29 signatures to conduct a referendum.

3. *Asharq Al Awsat,* January 23, 2013. See also the text of the Iraqi constitution on http://www.mod.mil.iq/article.html.

Deterioration of the Security Situation

Following the US withdrawal in 2011, the security situation in Iraq witnessed a marked deterioration, but the violence cannot be blamed on a single party. On the one hand, there were accusations against Vice-President Tareq Al-Hashemi of running the so-called "death squads," that eventually forced him to flee to the Kurdistan region. On the other hand, accusations are regularly leveled against Al-Qaeda for carrying out terrorist attacks in Iraq.[4]

According to the annual report of Iraq Body Count, a group that kept track of deaths, the number of dead in Iraq has increased significantly after the US withdrawal. According to the 2012 figures, 4,471 civilians were killed. It was the first increase in the number of casualties in three years, up from a toll of 4,059 dead in 2011. The report said that "at least one large explosion occurred each month in 2012 targeting security forces, government offices, and Shiites. The most violent was on 9 September 2012 in which more than 100 people were killed in a series of bombings."[5]

These attacks raised many questions, especially as the perpetrators had invariably attempted to put pressure on US troops to withdraw from Iraq, yet the bombings continued well beyond the withdrawal of the troops in 2011.

The Spread of Corruption

Some studies suggest that Iraq's budget in 2012 was $112 billion. Expenditure between 2003 and 2011 was about $ 450 billion, and by adding the 2002 budget, that would amount to $625 billion. However, the effect of the high spending is not visible on the ground. In general, services, security, and the economic environment have worsened.[6] The 2013 Human Development Report issued by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) placed Iraq on the list of "medium human development," ranking it 131st out of 176 countries in the world, even though it has several sources of wealth.[7]

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4. Ned Parker, "The Iraq We Left Behind: Welcome to the World's Next Failed State," *Foreign Affairs,* March/April 2012.

5. Summary of a report published by Reuters in January 2013. Iraq Body Count is an ongoing project that maintains and updates a database of violent civilian deaths. Data is drawn from cross-checked media reports, hospitals, morgues, NGOs, and official figures.

6. Bushra Al Asadi, Hakem Al Rabia, "Administrative and Financial Corruption and its Economic and Social Effects," *Arabic Future,* March 2013.

7. http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/UNDP-in-action/2012/English/UNDP-AnnualReport_ENGLISH.pdf

Human Rights Violations

The 2013 Human Rights Watch report condemned the draconian crackdown on demonstrators and the opposition by the Iraqi government. The report leveled numerous accusations about abuses within the judicial system and pointed to the existence of torture and arbitrary arrests as well as to the suppression of demonstrations in Baghdad and other areas.[8]

Iraq and the Indicators of a Failed State

The logical consequence of the aforementioned developments was the designation of Iraq as a failed state. In the eighth edition of the annual Failed States Index (FSI) of the Fund for Peace, a private American institution that developed 12 indicators to measure social, political, and economic conditions in countries around the world, Iraq has been rated among the most dangerous and failing countries.[9] Ranked ninth out of 177 countries, Iraq was in the High Alert section. Table 2.1 shows the percentages and indicators for measuring its failure.

Table 2.1: Iraq's score in failed state subindices

Demographic Pressures	8
Refugees and IDPs	8.5
Uneven Economic Development	8.7
Group Grievance	9.7
Human Flight and Brain Drain	8.6
Poverty and Economic Decline	7.7
State Legitimacy	8.4
Public Services	8.7
Human Rights and Rule of Law	8.3
Security Apparatus	9.9
Factionalized Elites	9.6
External Intervention	9.5

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8.   http://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2013/01/31/2013.

9.   The Failed States Index, http://www.fundforpeace.org.

It is obvious that the major objective of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 of a political and economic transformation did not materialize on the ground. In fact, a substantive result of that invasion is Iraq's transition from a "buffer state" to "a state at the crossroads" that attracts Arab and regional powers in direct or indirect conflicts. The confrontations run along racial, ethnic, and sectarian faults and have repercussions that are not confined to Iraq but spill over into the neighboring countries in general and the GCC states in particular.[10]

In this context, the statement by Tariq Al-Hashemi, the former Iraqi Vice-President, is particularly significant. He said that "Iraq has under the current Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki changed from the status of 'Protector of the Eastern Gate' to the source of ominous threats to Arab national security, especially the security and stability of the GCC countries. Iran's wishes in Iraq are commands."[11]

Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki visited Iran four times during his first years in office. Most of the Shiite ministers in the Iraqi government were among those who had been exiled to Iran by the former Iraqi regime during the 1980s, a fact that eventually enhanced Iranian influence in Iraq.[12]

In other words, the US confused hostility to the political regime with hostility to Iraq as a state. It dismantled the structure of the state and dissolved its major institutions, but it did not remodel them properly or effectively. Instead, it entrusted that task to sectarian movements that put an end to the sense of national identity and replaced it with the reinforcement of sectarian allegiances and the promotion of sectarian identity and ethnicity as the primary force within the state and society.

This led to the consolidation of subordination to Iranian politics at the expense of Iraqi interests,[13] and therefore while the US-led invasion in 2003 succeeded in overthrowing the Iraqi regime, it failed to establish the much-anticipated alternative system of government. Instead, an Iraq with new features, notably religious, ideological and cultural fissures, emerged. In addition, there was a significant growth in Iranian influence in Iraq.[14]

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10. Paul Salem, "Iraq, Ten Years after the U.S. Invasion," *Al Hayat,* March 21, 2013.

11. See statements by Tariq Al-Hashemi to *Asharq Al Awsat,* April 9, 2013.

12. Analysis by Middle East Online on relations between Kuwait and Iraq, February 2013.

13. Abdulaziz bin Sager, "Iraq's Invasion Started with a Lie and Ended in a Tragedy," Gulf Research Center, April 10, 2013.

14. Tariq Al-Hashemi, "Ten Years after the Invasion, Iraq Is at Crossroads," *Al Hayat,* March 28, 2013.

The Impact of Iraq on the Regional Security of the GCC

Iraq, as an integral part of the Gulf region, is of paramount importance to the GCC and the two entities are mutually influential. Developments taking place in Iraq have an impact on the GCC, as proved by the negative repercussions of the US invasion of Iraq. Some of the repercussions were as follows:

First, the negative effects of the destruction of the army and state institutions in Iraq, resulting in the emergence of a new Iraq where sectarian and ethnic conflicts are prominent features.

Second, Iranian influence in the Gulf States, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, and the expansion of its conventional and non-conventional military capabilities have reached such levels that Tehran now constitutes a threat to the regional balance.

Third, the issues of reform and change in the GCC countries have been pushed to the fore.

Fourth, new options have emerged concerning regional security, but they are associated with unprecedented political and material costs.[15]

Among the most important implications of the US-led invasion of Iraq was the change in the regional power balance. In light of the current situation and possible future developments in Iraq, the question then becomes: is Iraq an asset or a challenge to security in the Gulf region?

In fact, the answer to that question is not devoid of the complexity that characterizes regional security itself. Iraq is both a challenge and an asset to the Gulf Arab states. Therefore, these countries should formulate a strategic vision of their current and future relations with post-2011 Iraq that not only supports Iraq but also rectifies the imbalance in the Gulf regional security equation, caused mainly by the US invasion of Iraq.

Iraq as a Challenge to the Security Situation in the Gulf Region

The Obsession with Access to the Arabian Gulf

An analysis of the conflicts fought by Iraq against countries in the region (such as Iran and Kuwait) indicates that geography was a major factor in all of them. Iraq has no real physical access to the Arabian Gulf, which means that the important routes for export were under the control of countries against which it was in constant

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15. Mohammad Al Saeed Idrees, "Repercussions of Iraq's Invasion on the Strategic Options of the Gulf Cooperation Council," paper presented at the forum "Ten Years after the Occupation of Iraq."

conflict, including Iran. Iraq, being a landlocked country, is profoundly preoccupied with the issue of security. The country is shaped like a triangle with its base in the northern Kurdish region and the inverted tip and narrowest points located on the Arabian Gulf, which represents the most important and dynamic access points.

This geographical reality could be the cause for a future conflict between Iraq and Kuwait, at a time when the allegation persists that the several maritime access points of the latter have been over the years sliced off Iraq. Claims that Kuwait was part of Iraq have been made by Iraqi ruling elites in 1938, 1961 and 1991. This explain s the dilemma that exists in Iraq and which some people refer to as "nature's injustice towards Iraq."[16]

The perspective of landlocked countries is described by Robert D. Kaplan in his book *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us about Coming Conflicts and the Battle against Fate*. Kaplan argues that landlocked countries are poorer and less secure than countries with natural boundaries, which leads them to pursue aggressive and expansionist policies in order to secure a buffer zone or artificial frontiers.[17] While this analysis is accurate, it applies only partly to Iraq since it is not a poor country and it has diverse natural and human resources. However, it is a landlocked country and therefore access to seaports remains one of the most important naval strategic objectives for the Iraqi ruling elite.

Impact of Iraqi Defense Build-up on the Regional Security of the Gulf

A balance of power premised on normal relations that include confidence-building measures between the parties of the same region is a real guarantee of regional security, even when there is an inequality of capabilities. Such a balance is crucial in making sure that the disparity between the bigger states and the smaller states does not turn into a source or cause of threats. Thus, even though military capacity building is significant for the stability of Iraq and for the rectification of the imbalance in the Gulf regional security equation resulting from the US invasion of Iraq, the weapons Baghdad acquires should be defensive so that they do not pose a renewed threat to the security of the Gulf countries.

An increase in defense build-up by Iraq was noticed between 2010 and 2012. In this context, the US State Department announced in October 2012 that Baghdad

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16. Ashraf Kishk, "Gulf Responsibility toward Post-Saddam Iraq," paper presented at the conference "Effects of the Situations in Iraq on Surrounding Countries," Turkish Asian Center for Strategic Studies (TASAM), December 2010.

17. Robert Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us about Coming Conflicts and the Battle against Fate* (New York: Random House, 2013).

had signed about 476 weapons deals with the US valued at $12.3 billion within the framework of strengthening the broad and deep military cooperation between the two countries. At the same time, the State Department allocated in 2012 more than one billion dollars to various diplomatic initiatives, economic aid programs, and cultural and educational exchanges with Iraq. Under the Pentagon's proposed programs, US military sales to Iraq starting 2012 are estimated at $10.6 billion.[18]

A Russian arms deal with Iraq worth $4 million was put on ice in 2012 amid corruption allegations. However, in 2013, Iraq said that it would go ahead with the deal as soon as the budget was approved.

Iraq's strategic significance guides US policies toward the country. For the US, Iraq is an important partner in its efforts to address the threats facing the Gulf region and to carry out numerous tasks that include fighting terrorism and piracy and protecting nearly one-third of the world's oil transported by sea, in addition to the possibility of a military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities.[19]

Iraqi Oil Production and Its Impact on Gulf Oil

Estimates indicate that by the end of February 2013, Iraqi oil production reached about 3.2 million barrels per day, surpassing the daily output quota of Iran, which declined as a result of sanctions. Oil reserves were estimated at 144 billion barrels, fifth in the world after Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, Canada, and Iran. By granting licenses to oil companies, Iraq looks forward to increasing its production to 12 million barrels per day by 2017. However, official reports issued by the International Energy Agency (IEA) indicate that Iraq's ambitious expansion plans would be difficult to achieve in the absence of the required infrastructure and due to the prevailing tense political situation in the country.[20]

Another obstacle is the persistence of the sharp disagreement over the law of hydrocarbon resources – oil and gas. The Council of Ministers submitted the draft in 2007, but the Iraqi parliament has not approved it yet because of differences between the Iraqi government and the Kurdish Regional Government.

The strategic implications of Iraqi oil production for the Gulf Arab states may be viewed from two angles. The first is the impact of Iraqi production on the negotiating position of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

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18. http://www.almadapress.com/ar/news/.
19. Melissa G. Dalton and Nora Bensahel, "Revitalizing the Partnership: The United States and Iraq a Year after Withdrawal," Center for a New American Security, Policy Brief, December 2012.
20. Energy Information Administration, April 2013.

(OPEC). For years, Iraq produced oil outside OPEC's quota system as it was not subject to the organization's quotas after its invasion of Kuwait in 1990. However, Iraq's inclusion in the cartel's quota system with a production share of about 14.5 percent of OPEC's total production means that it might have a share of up to 4.5 million barrels per day, which means collision with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the "complementary producer" within OPEC.

The second angle is that increase in Iraqi oil production could mean the decline of the strategic importance of the Arab states of the Gulf for the world in general and for the US in particular.

Impact of the Security Situation in Iraq on the GCC Countries

The continued deterioration of the security situation in Iraq has repercussions for the security of the GCC countries. A recent example is the declaration by Al-Qaeda in Iraq that the Nosra Front, which is active in Syria and fighting against the regular Syrian army, was part of the organization and that its goal was to establish an Islamic state in Syria.

According to an audio message by the leader of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi, posted on the Internet on April 9, 2013, the time had come to announce to the Syrians and to the world that the Nosra Front was an extension of Al-Qaeda and part of the so-called "Islamic State of Iraq." Al-Baghdadi suggested that the names of the "Islamic State of Iraq" and "Nosra Front" could be replaced by a new name "the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant." A well-known fact is that the US has included the Nosra Front in its list of terrorist organizations.[21]

At the same time, reports indicate that the number of Arab and Muslim volunteers who went to Iraq to fight US troops after 2003 have returned to their home countries, especially Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Jordan. Their return is reminiscent of the volunteers who went home after they fought in Afghanistan. The gravity of the danger they represent was confirmed by the discovery by security services in one of the GCC countries of huge quantities of arms and ammunition ready to be smuggled into the country across the border with Iraq.[22]

Iran's Growing Influence in Iraq

Even though the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 reduced the "hard power" of Iraq – i.e., its army – it created another threat: "soft power" in the form of sectarian

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21. Statement published on the Russia Today website on April 8. See: http://arabic.rt.com.
22. Idrees, "Repercussions of Iraq's Invasion."

repercussions and the Dawa Party taking over power in Iraq, in light of its close relationship with Iran. One of the major goals of Tehran in Iraq is to make sure that Baghdad cannot threaten Iran again as happened during the eight-year war they fought against each other in the 1980s. Iran is now keen on three issues: preserving Iraq's territorial integrity, supporting a friendly government dominated by Shiites, and keeping the US preoccupied with the situation in Iraq so that it does not have more time to devote to the Iranian nuclear issue.

In order to achieve these goals, Iran adopted a three-dimensional strategy toward Iraq: Supporting the elections as a means to reinforce Shiite rule in the country, establishing a situation of creative chaos, and forming links with key actors in Iraq to reduce risks to a minimum.

Based on these premises, the possibility of the development of Iraq-Iran relations after the fall of the Syrian regime, a strategic ally of Iran, remains a strong possibility.[23] Tehran will use the pro-Iran Iraqi regime to push its policies aimed at interfering in the domestic affairs of the Gulf countries and the Arab world to compensate for the losses resulting from the fall of the Syrian regime.[24]
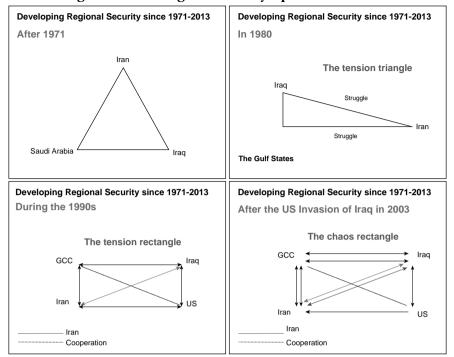
Iraq as the Cornerstone of Security in the Region
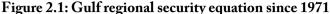
The Evolution of Gulf Regional Security Reflects Several Facts

Iraq has been an integral part of the Gulf regional security equation since 1971, a fact that makes Iraq and its neighbors mutually influential (see the four components of Figure 2.1). While the military threat from Iraq ended with the US-led invasion, new threats of a different kind have emerged, including the all-important sectarian repercussions on the GCC countries. While recognizing that the policies of the former Iraqi regime were a major cause for the collapse of the regional security structure that had prevailed until 1990, it must be recognized that Iraq cannot be left out of any regional security arrangements since it is itself essential to regional security. The transformations that have occurred in the Arab world since 2011 have had a clear impact on the equation of regional security. First, the Iran-Iraq standoff has receded and, in fact, accelerated steps have been taken to boost cooperation in all fields between the two countries.

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23. Idrees, "Repercussions of Iraq's Invasion."
24. Sager, "Iraq's Invasion Started with a Lie."

Figure 2.1: Gulf regional security equation since 1971

Second, the Gulf countries relations with the US have come under strain, especially after its stance on the issue of reforms in the GCC countries.

Third, tensions between the Gulf countries and Iran have increased as a result of the growing Iranian interference in the domestic affairs of the GCC countries.

Despite the continuance of the Iranian nuclear crisis, there are fears among Gulf countries that the issue could be settled through a deal between the US and Iran that will inevitably be against their interests in light of the imbalance of power between the GCC and other regional parties. According to a report on the military balance in the area in 2013, Iran's active armed forces numbered 523,000, while the active Iraqi forces were about 271,000. The GCC had 363,600 troops.[25] In spite of the obvious superiority of the GCC combined forces over Iraq, the possibility of the development of relations between Iran and Iraq in the future could undermine the current balance of power. At the same time, Iraq's arms deals during the last three years have been for heavy weapons, a situation that may represent a threat to the GCC states in case of a new conflict between Iraq and one of the GCC member countries.

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25. Source: International Institute of Strategic Studies, *Military Balance,* 2013.

Steps for the Integration of Iraq in the Security of the Region

The expected regional role of Iraq is based on three premises: First, the assets of Iraq. Regardless of the impediments to the resumption of normal Iraq-Gulf relations, Iraq possesses the basic factors required to play a regional role including a strategic location and diverse economic resources (large area, fertile land, diverse sources of water and oil and mineral resources). Second, the latest developments regarding the security of the region in the wake of the transformations in the Arab world in 2011 that led to a dramatic alteration of the map of regional balances and subsequently to the emergence of new regional equations in which the GCC interests should have a major focus.[26] Third, the latest international developments, most notably the transformation in the current US defense policy in light of the economic crisis that has hit the country. Official US sources indicate that the total domestic debt amounted to \$16 trillion in 2012,[27] prompting the US Administration to cut military spending by about \$487 billion from the 2012 defense budget in line with the strategy to reduce defense expenditure over the next ten years.[28]

In addition to these facts, there is the new defense strategy highlighted by Leon Panetta, the former US Defense Secretary, when he addressed a security forum in Singapore in June 2012. "Over the next few years we will increase the number and the size of our exercises in the Pacific… By 2020, the navy will reposture its forces from today's roughly 50-50% split between the Pacific and the Atlantic to about a 60-40 split between those oceans. That will include six aircraft carriers in this region, a majority of our cruisers, destroyers, Littoral Combat Ships, and submarines," Panetta told the annual Shangri-La Dialogue conference.[29]

The US Administration hopes that the reposturing of the forces in favor of the Pacific under the "Pivot" strategy will enable it to meet China's rising power. This "strategic rebalancing" means that future US commitment to the security of the Gulf Arab states will not be as strong as it was in the past. In other words, the partial decline of the influence of external actors in the region provides new opportunities for different regional security formulas and, consequently, an application of the "strategic depth" theory. This could mean an activation of security formats such as

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26. "Revival of Iraq's Regional Role, Opportunities and Challenges," Baghdad Center for Consultations, Studies and Media, April 2012.

27. See statement by US President available at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/barackobama.

28. See link to US Treasury: www.TreasuryDirect.gov.

29. See speech by Leon Panetta available at: http://www.iiss.org/conferences/the-shangri-la-dialogue/shangri-la-dialogue-2012/speeches/first-plenary-session/leon-panetta.

6 + 1 (GCC and Iraq) or 6 + 2 + 1 (GCC + Iraq and Yemen + Iran) as opposed to external options. On the basis of these developments, three Gulf strategies can be proposed regarding Iraq's regional role.

The Modest Strategy: the Reinstatement of Iraq's Membership in GCC Institutions

Before 1990, Iraq used to have full membership in some GCC institutions, namely the Council of Ministers of Education and Health, the Gulf Organization for Industrial Consulting, and Gulf International Bank.

The revival of these arrangements should be considered as a confidence-building measure which has become necessary between the GCC and Iraq. In addition, such an option and other similar possibilities could boost investment and trade between the GCC countries and Iraq and lead to a close-knit network of interests withdrawing from which would be costly for both sides. Another option is to establish a free trade zone between the two sides. All actions should be accompanied by well-organized media efforts to improve the cognitive image each side has of the other.

The Ambitious Strategy: Iraq Becomes a Member of the GCC

The charter establishing the GCC is both inclusive and exclusive as the council includes countries that share common bonds but does not allow other nations to become members. However, this does not mean the exclusion of Iraq from the Gulf regional security arrangements because it would mean the removal of a major player in terms of both size and weight.

There are many formulas that can be considered for an Iraq-GCC tie-up, including the NATO-Russia Council example. Under such a formula, regional groupings – including NATO – have a strategic partnership with non-member countries. The NATO-Russia Council was established in May 2002 as a mechanism for consultation, consensus-building, cooperation, joint decision and joint action, in which the individual NATO member states and Russia work on a wide spectrum of security issues of common interest. Even when relations between NATO and Russia were tense, the Council did not collapse or suspend its work.

The US did present requests to the GCC to reinstate Iraq in the Arab fold and encourage its involvement in the major Arab and regional issues.[30] However, there

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30. The Americans issued statements on Iraq's wish to join the GCC. The US civil governor Paul Bremer hoped that the GCC would accept Iraq as a full member of the Council. He said, "I speak as a representative of the U.S. government and urge and encourage the GCC countries to receive Iraq as a full member of the Council." He added: "I believe that the

is no agreement among the GCC countries on the issue of Iraq joining the bloc. During a visit to Baghdad in June 2008, UAE Foreign Minister Shaikh Abdullah bin Zayed said: "We look forward to Iraq becoming a full partner in the GCC." However, Kuwait's Foreign Minister later said: "Kuwait does not want the GCC to become an alternative to the Council of the League of Arab States and therefore the Council looks forward to a special relationship with neighboring countries instead of them joining it."[31] This stance was later changed, as was clear from the visit by the son of the Amir of Kuwait, the Minister of Amiri Court Affairs Shaikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad, to the Kurdistan region of Iraq in May 2012. During the visit, he revealed "the existence of a Kuwaiti inclination for a partnership with Iraq within a regional group of northern Gulf countries in order to diversify Kuwait's economy so that it does not depend fully and solely on oil."[32]

The Middle Strategy: Short and Long Term

Under the "Middle Strategy," there would be a unified Gulf strategic approach to a post-Saddam Iraq both in the short and long term. In the short term, the level of diplomatic representation between the GCC and Iraq would be restored to its levels

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Provisional Council has done everything in its power to be recognized by the nations of the world, including the Arab League, and I hope the GCC will accept the membership of Iraq." For more details about Iraq and the Gulf states, see Jassim Younis Al Hariri, "Iraqi Gulf Relations after the Occupation: Criteria for Cooperation and Conflict," *Strategic Studies* 191, Al Ahram Center for Strategic Studies (September 2008): 40.

At the Manama Dialogue held by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on December 12-14, 2008, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates called for a full partnership between the GCC countries and Iraq by allowing Iraq to join the Council and all its regional, financial, economic and defense organizations. He said that Iraq wanted to be a partner and that, in light of the challenges and Iran, it was in everyone's strategic interest to support the new government and the people of Iraq (*Al Hayat,* December 14, 2008). The GCC did not respond to the US call. In his answer to the US call, the GCC Secretary General said that the Council was interested only in Iraq's stability and prosperity and that national unity could be reinforced away from interference in its domestic affairs and divisions. He said that Iraq could not be ready for GCC membership in its current conditions. He said: "Even if the conditions were normal, the six-member GCC has made clear selections stipulated in its statute and within their homogeneity. There are specific common features among the GCC members and the GCC in fact cannot be a substitute for other regional organizations such as the Arab League to accept new member states under the statute that has clearly stipulated its members." Bahrain News Agency (BNA), http://www.arabicbna.bh, December 14, 2008.

31. *Asharq Al Awsat,* June 2008 and *Al Qabas,* Kuwait, June 10, 2008.

32. *Elaph,* April 28, 2012.

before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. This strategy also calls for carrying out common economic projects and the opening of new areas for cooperation between the two sides.

In the long term, new formulas for regional security that include both the GCC and Iraq would be drawn up in order to reduce Iranian influence in Iraq, which has been reinforced in the absence of Arab and Gulf players in the country.

In this context, Paul Wolfowitz, former Deputy Secretary of Defense and one of the faces of neo-conservatism in the US, said that part of the reason for the current regime in Iraq moving closer to Iran was the negative attitude of Iraq's neighbors towards it and that it was not because of the vacuum resulting from the overthrow of Iraq's strongman Saddam Hussein. He said: "The way to keep Iraq out of Iran's embrace is by supporting Iraq's new government, not by distancing oneself from it. This isolation, not a love of Persians, is what has pushed Iraq too close to Iran." [33] On the basis that future developments in Iraq will affect the essence of security in the Gulf region, the GCC should have a long-term strategy that counterbalances the regional and international roles for Iraq. Such plans would contribute to containing Iraq and not allowing it to turn again into a new source of threat to GCC security.

However, the question that needs to be asked is whether the GCC can cooperate with a country that it used to consider as an enemy. Prior to 1979, Saudi Arabia and Iran – the most threatening military power – engaged in an alliance against Iraq – the weakest military power – in a development that was contrary to the theory of the balance of power. However, Saudi Arabia reverted later to an alliance with Iraq (the strongest military power following the Iranian revolution and the collapse of the army of the Shah in 1979) against Iran – the weakest military power, but with the most dangerous ideology.[34]

As regional conditions are changing once more, the GCC countries can again cooperate with Iraq – the weakest military power, but with the most dangerous ideology – to counterbalance Iranian power. This can be done through security models that include practical steps such as the signing of a non-aggression treaty between the Gulf States and Iraq under the auspices of guarantors. The treaty should be collective and within a unified Gulf framework and not under the current state-to-state policies that include stipulations in accordance with the individual interests of each Gulf country separately.

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33. Paul Wolfowitz, "What Could Have Been Done Differently in Iraq," *Asharq Al Awsat*, April 9, 2013.

34. Idrees, "Repercussions of Iraq's Invasion."

Thinking of a model that includes both parties – the GCC and Iraq – would be a natural evolution of regional security unlike the attempts by the GCC to secure security arrangements with countries that are not located in the region, which have not been effective. The first attempt was in 2010 with the proposal that Morocco and Jordan join the GCC. The proposal did not succeed. The second attempt was the inception of a strategic agreement between GCC and Turkey in 2008. However, GCC-Turkish cooperation within that framework has been making slow progress for many reasons including the lack of clarity in Turkish policies towards some issues of concern to the GCC. For instance, Turkey is still showing reluctance to implement the decision to impose international sanctions on Iran.

The evolution of the domestic situation in Iraq also requires an active role by the GCC. Should the Shia-Sunni and the Arab-Kurdish conflicts in Iraq escalate, the GCC countries should adopt a common position towards them.[35]

Impediments to the Integration of Iraq in the Security of the Region

Divergences within the GCC over Post-Saddam Iraq

For Saudi Arabia and Iran, Iraq is part of the competition for greater regional influence, albeit indirectly. Saudi Arabia wants to prevent the new Iraqi state from coming fully under Iranian influence. It is also concerned about the implications of the security situation in Iraq for its own security, particularly as the two countries share a common border that is 812 kilometers long. The Saudi authorities have built a high-tech barrier to seal off its northern neighbor. The fence, thousands of kilometers of barbed wire across the vast and remote desert frontier between the countries, is equipped with ultraviolet night-vision surveillance cameras and underground movement sensors that set off silent alarms. In general, Saudi Arabia wants to ensure that Iraqi policies should not conflict with the priorities of Riyadh's foreign policy, including the fact that it is the largest oil exporter in the world.

For Kuwait, its concerns are mainly about an ominous territorial disintegration of Iraq or a civil war that will constitute a threat to Kuwaiti national security.

Other Gulf Arab states are concerned about the consequences of the growing sectarianism in Iraq. This concern is felt most obviously in Bahrain. Qatar's geographic isolation means that instability in Iraq will not affect its national security directly, while in the UAE, the concerns are chiefly of an economic nature.[36]

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35.   Sager, "Iraq's Invasion Started with a Lie."

36.   Kishk, "Gulf Responsibility toward Post-Saddam Iraq."

Referring to the discrepancies in the individual assessments of each of the Gulf countries, a Gulf academic said that the Gulf countries did not have a collective strategic approach towards regional issues in general, including Iraq. The situation in Iraq developed in a manner that did not converge with the perceptions of the Gulf and Western countries and that may explain the absence of a unified GCC position on Iraq. Today, the Gulf countries do not want a strong Iraq, like it used to be in the past, as it would be a threat to them. At the same time, they do not want a weak Iraq that could be used in the regional and international conflicts in the Gulf region. The GCC countries want a well-balanced Iraq.

The diplomatic representation of the GCC countries in Iraq reflects their attitudes and concerns. Although the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 has ended security concerns that have for a long time haunted the GCC countries in general and Kuwait in particular, the diplomatic exchange between Iraq and the GCC countries has not been fully restored yet. The UAE, Bahrain, and Kuwait nominated ambassadors to Iraq in 2008, five years after the invasion. However, Qatar, Oman, and Saudi Arabia have hesitated to make the decision.

Riyadh, nevertheless, realized the importance of having a diplomatic representation and on February 21, 2012 nominated its ambassador in Jordan as a non-resident ambassador in Baghdad.[37] The media advisor to the Iraqi Prime Minister hailed the decision, saying that the Iraqi government welcomed this step and stressing that Iraq would respond quickly in accepting the request. The advisor said that Iraq had had an ambassador in Saudi Arabia for a long time and that Baghdad had been awaiting the Saudi decision.[38]

On the other hand, any observer of the final communiqués issued by the GCC at the end of their annual summits from 2003 to 2012 would note that they followed the same pattern and did not reflect the strategic view of the GCC countries towards Iraq as a component of the security situation in the region. An analysis of the final statements in 2011 and 2012 shows that they were a repetition of the earlier communiqués despite the fact that the two summits were held after the US withdrawal from Iraq. The two statements had been expected to reflect a common Gulf approach toward Iraq that included tactical and strategic policies. However, the opposite happened and some Gulf official statements even said that the issue of US withdrawal from Iraq was an internal Iraqi matter.

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37. Jassem Al Hariri, "The Gulf Cooperation Council and Iraq after the US Withdrawal," *Middle East Magazine* 143 (2012).

38. Official Iraqi statement. See *Asharq Al Awsat* on February 22, 2012, available at: http://www.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=12139&article=62.

Prince Saud Al-Faisal, Saudi Arabia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, said in a statement following the 32nd GCC summit session in Riyadh in December 2011, that the "withdrawal of the U.S. troops from Iraq was a matter that regarded the U.S. and Iraq. They have agreed on the withdrawal from Iraq. As regards the actions and reactions related to the withdrawal, we do not know how things will be," he said. The minister added that "Iraq needed to make its policies toward the region clear," hoping that it will be able to interact with the countries in the region. "We hope that the situation in Iraq will be stable and that Baghdad will treat its citizens equally, in both duties and benefits, and that there will be no differences between Iraqis. We hope that matters will progress in a way that makes Iraq a factor of stability and a pillar of security for the Arab countries after it was a means of destruction in the region, especially that they themselves went through this experiment. We will wait to see what the Iraqi government will do."

Implications of the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait in 1990

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 continues to be an impediment for Iraq to resume normal relations with Kuwait in particular and the GCC in general. The debt issue is a major irritant and Kuwaiti official statements stress that Kuwait will not compromise on its dues from Iraq. In this context, Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Khaled Al-Jarallah said that "Kuwait did not waive the compensation from the Iraqi invasion." He added that an agreement has been signed for the settlement of the $500 million debt owed to Kuwait Airways by its Iraqi counterpart, but it has not been waived. Under the agreement, Baghdad would pay $300 million in cash and $200 million as an investment in an airline company to be set up in Iraq.[39] Some sources indicate that the total amount of the remaining debts and compensation was around $25 billion, while Iraqis are talking about six billion dollars only.

In addition, Kuwait and Iraq still have a problem with their frontiers despite Resolution 833 issued by the Security Council in 1993 on the demarcation of the border between the two countries. No agreement has been reached so far between the two countries on the demarcation of the maritime border. Some Iraqi officials said that endorsing the maritime boundary in accordance with this UN resolution would narrow the Iraqi navy shipping lanes used to export the country's oil. Fadel Mahmoud Jawad, legal advisor to the Iraqi Prime Minister, said that there was no new agreement between the governments of Iraq and Kuwait on the demarcation

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39. The statements published on November 14, 2012 on http://www.alarabiya.net/.

of the border between the two countries. He said that the current situation was just maintaining the border pillars in accordance with Resolution 833, the binding resolution for Iraq. He added that the decision was unfair and that it took away Iraqi lands, water, and wells and granted them to Kuwait. However, he said that the Iraqi government did not have any choice but to comply with the resolution.[40]

Iraq's Position on Some Gulf Issues

The Iraqi stance on regional issues is a natural result of the growing Iranian influence in Iraq. They reflect the convergence of the positions of the two countries on the issues of the Gulf, including on troops from the Peninsula Shield, the military arm of the GCC, entering Bahrain. In this context, Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki on March 26, 2011 said that the presence of the Shield Forces in Bahrain would worsen the situation in the region and fuel sectarian violence. After the troops entered Bahrain, he said that the intervention of any Sunni country in Manama could lead to a sectarian war. In an interview with the BBC on March 26, Al-Maliki said that the issue in Bahrain was between Sunnis and Shiites. He said that the presence of forces from Arab countries considered as Sunnis on the side of a Sunni government in Bahrain had created a situation that looked like a Sunni mobilization against Shiites. He added that the issue would be "like a snowball that would grow larger in size whenever it was neglected."[41]

This was not the first time that Iraq took a position that was in opposition to that of the Gulf countries. During the thirteenth session of the Arab Parliamentary Union held in Erbil in northern Iraq in March 2008, Khalid Al-Attiyah, First Deputy Speaker of the Iraqi parliament and the head of the Iraqi delegation at the meetings, insisted that the claim by the UAE to its three islands occupied by Iran should not be mentioned as is customary in the final statement of the conference.

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40. It is worth mentioning that Hizbollah threatened Iraqi Shiite companies operating in the Kuwaiti Mubarak port project against continuing to work there and demanded from the Iraqi government to take appropriate measures to prevent the construction work. It said in a statement posted on its website: "We warn the companies operating in the project to build the port of Kuwait not to continue to work. Just as the people of Kuwait did not forget how they suffered from the regime of Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi people have not forgotten the positions of the government of Al Sabah that supported Saddam's regime in the war for eight years against neighboring Iran and opened the Kuwaiti lands and airspace for U.S. troops to occupy Iraq."(Source: "The Problem of Iraq with Kuwait Did Not End with the Fall of Saddam," Middle East Online, March 20, 2013).

41. Iman Rajab, "Iraq's Foreign Policy towards Arab Revolutions," Al Ahram Strategic Dossier, July 20, Al Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies.

The speaker is a leading senior Shiite figure of the Dawa party,[42] and such stances only reinforce the Gulf's concerns about Iraq. The GCC countries do not have a problem with Iraq as a state, but rather with its ideologies, both Baathist and Shiite, that are expressed by the Iraqi elite holding various positions.

Conclusion

The Iraqi threat for the security situation in the Gulf region did not end with the toppling of the former Iraqi regime. In fact, the invasion created new threats, the least of which were sectarianism and the lack of security and stability in Iraq, which run in parallel with political divisions alongside sectarian faults. This situation makes religion a focus of the political conflict, which further complicates the standoff and reduces the chances of a national consensus, with repercussions that will not be confined to the internal situation in Iraq.

Iraq presents opportunities and challenges at the same time for regional security. However, in order to benefit from Iraq as the cornerstone of regional security, the fundamental problems between the GCC and Iraq should be settled so as to enhance confidence-building measures between the two sides, which would be an important foundation for regional security.

1. The GCC has a responsibility towards Iraq, not only because it is one of the factors in the Gulf regional security equation but also because the reduction of Iranian influence requires GCC policies that counterbalance Iranian policies in the region, particularly in Iraq.

Vision for the Future

The security situation in the Gulf region affects regional security as well as global security. Therefore, there are several regional and international variables that must be taken into account by the countries of the GCC:

•   US efforts towards self-sufficiency in energy and the growing Iranian influence raise many questions about the regional balance of power in the Gulf. Iraq offers an alternative to the Western countries as an important regional ally, and there are indications that support this orientation. The US embassy in Iraq, for instance, will remain one of the largest diplomatic missions in the world. Besides, there is the strategic cooperation agreement signed between Iraq and the United States in 2008.

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42. Ayesha Al Merri, "It Happened in Erbil," *Al Ettihad,* March 7, 2008.

- The expanding international relations of Iraq, including ties with NATO, raise questions about their impact on regional security. In particular, the strategic location of Iraq for NATO and the United States is seen as an extension of the Western presence in Afghanistan, allowing Western countries to encircle Iran.

- In light of the continuing border disputes between Iraq and Kuwait, another international intervention in case the conflict escalates, will become the subject of controversy especially because the current Iraqi government has been elected regardless of the protests in some Iraqi cities against its policies and the calls by the people for its removal from power.

- If the requirements to achieve regional security include reforming its constituent elements, the stability of Iraq is crucial for the GCC. The probabilities that Iraq will undergo development shifts similar to the ones in other Arab countries are not remote. The danger lies in the fact that the GCC countries cannot afford to be within a troubled region that has "Yemen to the south and Iraq to the north."

- The establishment of a permanent mechanism for interaction between the GCC and Iraq will be a prelude to the establishment of a multilateral cooperative regional security arrangement that reflects the regional identity. It will be a distinct departure from the strategic security calculations that have characterized the interactions of the region since the British withdrawal and turned it into an arena for regional and international conflicts.

3

Iraq-GCC Relations in the New Middle East: Closing the Political Gap

Fatin Shabbar

Recommendations for GCC Policymakers:

- Denouncing sectarian discourse and accepting and cooperating with the changing political demographic and the power balance in the region is critical in developing any meaningful relationship with Iraq.
- Adopting a zero-sum vision towards Iraq's relationship with Iran does not provide an accurate assessment and a clear vision of the current political scene operating within the region.
- Acknowledging the heterogeneity of the Shia community can contribute to promoting unity in the Arab world and enhance the project of political and social coexistence among its diverse communities.
- Responding to Iraq's call for economic and political cooperation can minimize the role played by foreign powers in shaping the political landscape of the region.

Recommendations for Iraqi Policymakers:

- The lack of a common political narrative between Iraq and the GCC is, to a large extent, responsible for reinforcing the strained relations between the two parties.

- Avoiding engagement in sectarian dialogue not only on a local level but also an international level can help provide a clearer view of Iraq's interests.

- Maintaining neutral international relations is fundamental to Iraq's reconstruction period and it can help Iraq develop into a powerful regional mediator for peace.

Introduction

The political scene in the Middle East is anything but stable. The withdrawal of US forces from Iraq, the sudden emergence of the Arab Spring, and the growing conflict between Iran and the international community are all complex issues that are significantly changing the political landscape in the Middle East. These issues are also linked to a rapidly increasing sectarian division in the Arab world that has, to a large extent, dismantled the long-held concept of Arab unity and replaced it with aggressive sectarian identities. Sectarianism is now employed by many Arab governments and oppositions to rule their countries and to undertake political lobbying and activism, a reality that has been politically harmful for the region.[1] This growing political instability has introduced some significant security challenges to the entire Middle East, but more specifically to the Gulf region due to its geostrategic position. Therefore, troubled by some serious internal and external security issues, the GCC is also faced with a new challenge of reassessing its foreign relations with regional powers such as Iraq, Iran and Turkey. This chapter focuses on GCC-Iraq relations especially since there is great potential for the new Iraq to grow into a regional mediator that can promote peaceful relations among Middle Eastern states.

Iraq has gone through major political reorientations after the fall of the Baath regime, reclaiming its role as a key player in determining the political destiny of the region. Iraq's close relationship with Iran, particularly under the leadership of Nouri Al-Maliki, has been an issue of concern for many of its Arab neighbors –

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1. F. Gregory Gause, "Saudi Arabia: Iraq, Iran, the Regional Power Balance, and the Sectarian Question," *Strategic Insights* 6, no. 2 (2007), available at: http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?id=30995 (accessed April 24, 2013).

particularly the GCC states – who have long considered Iran as a security threat.[2] The GCC does not consider Iran's relationship with Iraq as a voluntary one between two peers; rather it perceives the relationship as a manipulative and imperialistic one. For example, in a speech given in 2005 to the Council of Foreign Relations, Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal expressed his views on Iran-Iraq relations as follows: "[w]e fought a war together to keep Iran from occupying Iraq after Iraq was driven out of Kuwait. Now we are handing the whole country over to Iran without reason."[3] As a result of this view, and despite a long period of political reforms after the fall of the Baath regime, Iraq and GCC states have not yet formed a solid relationship that could help determine the potential level of cooperation between them particularly on the political and economic fronts. Some scholars even argue that the GCC has not yet adjusted to the shift in power balance in the region and so it has been noticeably unwelcoming of the pro-Iranian, Shia-based Iraqi government,[4] and it has been following a political approach that aims to "subdue Iraq, rather than … work with it."[5]

The relationship between Iraq and GCC lacks a common political narrative and therefore is extremely vulnerable to the aggressive political realities of the region. There are two aspects that stand in the way of a meaningful relationship between Iraq and the GCC states: sectarian tensions and issues of sovereignty and heterogeneity in political discourse concerning the "enemy." The political narrative analysis in this chapter is selective in the sense that it excludes socio-economic narratives that could play an important role in shaping the relationship between

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2. Elena McGovern, "Iraq's New Reality: Finding its Role in the Middle East" (report based in part on the fourth workshop of "Iraq's New Reality: Finding its Role in the Middle East," Stimson Center, Washington, D.C., December 2, 2009; 2010), 7. Also see Thomas R. Mattair, "Mutual Threat Perceptions in the Arab/Persian Gulf: GCC Perceptions," *Middle East Policy* 14, no. 2 (2007): 133, available at: doi: 10.1111/j.1475-4967.2007.00304.x (accessed April 12, 2013).

3. Ray Takeyh, "Iran's New Iraq," *Middle East Journal* 62, no. 1 (2008): 23, available at: doi: dx.doi.org/10.3751/62.1.11 (accessed April 12, 2013).

4. Saud M. Al Tamamy, "Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring: Opportunities and Challenges of Security," *Journal of Arabian Studies: Arabia, the Gulf, and the Red Sea* 2, no. 2 (2012):150, available at: doi: 10.1080/21534764.2012.734117 (accessed March 2, 2013).

5. Hassan Hassan, "Time Is Right for Gulf States to Rethink Approach to Iraq," *The National,* March 18, 2013, available at: http://www.thenational.ae/thenationalconversation/comment/time-is-right-for-gulf-states-to-rethink-approach-to-iraq (accessed March 28, 2013). The GCC policies referred to in this argument include weak diplomatic relations, low-level delegations to the Arab League Summit, providing refuge to Tareq Al-Hashimi and some other Baathist leaders.

Iraq and GCC. However, it is important to clarify that the exclusive focus on sectarianism and the narrative of enemy is not meant to undermine the complexity of the political narrative operating within the region, but instead aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of one aspect of this narrative that has been particularly influential in the formulation of regional foreign policy in recent years particularly on a state level.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part of the chapter aims to draw a theoretical understanding of political alliance as a concept constituted by a shared political narrative between different states and governments. In this first part, the GCC is used as a case study to exemplify the significance of a common narrative in forming political alliances. The second part of the chapter examines the potential for forming similar alliances between Iraq and the GCC using the concept of "common political narrative." This part draws particular attention to Iran as a key player in determining the type and extent of relationship that can develop between Iraq and the GCC. The question of Iran is also examined through the general sectarian narrative that is currently operating within the region.

GCC as a Political Narrative: A Historical Overview

To understand the current political scenario and explore opportunities for development in GCC-Iraq relations, it is important that we start with the history of the GCC. Although undeclared, the formation of the GCC was primarily based on a shared political narrative that constructs a common enemy.

When we speak of narrative, we are broadly speaking of a "story."[6] Generally, narrative is a story that can be told by an individual or by a collective and which promotes a particular perspective or a viewpoint. Narrative is commonly associated with fiction and so it is understood as more related to Arts and literary studies. However, lately the study of narrative has gained popularity in social and political sciences.[7] The acknowledgment of narrative as being relevant to social and political disciplines stems from the understanding that narrative is never neutral,

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6.   Molly Patterson and Renwick K. Monroe, "Narrative in Political Science," *Annual Review of Political Science* 1, no. 1 (1998): 315 available at: doi: 10.1146/annurev.polisci.1.1.315 (accessed on March 20, 2013).

7.   Shaul R. Shenhav, "Political Narratives and Political Reality," *International Political Science Review* 27, no. 3 (2006): 245 available at: doi: 10.1177/0192512106064474 (accessed March 9, 2013); this argument can also be found in Patterson and Monroe, "Narrative in Political Science," 315.

it is always embedded in particular ideologies, perspectives, and world views.[8] This understanding indicates that narrative is representative of unbalanced power relations and therefore it is highly relevant to politics. However, it also indicates that narrative is contested in meaning because its relation to power makes it open to different definitions regulated by different disciplinary ideologies.

In this sense, coinciding "politics" with "narrative" makes the term even more contested especially because there is no one definition of politics. However, the term "political narrative" in this chapter refers to the political construction and legitimization of certain realities that serve particular political interests in society. Dennis Mumby defines political narrative as "an ideological force that articulates a system of meaning which privileges certain interests over others."[9] In this sense, political narrative is an important topic of enquiry given its capacity to facilitate social change within any given society due to its ability to provide "a shared language that becomes the basis of mobilization around particular issues."[10] Also, another important aspect of political narrative is its capacity to construct a shared political identity that promotes the interests of the dominant group as collective.[11] Therefore, political narrative becomes a "means of constituting and diffusing collective identities in particular societies."[12]

Shaul Shenhav emphasizes that political narrative can be located within both formal and informal frameworks.[13] By formal framework, Shenhav means a narrative produced within formal institutions by politicians and formal political figures. Informal framework, on the other hand, is representative of a fairly broad definition that could include any issues or themes that are "normally considered political, such as power relations, collective decisions and social conflicts."[14] This chapter discusses political dialogue in both forms, formal and informal. The following section provides an example of how a particular political narrative encouraged the development of a

8. Shenhav, "Political Narratives," 248.

9. Dennis K. Mumby, "The Political Function of Narrative in Organizations," *Communications Monographs* 54, no. 2 (1987): 114, available at: doi: 10.1080/03637758709390221 (accessed February 1, 2013).

10. Janet Hart, "Cracking the Code: Narrative and Political Mobilization in the Greek Resistance," Social Science History 16, no. 4 (1992): 633.

11. Patterson and Monroe, "Narrative in Political Science," 322.

12. Hart, "Cracking the Code," 633–34.

13. Shenhav, "Political Narratives," 247.

14. Shenhav R. Shaul, "Thin and Thick Narrative Analysis: On the Question of Defining and Analyzing Political Narratives," *Narrative Inquiry* 15, no. 1 (2005): 77, available at: doi: http://10.1075/ni.15.1.05she (accessed March 8, 2013).

special alliance within the Gulf region. Subsequently, the implications of this same political narrative in dividing today's Arab region are discussed.

GCC: Six States and One Narrative

An important element of political narrative is its capacity to construct a shared political identity. The GCC was established on the basis of a shared political narrative that is especially concerned with security measures. The organization was established in 1981, a critical time of insecurity, just after the Iranian revolution. Its establishment did not come as a surprise; the six Gulf States had a tradition of social and economic collaboration.[15] Also, and more importantly, in 1976 Saudi Arabia initiated an informal cooperation among the six states on issues concerning cross-border security.[16] This was largely motivated by the British withdrawal from the region that made it more vulnerable to external threats. Although the United States was constructing a more structured relationship with the Gulf region at the time, there was no concrete relationship that the Gulf region could rely on, and therefore, a unified body based on political collaboration had the potential to generate a sense of security within the region.

However, subsequent political developments in the region, shaped by the growth of the Iranian Islamic revolution, introduced a threat to Gulf monarchies. As Ramazani emphasizes, the Gulf States feared the exportation of the Islamic revolution, especially Saudi Arabia that was facing a rebel movement by some of its radical Sunni fundamentalist groups at the time.[17] There was also fear that the Shia minority (and a majority in Bahrain) could be encouraged to rebel by the success of the Iranian revolution and the establishment of the first-ever Islamic Shia state. As a matter of fact, the Shia in both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain rebelled in 1979 and 1980, but their rebellion was controlled by the monarchies. The fear of the Iranian revolution was not limited to Saudi Arabia or Bahrain; it was also shared by other monarchies in the region. It is important to mention that the Iranian revolution was the second in the region where the monarchy was replaced with a republican system. It seemed that monarchy-based governments were becoming more and more vulnerable to transformational revolutions. Also, the time of the revolution

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15. Rouhollah K. Ramazani and Joseph A. Kechichian, *The Gulf Cooperation Council: Record and Analysis* (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 1988), 7.

16. Neil Patrick, "The GCC: Gulf State Integration or Leadership Cooperation?" (research paper, Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States, November 2011), 4.

17. Ramazani and Kechichian, *The Gulf Cooperation Council,* 7.

coincided with the Russian invasion of Afghanistan which made the Gulf region even more vulnerable to political instability.

However, Neil Patrick emphasizes that the Iranian revolution was different and more threatening in the sense that it had the potential to "weaken Saudi Arabia and a number of other Gulf states from within."[18] It is important to emphasize that this argument not only refers to the development of a powerful Shia state that can politically mobilize Shia minorities (and the majority in Bahrain) within Gulf States, but it is also referring to the potential for small Gulf States finding refuge in Iran's growing power.[19] A Saudi government advisor stressed that after the British departure from the region, the development of GCC was necessary "to avoid the situation of those states lacking protection looking elsewhere."[20] As Walt argues using power theory, "[w]hen confronted by an external threat, states may either balance or bandwagon."[21] With a lack of protection, small Gulf States were prone to form an alliance (bandwagon) with either Iraq or Iran. Such a reality threatens Saudi Arabia's interest in being a powerful regional player and would make it vulnerable to Iran's or Iraq's domination.

Therefore, and despite the fact that there were other secondary motivations including common culture, religion and economic resources, the political narrative that sees the Gulf region as politically vulnerable to security threats particularly from Iran was the main aspect of unification. Economic and socio-cultural aspects were secondary because firstly, these aspects are not confined to the participant states; there are other regional states who share the same economic and geo-cultural framework including Iraq. Secondly, commonality has always existed between these states and there were certainly better times for unity to develop on the basis of economic and socio-cultural expansion than in 1981. However, the timing of the establishment of the GCC indicates that there was an urgent concern that motivated the formation of an alliance among the six Gulf States.

Going back to the power theory, most often alliances develop as a response to threat; power theory confirms that to prevent strong powers from domination it is essentially important that power balance is developed and maintained.[22] Creating a power balance often involves weaker or insecure states forming alliances to counter a hegemonic power. In this sense, revolutionary Iran and a powerful and resourceful

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18.   Patrick, "The GCC," 5.

19.   Patrick, "The GCC," 6.

20.   Patrick, "The GCC," 6.

21.   Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987), 17.

22.   Walt, *The Origins of Alliances,* 18.

Baathist Iraq placed the Gulf region under a security threat consequent upon which an important decision had to be made of either balancing power through the formation of an alliance or bandwagoning with the threatening power. While some smaller states in the region were compelled to bandwagon with Iran or Iraq, Saudi Arabia had to act urgently to establish a formal cooperation council which is, in reality, a defense cooperation initiative based upon a security-based political narrative shared by the six GCC states.

Iraq-GCC Relations: Is There a Shared Political Narrative Concerning the Enemy?

With the emergence of the Arab Spring, the political narrative that threatened the GCC in the 1980s is now being repeated even more aggressively. However, the fear now is not so much of smaller Gulf States looking elsewhere (bandwagon) like it was in the 1980s, but it is actually of people/citizens looking elsewhere. The Arab street is now stronger and louder than ever and has already succeeded in ousting four dictatorial governments (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen) making the Gulf region even more vulnerable to instability. On the other hand, Iran's positive reputation and popularity in Arab streets is growing steadily particularly in Arab states populated with Shia citizens. Mousavian argues that this is due to Iran's active "support for the Palestinian cause" and its unfriendly "opposition to the Western military presence in the region" combined with its vocal hostility towards Israel.[23] These are important political aspects that the GCC cannot compete with due to its alignment with western superpowers that has, in turn, amplified the bloc's lack of credibility in the Arab street.

Therefore, the current unrest on the Arab street and Iran's exploitation of the situation raises some significant concerns for the GCC states who have continuously regarded Iran as an enemy that poses domestic and regional threats to their security.

This chapter also examines the extent to which this political narrative that sees Iran as a major enemy is shared by Iraq. Iraq's relationship with Iran is more complex than how the GCC states have framed it so far. Until the gaps in the current political narratives are located and addressed, the relationship between Iraq and the GCC has very little chance to improve and prosper.

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23. Seyed Hossein Mousavian, "A Great Partnership: Iran, Iraq and the GCC," Forum for Arab and International Relations, Doha, December 2, 2012, available from: FairForum.org: http://www.fairforum.org.

Iraq's relationship with Iran has been a prominent factor in shaping the GCC's unfriendly relationship with Baghdad. As indicated earlier, the GCC has always framed its relationship with Iran from a zero-sum perspective and, by default, it has always viewed Iraq's relationship with Iran from the same perspective, it "can either be an ally against Iran, or it can be an enemy."[24] However, Iraq has a distinctive historical connection with Iran that makes its relationship with Tehran inevitably closer than its ties with any of its neighboring Arab countries.

It must be clarified here that a "distinctive historical connection" here does not refer to sectarian loyalties but rather to political ties where sectarian measures play a part. In other words, Iran's prominent role in hosting and nurturing Iraqi opposition movements during the Baath regime, a role that many Arab countries distanced themselves from, has a great impact on the nature of the relationship and the level of cooperation that has then developed between the two countries after the fall of the Baath regime. The prominent Shia political parties that are currently operating in Iraq have all enjoyed Iran's support at some stage of their development, an important point that needs to be taken into consideration when analyzing the relationship between the two countries. A brief historical account of the relationship will put things in clearer perspective.

The oldest Shia oppositional organized movement in Iraq is the Dawa party (Hizb Al Dawa Al Islamiya).[25] The Dawa party was organized in the late 1950s as a response to secular and leftist political ideologies.[26] The aim of the party was to have a religious-based rule in Iraq where politics conforms to Islamic teachings. Al-Dawa developed as an independent Iraqi party that was politically distant from Shias in Iran. However, in the 1970s, when Shia political activism was officially targeted by the Baath regime, many Dawa officials found refuge in neighboring countries including Iran, Syria, and Lebanon.[27] However, although the Dawa party was given sanctuary in Iran, they remained to a large extent independent from Iran's political and ideological control as there were some major ideological differences

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24. Hassan, "Time Is Right."

25. This is the official website for the Dawa party: http://www.islamicdawaparty.com/.

26. Rodger Shanahan, "Shi'a Political Development in Iraq: The Case of the Islamic Da'wa Party," *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 5 (2004): 944, available at: doi: 10.1080/0143659042000232045 (accessed March 10, 2013).

27. Shanahan, "Shi'a Political Development," 947. Argument can also be found in Reidar Visser, *Iran's Role in Post-Occupation Iraq: Enemy, Good Neighbor, or Overlord?* (New York: Century Foundation, 2009), 10.

and disagreements particularly in regard to the "principle of clerical rule" *(Wilayat al–faqih)*.[28]

On the other hand, there are some opposition movements that have emerged from within Iran such as the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (hereafter ISCI), formally known as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). ISCI is a Shia-based opposition party that developed in the 1980s under the direct leadership of Iran.[29] Iran, in an attempt to create strong Iraqi allies, invested heavily in funding, organizing, mobilizing, and training ISCI members. Therefore, this opposition movement was pro-Iran in all its ideologies and political visions. A third Shia-based opposition movement that has recently developed an authoritative voice in Iraq is the Sadrist movement. The Sadrist movement developed in Iraq in the 1990s under the leadership of Muhammad Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr.[30] It grew independently from al-Dawa and ISCI parties and was not on a good terms with either of them, a situation that continues today. Within the Sadrist movement developed Jaish Al Mahdi in 2003[31] that was formally disbanded in 2008 but resulted in the emergence of other groups such as Asaib Ahl al-Haq and Promised Day Brigade.[32] The Sadrist movement was initially particularly hostile towards Iran, though Tehran with its strategic foreign policy was able to change this position, but not entirely. However, since 2008, Moqtada Al-Sadr, the leader of the Sadrist movement, has been undertaking his religious studies in Iran. This is an example of how being religiously aligned with Iran's Hawza can successfully open the door to a political partnership..

Apart from opposition movements, Iran also provided a sanctuary for over 400,000 displaced Iraqis when mass deportations took place in 1980s[33] as

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28. Visser, *Iran's Role,* 10. Argument can also be found in Shanahan, "Shi'a Political Development," 947.

29. N. Watts James, "Iranian Influence in Shi'a Groups of Iraq" (master's diss., Naval Postgraduate School, 2012), 29.

30. Visser, *Iran's Role,* 11.

31. James, "Iranian Influence," 35.

32. There is also an argument that sees Jaish Al Mahdi as an ideological formation that was not disbanded but its military activities were suspended by Al-Sadr. Recently, Al-Sadr announced his plan to restructure Jaish Al Mahdi particularly in Baghdad and its surrounding areas. Announcement cited in "Al-Sadr Decides to Restructure Jaish Al Mahdi and Calls on His Followers to Obey," *Al-Alam News Network* (in Arabic), November 29, 2013, available at: http://www.alalam.ir/news/1539335 (accessed December 1, 2013).

33. Ali Babakhan, "The Deportation of Shi'is during the Iran-Iraq War: Causes and Consequences," in *Ayatollahs, Sufis and Ideologues: State, Religion and Social Movements in*

well as thousands of others who fled to Iran in the 1990s. Many of those Iraqis and their newly-established families returned to Iraq after the fall of the Baath regime creating a pro-Iranian community within the Iraqi population. It is also important not to overlook Iran's major support for the Kurds against Saddam in the 1980s, particularly their financial and military support in 1984.[34] Also, important to consider is the role Iran played in supporting the Intifada in 1991 especially when "Iraqi Shiites begged at the Kuwait border for sanctuary … [but] No state in the region lifted a finger to help the vic¬tims, except Iran."[35] These historical accounts that signify Iran's prominent role in defying the Baath regime places Iran in a more favorable position – on both state and non-state level – among those in Iraq who are hostile to the Baath regime. This historically distinctive relationship with Iran is captured in the words of Ibrahim Al-Jaffari, a former Prime Minister of Iraq, who described Iran as "a friendly state which stood by Iraq's side in time of crisis. It harboured Iraqis when Saddam Hussein killed, displaced and harmed many of them."[36] Many Iraqis, on the other hand, feel betrayed by their fellow Arab neighbors who remained passive, if not supportive, of the dictatorial regime and the US invasion.[37]

In addition to these distinctive historical ties, there are also geopolitical ties that link the two states. Iraq's territorial unity is of particular interest to Iran because any territorial division in Iraq will affect the latter tremendously due to its ethnic geopolitics.[38] Therefore, and unlike what is commonly believed, a stable, unified and nationalist Iraq is one of Iran's significant foreign policy interests particularly in its current state where it has been facing some serious issues at the domestic

Iraq, ed. Faleh Abdul-Jabar (London: Saqi Books, 2002), 199. Argument is also found in Joyce N. Wiley, "The Iraqi Shi'as: Origin, Ideology, and Current Politic Goals," in *Iraq: Its History, People, and Politics,* ed. Shams C. Inati (New York: Humanity Books, 2003), 159.

34.   Carole A. O'Leary, "The Kurds of Iraq: Recent History, Future Prospects," *Middle East Review of International Affairs,* 6, no. 4 (2002): 26.

35.   Augustus Richard Norton, "The Shiite 'Threat' Revisited," *Current History—New York Then Philadelphia* 107, no. 704 (2007): 437.

36.   David A. Rousu, "Beyond the Shatt al-Arab: How the Fall of Saddam Hussein Changed Iran-Iraq Relations" (master's diss., University of Arizona, 2010): 38. Argument also found in "US Memo: Iraqi PM Said Iran, Syria Armed Militants," *CBS News* February 3, 2011, available at: http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-501713_162-7313744.html (accessed April 2, 2013).

37.   Vali Nasr, "Regional Implications of Shi'a Revival in Iraq," *Washington Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2004): 14, available at: doi: 10.1162/016366004323090232 (accessed April 1, 2013).

38.   Kayhan, "A Modest Nationalism in Iraq."

and international levels. Some political analysts rightly see Iran as a "state with the greatest stake in keeping Iraq unified and ensuring its sovereignty, because Iraq's disintegration could adversely affect Iran's national integrity and its aspirations to become a regional leader in the Middle East."[39] Of course, Iran's interest in a unified Iraq matches Iraq's own national interest in keeping the country undivided.[40] Therefore, there is a common political dialogue between Iran and Iraq that is not particularly shared by other neighboring states at this stage. This explains Iraq collaborating with Iran on several occasions to mediate agreements with different political parties to ensure unity and prevent divisions.[41]

At the same time, it is important to also acknowledge that Iran has been very strategic in its foreign policy. Like many other neighboring states, Iran has a great geopolitical interest in Iraq and has tried its best to build a strong alliance with Baghdad. Iran was among the first states to officially recognize the new democratic system in Iraq and by default the elected Iraqi government.[42] Iran also responded very actively to Iraq's request for international economic investments, positioning itself as the second largest trading partner after Turkey.[43] However, this was happening while Iraq was trying eagerly to reach out to the Gulf States but facing reluctance.[44] For example, 10 years after the change of regime, Saudi Arabia still does not have diplomatic relations with Iraq on the ground, nor does Qatar. Iraq hosted the Arab League Summit and hoped that this would open up opportunities for improving relationships with neighboring Gulf States; however, Saudi Arabia and Qatar restricted their representation to low-level delegations, sending a clear message of reluctance to cooperate.[45] Also, GCC economic investment in Iraq is very slow and issues regarding debts and borders are yet to be resolved. In addition to all that, there are other barriers to communication including the red carpet reception given

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39.   Mohammed Ayoob, "Only Iran Can Save Iraq," CNN, December 28, 2011, available from: http://edition.cnn.com/2011/12/28/opinion/ayoob-iran-iraq-sectarian-strife (accessed March 24, 2013). Argument can also be found in Kayhan, "A Modest Nationalism in Iraq."

40.   Some Iraqi politicians like Ahmed Al-Alwani advocate regionalism; however, Al-Maliki's government has been very clear about its support for unity.

41.   An example of this is the 2008 ceasefire agreement between Al-Sadr and Al-Maliki's government.

42.   McGovern, "Iraq's New Reality," 6.

43.   Mohammed Ayoob, "Only Iran Can Save Iraq."

44.   Zayd Alisa, "Saudi Arabia and Qatar Ratcheting up Sectarian and Ethnic Tensions in Iraq," *Diplomatic Courier* April 1, 2013, available at: http://www.diplomaticcourier.com /news/ regions/middle-east/1421 (accessed April 15, 2013).

45.   Alisa, "Saudi Arabia and Qatar."

to Tariq Al Hashimi and the refuge provided for some Baathist officials.[46] More recently, the complications with the Gulf Cup of Nations worsened the relationship even further with the Ministry of Youth and Sport denouncing the decision to switch the tournament from Iraq to Saudi Arabia as "politically motivated."[47] All of this is happening while Iran is trying eagerly to build a long-lasting relationship with Iraq which, on its part, is looking for international friendship and support that could be of assistance in its transitional state. Therefore, the Iraq-Iran relationship has developed progressively after the fall of the Baath regime and this is particularly due to "the political weakness of one state that allows interference by another state for its own self-interest."[48] This process of interference and alignment was made easier by the historical ties that link the two states and their people. However, as Iraq builds its socio-economic strength and becomes a tough competitor in the oil market, this aspect of alignment is now taking a different shape and becoming more balanced than it has been previously.[49] As Maggiolini argues "Iraq is re-emerging as an actor in its own right and recovering from being the battlefield of competing regionalisms."[50] It is important to note, therefore, that Iraq's relationship with Iran is different to that of the GCC's relationship with Iran and that the Iraq-Iran relationship would never fit into an either/or analogy as the GCC would like it to be.

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46. Alisa, "Saudi Arabia and Qatar."

47. "Iraq Pull out of Gulf Cup in Spat with Saudi Arabia," SBS News, October 2013, available at: http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2013/10/10/iraq-pull-out-gulf-cup-spat-saudi-arabia (accessed October 22, 2013).

48. Maximilian Terhalle, "Are the Shia Rising?" *Middle East Policy* 14, no. 2 (2007): 75, available at: doi: 10.1111/j.1475-4967.2007.00298.x (accessed February 15, 2013).

49. Gause in Robert Tollast and F. Gregory Gause III, "Iraq in the Middle—Part I: F. Gregory Gause III on Iraq's Relations with the GCC," *Small Wars Journal,* May 23, 2012, available at: http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/iraq-in-the-middle-part-i-f-gregory-gause-iii-on-iraq%E2%80%99s-relations-with-the-gcc (accessed March 12, 2013). Argument is also reflected in Lydia Khalil's article, "Nobody's Client: The Reawakening of Iraqi Sovereignty," Lowy Institute for International Politics, April 2009 available at: http://www.lowyinstitute. org (accessed April 26, 2013).

50. Paolo Maggiolini, "Iraq's Foreign Policy Directions and Regional Developments. Where Does Iraqi Foreign Policy Start?" *ISPI Analysis* no. 199 (2013): 5, available at: http://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/iraqs-foreign-policy-directions-and-regional-developments-where-does-iraqi-foreign-policy-start-9086 (accessed October 14, 2013).

The Fear of the Shia Crescent: Interrogating the Sectarian Narrative

The relationship between Iraq and Iran has always been viewed through a religious prism that describes Iraqi Shias as manipulated by Iran. However, this political narrative is not exclusive to Iraqi Shias; Arab Shias generally are accused of being politically, culturally, and ideologically linked to Iran, a prevailing political narrative within the region that has been communicated by many Arab leaders, either directly or indirectly.[51] This sectarian narrative is communicated in the Arab region on different levels: political, clerical, media, and even academic level. For example, on the political level, King Abdullah of Jordan warned Arab states of the development of a "Shia crescent" explaining that "Shiite expansion" would endanger the stability and the cultural make-up of the Arab and Muslim world.[52]

This narrative is highly critical in its attempt to "foreignize" the Shia identity from the Arab and Muslim world, a point that is explored further in the following paragraphs. King Abdullah's notion of a "Shia crescent" later grew into a common political narrative used by Arab and non-Arab rulers and has had some significant implications on the development and mobilization of the Arab Spring.[53] This "Shi'a crescent" theory and the anti-Shia rhetoric generally is also found on a clerical level where Shia are often denounced as Kafir and some Wahabi clerics even label them as "safavid,"[54] a discourse that associates the Shia with Persian culture and denounces their Arab identity disseminating the idea that Shia are not "true Arabs," [55] or even true Muslims. It is important to highlight that the discourse of "safavid" has also been adopted by politicians such as Ahmed Al Alwani in Iraq to de-legitimize the political voice of some of the Shia parties. Even academia has picked up on the sectarian discourse in an attempt to evaluate the "Shia threat" in the region using labels such as: "Shia rising, the Shia revival, Shia axis, pan-Shiism,

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51. Gause, "Saudi Arabia."

52. Jaafar Alloul, "The 'Shi'a Crescent' Theory: Sectarian Identity or Geopolitics of Religion?" (master's diss., Ghent University, 2011), 66.

53. Amir M. Haji-Yousefi, "Whose Agenda Is Served by the Idea of a Shia Crescent?" (paper presented to the annual *ALTERNATIVES Turkish Journal of International Relations* 8, no. 1 (2009), 116–17, available at: http://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2008/Haji-Yousefi.pdf. (accessed April 16, 2013).

54. Alloul, "The 'Shi'a Crescent," 71.

55. Rodger Shanahan, "Bad Moon Not Rising: The Myth of the Gulf Shi'a Crescent," *Lowy Institute Analysis Paper* September 2008, 3, available at: http://lowyinstitute.org/publications/bad-moon-not-rising-myth-shia-crescent (accessed October 15, 2013).

Shia international, Shia renaissance, Shia bloc, Shia empire, Shiitestan and Shia awakening."[56]

One of the main features of this political narrative found on different levels in today's Arab society is that it represents Shia as "potential domestic enemies to their own countries"[57] rendering them as the "Other … who ultimately endangers and threatens 'our way of life.'"[58] This discourse works to manufacture fear of the Shia identity in the public and the political consciousness of the region. Rodger emphasizes that the fear of Shia lies on two assumptions, "Shiʻa communities rise up against their governments and increase Iranian influence in the region."[59] Therefore, the development of a Shia government in Iraq, as Rodger argues, "re-awoken the fears generated by Iranian revolution in 1979" and it might have been even more threatening given that Iraq is an Arab state.

However, the political narrative that manufactures this fear is highly problematic because it represents the Shia community as a singular whole, manipulated and mobilized by Iran. Such a vision is not only communicated by King Abdullah of Jordan but was also clearly communicated by Egypt's then President Hosni Mubarak who argued in an interview with Al-Arabiya in 2006 that Arab Shias are "loyal to Iran, and not to the countries they are living in."[60] In this political narrative, Shia citizenship is problematized implying that unlike Sunnis, Christians, Jews and other religious communities, Shias cannot be loyal to their Arab identity. Though very popular in the region, this narrative is not politically justified or supported; in fact, there are many examples that prove otherwise. Taking Iraq as an example, Shia in that country have proven their loyalty to their national identity and emphasized their distinctiveness from Iran on different historical occasions including the 1920s uprisings against Britain, the collapse of the monarchy in 1958, the Iraq-Iran war in 1980s, and even the 1991 Shia uprising against the Baath regime which has "focused on Iraq as a territorial whole." [61]

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56.   Haji-Yousefi, "Whose Agenda," 5.

57.   Abbas Kadhim, "United We Stand," *Al-Ahram* April 13, 2006, available at: http://weekly. ahram.org.eg/2006/790/re85.htm (accessed April 1, 2013).

58.   Zemni in Alloul, "The Shiʻa Crescent," 68.

59.   Shanahan, "Bad Moon," 3.

60.   "Mubarak's Questioning of Shiites' Loyalty Draws Sharp Iraqi Criticism" *Asharq Al-Awsat,* April 10, 2006, available at: http://www.aawsat.net/2006/04/article55267171 (February 15, 2013).

61.   Visser, *Iran's Role,* 7–9.

These examples indicate that when loyalties were in question, Iraqi Shias have always prioritized their national identity as opposed to their sectarian one. This argument supports Terhalle's view that political activism by Shias around the Arab world has always been motivated by communal national interest rather than transnational Shiite interest manipulated by Iran.[62] For example, and as some Iranian scholars argue, "[e]very Iraqi government, whether it is dominated by Shiites, Kurds, or Sunnis, will perceive the existing Iran-Iraq issues such as the 1975 Algiers Agreement as a "national" agenda,"[63] and therefore any political and non-political response to such issues will always be based on a nationalist dialogue rather than a sectarian one.

The sectarian narrative discussed earlier does not perceive the Shia as capable of developing a nationalist discourse; in fact, it places the Shia identity in binary with the Arab identity. In other words, the sectarian narrative discussed earlier creates a dichotomy between Shiism and Arabism in which an individual can either be a Shia or an Arab. This narrative sees Arab Shias as a monolithic group that is politically motivated by their sectarian interests[64] and politically derived from Iran and will always work to serve Iran's interests.[65] In the case of Iraq, this assumption leads to thinking that as long as Shia are in power, Iraq's politics will be guided by Iran's influence. In other words, this assumption indicates that Iraq needs a Sunni or a secular government in order to be liberated from Iran's influence.[66] Prasanta Pradhan argues in his article on the GCC-Iran conflict, that the GCC fails to realize that not all Shias are Islamists or sectarian; some of them are in fact secular and some are even anti-Iranian.[67] It may be added here that some are pro-Iranian but still nationalist.

As Haji-Yousifi argues, "Shia are far from a political monolith." They are geographically, nationally, culturally, ethnically, and ideologically diverse. Therefore, their political activism and their overall foreign politics are "shaped by local social,

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62. Terhalle, "Are the Shia Rising?" 72.

63. Barzegar Kayhan, "A Modest Nationalism in Iraq Will Favor Iran," *Aftab News,* March 24, 2009; article is translated from Persian to English, available at: http://belfercenter. hks.harvard.edu/publication/18941/modest_nationalism_in_iraq_will_favor_iran.html (accessed March 27, 2013).

64. Prasanta K. Pradhan, "The GCC-Iran Conflict and Its Strategic Implications for the Gulf Region," *Strategic Analysis* 35, no. 2 (2011): 271, available at: doi: 10.1080/ 097 00161.2011.542923 (accessed March 12, 2013).

65. Terhalle, "Are the Shia Rising?" 70.

66. Mattair, "Mutual Threat Perceptions in the Arab/Persian Gulf," 133.

67. Pradhan, "The GCC-Iran Conflict," 271.

political and economic conditions."[68] A good example of this diversity is depicted in the GCC's Shia population; although they are part of the same region, their "willingness to challenge the status quo varies considerably" from one state to another depending on their socio-economic condition within the state.[69]

Similar analysis can be made in regard to the political identity of the Shia in Iraq particularly in relation to their view of Iran. Looking back at the historical development of Shia opposition movements, there are some fundamental political/ideological differences between these parties indicating that Iraqi Shia themselves are not unified on the position of Iran and the role it can play towards their own political development. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein, the three dominating Shia parties in Iraq have engaged Iran differently in their political work. While members of the ISCI have talked openly about their close relationship with Iran and their appreciation of the Iranian political process, Al-Maliki's government has not been as vocal about its relationship with Iran and has clearly followed a different political process in the eight years it has been in power. In his earlier years in government, particularly in 2009, Al-Maliki even accused Iran publicly of arming militias in Iraq,[70] a political gesture that indicates his investment in his own interest rather than on loyalty to Iran. Al-Maliki's government, although friendly with Iran, will not allow the development of an Iranian-based political system based on Wilayat al Faqih, for example.

Therefore, unlike ISCI, al Dawa party, currently led by Al-Maliki, has some fundamental political differences with Iran that would always impact the kind of relationship that can develop between the two countries. On the other hand, the relationship between Iran and Al Sadr is very different. Their relationship started on an extremely hostile note and then it gradually improved; however, Iran and Moqtada Al-Sadr cannot be called allies or friends.[71] The recent developments in Iraq shaped by demonstrations in Anbar revealed a significant rift among the Shia parties where Al-Sadr publicly criticized Al-Maliki's government.[72] Al-Sadr has been strategically leading to an election that is particularly hostile towards Al-Maliki, a move that is definitely not backed by Iran. In fact, Maha Al-Douri, a

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68.   Terhalle, "Are the Shia Rising?" 79.

69.   Shanahan, "Bad Moon," 3.

70.   Rousu, "Beyond the Shatt al-Arab," 82.

71.   Takeyh, "Iran's New Iraq," 24.

72.   Ali Abel Sadah, "Muqtada al-Sadr: Staying in Iraqi Government a 'Sin,'" *Al Monitor,* January 4, 2013, available at: http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/03/sadr-letter-against-maliki.html (accessed March 20, 2013).

member of the National Assembly belonging to the Sadrist movement, has spoken out against Iran in an interview to al-Sharqiya news, accusing Iran of interfering in Iraq's sovereignty.[73] In this sense, the three dominant Shia parties in Iraq are obviously not monolithic in their political approach toward relations with Iran.

However, Shias in Iraq as civilians and as participants in governments are continually considered by many of the Arab neighboring countries as a homogenous group driven by sectarian interests. Such a narrative not only presents Shia as a threat to their own nations but it also stigmatizes their citizenship and their contribution to the political process. If this narrative continues to shape perceptions in the GCC, the relationship between Shia-led Iraq and the GCC states could remain stagnant. In fact, this sectarian narrative inflamed by Arab media and reinforced by Arab leaders who, to say the least, fail to condemn it, has led to a lack of trust between Shia and Sunni in the Arab world, a fact that has undercut the possibility of developing any constructive political dialogue between the two.

Conclusion: Where to from Here?

Iran and sectarianism are two of the key elements in the political narrative operating between Iraq and the GCC. The intersection of these two elements has impacted negatively on the Arab street, on Arab unity and the political fraternity in the region. To build and develop a constructive political dialogue between Iraq and the GCC, it is important that Arab leaders reflect on the political narrative operating within the region that makes sectarian discourse a deceptive cover for ideological interests. Iraq, in its current state, is keen to improve its relations with the GCC and other neighboring countries. However, the GCC has been very slow in responding to Iraq's request for cooperation and particularly critical of Al-Maliki's leadership and his friendly relationship with Iran. The GCC needs to initiate a new political evaluation of the relationship between Iraq and Iran that looks beyond sectarian motives. Realizing and accepting the political context that aligns Iraq and Iran is an important first step toward building a good relationship between Iraq and the GCC states. As long as the GCC views Iraq's relationship with Iran from a zero-sum point of view, their relationship is not likely to improve, especially in light of the outbreak of sectarianism within the political narrative operating in the region.

The Shia community is not homogenous but a diverse one separated by different histories, ethnicities, cultures, languages, and geo-political realities. This diversity is

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73.   Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVdR9HAKPCU, June 11, 2012.

not yet acknowledged by Arab leader as there is a fear within the GCC states that any Shi'a government in Iraq will be pro-Iranian, which is a misleading viewpoint manufactured by a prevailing sectarian narrative that sees the Shia as a monolithic group who are always guided by sectarian motives. However, as Mowaffak Al-Rubaie, Iraq's former national security advisor, stressed at the Manama Dialogue in 2007, "GCC states should not be worried about an Iraq dominated by Shia and Kurds. Iraq is a democratic parliamentary constitutional system. That is what you have to accept."[74] Democracy in a Shia-populated country like Iraq means that the Shia will inevitably be a major part of the political system, if not the main part as it has been the case in the last eight years in Iraq. As Amir Haji-Yousifi argues, Arab countries particularly the GCC states "must learn to co-exist with a Shiite Iraq and to recognize and establish ties with it. If not, other countries will fill in the vacuum that they will create."[75] Iran's major partnership role in Iraq's development is not a surprising reality but a logical development in response to the GCC's reluctance to cooperate with Iraq. As Pradhan argues, "reluctance of the GCC countries to deal with the Maliki government enabled the Iranian government to take the lead in the reconstruction and development."[76]

Caught between a sectarian narrative and perceived Iranian threat, the GCC seems to have no clear vision on how to engage with a democratic and Shia-led pro-Iranian Iraq.[77] Unfortunately such a lack of vision is widening the gap between Iraq and the GCC states. In fact, this lack of vision and, to some extent, hostility towards Al-Maliki's government "created a sense of solidarity between the new Iraqi political elite and Iran" as they both see themselves as being vulnerable to GCC's hostility.[78] They both see themselves as victims of the same war, the war against the perceived "Shia threat." Takeyh argues that even on a public opinion level, the Iraqi Shia community, diverse as it is, is well aware of the unwelcoming attitudes of the Arab states towards their empowerment, a fact that makes Iran a

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74. Pradhan, "The GCC-Iran Conflict," 271. Al Rubaie who was in the advisor position at that time also indicated that Iraq and GCC are "fighting the same enemy" perhaps pointing to terrorism or Al-Qaeda as the enemy. However, I find this argument problematic because terrorism is defined differently by the two countries; many Shia Iraqis allege terrorism is exported by Saudi Arabia. Instead, the narrative of the enemy could be more shared by Iraq and Iran; please refer to James, "Iranian Influence," for a more articulated argument.

75. Haji-Yousefi, "Whose Agenda," 132.

76. Pradhan, "The GCC-Iran Conflict," 270.

77. McGovern, "Iraq's New Reality," 7.

78. Al Tamamy, "Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring," 150.

more attractive state to align with.[79] The GCC needs to realize these dynamics and respond to them effectively.

Although it is aware of the depth of the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran, Iraq is trying to take a neutral stand on the issue. For example, Tahseen Shaikhli, an Iraqi government spokesman, stated, "[w]e are trying to avoid being a part of this conflict between them."[80] Maggiolini argues that Iraq under Al-Maliki's leadership has tried to maintain neutrality in its foreign policy.[81] In an interview to *Wall Street Journal,* Nouri Al-Maliki confirmed: "I am a friend to all countries. A friend of America; a friend of Russia; a friend of Iran; a friend of Turkey; and a friend of the Arabs, even those that insist on boycotting us.'[82] In this account, Al-Maliki's emphasizes the neutrality of his government, which aims to distance Iraq from any international conflict and instead focuses on positive relationships that promote the political and economic development of the country. Thus, Iraq can act as a mediator in the region, particularly between Iran and GCC. Saudi Arabia can mobilize its relationship with Iraq to negotiate agreements with Iran and contain the so-called "Iranian threat." After all, "a strong, stable, democratic Iraq is the best guarantee that Iraq will be able to shake Iranian manipulation" and increase political and economic authority.

In other words, a stable Iraq means a better balance of power in the region.[83] This suggests that more effective cooperation between the GCC and Iraq where a disintegrating political narrative is contained and replaced with a uniting one is a necessary step toward the development of an effective political process in the Middle East.

79.   Takeyh, "Iran's New Iraq," 25.

80.   Roy Gutman, "As US Departs Iraq, It Leaves behind Allies Who Won't Talk," *Independent Kurdistan Journalism,* April 25, 2013, available at: http://ikjnews.com/?p=2767 (accessed April 25, 2013).

81.   Maggiolini, "Iraq's Foreign Policy," 4.

82.   "Interview with Nouri al-Maliki," *Wall Street Journal,* December 12, 2011, available at: http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203430404577092512821791908.html (accessed April 4, 2013).

83.   Bernd Kaussler, "Gulf of Mistrust: Iran and the Gulf Protests," Foreign Policy in Focus, April 21, 2011, available at: http://fpif.org/gulf_of_mistrust_iran_and_the_gulf_protests/.

4

Confronting Threats from Iran through Proactive Cooperation with Iraq: "Objective Necessity" for the GCC

Metodi Hadji Janev

Recommendations for GCC and Iraqi Policymakers:

- GCC countries need to act proactively and approach Iraq with a proposal whose final goal would be to accept Iraq as a full member of the GCC.
- The GCC countries must assure Iraqi leaders about their commitment to Iraqi identity building and isolate and prevent any destructive forces that might harm regional stability and Iraq's security.
- Building an extended security community with Iraq must begin with joint GCC-Iraq social stability projects in the short run that will replace sectarian-driven solutions with regional Muslim-driven solutions.
- The GCC countries should create an environment in which civil society organizations (free of any government interference and established on a joint GCC-Iraq platform) can develop projects to address common issues like corruption, socioeconomic needs or health policies stressing the shared Muslim identity as opposed to sectarian issues.

Recommendations for Iraqi Policymakers:

- All political representatives in Iraq should contribute toward building an Iraqi identity based on a Muslim outlook rather than with sectarian or ethnic overtones.

- All political figures must use their joint influence to discourage and prevent any form of violence or rhetoric and actions that lead to violence regardless of the perpetrators' ethnic or sectarian belonging.

- All political leaders should base their actions on internal and regional political and economic issues on a win-win rather than a zero-sum approach.

- Build a regional Muslim identity through an indirect joint approach with the rest of the GCC countries based on short-term measures (addressing economic, environmental and broader social challenges) and long-term plans whose final goal is full membership in the GCC.

Introduction

The US-led invasion of Iraq and the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime upset the balance of power in the Gulf. The removal of Saddam's regime and the rise of Iran as a regional power were seen as serious threats by the GCC countries. Complex internal, regional, and global dynamics on the security, political, social and economic levels hold the potential to affect Iraq's future in two directions. First, they could push Iraq into civil war and second, Iraq could become a dictatorship aligned with aggressive Iran. Hence if the GCC countries want to maintain stability and prevent Iran from dominating the Gulf, then they need to support the building up of Iraq's stability and security. In this context, a promising proposal such as an extended security community could produce a win-win situation and facilitate Iraq's membership in the GCC. In order to be successful, the GCC countries must cooperate with Iraq and consider short-term and long-term measures.

When Complexity Turns into Instability: Iraq as a Potential Threat to GCC Countries after the US Withdrawal

The destruction of the regional balance of power between Iraq and Iran after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime has been seen by the GCC states as a serious threat to stability in the region. Today after the US withdrawal from Iraq, ethnic and sectarian unrest seriously affects Iraq's national identity struggle. Complex security,

political, social and economic dynamics at internal, regional and global levels hold the potential to affect Iraq's future by pushing it into civil war or turning it into a dictatorship aligned with an aggressive Iran. Either way, Iraq will pose a challenge to the GCC countries' security.

Iraq's Internal Unrest and Potential for Internal Civil War

Internal security in Iraq has dramatically worsened since the US pulled out its forces. Current challenges that threaten Iraq's internal security are complex and straddle the boundaries of political, economic and social relations among Iraq's ethnic and sectarian groups. As a result, struggle for new Iraq's identity is now deeply trapped in violent sectarian disputes between Iraqi Shias and Sunnis on the one hand and inter-ethnic disputes between Shias (who form a majority) and Kurds on the other.

A recent political crisis that challenged Iraq's internal security dates back to the events before and after the 2010 elections. In general, complex political disputes over power sharing among Iraq's Shiites, Sunnis, and Kurds are ethnic and sectarian driven, with shifts in alliances (former strong enemies who indulged in armed violence against each other are now together). Leading political representatives of Iraq's ethnic groups fight over autonomy, authority, and control of Iraq's vast natural resources. In addition, the struggle for political power along with economic issues are segmented inside specific ethnic or sectarian groups which further influence the overall security of the country. In the current environment characterized by strained relations among various groups, everybody accuses everybody else and each side views the other with growing suspicion in this high-stakes competition.

The Shia-Sunni, Shia-Kurdish, and Sunni-Kurdish Confrontations

Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki's political moves have fostered sectarian and ethnic divisions in Iraq. According to his opponents, Al-Maliki's goal is to centralize power in his and his party's hands.[1] They accuse him of establishing control over independent bodies, for minimizing the Irbil Agreement provisions regarding power sharing and for denying Sunnis the right to exercise autonomous political power in regions where they constitute a majority.[2]

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1. See also Marisa Sullivan, "Maliki's Authoritarian Regime," *Middle East Security Report* 10 (April 2013).

2. This agreement was supposed to serve as the basis for the formation of the new Iraqi government and enable political accord. For more about the Irbil Agreement, see Ramzy Mardini, "Iraq's Recurring Political Crisis," Institute for the Study of War, February 16, 2012, available at: http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iraqs-recurring-

Numerous events seem to confirm these allegations. After the official US withdrawal from Iraq, Al-Maliki attempted to arrest Sunni Vice President Tariq Al-Hashemi and to dismiss top Sunni official Deputy Prime Minister Saleh Al-Mutlaq.[3] As a result, Iraqiyya (dominated by Sunni parliamentarians) announced a boycott of Parliament.[4] Although Hashemi (who previously moved to the Kurdish regional government–KRG) asked for assurance of a fair trial, in May 2012 a Baghdad court launched the trial in absentia and in September 2012 convicted him for the killing of two Iraqis and sentenced him to death.[5]

Ethnic Kurdish-Arab unrest deepened when KRG President Masoud Barzani, accused Al-Maliki of a "power grab" by taking control of the security forces. Furthermore, sectarian disputes initiated a cascade effect on ethnic tensions. Given Al-Maliki's recent moves (including the establishment of Tigris Operational Command), fear has begun to grow among the Kurds that Al-Maliki will try to remove President Jalal Talabani from his position and permanently replace him with a Shiite (Khuzai).

Territorial disputes among Sunni Arabs and Kurds clearly attest to the complexity of Iraq's internal security. After provincial elections in 2009, Sunni Arabs wrested control of the Nineveh-Mosul province from the Kurds. When Al-Hadba'a won clear victory, it became clear that its search for an Arab-Islamic identity with no Kurds could instigate ethnic unrest. The Kurdish populace from this region also opposes the Sunni dominance. As a result, in the region where Kurds dominate, Nineveh Governor Atheel Al-Nufaiji's visits are not welcomed. Along with current Shia-Sunni-Kurd struggle for political power, there is growing social and economic unrest that could deepen the inter-sectarian and interethnic disputes.

Economic and Social Challenges to Iraq's Security

Sectarian and ethnic disputes as well as inter-sectarian and inter-ethnic divisions over economic and social interests have affected Iraq's internal security after the US withdrawal and the subsequent elections. Disputes over Iraq's natural resources underlie ethnic tensions between the Shia-led federal government and KRG. These

political-crisis (accessed December 3, 2012).

3. Raad Alkadiri, "Iraq: Back to the Future," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 53, no. 1 (2011): 10.

4. Liz Sly, "In Iraq, Sense of Relief is Chilled by Political Crisis," *Washington Post,* December 18, 2011.

5. Omar Al Jawoshy and Michael Schwirtz, "Death Sentence for a Top Iraqi Leader in a Day of Bloodshed," *New York Times,* September 9, 2012.

disputes have been interpreted through defense budgets, territorial issues (over oil-rich territory), laws regarding oil production, and signing of contracts with specific firms. Thus, these issues and challenges endanger the security situation, pushing Iraq toward sectarian and ethnic armed conflict and opening the door for outside forces to step in and influence the overall security of the country.

Iraq's Security under Serious Threat from Violent Groups

In order to reduce the pressure against him, Al-Maliki undertook several short-term political and populist social measures. Nevertheless, Al-Maliki's political outreach ended when ten bodyguards of Finance Minister Rafi Al-Issawi were arrested and culminated when protests in Faluja by Sunni demonstrators left seven dead and 70 injured. These events along with other complex political, economic and social issues have complicated Iraq's security environment by offering space for violent groups to accomplish their agenda.

Calling for restraint, Al-Maliki warned that the current scenario matches the violence of groups such as Al-Qaeda. Given the many attacks carried out by these violent groups since 2012 and the accompanying rhetoric, Al-Maliki was telling the truth. Fighting between rebels and Syrian regime forces has been regularly reported in close proximity to the Iraqi border. Furthermore cross-border armed incursions have also occurred. These and similar events, on the one hand have sharpened the arguments for Al-Maliki's government to use harsh measures against his political opponents (especially Sunnis) in the name of security. On the other hand, these events along with other political and social factors have pushed Iraq's leadership toward Iran's arms.

Iraq's Dictatorship Aligned with an Aggressive Iran?

The possibility of Iraq turning into a dictatorship depends on several factors. These factors include Al-Maliki's shifts in policies (internally and externally) in the context of his ambition to stay in power; Iraq's ethnic and inter-sectarian dynamics; Iraq's economic, social, and energy challenges; the US role in the region; Iran's ambitions; Syrian internal conflict, and the role of other regional players such as GCC and Turkey.

Internal political dynamics show that an unconstrained Al-Maliki might move toward dictatorship. Attempts to tighten his hold on power mentioned earlier lead one to conclude that he is indeed moving in that direction. However, so far it is not clear whether this was preplanned or the result of unforeseen circumstances

leading to that eventuality. On the other hand, it could be argued that regional configurations and their influence on Iraq's security have pushed Al-Maliki toward Iran. The Syrian conflict (the involvement of foreign Sunni fighters threatens Iraq's internal security), Turkey's regional ambition, potential for Kurdish secession, and overall Iraq's sectarian and inter-sectarian dynamics (alliance between al Sadr and Sunni clerics) are some of the main reasons that explain Al-Maliki's moves.

Several reports attest that Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQ-I) and other Sunni insurgent groups have escalated their numerous attacks on Shiites as well as members and installations of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). Their ultimate goal is to undermine Al-Maliki's leadership and the confidence of the ISF and to inflame sectarian conflict. In April 2013, Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi announced that his group was joining with Syria's Al-Nusra Front to form the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. Although ISI and Al-Nusra's immediate priorities remain quite different and focused on domestic pursuits, Al-Maliki's concern is valid for two reasons.

First, if the war in Syria is won by the opposition, ISI could have a major staging area in Syria's Al-Nusra-controlled territory from which it can launch attacks against the Iraqi government. Second, if the Syrian regime prevails, Sunni militants are likely to return to Iraq and will join established extremist groups such as the ISI/AQI.

The conclusion of the civil war in Syria could also pose a threat to Iraq's stability in terms of the inter-ethnic conflict (i.e., the so-called Kurdish question) and this may be seen as an additional argument for Al-Maliki's recent political play. So far the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq is the only autonomous region governed by the Kurds. Given the recent dynamics in Syria and the West and the GCC countries' support of the predominantly Sunni-led opposition against Assad, it could be argued that it is reasonable for Al-Maliki's government to fear potential secession. Should the war in Syria end with the opposition's victory, there is a reasonable likelihood of the establishment of a Kurdish autonomous region in northeastern Syria. Another Kurd region is likely to bolster general Kurd goals for a single Kurd state. Since Iran also fears Kurdish secession from its territory, and Turkey has already launched a project to cooperate with KRG, the conflict in Syria only pushes Al-Maliki toward Iran. At the same time, this also gives Al-Maliki an excuse to bring security matters within his power grip.

Additional political circumstances related to GCC countries and Iran's relationships in the region play in favor of Iraq's aligning with Iran. Iran's power projection and its behavior in the Gulf and in the broader Middle East largely

shape the GCC countries' fear of Iran and determine their attitudes to the events in Iraq. The Arab monarchies' fear of Iran's influence in the Gulf has grown after the Islamic revolution. In fact, the establishment of the GCC chiefly came as a response to the threat perceived from Iran. According to Vali Nasr "…the Iranian Islamic revolution changed the Shia–Sunni power equation in Muslim countries 'from Lebanon to India' arousing the traditionally subservient Shia to the alarm of traditionally dominant and very non-revolutionary Sunni… The removal of the Taliban and the Saddam regime has strengthened Iran's position in the Gulf." At the same time, as the GCC countries saw it, the US-led coalition's withdrawal from Iraq arguably opened the door for Iran to influence the political shape of Iraq and added to its strength. Furthermore, Iran's nuclear program pushed the GCC countries toward unity. As Mustafa Alani holds, the GCC states see Iran as an aggressive and expansionist state and are convinced that a nuclear Iran would constitute a major challenge for them.

Thus, it is more than clear that if the right approach is not taken, Iraq will be a fertile ground for regional destabilization through its neighbors' proxy wars and non-state actors. Hence if the GCC countries are concerned about Iraq's stability and want to prevent Iran from dominating the Gulf, they have to help restore Iraq's stability and security. One possible way would be to approach Iraq with a promising project that will produce a win-win situation. This approach nevertheless must not be as Neil Patrick underlines, based on a familiar pattern of symbolic collective actions in one way. Instead it should be designed in two directions (GCC-Iraq) with a comprehensive scope.

Strengthening Ties with the Source of Fear: Closer Cooperation between Iraq and the GCC Countries as a Means to Prevent a Possible Crisis

The direct connection between instability in Iraq and domestic stability of the GCC countries has been a much discussed issue. The issue of Iraqi territorial integrity has been mentioned in several GCC summit meetings declarations. Nevertheless, recent internal political dynamics in Iraq and Al-Maliki's shift toward Iran override existing concerns over Iraq's sovereignty. These developments should persuade the GCC countries to approach Iraq proactively and prevent it from becoming a potentially fertile arena for instability.

A proactive approach to collective security cooperation could offer a win-win scenario for both Iraq and the GCC countries. To avoid further polarization

with Iraq, the GCC countries should invest in a political environment which will facilitate the expansion of the existing "security community" between the GCC states and Iraq. Historically, the collective security concept has offered a remedy for insecurity in states internationally. Therefore, expanding the security framework in the Gulf is a promising investment that will ensure peaceful settlement of existing issues and disputes that pose serious security challenges.

However, this does not mean that the GCC should apply solutions that have worked in other regions. The Gulf countries share a unique tradition, culture and values distinct from other regions that determine perceptions, approaches and the political calculus. Therefore, one must take these factors into consideration when planning for GCC-Iraq cooperation, keeping in mind the existing obstacles for future cooperation projects and carefully designing ways to overcome them in order to make these projects feasible.

Meeting the Obstacles for Proactive Cooperation between the GCC Countries and Iraq

The differences that exist among the GCC countries on the one hand and between these countries and Iraq on the other create roadblocks for potential future cooperation. In particular, there are questions over Iraq's Arab identity due to sectarian factors, which in turn undermine Iraq's ability to resolve issues without foreign support. These work against expanding "security community" (as a proactive project) between the GCC countries and Iraq. In this context for example, in 2011 Ambassador Seyed Husain Mousavian identified the strategic concerns of the GCC countries (some of which are addressed previously) which, in fact, reinforce skeptics' arguments against potential GCC and Iraq cooperation.

The record of the GCC in reaching agreements and resolving disputes offers an interesting picture. So far, the GCC states have easily resolved economic and welfare promotion issues. However, when questions of national sovereignty are involved, the GCC as a platform has not come up with promising solutions. In this context, for example, Louise Fawcett states that GCC "sovereignty was a prize to be nurtured, not one to be sacrificed on the altar of a pan-Arab movement, or one that extolled the virtues of integration."

The conflict resolution experience regarding identity and belonging issues in the region further confirms the difficulties in carrying forward the previously proposed cooperation. The importance of the question of collective identity in the Gulf in this debate, however, arises from the idea for GCC-Iraq expanded security

community itself. Without collective identity, it is almost impossible to establish a collective security community.

Cultural heritage shaped by pride, belonging, honor, tradition and mutual distrust sharpen sectarian and ethnic rifts in the Gulf. When referring to the sectarian rift in the region, for example, Vali Nasr claims that "conflict has been shaped in the modern era according to the rule that being Sunni or Shia defined..." These circumstances according to him define "who has and who has not, who sits at the table and who does not"... Thus, the sectarian rift seriously undermines the collective regional identity (in the context of joint Arab identity) and directly influences any attempts for cooperation between the Sunni-led monarchies of the GCC and Iraq led by a Shia-dominated government.

There are additional obstacles in the way of expanding the security community between GCC and Iraq. Some have argued that without foreign assistance the GCC countries alone cannot resolve hard political questions. In this context, the US has the greatest role for it has helped to promote regional cooperation and thus avoid dead-ends caused by the GCC countries' lack of capacity and will to make cooperation and regional institutions work.

Even though there are serious obstacles to future cooperation between the GCC and Iraq, current regional and global political dynamics urge the GCC countries to consider Iraq as a future partner in the upcoming expansion of the Gulf security community. While the US has played a great role in enabling GCC cooperation, the GCC countries need to start shaping their own security for several reasons instead of waiting for security projects designed by foreign players.

- First, as Christian Koch argues, the security of the GCC cannot be determined solely by external factors.

- Second, there is the possibility that the US will lose interest in playing a significant role in the region as it moves toward energy independence. According to some estimates, the US will be the world's leading oil producer in less than five years and will be exporting oil by 2030. Furthermore, it is very likely that the rise of China and India will dominate the US foreign policy for the foreseeable future.

- Third, US military support has enabled the GCC to facilitate cooperation among the Gulf countries and has helped each of the GCC countries to improve its own military capabilities. Many of the existing disputes that had potential to escalate were resolved peacefully or are being resolved in that manner.

- Fourth, the existence of successful cooperative security arrangements based on a collective security framework makes the prospect of cooperation between the GCC and Iraq promising. It could be argued that the GCC alone is not capable of enhancing security largely because it does not include any of the countries that threaten the Gulf countries. In fact, there can be no Gulf security system without the comprehensive involvement of all parties including the GCC states alongside Iraq, Iran, and Yemen.

Building the platform that could lead toward collective identity as a key element to future cooperation between Iraq and GCC requires an understanding of sectarian issues, the source of divisions. Reaching the goal of an expanded security community project that will incorporate Iraq in the GCC is not easy to achieve under current political circumstances. Therefore the GCC countries need to consider what Ehteshami called "short term requirements" and "long term visions." Both short-term requirements and measures and long-term visions should focus on confronting existing obstacles such as sovereignty issues, common identity building, and ability to resolve security challenges without heavy foreign involvement.

Short–Term Measures as an Indirect Proactive Approach that the GCC Needs to Consider while Approaching Iraq

In order to achieve the requirements for an expanded security community with Iraq, in the short term, the GCC countries need to undertake steps intrinsic to the crisis management process based on the indirect approach. This is important since such approaches focus on activities and measures that will lessen tensions. Considering the current security situation in Iraq and tensions with the GCC, the indirect approach should be considered through introducing a set of proactive measures that focus on addressing issues that challenge both the GCC countries and Iraq.

In this context Cordesman and Burke assert that "…recent years have made it clear that the combination of high population growth, issues in educating and employing native youth, housing, infrastructure pressures, medical services, and other material issues plays a critical role in the security of each GCC state…" These issues, according to them, "are compounded by sectarian differences, tribal pressures, foreign labor issues, and popular perceptions of corruption, responsiveness and integrity of government services, and divisions by region and income group over the quality of government services…"

One potential way to avoid a sectarian rift (a crucial obstacle for a common GCC-Iraq identity) is for the GCC countries to focus on building a Muslim identity and commonalities through which they can tackle economic, environmental, and broader social challenges. Thus, the GCC countries should try to establish a basis for the perception of a common identity. Nonetheless, political narrative and behavior also must be considered in the short run.

Addressing Economic, Environmental, and Broader Social Challenges as an Indirect Proactive Approach toward an Extended Security Community between GCC and Iraq

One possible way of indirectly lessening the tensions with Iraq is to build on best practices that have worked in the past. So far, most of the GCC accomplishments have come from economic sector cooperation. The Joint Economic Agreement of 1981, the introduction of a Customs Union in 2002, the proposal for a common market in 2008, the introduction of a region-wide electricity grid, common transport and infrastructure projects, and even cooperation in the field of peaceful nuclear research are some of the areas that can lead to increased cooperation with Iraq.

The process of globalization and its effects have brought common challenges to GCC countries and Iraq in terms of social instability. Social demands so far have easily fueled religious and ethnic tensions, proving their mutual dependence and capability to create Circulus vitiosus in Iraq and the wider region. Denying the existence of sectarianism will not help. Addressing these challenges with joint mechanisms toward achieving social stability is a good way to proceed indirectly to the core issue of extending the security community. The GCC countries have recognized some of these challenges and have already considered a similar platform during the last summit held in Bahrain in December 2012.

Social unrest both in Iraq and in some GCC countries deriving from economic challenges has shown that the whole region needs an alternative to the oil industry. Therefore, measures and initiatives that will stimulate cross-border projects (GCC-Iraq) focused on finding alternative sources of job creation should be considered by the GCC countries and Iraq. All these programs, however, should have a Muslim rather than sectarian pretext, and focus on the similarities between Sunni and Shia Muslims. This approach will reduce social unrest and eventually inhibit the growth of sectarian rift, which remains a crucial obstacle to a future security community between the GCC countries and Iraq.

Projects focused on improving the food industry are examples that might be considered. Joint projects between GCC countries and Iraq carefully designed

to avoid sectarian and ethnic differences and stimulate application of the latest technology in the food industry will produce new jobs. This indirect approach will help in building social stability. A similar approach to tourism, sports, culture and other industries and small business should be certainly considered. Nevertheless, competitive and educated labor is a must if the GCC countries and Iraq want to implement such projects.

Joint programs and initiatives between the GCC and Iraq that will improve educational standards also are an indirect approach to resolving existing obstacles for cooperation. Among others, the presence of Iranian labor in both the GCC countries and Iraq throws the focus on issues such as unemployment and thus leads to social unrest. In fact, Iranian human resources dominate throughout the region due to their advanced education, professional skills, and training. According to some estimates, around 500,000 Iranian workers and businessmen are living and working in the United Arab Emirates alone. On the other hand, the 2009 UN Arab Knowledge Report points out that there is insufficient technically qualified labor in among Arab graduates and that the education in the Arab world needs a more practical and less theoretical approach. The establishment of joint educational scholarship and exchange programs by the GCC countries and Iraq would enable the education system to produce educated and skillful youth ready to cope with contemporary business requirements.

With these short-term measures, the GCC countries and Iraq could move the debate from sectarian issues toward building a platform for future visions among the upcoming Gulf public elite. Indirectly, such programs should be designed to stress not just national values but also regional cooperation and coexistence. The focus must be on civic education which in turn will marginalize extremist or divisive voices. Promoting shared history and cross-community dialogue during the academic programs could lead one to think beyond national identity to the possibilities of having multiple and plural identities.

Additional short-term mechanisms that sit well with the indirect approach to the political and security tensions, and that the GCC countries and Iraq need to consider, stem from global concerns such as (but not limited to) the negative effects of globalization. We address some of the negative aspects of globalization.

Like the rest of the world, the Gulf region is also facing the effects of the global warming. Projects and programs with Muslim pretexts (not sectarian ones) that will stimulate creative solutions and investments in renewable energy sources, like solar collectors and photovoltaic, can bring together government officials and the local populace. Given that this is another area of common concern, joint projects in this

direction could help in refocusing attention from sectarian unrest toward innovative job creation solutions. In this context, as Antony asserts, the GCC countries have done little to capitalize on a ready source of skilled labor from a fellow Gulf country that could promote the two sides' shared commercial interests.

Another issue of globalization that seriously affects employment and social rights and thus social stability comes from the corporate world's pursuit of greater profit. Today it is more than clear that business is a profound driver of employment, wealth creation, and thus a driving force of social stability. However, it is also true that business holds the potential to produce negative impacts on the society. In this context, Friedman's argument from 1970, that "there is one and only one social responsibility of business – to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game …" is still valuable. Combined with the increased migration to the region (as an effect of globalization) cheap outside labor creates unintended social frustration among the GCC and Iraq populace. On the one side, the private sector is crucial for wealth and stability, while, on the other side, its practice (although by law) is oriented toward higher profit which in the ends leads to a race for cheaper labor. This labor force usually come from outside the region and thus affects the economic opportunities available for the GCC and Iraq populations, creating social unrest. "The usual suspects" in the people's eyes are the GCC and Iraq governments.

Therefore, in order to lessen the negative effects of globalization, the GCC countries and Iraq should consider projects to encourage corporate social responsibility among local businesses and industries. Measures that will set higher standards for foreign workers and give priority to GCC and Iraq labor vs. foreign labor must be implemented. As Cordesman and Burke argue, "Such efforts can also be joined to the use of GCC-wide identity cards to help ensure the stability of foreign workers by protecting them, managing visas, and tracking every entry, departure, and change in job status." In the long run, this should cement the path toward building a common GCC-Iraq identity – an important enabler to the envisioned security community.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) can play a significant role in the extended security community building process between the GCC countries and Iraq. Although there are different views, and sometimes suspicions, about the role that CSOs play in the Arab world, it has been seen that CSOs usually are helpful players when governments need alternatives.

Civil society and opposition activists should encourage Islamist groups to emphasize the Muslim identity and commonalities and focus on unifying issues

like corruption, socioeconomic needs, and health policy. Supporting the local organizations will relieve the regimes from part of their obligations, produce a decrease in unemployment rates, and reduce social resentment. These organizations can organize different educational courses, persuade violent actors to adopt peaceful alternatives, and lessen the pressure from destructive forces on Iraq and some of the GCC governments. They can also promote self-employment skills and entrepreneurship. Supported by the joint Iraqi-GCC government programs, international foundations, or local and regional charitable organizations, the CSOs can actually contribute to fostering social stability. Their role in reducing sectarian tensions will be crucial by giving them a space to promote inclusive and non-sectarian national identities.

The US can support most of these initiatives by sharing best practices. These efforts will also benefit the US which is often seen in the region as a Sunni protector only. A US engagement that would encourage the political dialogue in Bahrain would be a good start.

Changing the Political Narrative and Behavior both inside the GCC Countries and Iraq and between GCC Countries and Iraq as a Short-Term Measure

Besides economic measures, the behavior of public figures plays an important role in the Gulf. This more or less derives from the intrinsic and unique culture of the region. Therefore, public figures of the GCC countries must avoid any statements that will inflame tensions with Iraq, or provide the arguments for a turn toward Iran. In this context, measures that will reduce suspicions among Iraqi officials about GCC support for violent Sunni opposition groups in Iraq are more than welcome. Furthermore political narrative must be carefully designed with other partner nations because it can aggravate the mistrust among the Gulf players (an example of this being the diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks. According to this source, some GCC leaders pushed the US to attack Iran). Instead, narrative that will promote mutual trust and support meaningful political, economic, social and educational reforms and lead toward a unified GCC including Iraq is what is needed (see, for example, the statement of Prince Saud Al Faisal in 2004).

The trust of the people in the institutions must be increased. For example, quotas for minorities in public administration and security forces will increase the trust in the governments in both GCC countries and Iraq. For example in Iraq, this will deter possible attacks on patrols, if they belong to different ethnic or religious groups.

Rule of law has to be guaranteed to everyone in order to prevent the feeling of "first and second class" citizens and to ensure that religious practices are consistent with the requirements for public order. Governments on both sides must carefully design their narrative and avoid fueling sectarian tensions, instead of the common practice of fueling pride with narrow ethnic narratives.

In short, both the GCC countries and Iraq need to work toward building a new vision about a common Muslim identity that would be jointly created. For this both sides need to consider an indirect approach first and accept structural reforms that will enable governments on both sides to effectively address existing economic, environmental, and broader social challenges as the short term measures and pre-requisites for long-term common identity building leading to the goal of prosperity. Although these and other short-term measures are crucial components that the GCC countries must consider for an effective crisis management approach toward Iraq, given the complex environment in the region these alone will not be enough.

Long-Term Plans for Future GCC-Iraq Relations

The GCC must consider a broad-based long-term approach designed to establish itself as a driving force capable of shaping the Gulf security community. Based on principles of collective security, the GCC must create an environment to include Iraq as a valuable partner and member state. In return, Iraq should also reconsider its position and offer a hand of cooperation. In this context, projects that guarantee long term economic development, including stable supplies of oil and a steady oil price, would be helpful.

Much has been written lately about the future evolution of the GCC. Trying to propose solutions for the existing security challenges that face the GCC countries, including Iraq and an aggressive Iran, Pollack has compared the GCC with several similar organizations. According to his calculus, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) model is a good example for the development of GCC-Iraq relations in the long term. Others have also argued for a change in the GCC toward co-opting Iraq and other regional players. Some have even come with the concrete initiatives. According to Mousavian, "…. A Persian Gulf Security and Cooperation Organization" initiative should be based on the principles such as: impossibility of any change in existing borders, respecting the integrity of other members and noninterference in the internal affairs of member states…"

Regardless of the fact that there are also other good proposals that could serve as a basis for the future development of GCC-Iraq relations, one thing worth mentioning is that all of these proposals also count on US and Western support.

Tradition, and political and security dynamics dictate that in order for these ideas, concepts, and efforts to succeed, all players must agree and participate. For example, CSCE succeeded because NATO and the Warsaw Pact, as well as virtually all the neutral states of Europe, were able to discuss their security concerns. Thus the US, the West, and other major players, must be encouraged by the international community to participate and support these processes and persuade Iraq to cooperate with the GCC.

This is a win-win scenario that both GCC and Iraq must pursue. The GCC with Iraq as a member could proceed toward the establishment of a wider regional cooperation system to promote political, security, economic, cultural, social, and military cooperation among regional states. Such a system is of vital importance for complete confidence building which will eventually yield an alternative to Iran's unilateral regional ambitions. An organization capable of overcoming mutual differences and stand together will reduce the possibilities of interference by foreign powers in the region and will be a guarantee for the establishment of sustainable peace, stability, and security. Besides encouraging unity among Arabs in the region, it will strengthen relations among nations and thus promote sustainable development in the region.

The GCC does not have an alternative when it comes to Iraq. As we have explained, if not approached by the GCC countries it is very likely that Iraq will move toward a dictatorship aligned to aggressive Iran. In this context, it is clear that GCC does not have the military capabilities or other hard tools of security projection that can influence the calculus of their larger and more powerful neighbors. Therefore, instead of being a US protégé, the GCC must initiate the process of taking ownership of regional security and shape it. The Prime Minister of Qatar, Hamad Al-Thani has stressed that: "The security of the Gulf will remain part of the responsibility of the sons of the Gulf; it depends basically on building mutual confidence among the Gulf countries and their self-reliance."

This must definitely start with an approach toward Iraq based on short-term measures and mechanisms. If the GCC and its western allies fail to accomplish this goal, it is very likely that instability will dim the bright future of the region. Moreover, if the process of bringing Iraq into the GCC bloc fails in the coming years, the GCC will prove its incompetence and will confirm the negative attitude toward this organization's role in the region.

Conclusion

Iraq is facing serious security challenges after the withdrawal of the US and coalition forces. While the federal government is struggling to establish Iraq as a functioning democracy, its complex sectarian, ethnic and social dynamics hold the potential to disturb the fragile peace in the Gulf. At the same time, regional dynamics are a cause of concern too. Sectarian violence in post-conflict Iraq has intensified the Sunni-Shia rift across the GCC countries. Iraq's internal struggle over power sharing on the one hand and Syria's internal conflict and allegations about Iraqis and regional Sunnis' support of the Syrian opposition on the other have pushed Al-Maliki to tighten his grip on power. At the same time, Iran's regional ambitions amidst a regional balance of power vacuum have caused legitimate concerns among the GCC monarchies.

If the GCC does not come up with proposals, Iraq's and the entire region's stability will be unpredictable. Such a scenario may push Iraq toward civil war or turn it into a dictatorship aligned with an aggressive Iran. If the GCC countries want to neutralize the immediate threat they perceive from Iran or an unstable Iraq, they need to approach Iraq and offer cooperation. This will enable the GCC countries to shape the Gulf's security and establish a bonafide platform for solving all disputes with Iran. Given the complex ethnic and sectarian disputes and regional and global (in terms of Arab Spring) influences, the GCC countries should focus on short-term engagements and long-term plans. Common challenges will be best solved with an indirect approach focusing on improving social stability and establishing a platform for further cooperation that will lessen existing tensions and mistrust. The final goal of these efforts must be to grant Iraq full GCC membership. Nevertheless, if the GCC countries want to achieve an effective collective security approach, they must act immediately.

5

GCC and Post-War Iraq Relations: Issues of Stability and Conflicting Interests

Abderraouf El Ouazzani Taibi

Recommendations for GCC Policymakers:

- Define a new perception of sustainable stability and common security focused at the domestic level on the democratization process and addressing the socio-economic issues.
- GCC must implement an effective supranational executive structure that will allow the setup of a real common security policy.
- GCC countries should act with Iraq on a multilateral basis, dealing with common priorities rather than bilateral relations and considering all the current changes that affect the Gulf region.

Recommendations for Iraqi Policymakers:

- Iraq should be more involved in the process of a deliberative democracy by involving all components of Iraqi society.

- Iraq should strengthen balanced relations with GCC and Iran, keeping in mind the multi-sectarian aspect of the Iraqi society (i.e., will call continuously for a real reconciliation between Sunnis and Shiites).

- Iraq must prevent all external interference in domestic policy affairs and try to build up relations with the GCC countries based on mutual respect of sovereignty, national integrity, and stability.

Introduction

More than a decade after the Third Gulf War, we can definitely confirm that politics, security and economy in the Gulf region have had their highs and lows. With the accentuation of sectarian and ethnic divisions in Iraq during the last decade and the failure of the current policies in Baghdad, a new explosion of violence cannot be ruled out, especially as the tensions and power struggle between various external forces such as USA, Iran, the Sunni Gulf monarchies and Turkey encourage divergent tendencies. Further, the effects of the Arab Spring seen in the political changes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, civilian protest in Bahrain, and the crisis in Syria have triggered political competition between various world and regional powers, such as the US, EU, Russia, China, and Iran making the political situation in the region more complicated.

In addition, a stable situation in Iraq does not seem achievable in the near future. The US leaves behind a fragile and divided country wracked by sectarian and ethnic issues.[1] Polarization within Iraq will be exacerbated by the enmity that will intensify between Shiites and Sunnis in the region.

Iraq has been at the center of international security policy debates over the past two decades. However, after the Iraq War in 2003, US interest in the region weakened and the security situation in the country deteriorated dramatically, leading to Iraq losing its importance in the international security debates regarding the evolution of the political situation in the Gulf region and the world.[2] Besides, after the withdrawal of the US occupation troops and the US refocusing on Afghanistan policy, security debates regarding the Gulf region became more about the threat from Iran (i.e., Shiite expansion, nuclear program) and the effects of the Arab Spring.

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1. Daniel Serwer and Sam Parker, "Iraq after the Surge: Options and Questions," United States Institute of Peace, USIPeace Briefing, April 2008.

2. Adnan Jasim BuMetea, "Political Communication in the Arabian Gulf Countries," Xlibris 2013, Scribd edition; available at: http://www.scribd.com/doc/157687404/Political-Communication-in-the-Arabian-Gulf-Countries.

Although Iraq is no longer at the center of the security debate in the Gulf region, the instability in this country continues to be a major issue of concern in the global political arena. All the GCC countries are more vigilant, especially considering the growing influence of Iran, the military conflict in Syria, the unrest in Bahrain, the dramatic escalation of civilian uprising in Iraq that began in December 2012 when the Finance Minister Rafia Al-Issawi's staff was arrested, as well as the interference (direct and/or indirect) of major international powers in the region. However, this vigilance must not lead to the establishment of a purely security solution, but rather should lead the GCC countries to reflect on the political and social reforms that will mitigate the current tensions and contribute to alleviating some of the social tensions. Such an approach would build on the local and global levels, a trusted society based on the universal values of justice, freedom and dignity.

This chapter will examine the changes in post-war Iraq and the impact of the Arab uprisings, the GCC's perceptions of the region, and the likely direction of GCC and post-war Iraq relations. It will look at the key aspects that have characterized relationships between the GCC countries and post-war Iraq during the last 10 years and the strategy that could potentially shape this relationship in light of current changes and those expected in the future.

It seems appropriate to start with an analysis of the situation in Iraq and GCC countries during the last decade. We will present a description and an analysis of the failure of US policies in Iraq and their local/regional aftermath. This will lead us to discuss the growing influence of Iran in the region versus a weakening US role, mainly taking into account the high cost of the war in Iraq and the financial crisis plaguing the country. Subsequently, we will shed some light on post-war Iraq and GCC relations against the backdrop of the current situation in Iraq, the Arab Spring's effects on the region (with a special focus on the Syrian crisis), and the current regional/international power struggles and national/regional stability.

Local Effects of the Iraq War

Despite the persistent confusion among observers over the true reasons for the US intervention in Iraq, from an American viewpoint, the results are mainly negative at various levels. The human and financial costs of the intervention in Iraq were huge for American society. More than 1.5 million troops were sent to Iraq, 4,488 were killed and 32,225 wounded, and the financial cost of the war exceeded $800 billion.[3]

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3. Jordan Weissmann, "An $800 Billion War: The Immense Cost of Invading Iraq, in Charts," *Atlantic,* March 22, 2013, available at: http://www.theatlantic.com/

At the same time, the tenth anniversary of the fall of Saddam Hussein should have been a joyous occasion for the Iraqi people. Unfortunately, the current situation is far from being satisfactory.

On the political level, tensions between Sunnis and Shiites have worsened, and the conflict between the Kurds and Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki will only aggravate the situation further. Moreover, corruption is widespread in all areas, and stability and security are far from being restored.

Just as history will judge harshly the action of former US President George W. Bush, it will also blame President Barack Obama for his policies in Iraq and Syria. Indeed, Obama's Syria policy raises many questions, bearing in mind the lack of direct support of the United States (and of all western countries) to the revolt of the Syrian people. This passive policy strengthens the difference in the power struggle between the resistance groups and the army of Al-Assad regime which resorted to the use of chemical weapons, even if at a low level (according to the White House).[4]

While the US responsibility for the instability in Iraq is clear, the situation has been aggravated by the crisis in Syria, the strengthening of Iran in the region, and various security and stability issues caused by the Arab Spring events as well as the nature of the region's political regimes.

Uncertainty and Threats Faced by the Political System

Ten years after the beginning of the war in Iraq, the situation is alarming with the country completely disfigured by war. Iraq today clearly illustrates that it needs more than elections and a constitution to establish a democracy. The new political system oriented towards pluralism threatens to succumb to the growing domestic polarization. There were signs that a democratic political process could be established; however, there are many substantive issues impeding the implementation of such process. These issues are many and varied including sectarian violence, economic and social problems, external interference issues, and the effects of the Arab Spring. This chapter will address some of these points as part of the overall discussion on the GCC-post-war Iraq relationship.

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business/archive/2013/03/an-800-billion-war-the-immense-cost-of-invading-iraq-in-charts/274290/.

4.   CBS News, "White House: Obama's 'Red Line' on Syria Chemical Weapons Not Crossed," April 26, 2013, available at: http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-505263_162-57581556/white-house-obamas-red-line-on-syria-chemical-weapons-not-crossed/.

At the sectarian and ethnic levels, Iraq today is a country completely divided between Shia, Sunni, and Kurds. With the withdrawal of the US armed forces, Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki's policy shows signs of a new dictatorship trying to centralize power to the maximum and eliminating the main Sunni political rivals (e.g., the Sunni Vice President Tareq Al-Hashemi). In addition, there are many conflicts with the autonomous Kurdish region mainly on the issues of borders and oil. However, the Kurds also feel threatened by the concentration of power with Al-Maliki. Even though they participated positively in the construction of a central government; they have simultaneously made many efforts to strengthen their autonomy with the support of the United States. Their relations with Al-Maliki deteriorated significantly and the disputes aggravated because the Iraqi Kurds and Arabs cannot, so far, either agrees on the extent of the Kurdish autonomy or the territorial boundaries of autonomous Kurdistan. The current situation in Iraq is especially worrisome because a similar polarization as continues to escalate tensions in Mesopotamia could occur at the regional level. Iraq with its sectarian and ethnic heterogeneity presents an image of what the Gulf region might be in the future as far as internal stability is concerned. The country is no longer a real power in the region as it threatens to become the plaything of external powers.

Although Al-Maliki tries to maintain a political balance between Tehran and Washington, the situation with the neighboring countries remains very tense. Iraq is already tested today by the "Cold War" between Iran and Saudi Arabia. This cleavage has a geopolitical context plus the sectarian element of an Iranian-Arab rivalry. In the context of the Arab Spring, such sectarian polarization has rarely been seen so far on an interstate level, and the social cohesion in the Gulf region is increasingly far from these forms and/or characteristics of sectarian polarization.

However, Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Gulf monarchies like Qatar are trying to tip the regional power balance in their favor as a result of the Arab upheaval. In Egypt and Tunisia, Sunni conservative actors such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists have gained influence. Bahrain, meanwhile, witnessed military intervention by the Peninsula Shield in order to prevent external military aggression and maintain internal political and social stability. In Syria, the competition between Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey on the one side (who are committed to support the Syrian opposition) and Iran and Russia that support the al-Assad regime on the other has never been so clear.

Prime Minister Al-Maliki is clearly opposed to the overthrow of President Bashar Al-Assad as a Sunni government in Syria would never be in the interest of the Iraqi Shiites. This attitude confirms the view of the Gulf monarchies that

Al-Maliki is a representative of Iran's interests. The reintegration of Iraq in Arab politics is extremely difficult against this background. The summit of the Arab League in March 2012, organized in Baghdad, may well be considered a success for Al-Maliki, but the low representation of Sunni Gulf monarchies and the refusal of Saudi Arabia to open an embassy in Baghdad indicates their distrust vis-à-vis the Shii-dominated government in Iraq.

The polarization inside Iraq and the regional polarization have recently become very critical, and further complicate the situation in Iraq in terms of foreign and domestic policy. Growing tensions between Iraq and its Sunni neighbors could push the Gulf States to encourage the efforts for Sunnis' autonomy in Iraq. In case of a further escalation of the situation in Syria, it is even conceivable that Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey will work to overthrow Al-Maliki thereby increasing the chances of an end – also sought by Ankara – to the Assad regime. There are many signs of correlation of the crises in Syria and Iraq. This is also why Al-Maliki and large parts of Iraqi Shiites will rely more on Iran in the future.

The danger of a new explosion of sectarian violence in Iraq increases in this context. The potential for more violence is much higher than a few years ago because Iraq's neighbors are more heavily involved in the current disputes and the American support for stability is missing. The fear of being caught in a civil war in Iraq could have a moderating influence on the neighbors. However, Saudi Arabia, for example, should always consider the impact that its Iraq policy will have on its own Shiite minority living in regions of oil transit.

The ethnic cleavage between the Arabs and Kurds is less virulent for the moment in the context of the sectarian polarization currently marking the region. The Kurdish issue could, however, also erupt depending on the escalation of the situation in Syria. The Syrian National Council is not supporting the claim of the Syrian Kurds for autonomy and that is why the Kurdish parties have kept their distance from the Syrian National Council. But if there is a real emancipation of the Iraqi Kurds, the Kurdish issue could also gain a new momentum in neighboring Turkey and then in the whole region. The impact of such developments on the sectarian polarization in the region - especially in Iraq - is hardly predictable today. The conditions are now too complex and too volatile.

Regional Aftermath

Iran's Regional Influence

At the regional level, since the US intervention in March 2003, observers are unanimous that Iran is the big winner of the war in Iraq. Indeed, the growing Iranian influence is seen from three main perspectives: ideological, sectarian, and nuclear threat. The ideological difference obviously comes from the 1979 revolution in Iran which introduced a revolutionary Shiite Islam, one of the main factors that complicated Iran-GCC relations.

Iran does not declare officially the exportation of the revolution; it tries to extend its influence areas through its allies who can ensure its interest in the long term in the region. Iranian support to Hamas is clear from former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's speeches in which he has pointed out many times that Iran will support Hamas until the collapse of Israel.[5] This support was clearly significant and crucial too in the last war in Gaza between Hamas and Israel. Moreover, since 9/11 the Gulf countries, despite their support to Palestinian Islamist movements, have adopted a moderate attitude against Israel, leaving the field open for Iran's influence.[6]

The Iranian support for these groups constitutes another argument for its influence in the region. On the other hand, the Iranian support to Hizbollah in Lebanon, which is involved in the Syrian conflict, shows the magnitude of the rising Shiite influence and how it could be a real indirect threat to the GCC countries.

At the sectarian level, the nature of the tensions in Bahrain and Yemen shows that they are the result of the Iranian influence and the rise of the Shia in the region.

Finally, the Iranian nuclear program is the third source of concern for all GCC countries despite Iran's insistence that it is a civil nuclear program. The GCC countries have not hesitated to declare their intention to develop their own nuclear programs under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).[7] It is possible to see this stance of the GCC countries as an attempt to balance Iran's nuclear program, even though this has not been expressed directly.

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5. "Iran's Influence in Palestine Hamas Politics Essay," available at: UKEssays.com: http://www.ukessays.com/essays/politics/irans-influence-in-palestine-hamas-politics-essay.php#ftn.

6. Yoel Guzansky, "Israel's Relations with the Arab Gulf States: Between Iran and the Arab Spring," *Politique étrangère* 77, no. 4 (Winter 2012).

7. Laura El-Katiri, "The GCC and the Nuclear Question," Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, *Oxford Energy Comment,* December 2012.

Iranian Presence in Iraq: A Threat to the Gulf Region's Stability?

Beyond the influence aspect, today Iran has a real presence in the Iraqi political system. First of all, the main objective of Iran is to prevent Iraq from becoming a source of threat in the future. This goal derives from the trauma caused by the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988 and also all the periods of tensions that characterized the bilateral relationship between the two countries after the creation of the Iraqi state in the 1920s. However, Tehran has tried to transform its traditional enemy into a partner, and if possible an ally. Thus, through Iraq, Iran can increase its influence in the Arab world, including the Gulf region. This would at the same time strengthen the Shiite positions in the region and deal with the Sunni axis that Saudi Arabia has tried to consolidate.

In this context, the highlight is that a large number of Shiite leaders, who are now in power in Iraq, lived a long time in exile in Iran and established close ties with Iranian political and religious leaders. Since 2003, Tehran has also been very active in Iraq and its political influence has increased despite the American presence.[8] Beyond the political and religious dimensions, Tehran has also focused on the economy. Through its policy, the Islamic Republic has today, as never before, many levers of influence. Despite the sanctions imposed by the West, the Iranian public and private sectors are increasingly present in Iraq. Bilateral trade reached $10 billion in 2010 and could double in the future, according to Tehran, which would make the Islamic Republic the most important economic partner of Baghdad.[9] Besides, extensive cooperation has developed between the two countries in many areas including transport, electricity, industry, reconstruction assistance, education, environment, and justice).

The security issue remains a central point in the Iranian policy toward Iraq. Neighboring countries are concerned about the installation of pro-Iranian regimes, which is quite the case with the current prime minister, Al-Maliki. On the other hand, the Arab Spring, the socio-economic situation, and the regional political context have prevented Iran from having a total influence on the country. The vigilance of the Sunni and Kurdish communities, and support from the GCC countries, may help to prevent the establishment of a new dictatorship representing only one part of the Iraqi people and serving the interests of external powers.

8.　Hussein D. Hassan, "Iran: Profile of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad," *CRS Report for Congress,* July 9, 2008, available from: http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS22569.pdf.

9.　Mohammad-Reza Djalili and Thierry Kellner, *Histoire de l'Iran contemporain* (Paris: Découverte, 2010).

Post-war Iraq and Effects on the GCC: Domestic Instability Threat

Considering the Iranian threat, the GCC countries favored multilateral actions and dialogue. Some countries, such as UAE, Qatar and Oman, have developed their economic relationship with Iraq, reflecting a pragmatic approach in their foreign policies.[10]

As mentioned previously, the main concern of the GCC was that the Iraq war could become the source of a large imbalance in power between Iraq and Iran. The war could significantly weaken Iraq and make Iran a major regional player. This imbalance came into being following the takeover of power by pro-Iran Shiite groups, which was seen as a threat to the internal stability of the GCC countries.[11] In addition, the nature of tension in Bahrain was also evidence of the rising influence of Shiites versus Sunnis, a development that could generate potential sectarian conflicts in the region.[12]

The example of Bahrain clearly illustrates the connection between the war in Iraq and the issue of stability in the GCC countries, as well as the position held by these countries towards Iraq as a sovereign and independent Arab country. Moreover, this sense of insecurity generated by the US invasion of Iraq in the major Gulf countries has pushed the GCC countries to reconsider the issue of their security on the basis of a new structure of regional countries rather than the US alone.[13] Thus, the search for dialog and consensus between the states of the region, particularly the GCC countries has become more important. In addition, beyond the partnership with the US, the GCC began taking its own initiatives. The military intervention in Bahrain underlines this change of attitude. Another important example is the fact that the GCC has not agreed to integrate Iraq as a member despite US insistence.[14] In these new circumstances, the GCC states have ended up with different perceptions of their security, which have increased further with the global financial crisis (that deeply affected the US) and the effects of the Arab Spring.

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10.   Mehran Kamrava, "The Arab Spring and the Saudi-Led Counterrevolution," *Orbis* 46, no. 1 (Winter 2012).

11.   Ted Galen Carpenter and Malou Innocent, "The Iraq War and Iranian Power," *Survival* 49, no. 4 (Winter 2007–08).

12.   Jane Kinninmont, *Bahrain*: *Beyond the Impasse* (London: Chatham House, 2012).

13.   Thomas Mattair, "Mutual Threat Perceptions in the Arab/Persian Gulf: GCC Perceptions," *Middle East Policy* 14, no. 2 (Summer 2007).

14.   Christian Koch, "The GCC as a Regional Security Organization," *KAS International Reports,* November 2010.

Even though the Arab Spring has lost its intensity and does not threaten the stability of the GCC countries anymore, these countries still face a series of challenges related to socio-economic and human rights situations that need to be resolved as they could become more controversial and critical in the future. Solutions mainly based on the use of force and repression cannot be an effective solution in the long term. The issues that are at the root of these protests should be answered comprehensively, with real political reforms, including a debate between the various sections of society.

On the other hand, if we look closely at the behavior of the Western countries vis à vis the former leaders in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, the GCC countries would realize that they have to rely on their own initiatives as well as implement real reforms that can strengthen their social and political cohesion. Such an approach would ultimately enable these countries to meet all the challenges and deal with internal/external threats of any kind. Otherwise, against the backdrop of instability in Iraq and geopolitical changes in the region, if political reforms are not implemented, the GCC countries will remain fragile.

GCC and Post-War Iraq

The Dilemma of Security Issues

As described earlier, the perception of uncertainty and instability in the GCC countries was mainly driven by the failure of the US politics in Iraq, the decline of the US role in the Gulf region, the rising Iranian influence, and the effects of the Arab Spring that generated various political changes in the Arab world. This perception led the GCC countries to realize that they must rely on their own individual and organizational potential, and may have led them to a knee-jerk protective response that could end up backfiring in the long term.

Beyond the economic aspect, the local and regional policies adopted by the GCC countries often differ. However, it is important to consider first the points that constitute their real concerns and priorities at the organizational level (i.e., stability and security).

We will discuss the security approach currently adopted by the GCC countries and the one that should be considered in view of the GCC-post-war Iraq relations and the current regional geopolitical changes.

Thus, strictly from the security point of view, can we consider the GCC as a united and homogeneous security community? What is the impact of current

regional and international changes on the cohesion of the GCC countries in their common policy? Is there a common regional security policy that would permit a single policy towards Iraq? Are there some central questions to be addressed especially given the critical role that the Gulf region plays in the current major issues of regional and international security?

Redefining the Security Approach: From Stability to Security

Addressing the question of security community in a complex and changing regional political context leads us to consider the specific characteristics of each country within the GCC organization. As the size, power, and nature of the society in each GCC country are different, their way of facing any challenge may be very different too. The security approach is limited only to collective military force and does not extend to a homogeneous security community. Further, the Peninsula Shield Force, established in December 1986 for a collective self-defense capability, was confronted in 1990 with its first real challenge when Iraqi forces attacked and occupied Kuwait – the ineffectiveness of the force became immediately apparent.

The inability of the GCC states to collectively deter the Iraqi aggression and the need to rely on Western forces for their own defense raised serious questions that continue to be present even today, mainly with the current changing regional political context (i.e., change in nature and origin of threat). What became clear was that each member state had a different conception of how a joint military force should be structured and the purpose it should serve. The different perceptions about the utility of Peninsula Shield led to a growing hesitancy on behalf of the smaller GCC states about a possible revamping of the force and its expansion (the constant fear was that Saudi Arabia would take full control of these military forces).

Beyond the different military arrangements and political commitment for common defense that has been suggested between the GCC countries, each state continues to maintain full control over its security and defense policy and acts almost exclusively according to its national interests and strategy. The hope that the agreement could one day lead to a unified defense policy with a unified central command therefore remains a distant objective.[15]

With the exception of the last intervention in Bahrain, the GCC countries have chosen to develop a bilateral rather than multilateral external policy, which

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15.   For the GCC Joint Defense Agreement, see the GCC official website: http://www.gcc-sg. org/. Cf. also, Abdullah Al-Shayeji, "GCC Leaders Must Look to Strengthen Security, Harness GCC's Soft Power," *Gulf News,* December 14, 2009.

is a real constraint preventing the GCC from becoming an organization with a common security policy.[16]

Besides, if we assume a multiplication of conflicts simultaneously affecting different GCC countries, it seems unrealistic that Peninsula Shield Force can deal with the challenge, keeping in mind that the involvement of external forces is not viewed positively in the current regional political context. This observation then leads to the priority issue of ensuring stability and security: this could be done either by implementing deeper political reforms or by a reactive security response without any consideration of prospective reforms. In the long run, the latter option is a greater threat than any external danger facing the GCC countries.

Moreover, Abdulghaffar et al. (2013) state that the five years that have passed since the GCC common market declaration in 2008 have demonstrated that the GCC as a single market has not been effective and that this is a result of lacunae in the the bloc's institutional setup. In short, the only institutional body that wields substantial power, the Supreme Council, is not designed for the day-to-day of enforcement of a single market, while the bodies that are better equipped lack the power.[17]

However, beyond the common military forces, the GCC countries are likely to consider the security issue in the framework of political reforms that will mitigate external interference, respond constructively to the domestic demands, and consolidate the cohesion among themselves beyond the mere aspect of military cooperation. In this sense, the Arab Spring can be seen as an opportunity and not a threat within a global sustainable security approach.

Dynamic Partnership

It seems appropriate in the context of the previously mentioned definition of the security issue to discuss the type of relationship that could be developed between the GCC and post-war Iraq. Beyond bilateral economic exchange, which does not directly address the problems that threaten their stability (i.e., ethnic and sectarian issues, social justice, political and individual liberties, etc.), it is imperative for these countries to set up a real common policy, taking into account national challenges

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16. Helle Malmvig, "An Unlikely Match or a Marriage in the Making? EU-GCC Relations in a Changing Security Environment," *Danish Institute for International Studies* (DIIS) Brief, November 2006.

17. Mahmood Abdulghaffar, Omar Al-Ubaydli, and Omar Mahmood, "The Malfunctioning of the Gulf Cooperation Council Single Market: Features, Causes and Remedies," *Middle Eastern Finance and Economics* 19 (2013).

and regional realities. This relationship requires an open dialog between the GCC countries and all components of Iraqi political society.

At the policymaker level, the dialogue with Iraqi politicians should be continuous with an emphasis on issues of common interest, starting with the economic and national political stability. In this sense, even if Iraq is not invited to join the GCC, the relationship could be seen in the context of a multilateral partnership involving Iraq and the GCC as an organization to deal with common priorities: national integrity and stability, respect of sovereignty, preventing external interference, developing economic exchange, and taking into account the multi-sectarian aspect of the Iraqi society.

The sectarian issue is a source of confusion and domestic instability in Iraq (and in some GCC countries such as Bahrain), and it is important that the GCC countries try to strengthen the fragile political balance between different components of the Iraqi political forces by supporting the Sunni community and recognizing some Shiite voices which oppose Iranian interference and call for a real reconciliation between Sunni and Shia.[18] On the other hand, we must not overlook the big role of civil society, especially in the context of the Arab Spring, which calls for a governance system based on real economic and social justice, separation of powers, and protection of individual and collective liberties. The current uprising in Iraq that started in December 2012 could be considered as a good element that reflects this vision.

Supranational Authority

The competition between Iran and the Saudi Arabia in the Gulf region has heightened after the weakening of Iraq and Egypt. Given the interdependence of the political situation in the Gulf countries, the question is how long before the GCC countries are able to set up a common policy to reduce Iranian influence, mitigate the risk of explosions in Iraq, and execute a strategic policy in the region.

As mentioned, the main constraints are the lack of a supranational authority which would provide the organization with political independence and the lack of any kind of authority that can demand the compliance of member states on any matter.[19] The supranational authority could be a solution not only for the military security dilemma, but could enable the GCC countries to respect their

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18. Speech by Muqtada Al-Sadr, leader of the Sadrist Movement, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M244Hz-AuEM.

19. Robert Copper, "Understanding Regional Integration in the GCC," *e-International Relations,* July 8, 2013.

commitment, and implement a harmonious policy at the regional level and vis-à-vis Iraq in particular.

Arab Spring: An Opportunity or Threat?

The Arab uprisings have left the region torn with the uncertainty of reforms, the difficult task of establishing new political systems, the resilience of authoritarian structures, and persistence of violence. They also showed that political legitimacy is linked to popular will as well as the ability of governments to allow people to live prosperously and with dignity.

This new and still evolving situation has created several unintended consequences. In addition to opening old wounds and rekindling old rivalries, these protest movements have revived the regional power games, especially between Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, and have forced the external powers, such as the US, Russia and China to rethink their approach to the region. The future may likely throw up some surprises, but we can at least expect a deep and long period of instability while the new elites try to negotiate a new social contract and establish a new policy.

It is difficult for those who study the region to interpret recent events because of their complex and dynamic nature. To understand these events better, three questions are posed to examine the GCC and post-war Iraq relations against the backdrop of previously mentioned issues and in the framework of the evolving regional political order:

- What has changed and what has not changed?
- What factors or trends remain uncertain or ambiguous?
- Is the Arab Spring a threat or an opportunity for countries in the region and for GCC-post-war Iraq relations?

Change vs. Continuity

For the first time in the history of the Arab world, the region began a true national self-determination process in which people had a role in defining its political reality. This major historical evolution has five main features:

- The birth of the modern Arab citizen
- The birth of a genuine political process
- The draft of a new social contract

- The establishment of accountability mechanisms and political legitimacy
- The redefinition of the relationship between civil and military authorities

For the first time in the Arab world, political and social trends converged and led gradually to states that reflected the desire of the majority while protecting the rights of minorities.

During this remarkable period in the history of the Arab world in general and of North Africa in particular, the population of the region have undertaken a genuine process of national self-determination for the first time. Dictatorship and corruption led to the emergence of new actors on the political scene. But the Arab Spring is still a very multi-faceted event throughout the region; the popular uprisings had the ability to change the internal balance of power in both the old and new political systems.

Facing the developments of the Arab Spring, the GCC countries' leaders took a much more homogeneous attitude than the heritage and institutional differences may suggest, considering the Arab Spring mainly as a threat. With the exception of Qatar, all Gulf leaders have adopted a policy of repression and resistance to the democratic aspirations of people. At the same time, the Iraqi government of Nouri Al-Maliki has chosen the same path by forcefully repressing the civilian protesters, which has encouraged a radicalization in their claims, as we have seen since April 2013.

As noted earlier, the security approach that was adopted is very limited and does not integrate a comprehensive view of wide-ranging reforms in the long term. The use of force may succeed in stopping the protests and their geographical progression in the short term, but will not be a long term solution. Indeed, the challenge is deep-rooted and the answers cannot be found only in repression or buying social peace by the massive injection of money. There is a real need for a redefinition of the current social contract and a new role for institutions. If the requests seem passive now, they could be more radical in the future. In addition, repression only increases the tension and suspicion in GCC-post-war Iraq relations and that significantly reduces the possibility of any constructive dialogue and partnership.

The Case of Bahrain: Continuing Uncertainty

The situation in Bahrain is far from being calm and normal though the authorities are monitoring events. In addition, the transformation of civilian popular protests into a sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shia, and the systematic rivalry between the two great powers of the region Iran and Saudi Arabia, leaves the country and region facing a very uncertain future.

The GCC military intervention in Bahrain was justified because of its security and its GCC membership. But the GCC countries need to understand that until these problems are resolved comprehensively, they will return in other forms and intensities, and the use of force alone will not mitigate the situation. Indeed, the Syrian crisis is a living example of the radicalization of civilian revolt and its evolution into a dramatic situation.

Furthermore, given the sectarian nature of the conflict and its implications with respect to Iraq (and given the nature of the pro-Iranian regime in Baghdad), it is very difficult to find a ground for constructive multilateral relations.

Syrian Crisis: From Civilian Protests to Military and Regional Conflict

The evolving crisis situation in Syria has many unintended consequences. In addition to rekindling old rivalries, the Syrian revolt has revived a serious regional power struggle, especially between Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, and requires external powers such as the United States, Russia, and China to reconsider their approach to the region.

Several factors make the Syrian crisis a source of threat to all countries in the region as well as the interests of the great powers. Among these factors are:

- The transformation of civil protests into military conflict with a potential for spreading to the regional and/or international level;
- Involvement of terrorist groups threatening the safety of all neighboring countries and the loss of control over the situation on the ground for all stakeholders;
- Differences between the great powers regarding the evolving situation and the outcome of their interests (US, EU, Turkey, GCC vs. Russia, China, and Iran);
- Risk of instability in the neighboring countries such as Lebanon and Israel, especially after the involvement of Hizbollah and the Israeli strikes.
- Risk of instability in Iraq following the flow of armed groups over the border, and the support of Al-Maliki to the Assad regime.

With factors like the involvement of terrorist groups, security of Israel, and stability of Iraq, we can see how complex the Syrian crisis is.

With the presence of Al-Qaeda in this conflict, the current situation is confusing and dangerous for all regional and international stakeholders.

On the issue of Israel's security, it must be emphasized that neither the US nor Russia want that Israel's security be compromised. However, instability in Syria, the uncertainty of the future regime in Syria, Iran's involvement, and the presence of Hizbollah are among the factors that make all parties hesitate to take any real position or support on the ground, despite their divergences.

On the other hand, it may be noted that in such a regional configuration, Iraq's position only becomes more fragile as the upheavals significantly affect its stability and increase its domestic sectarian tensions.

In such a scenario, a sustainable and constructive partnership between post-war Iraq and the GCC countries seems difficult. However, a political solution in Syria should be sought and encouraged, as is the case with the latest convergence between the US and Russia. This will at least limit the number of civilian casualties every day.

The lesson which can be learned from these developments is that all countries must implement radical reforms by engaging in a social debate leading to a real democratic and social contract. This would be the best way to dissipate social unrest. It would be good to see the Syrian crisis not as a threat but as an opportunity for internal reconciliation between policy makers and the people and the establishment of a genuine policy of social cohesion, justice, and sustainable development.

Conclusion

The Iraq war has been a catalyst for the GCC countries to review their security issues and strengthen their cooperation. Subsequently, the Arab Spring has raised other issues that are very important at the domestic level but had not been on the agenda of the GCC countries.

Moreover, it has brought forward a major new player "the people" who have been silent for many decades and absent in any change process, leading observers to redefine the notion and the concept of security (which is not only through force) and threat concepts (that is not often external or from violent mechanisms). However, the political stability which binds all these countries can be enhanced by a deliberative process of democratization and a new social contract that clearly defines the roles of institutions and associated responsibility to accountability.

Furthermore, we tried to define the regional narrative in the last ten years, while putting the focus on the specificities of both parties (GCC and post-war Iraq) and on the changes that occurred in the region following the Arab Spring.

What is very apparent is that a constructive relationship between the GCC countries and post-war Iraq, especially in the current regional and international political context, requires several considerations:

- The GCC countries and post-war Iraq must redefine the notion of security by moving away from hard power and focusing on soft power. In other words, they should concentrate on the democratization process and comprehensively address the socio-economic issues.

- The GCC as an organization must act beyond the Peninsula Shield Force's boundaries and seek a role in a global regional policy. It should be able to implement corresponding supranational executive structures.

- Iraq must be more involved in the process of a deliberative democracy which includes all fractions of Iraqi society.

- Beyond the existing bilateral economic relations, the GCC countries should be committed to a common multilateral policy with Iraq that is based on a real dialog with the various sections of Iraqi society and strengthens Iraqi political stability.

- Both parties should be engaged in an agreement (even if informal) mutually respecting their sovereignty and preventing all forms of direct and/or indirect interference.

- The GCC countries and post-war Iraq will need to start discussing their preferred way of confronting the threats at domestic level, within the framework of their mutual relationship though some divergences still persist.

After the instability and insecurity in post-war Iraq and the deep changes caused by the Arab Spring, it seems appropriate to say that the GCC should make more efforts to find their new identity as a powerful regional platform. In addition, Iraqi leaders must understand that the consolidation of power (as seen today), the discrimination against any section of Iraqi society, and unilateral external relations are not the right options for building a stable Iraq which is in harmony with its neighbors. The uncertainty resulting from the changes occurring in the region since the war in Iraq in 2003, the Arab Spring, and the Syrian crisis must push both the GCC countries and Iraq to rethink their policies and perception of these changes. The leaders of the GCC countries and post-war Iraq should make all efforts to overcome their differences and create an environment of sustainable stability and security, based on common interests.

6

China as a Factor in the Emerging GCC-Iraq Relations: The Predominance of Oil

Sanju Gupta

Recommendations for GCC Policymakers:

- Critical dependence of all growing economies on the energy resources of the GCC countries reiterates the importance of the region for global security. This situation co-exists with an unstable Iraq, Iran's nuclear program, and the GCC'S own quest for security.

- The "Iraq" factor notwithstanding, there is rising need for cooperating with China in the "energy waterways", given the backdrop of a skeptical US and an uncertain Iran.

- To broaden the spread of energy exports as an integral part of economic diversification it is imperative to have deeper engagements with China and other Asian powers.

Recommendations for Iraqi Policymakers:

- Acquire a shared commitment to developing Iraq's oil industry in an efficient way that maximizes the benefits to the Iraqi people

- Develop an investment regime which would remove legal and administrative obstacles, as well as uncertainties for foreign investment in the petroleum sector. A sound investment would include model agreements, and bidding and contracting procedures to ensure transparency.
- Be sensitive to the regional power dynamics and tread with caution on the path of building development pacts with external powers such as China.

Introduction

The post-Cold War era has seen the Arabian Gulf region in a state of ferment. Many assertive political constituencies are demanding reform of the existing systems of governance. At another level, various countries which are dependent on the energy resources of this region are seeking to hedge the prospect of chronic instability by avoiding incremental change and instead by favoring participatory and responsible governance in almost all the states in the region. Some external powers which exercise influence in regional politics have striven to prevent the rise of any regional hegemon, which might become so powerful as to shift the balance to the disadvantage of their energy needs.

Given the dependence of their economies on energy supplies from the GCC states, the major western powers have watched developments in the region with concern. In fact, there have been various suggestions from the western world for sustained democratization and development partnerships initiatives. However, cookie-cutter solutions or one-size-fits-all models do not exist for the region, and if forcibly realized would only result in future "Iraqs." Significantly, the critical dependence of all growing economies on the energy resources of the GCC countries underlines the importance of the region for global security. At the same time, with the regime instability in Iraq, Iran's nuclear program, and the GCC's quest for stability and security, especially regarding "energy," developments in the region will continue to engage global attention. According to rough estimates, Gulf oil exports will more than double by 2020. As the bulk of these exports are transported from Gulf ports to their respective destinations in Asia and elsewhere through sea lanes of communications (SLOCs) of the Indian Ocean like the Strait of Hormuz, Malacca Straits and other waterways, the presence of a powerful navy is necessary for ensuring safe and uninterrupted flow of oil. The United States, which has a massive naval presence in the Indian Ocean, enjoys a strategic advantage over other great powers vis-à-vis the Gulf region.

The geostrategic and geo-economic importance of the Gulf region has been providing a greater security role for the US which has remained a significant factor in the overall polity, economy and security framework of the region. Many regional actors continue to favor a strong US military and diplomatic presence, and they have been unsuccessful in evolving common policies and perceptions. Though Iran is seen as a potential threat to the security of the region, the GCC countries lack a common approach toward Tehran. In recent years, in view of their economic and energy security necessities, the GCC countries have looked to forging close ties with Asia and especially the rising Asian powers. Within Asia, China's relationship with the Gulf region has assumed dynamic proportions, chiefly due to its growing energy requirements to feed its driving economy. According to IEA estimates, by 2030 the Gulf will supply one in every three barrels of China's consumption. While energy is the driving factor behind China's growing attention to the Gulf region, the same can also be said for the GCC countries and Iraq and their increased focus on Asia and China in particular. China is seen by the Gulf States as a huge market for its oil exports.

Though Iraq is not yet on the edge of civil war, its stability and security now depends on the ability of its leaders to move towards some form of viable political unity and effective governance. Today it is clear to the GCC countries that their security, especially "energy security," depends on a stable Iraq, and that Iraq's stabilization cannot be achieved without strong and adequate international assistance. China has been emerging as a proactive partner in all these efforts. Chinese state-owned oil companies are now aggressively bidding for contracts in Iraq, and there is a clear Chinese presence in regional commerce as well as in the energy sea lanes of the Indian Ocean.

In order to decrease misperception and avoid conflicts related to energy issues, China and the US have engaged in a number of dialogues. It is evident that China now shares a certain interest with the US to ensure an unhindered process of recovery in Iraq, so that the country starts its reconstruction smoothly. However, there are big differences between these extra regional powers as to the best approach to attain this objective. One such divergence relates to the "Iran" factor. Antagonisms between Iran and United States have meant that Beijing has been cautious about its relations with Tehran. While seeking oil and natural gas from Iran, the extent to which China can maneuver between the pro-American regime in Saudi Arabia and anti-American regime in Iran is a question that will test the pragmatism of its Gulf policy. It is also an issue which will have the attention of the GCC countries in their evolving relations with post-war Iraq.

This chapter examines China's energy engagements with the GCC countries and Iraq against the backdrop of the Iran and US factors in the regional energy framework.

GCC Looks East: New Orientations in GCC-Asia Relations

The reliance on external security guarantees notwithstanding, the Gulf remains an extremely volatile sub-region with multiple and interlinking threats to internal and external security. Since 1980, the region has experienced three major interstate wars based on balance of power considerations. The experience of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), the first Gulf war (1991) and the US-led invasion of Iraq (2003) underlined the imbalances and flaws in a regional security system overly reliant on one external power and not inclusive of the two regional powers. The preoccupation of regimes with survival remains paramount in their construction of security strategies, but it is clear that the concept of Gulf security in the coming years will be intertwined with the political and economic opening up of the region. Four factors will shape the contextual framework within which it will evolve.[1] The first is the impact of the processes of globalization and the revolution in information and communication technologies. This is creating new forms of private, public and virtual space in which to mobilize, organize and channel participatory demands. Globalization has also enmeshed the Gulf within a wider interconnected region with multiple sources of actual or potential insecurity. These include the ideational and radicalization linkages emanating within, and flowing from, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the impact of progressive state contraction and ungoverned spaces in Somalia and Yemen and their implications for maritime security, and the threat of nuclear proliferation in Iran. This links to the second factor, which is the growing internationalization of the Gulf and its emergence as the center of gravity in the Middle East by virtue of its economic and financial resources. The rapid expansion of economic and political links with China, India, and Russia is creating new strategic linkages which are shifting the international relations of the region in subtle ways.

Issues of energy dependence and security of access to regional resources give external powers a stake in regional security structures. International reactions to the outbreak of piracy in the Gulf of Aden during 2008 may be a harbinger of future policy trends. As the Gulf's share of global oil and natural gas production

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1.   Kristian Ulrichsen, "Gulf Security: Changing Internal and External Dynamics," Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2009.

is projected to increase from 28 percent in 2000 to 33 percent in 2020, with most of that increase going to Asia, its strategic significance will only increase, together with the number of external powers holding a stake in regional affairs. Oil (and, more recently, natural gas) is therefore the third factor which both explains international interest in the Gulf and frames the challenges facing its political and economic evolution. However, oil and natural gas reserves are not distributed evenly throughout the Gulf, and pockets of energy poverty and reliance on imported natural gas (primarily from Qatar) have already emerged. This distinction will play a crucial role in shaping regional development and potential sources of tension and insecurity in the future. The fourth contextual factor is the continuing lack of internal consensus within the GCC itself. The GCC was established in 1981 as a political and security bulwark against revolutionary Iran. Lingering intra-regional disputes and fears of Saudi hegemony on the part of the smaller member states have hampered progress towards security cooperation, which has lagged behind economic integration.

As the GCC states confront new economic and security threats, they should, according to Middle East experts, consider the following aspects:

- New governments, new weapon systems, and new alliances will not change the basic security relations or national interests in the Gulf.
- The Gulf States are consumers and not producers of security. They will never have large populations well-versed in military science or technology that could compete with Iraq or Iran, nor are they likely to agree on a coordinated and coherent defense planning strategy that includes joint commands, combined forces, and interoperable equipment.
- Their response to risk is to seek stronger commitments from the United States and Europe and encourage new friends and customers in Asia - China, India, and Japan - to cooperate. None of these appear interested in single-handedly contributing to Gulf security or protecting sea lanes and access to oil and gas.

While the United States has remained the main strategic partner for the GCC countries, major Asian giants like China are emerging as key economic partners. Over the past two decades, the GCC has decisively moved east for its trade. Today, the majority of GCC trade shows rising trends towards Asia.[2] Figure 6.1 presents the example of Saudi Arabia to show this shift. Twenty years ago, the US and EU

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2.   Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg, "The GCC Turns East," *Arab News,* December 23, 2013, available at: http://www.arabnews.com/gcc-turns-east.

accounted for 40 percent of GCC trade. Today the figures stand at just over 20 percent. By contrast, China's share rose from less than 2 percent in 1992 to over 10 percent in 2011.[3] India's share rose from 3 percent to 11 percent during the same period. Until recently, the US was the GCC's number two trading partner after the EU, and the number one single country trading partner. Today it is the sixth, after the EU, Japan, India, China and South Korea. If we compare GCC trade figures with China and the US over the past 20 years, in 1992 GCC trade with the US accounted for 15 percent of overall trade, and China less than 2 percent. In 2002, trade with the US was down to 11 percent, while it doubled with China to 4 percent. Presently, trade with the US is down again to less than 8 percent, while trade with China doubled again to over 10 percent of overall GCC trade.
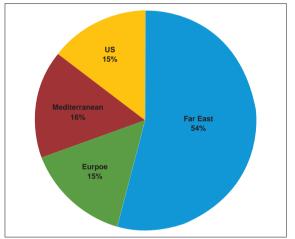
Figure 6.1: Saudi crude oil exports by destination (2012)

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, APEX

Structural changes in the world economy have accelerated the economic realignment of the two regions. Over the past three decades, China's economy has grown fifteen-fold to become the world's second largest economy after the United States. By 2020, India is expected to be the world's third largest economy. On current trends, Asia could account for half of the global output by then.[4] The Middle East, given its geostrategic location and oil production capacity, will probably remain the dominant supplier to Asia (Figure 6.2). Imports meet 75 percent of Asian demand and are expected to account for 90 percent by 2030.

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3.   Ibid.

4.   http://www.iiss.org/en/publications/strategic-s-comments/sections.

Figure 6.2: World's biggest oil reserves

Iran has warned its neighbours against making up for any shortfalls in its oil exports under new US and EU sanctions

Top ten by size
Billion barrels

3 Canada — 175

5 Iraq — 115

4 Iran — 137

8 Russia — 60

9 Libya — 46

104 Kuwait **6**

211 **2** Venezuela

37 **10** Nigeria

98 **7** UAE

263 **1** Saudi Arabia

AFP

Source: EIA

The Middle East already supplies about 60 percent of China's oil needs, and Chinese demand for Saudi oil is expected to soon outstrip that of the US. Indeed, China temporarily overtook the US as the largest buyer of crude from Saudi Arabia in 2009 as the American economy went into recession after the financial crisis; in the same year, China surpassed Japan as the world's second-biggest oil importer. Gulf exports to Europe and the US are expected to shrink, underscoring the Gulf producers' need to secure long-term markets. According to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA), US oil imports from the GCC countries were 1.71 million barrels per day (m b/d) in 2010, down from 2.37m b/d in 2008.

The fact that the oil and gas sector is considered a strategic one by governments in both regions limits investment opportunities. Nevertheless, some significant direct investments have been made. For example, national oil companies (NOCs) in the Gulf have positioned themselves as strategic investment partners of Asian customers. Asian firms, in fact, have made deeper inroads into Iraq, after the country opened up its oil industry to foreign companies in 2008. China National Petroleum Corp (CNPC), China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), and China

Petroleum and Chemical Corporation (Sinopec) have secured strong footholds in the country, alongside Western international oil companies.

Rapidly rising levels of trade between the Gulf and Asia have fostered talk of a new "Silk Road." It makes sense for the countries of East and West Asia, boasting far higher rates of growth than the faltering economies of the developed world, to strengthen their economic ties. The EIU's report analyzes how the Arabian Gulf countries are shifting their trade and investment emphasis to emerging markets, especially in Asia. Some of the findings of this report are as follows[5]:

- Emerging markets will drive global growth in the years ahead.
- The emergence of India and China and the growing economic importance of sub-Saharan Africa present massive opportunities for the GCC.
- Asia will be the most important emerging market region for the GCC.
- China is expected to be the GCC's most important economic partner by 2020.
- Trade with Africa will focus on agriculture.
- Most GCC investments in emerging markets will focus on tried and tested areas of competitive strength, chiefly energy and services industries such as port operations, tourism, retail, finance services (especially sharia-compliant finance) and telecoms.
- In Asia and some parts of the Middle East, the GCC countries will invest heavily in infrastructure.
- While the opportunities are significant, the rise of new economic powers also means new competition.

There is no doubt that Asia's growing thirst for oil is the primary factor driving increased trade. For the GCC states, broadening the spread of energy exports away from customers in the West has been an important part of plans for economic diversification. So far, however, the Gulf-Asia model is a relatively simple one: the Gulf exports energy and energy-related products and imports Asian manufactured goods, construction services, food and labor. The natural next step would be a stepping-up of cross-regional capital flows. However, the fact that direct and portfolio investments have not taken off indicates that there are big barriers to deeper engagement. Neither has the economic relationship translated into deeper

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5.   Economist Intelligence Unit, "GCC Trade and Investment Flows: The Emerging-Market Surge," May 12, 2011, available at: http://www.cfoinnovation.com/content/gcc-trade-and-investment-flows-emerging-market-surge).

political or military ties. Asian powers seem unlikely to replace the United States as GCC states' main security guarantor anytime in the near future, even as American reliance on Middle Eastern energy decreases.[6] However, there is a possibility that political developments in the Middle East could encourage China to rethink its entrenched path of non-intervention. This would affect the regional balance.

Although construction and energy projects have deepened the economic engagement between the Gulf and Asia, there is no doubt that this remains limited, and dominated by customer/supplier transactions. Governments in both regions have apparently not seen closer links as a high priority, and the relationship remains primarily economic rather than political. An important factor in this is the continuing strong defense relationship between the GCC states and the United States – even if this has been strained by the Arab Awakening, in which Gulf leaders saw Washington as abandoning long standing regional allies such as Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. China has long appeared content to rely on the Western security umbrella to secure the safe passage of both its exports and its energy imports. Its deployment of naval vessels to help in counter-piracy efforts off Somalia is its first venture in this field. However, experts believe that China could be impelled into a more active role to protect its growing maritime interests.

According to analysts, China's foreign policy has turned more assertive than it has been in the past decades. When it comes to the Middle East, China has expressed this aggressiveness mostly through the veto power it wields in the United Nations Security Council, protecting Iran from crippling sanctions over its nuclear program. There are different interpretations of Chinese assertiveness[7]; Charles Grant from the Centre for European Reform recently provided a number of factors that may explain the situation: China's economic growth has surged at a time when the West is in crisis, making its leaders more self-confident and less willing to accept Western tutelage. Above all, China is uneasy with what the Americans have called the "pivot to Asia" or "rebalancing" of forces and renewed US attention further east. To counter the American strategy, Chinese academics have come up with their own pivot. The theory was recently articulated by Wang Jisi,[8] who called it "March West," (the region to the west of China, including Central Asia, South

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6. Economist Intelligence Unit, "The GCC in 2020: Outlook for the Gulf and the Global Economy," March 2009.

7. Naser Al-Tamimi, "Is China Pivoting to the Gulf?" Al Arabiya News, April 28, 2013, available at: http://english.alarabiya.net/en/2013/04/28/Is-China-pivoting-to-the-Gulf-.html.

8. Ibid.

Asia and the Middle East), which would offer Beijing additional strategic leverage against Washington since "U.S. is desperate for China's assistance" in stabilizing these regions.[9]

China-GCC: The "Energy Imperative"

There is no question that if any country has experienced unprecedented economic growth over the past two decades, it is China. Since 2008, at a time when global economies recorded one of their slowest paces of growth, the People's Republic of China single-handedly spearheaded a global economic recovery, one that is albeit weak but has laid a solid foundation for years to come. One such policy is securing its energy supplies globally and its crude oil and gas in particular. The International Energy Agency (IEA) forecast that 65 percent of China's crude oil consumption will depend on imports by 2015.[10] To sustain its growth, China requires increasing amounts of oil. Its oil consumption grows by 7.5 percent per year, seven times faster than the US.[11]

Growth in Chinese oil consumption has accelerated mainly because of a large-scale transition away from bicycles and mass transit toward private automobiles.

China's ability to provide for its own needs is limited by the fact that its proven oil reserves are small in relation to its consumption. At current production rates, they are likely to last for less than two decades. Though during the 1970s and 1980s China was a net oil exporter, it became a net oil importer in 1993 and is increasingly dependent on foreign oil. China currently imports 32 percent of its oil and is expected to double its need for imported oil. A report by the IEA predicts that by 2030, Chinese oil imports will equal imports by the US. today. China's oil imports mainly come from the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America with approximately half of these coming from the Middle East.[12]

9.   Ibid.

10.   Gal Luft, "Fueling the Dragon: China's Race into the Oil Market," Institute for the Analysis of Global Security available at: http://www.iags.org/china.htm.

11.   itsjustS, "Oil Crisis," August 2008, available at: StudyMode.com: http://www.studymode.com/essays/Oil-Crisis-158601.html.
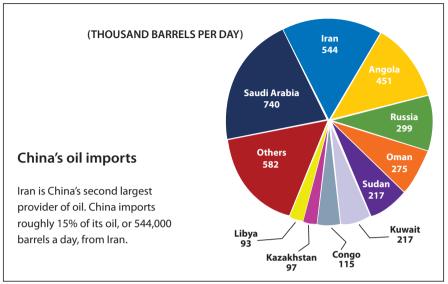
12.   Luft, "Fueling the Dragon."

Figure 6.3: China's oil imports

Source: Facts Global Energy, 2009 Numbers

China is the world's second largest oil consumer and its second largest net importer of oil. In one of its major policy changes, the country has increasingly started to look to diversify its crude oil and natural gas import basket to hedge against potential supply disruptions from its concentrated dependence on Middle East oil.[13] CNPC, Sinopec and CNOOC are the major national oil giants that are responsible for securing the country's energy supply. They have massive investments in Africa, Brazil, and in Central Asia and usually have an advantage over other private oil companies. Ranging from building infrastructure, providing loans for the development and building of refinery and petrochemical complexes to the price they are willing to pay for rights to explore and buy assets in foreign nations, China has an advantage over would-be competitors in foreign markets. Not only do overseas investments provide a stable energy supply for China, they also help the government in maintaining and increasing its strategic influence across the globe. The Chinese government offers loans for exploration & production (E&P) activities and in return is guaranteed shipments of oil on an on-going basis. These

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13.   Aditya Malhotra, "Chinese Inroads into Central Asia: Focus on Oil and Gas," *Journal of Energy Security,* November 20, 2012, available at: http://www.ensec.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=387:chinese-inroads-into-central-asia-focus-on-oil-and-gas&catid=130:issue-content&Itemid=405.

loans have proven to be a decisive factor in many cases in successfully bidding for major oil contracts.

Hence, China is becoming a major energy player in global politics and its influence in the Middle East is on the rise. In fact, this will gradually emerge as a main cause in deciding how India shapes its Middle East policies over the long term. According to energy experts, the competitive relationship between China and India has become defining, and there are several areas of strategic interest which could potentially be conflict points in the future. Energy security is one such point, and while escalation between China and India is unlikely, it is important to note that the energy policies of each nation are largely based on geopolitical considerations.

The potential for the Malacca Strait to be blockaded by a rival is of great concern to China, since as much as 85 percent of its oil is shipped through the region. For India, Myanmar is of strategic importance due to its location. China is already on friendly terms with Pakistan and has been expanding its presence in the Indian Ocean, thus giving India a feeling of encirclement. India's interest in Myanmar directly relates to the growing presence and influence of China in the region. China's "string of pearls" strategy refers to attempts to negotiate basing rights along the sea route linking the Middle East with China, including creating strong diplomatic ties with important states in the region. Not only does this come in conflict with India's naval projection of power, it also directly threatens India's energy access and the regional balance of power. It is important to recognize that China and India's energy policies revolve around traditional ideas of security, which highlight military and political balancing.

While oil will certainly continue to be the most central aspect of China's relations with the Middle East, to see the Chinese relationship solely through such a prism will no longer be enough. One of the most obvious indicators of China's increasing involvement in the Middle East is the explosion in economic activity. From 2005 to 2009, the total trade volume between China and the Middle East rose 87 percent, to $100 billion, and the Middle East's exports to China grew by 25 percent. In contrast, exports from the Middle East to the United States declined by 45 percent during that same period. As a result, last year China surpassed the United States as the top destination for the Middle East's exports. On the other hand, China is also the top source of the region's imports, most of them being low-cost household goods that increase purchasing power for the average Middle East consumer.

China's diplomatic, economic, and security interests in the Middle East continue to expand commensurate with its energy interests and growing international clout.

Indeed, there is sufficient reason to look beyond the more immediate energy security question. While energy is the driving factor behind China's growing attention to the Gulf region, the same can also be said for the GCC states and their increased focus on Asia as a whole and China in particular. China is seen by the Gulf States as a huge market for its oil exports. With oil demand has plummeted following the global economic crisis, and the outlook remains bleak for much of the industrialized world, more attention has been focused on securing access to the Chinese domestic market, which remains the fastest growing energy market in the world. In addition, the emphasis being placed on reducing reliance on oil and gas and the search for alternative energy sources by the Western world has also increased the pressure on Gulf oil producers to seek new markets and lessen old dependencies.

In the words of Abdulaziz Sager, "The GCC countries need a secure long-term market for their hydrocarbons, which make up for their main source of income. However, one motivating factor in this evolving GCC-China relationship has been the intention to expand their non-oil revenues."[14] For this, China represents a potentially highly lucrative market. China's steel industry, for example, has been a net exporter since 2004, which – given its competitive prices – is good news for the booming construction sector in the region. In the petrochemicals sector, China currently has 50 projects under way involving at $1 billion in investment. It could also plug into the lucrative Islamic banking field in the region. China's shift from exporter to consumer market is being seen as an opportunity for the GCC countries to sharpen their competitive edge and increase their share in the world's largest market, as well as play a pivotal role in exporting Chinese goods to European countries. The region is already benefiting from access to cheaper Chinese production, with enormous demand for garments, fabrics, electronic and telecommunications products. The result is that the region's petro-diplomacy is emerging as a crucial foreign policy tool aiding China's economic modernization. The growth in the non-oil economy is partly a product of the boom in the GCC stock markets, which grew by 64 percent in 2004 with a market capitalization of over $750 billion. As a result, Chinese investors and institutions can now hold stocks and shares in many companies in the GCC countries and also attract GCC capital.

However, as China's influence grows in the Middle East, two contradictory points should be highlighted: on the one hand, the old "oil for security" paradigm of US-GCC relations could weaken as the United States get less oil from the Middle

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14. Abdulaziz Sager, "GCC-China Relations: Looking beyond Oil: Risks and Rewards," Gulf Research Center, November 1, 2005.

East and China's economic and political influence grow over time. On the other hand, while there are concerns about the future of the US role, there is at the same time no alternative to it. It will hence be interesting to explore the various pieces of this jigsaw puzzle involving China and the various regional actors, i.e., Iraq, Iran, the GCC and the US.

Regional Equations: Post-War Iraq, China, and the GCC

The GCC countries have come to attach great importance to strategic cooperative relations with China and hold that stronger cooperation between both sides is conducive to their respective realistic and long-term interests. The GCC is ready to work with China to enrich and improve cooperation mechanisms in all areas, strive for early signing of the free trade agreement, and launch the joint economic and trade committee mechanism. The bloc's member countries are ready to maintain communication and coordination with China on major international and regional issues including transfer of technology, renewable energy, agriculture and food security, and the fight against piracy.

The GCC has come to appreciate China's position and role, expressing the hope that relevant countries will overcome the negative impact of turbulence as soon as possible and achieve stability. This has especially come to hold good for post-war Iraq and Iraqi instability. Regardless of what the GCC states think of the US invasion of Iraq, they will face a massive increase in their future threat level if Iraq does not remain unified, and if the US fails to help Iraq achieve security and stability, or if Iraq does not move forward in political accommodation and development. There has been major military progress in Iraq during the last few years, although it is uncertain and could be reversed. Sectarian and ethnic divisions remain a major threat and could create a power vacuum for Iran to exploit and/or lead to much broader sectarian tension.

Oil production in the country has been slowly but steadily climbing since the end of the war as the Iraqi government and partners such as Exxon Mobil (XOM, Fortune 500), BP (BP), Chevron (CVX, Fortune 500) and Total (TOT) work to repair existing fields and hunt for new sources (Figure 6.4). With oil prices around $90 per barrel, Iraq's production rate translates into roughly $100 billion a year in revenue. The vast majority of this goes to the Iraqi government. Most of the foreign oil companies in Iraq work on a contract basis, or else pay a high royalty rate. No doubt Iraq's oil production is growing, and world oil markets are looking to Baghdad to play a major role in keeping global oil flowing and moderating prices

in the years ahead. Iraq benefits from having some of the lowest production costs in the world and easy geography but the challenges are great: a) the conflict between Iraq's federal and regional governments and legal framework still continues, b) Iraq's needs to overcome the storage and transportation bottlenecks while building a larger and better trained workforce capable of operating the drilling rigs, c) insufficient water supplies are a problem because water is needed to pump oil from the ground, and, d) Iraq's oil and gas fields and ports have deteriorated over the years due to war, neglect, internal conflict, and international sanctions.
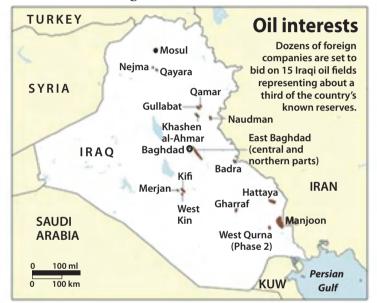
Figure 6.4: Oil interests

Sources: ESRI, Iraq Ministry of Oil

Thus, for Iraq the most pressing task at present is to resume stability and normality, which is also the general concern of the international community including China. This is because the Chinese government attaches great importance to, and is ready to, take a positive role in the economic reconstruction of post-war Iraq. CNPC was one of only two oil companies to successfully bid for contracts in Iraq's first oil field auction in June 2009.

The corporation has accepted low remuneration rates for extracting oil in Iraq but agreed to expand operations at the giant Rumaila oil field to increase supply and, therefore, gross remuneration. CNPC's activities, along with those of other Chinese oil companies, have made China one of the largest oil beneficiaries of

the Iraq War. Indeed, Beijing envisions Iraq as key to its strategy of increasing production by Chinese companies from 1.5 million barrels per day of oil equivalent in 2009 to 4 million barrels per day in 2020.

Apprehensive of the increasing Iranian influence in post-Saddam Iraq, the GCC states though afraid of the unified policy towards Iraq, are clear on the following points

- To keep Iraq free from Iranian influence
- To help Iraqi reconstruction, especially in the name of self-security
- To be willing to accept Chinese role in Iraqi (oil) reconstruction as opposed to Iran, in the wake of receding US influence

In the past decade or so, China waited patiently on the sidelines while the US and its allies coped with Iraq's new, and often times messy internal dynamics that followed the 2003 overthrow of Saddam Hussein by a US-led coalition. China reemerged in 2008, however, to sign post-Saddam Iraq's first major oil deal with a foreign country. While the majority of Iraqi oil deals in the post-Saddam era were awarded to Western firms, the Western shift to a more amenable and independent oil-rich Kurdish region in the north amid disenchantment with southern Iraq is creating a vacuum that China has found hard to resist. China has the capital that Baghdad is desperately seeking to build its oil and gas infrastructure, while Iraq has crude potentials that are alluring to a China that seeks to diversify its energy sources. Already, Chinese oil firms have taken an active interest in acquiring deals that had been awarded to Western firms in 2009-2010, which the latter are now relinquishing so they can focus on alternative oil fields in Kurdistan. Although talks between China and Iraq go back to at least 1997, major investments have only occurred in recent years, with CNPC focusing on the 17 billion barrel Rumaila field — Iraq's largest — and Halfaya, both in the south. As of 2010, China had made five major oil investments in Iraq after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, one of which was in Kurdistan. The implications of this shift away from the West in favor of China will be far-reaching for both Iraq and the Middle East.

This shift in the regional "oil" balance has the potential for Iraq to surpass Saudi Arabia as a producer and exporter. Even if it reaches only half of its stated production target of 12 million barrels per day by 2017, an Iraq with significant spare capacity would challenge Saudi Arabia's dominance as an exporter. Moreover, Saudi Arabia's long standing partnership with the US is under stress, partly due the Kingdom's growing relationship with China. Saudi Arabia has formed a number of new joint ventures with China, including a partnership between China

petrochemical corporations and Saudi Aramco to build refineries. Even more threatening to Saudi Arabia's oil hegemony will be a continued strengthening of Iraq's relations with Iran. Hence, for the broad objective of keeping Iran away from Iraq, Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries are mute spectators to an increasing Chinese role in Iraqi reconstruction. How this will impact Iraq's stature in OPEC is, however, a question which troubles all the oil majors equally.

Iran in the Regional Energy Matrix: Fallout for China, US, and GCC

The Arabian Gulf is a region where the interests of all major powers converge, owing to the predominance of oil in global politics and the predominance of GCC in global oil politics. Interestingly, the American predominance and role has witnessed a gradual decline in the "post Iraq war" era while Iran's role has assumed strategic heights. The circumstances combined with a tight oil market that has led world prices to record heights have come to condition the thinking and behavior of all the major regional actors: GCC, US, Iran, China and as well as Iraq. This is particularly true for China, whose dependence on energy imports is already substantial and whose sense of vulnerability is acute. Meanwhile, the current geopolitical situation and state of the oil market have supplied the impetus to Iran to use its energy resources as an instrument of foreign policy. One can see these currents play out in the crisis over the Iranian nuclear program, wherein China, the US and Iran are enmeshed in the game of changing equations and shifting allegiances.

The US, long accustomed to being the predominant external actor in the Middle East and preoccupied with issues specific to the region, has yet to examine systematically the salience, scope and implication of the burgeoning Gulf-Asia ties, much less adjust its policies to them. In the words of John Calabrese, US policies towards the Gulf have derived from a complex set of interests:

- Strategically, the US has sought to prevent the domination of the region by hostile powers.
- Economically, it has striven to ensure unimpeded access to oil.
- Politically, it has aimed to protect friends and allies in the region through diplomacy and security assistance.

However, in the changed contemporary scenario, the US faces numerous challenges ranging from the fragile situation in Iraq, the nuclear program of Iran, and the lack of whole hearted support from the GCC countries to join hands with

the US to counter Tehran. Moreover, China's growing presence will gradually come to affect the US ability to maneuver and influence events in the region.

The Islamic Republic of Iran presents a serious challenge to US interests in the Middle East. The source of Washington's disconnect with Iran are numerous and include its sponsorship of terrorism, its widespread human rights abuses, its leaders' penchant for threatening US friends and allies in the Middle East, and its support of anti-American insurgents in Afghanistan. The most important concern for US policymakers, however, is Iran's suspected pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability. The US and its allies have sought to dissuade Iran from developing a nuclear weapons capability through a combination of sanctions and engagement. Iran, however, continues to pursue uranium enrichment and is reported to be close to developing the technologies necessary for producing nuclear weapons. The sanctions regime against Iran is heavily reliant on other international actors, including Russia, India, Germany, Japan, South Korea, and Turkey, each of which maintains significant commercial and financial ties with Iran. Winning China's cooperation, however, may be the most critical element of any US effort to dissuade Iran from developing a nuclear weapons capability.

For Iran, no country in the world is as important in ensuring its survival and helping to insulate it from international pressure as China. Despite its drive for independence from foreign control, Iran has become heavily reliant on China economically, diplomatically, and, to some extent, militarily. The 2011 legislation by the US Congress targeting Iran's Central Bank has inflicted the greatest damage on the Iranian economy. Any foreign company or country that deals with the Iranian Central Bank, which serves as a clearing house for Iran's oil sales, could be barred from the US financial system. As a result, many of Iran's major oil customers, Japan, South Korea, and the European Union, are reducing purchases of Iranian oil.

In addition to purchasing Iranian oil and natural gas, China is also the most important foreign player in Iranian "upstream" (exponential and extraction) operations. China is currently slated to develop the giant Azadegan and Yadavaran oil and natural gas fields. Japan has been designated by Tehran as its preferred foreign investor in Azadegan, but Tokyo withdrew from the deal due to US pressure. China currently sees its interest best served by accommodating US primacy in the Middle East, rather than challenging it. However, at the same time, the Asian power also wishes to cultivate the image of a "responsible" international actor or major power and this will mean deepening involvement in the region. This desire may persuade China into playing a more visible role in Middle East affairs, either by investing heavily in Iraqi reconstruction or fighting against US sanctions on Iran.

Thus far, China has maintained a careful balance and managed to avoid taking any clear sides. However, this position may not be sustainable for long as the GCC states, wary of Iran and to some extent skeptical of Chinese involvement in Iraqi oil "recovery," would like to see the game shifting in their favor. These states are not only seeking to gain Chinese support in their regional disputes, but they also increasingly see relations with China as a way to establish a measure of independence from the US.

The very nature of Gulf-Asia relations is such that a diminution of US influence is unlikely to translate into a net gain for any single external actor. Moreover, there is no indication that China or any other country, or even a collection of Gulf-Asia partners, has the intent or the capability to assume the mantle of US military power as far as policing maritime energy trade is concerned.

Cooperative Management as a Prerequisite for Energy Stability

Since the concerns of all the major players in the Middle East are centered on either import or export of oil and natural gas or even control of the same, the region has seen divergent perceptions of security and regime stability. For the energy hungry countries of Asia, particularly India and China, prime concerns relate to energy transportation and securing energy sea lanes. Nevertheless, it is clear that transportation risks are directly or indirectly related to political stability in the region, while political instability can further give rise to price fluctuations, excessive resource nationalism, and increased external interventions.

For the oil-rich Gulf economies, there is convergence of views in the areas of energy security and economic integration, but divergence regarding the future security architecture. For Iraq, the focus is on reconstruction and recovery to pre-war levels. For Iran, the objective is to gain maximum support and sponsorship of its oil and natural gas program. The current environment is one where energy-resource nationalism and transnational energy cooperation are being practiced simultaneously. It is an environment marked by conflicting politics/geopolitics and the push of strategic imperatives where energy resources are employed to achieve geopolitical objectives. And is an environment where the winners and the looser in the broader struggles for energy security and geographical advantage, have yet to be determined.

It goes without saying that any new security architecture for the Gulf region must satisfy three basic goals:

1. It should make the Gulf States safer than they already are.

2. It should simplify, rather than complicate, the security dynamics of the region.

3. It should be flexible and robust enough to withstand both internal and external changes.

According to some Gulf security analysts, the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) provides for a potentially very useful model of what the Gulf States might adopt to create a more peaceful, stable Arabian Gulf. Beyond the GCC core, Iran and Iraq would have to be invited to participate. Only with their participation would it be possible to address the Gulf's main security problems through cooperative threat reduction and conflict resolution measures. The US should be a member, just as it has been a member of the CSCE/OSCE, because it is the principal military ally of the GCC states and Iraq. China and India both have great and growing interests in the Gulf and the potential to play roles similar to that of the United States; they too would be good candidates for inclusion. Indeed, attempting to exclude China or India could compromise such an organization because both have their economic and political clout.

In the words of Dr. N Janardhan, "Seldom does the discussion on Gulf-Asia relations focus beyond the expanding economic ties between the oil-rich producers and some of the biggest energy consumers. Exploring the 'what next' dimension of this engagement reveals tentative, but interesting, attempts to diversify toward 'strategic' cooperation that offer alternative possibilities for Gulf security and stability in the long term.

It appears, however, that the progress of any Asian country's strategic role in the region impinges on several regional and external players having their own interests and concerns. Hence, rather than an individual country, an Asian cooperative approach would serve the purpose better."

Gulf regionalism that is outward looking, flexible, dynamic, and consistent with regional diversity would contribute to regional and global welfare, peace and security. This would also enable these nations to take advantage of the opportunities emerging from enhanced economic integration and also face the common threats of terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as well as ensure energy exports, security of sea lanes, tackling pandemics, natural disasters and others. A few essential ingredients for this cooperative security architecture are as follows:

- It should articulate an inclusive, open and transparent process of community building.

- Soft regionalism based on informal dialogue and consultation mechanisms, consensus building and open structure would help in establishing co-operative and beneficial norms of state behavior.

Hence, an Arabian Gulf that is integrated through a web of regional cooperative structures will offer more opportunities for socio-economic advancement of its people and lay the foundation for eroding political rivalries and harsh nationalist impulses and bringing about regional stability and peace.

7

The Strategic Evolution of US Military Presence in Iraq

Degang Sun[1]

Key Recommendations for GCC Policymakers:

- The GCC should play a leading role in regional security affairs, and it should not remain aloof to the chaotic sectarian conflict in Iraq.
- The GCC should serve as a mediator and integrate Iraq politically and economically.

Key Recommendations for Iraqi Policymakers:

- Foreign military presence cannot solve Iraq's internal security problems.
- The best policy is to achieve national reconciliation and stick to economy-first development strategy.

Research Questions and Puzzles

For a long time, the Middle East has been the epicenter of ethnic conflicts, religious discord, terrorist attacks, territorial disputes, and other cross-border problems. Throughout the past centuries, the fate of the Middle East has been decided by external powers rather than the regional people. Due to its unique location as a "corridor" to the three continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe, as well as its role as a "hub" of the world's oil and natural gas reserves, the region has been the playground for major powers competing for predominance.

The establishment of a foreign military presence is undoubtedly one of the most strategic ways for external powers to project their influence, grab regional resources, and deny other powers seeking hegemony.[2] By the early 21st century, countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Russia, and Japan have established dozens of military presence near the Persian Gulf and the Middle East as a whole. Even India, an emerging economy, has built a military base in Tajikistan (as Japan has in Djibouti), and it may well be keen to establish a second base in the Middle East. Of the 21 countries in and around the Middle East, only three are without any apparent foreign military presence (Iran, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan). The United States has a military presence in 13 of these countries, the United Kingdom in nine, and other external powers in nine Middle Eastern countries as well. Therefore, the external powers act as if they were "Gulf neighbors" due to their military presence power projection in this area.[3]

The US is a typical example of countries seeking hegemony through a military presence. Since the end of World War II, it seems to be a "rule" for the US to establish military bases in occupied states to project power and ensure regional predominance. For instance, the US-led coalition defeated Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and Imperial Japan and after defeating these powers in 1945, Washington established permanent military bases in these countries to contain and establish a counterbalance to the communist bloc; since the end of the Korean War in 1953,

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2. For more literature on military bases, please refer to Alexander Cooley, *Base Politics: Democratic Change and the US Military Overseas* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Mark L. Gillem, America Town: Building the Outposts of Empire (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Thomas Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map: War and Peace in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2004).

3. J. E. Peterson, "Foreign Military Presence and Its Role in Reinforcing Regional Security: A Double-Edged Sword," in *Arabian Gulf Security: Internal and External Challenges,* ed., Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research (Abu Dhabi: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2008), 93.

US troops have been stationed in South Korea, resulting in the establishment of a strategic balance on the Korean Peninsula vis-à-vis China and the Soviet Union; after the US-led coalition forces expelled Saddam's troops and "liberated" Kuwait in 1991, US built military bases in the Emirate; when the Kosovo War ended in 1999, the US crushed Serbia and maintained a balance of power vis-à-vis Russia in the Balkans by deploying military bases in Kosovo; since the end of the Afghan War in 2001, the US has succeeded in building military bases in the central Asian country, to deter the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Therefore, why did the Obama administration close its military bases and abandon its power projection "beachheads" in Iraq in 2011? Is Iraq an exception?

Hard Military Bases and Soft Military Presence: A Conceptual Differentiation

Power projection can be achieved not only by having military bases, but also by a soft military presence. Although the Obama administration closed hard US military bases in Iraq in 2011, a soft military presence still exists to maintain US power and influence in that country in an indirect way.

Power to countries is like currency to individuals, and the essence of a foreign military presence is power. As Karl Marx put it, land is sufficient for a regional encroaching regime, but waters are indispensable for an aggressive regime with world ambition.[4] Similarly, A.T. Mahan highlighted that, "the mysterious power… was not in this or that man, king or statesman, but in that control of the sea.[5]" Foreign military presence is an important means for states to project their power, interfere in regional affairs, spread their culture, safeguard their foreign interest, and enhance their political influence.[6]

In this chapter, foreign military presence refers to an area on land or on sea beyond a sovereign state's jurisdiction, where a certain number of armed forces are stationed and which has military activities, organized institutions, and military

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4. Karl Marx, *The Inside Story of the Diplomatic History in 18th Century* (Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1979), 80.

5. Alfred T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History: 1660–1783* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1895), 278.

6. Degang Sun, "Outpost for Power Projection: A Chinese Perspective of French Military Bases on African Continent," *Journal of Cambridge Studies* 6, no.4 (2011), 53.

facilities.[7] It is by nature the geographical and functional extension of a country's domestic military deployment.

Foreign military presence takes a great variety of forms. For instance, according to duration, they can be divided into permanent (with a long-term objective) or an ad hoc (with a short-term objective) presence; based on difference in functions, they can be divided into army, air, naval, logistic, communication, arsenal and intelligence presence, etc.

This paper divides foreign military presence into two types: hard military bases and soft military presence. The former refers to military areas on the open sea, colonies, departments, trust territories, or foreign territories, where a state deploys a certain number of armed forces, engages in military activities, and builds up certain institutions and facilities.[8] As of 2013, the US had 598 military bases and installations in 40 sovereign states (Army: 265; Navy: 116, Air: 197, Marine Corp: 20).[9] Its total foreign bases are almost as many as that of Roman Empire in 117 A.D. and of the British Empire in 1898 when the two empires were in their respective heyday. Besides, currently Britain has foreign military bases in Cyprus, Ascension Islands, Kenya and Falkland Islands, making it a world power as well.[10]

In the contemporary greater Middle East, the US has military bases in Qatar (with forward headquarters of the US Central Command), Bahrain (with headquarters of the US Fifth Fleet), United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, Turkey and Djibouti; France has bases in the UAE and Djibouti; Russian bases exist in Kyrgizstan and Tajikistan, and Britain has a base in Cyprus.

Soft military presence is more dynamic and less visible, including ad hoc military deployment (such as rapid deployment troops), technical military stations, foreign arsenals, military supply sites, drone bases, small intelligence stations, reconnaissance sites, aerospace tracking facilities and so on. In a broader sense, broadcast relay stations, communication facilities, aerospace and aviation launchers,

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7. Professor Robert Harkavy admits that there are "definitional and semantic problems surrounding this subject (bases)," and scholars usually use facilities, basing access, among others, to refer to "bases." See Robert E. Harkavy, *Strategic Basing and the Great Powers, 1200–2000* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 5.

8. China Encyclopedia Compiling Committee, *China Encyclopedia (Military)* (Beijing: China Encyclopedia Publishing House, 1989), 562.

9. Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy Undersecretary of Defense, *Base Structure Report,* Fiscal Year 2012 Baseline, 2012, 7.

10. Danica Sorber, "What Countries Have Overseas Military Bases?" *eHow,* May 2, 2011, available at: http://www.ehow.com/info_8342821_countries-overseas-military-bases.html.

and ground receiving stations are regarded as soft military bases as well.[11] According to statistics, in 2012, soft military presence represented 90 percent of all US military forces abroad, while big and medium-sized military bases made up only 6 percent of the total (see Table 7.1).

Table 7.1: US military deployment abroad (as of 2012)

	Large Bases	Medium-sized Bases	Soft Military Presence	Others	Total
Army Bases	5	8	272	31	316
Naval Bases	4	3	98	9	114
Air Bases	9	5	191	11	216
Marine Bases	3	2	10	5	20
Total	21	18	571	26	666

Source: Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy Undersecretary of Defense, Base Structure Report, Fiscal Year 2012 Baseline, 2012, 24.

The US military deployment in the Middle East is a case in point. Since the 9/11 incidents, Washington has maintained hard military bases in Turkey, Djibouti, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain, among others, and a soft military presence in Algeria,[12] Israel, Iraq and Yemen. With terrorist threat mounting, the US rapid deployment troops have become a major type of soft military presence, which enjoys more flexibility, stronger mobility, lower cost, and what is more, less physical visibility to the host nations. Therefore, soft military presence can reduce the potential risk of "base politics."

From Hard Military Bases to Soft Military Presence: Case of Iraq

Since its invasion of Iraq, the US deployed a considerable number of troops, pooled in resources and contributed to diplomatic endeavor in the country to set a "democratic model" for other failed and failing Islamic states. To achieve that goal, the US paid a heavy price - 4,485 soldiers and officers died, 72,271 were injured,

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11. Robert E. Harkavy, *Great Power Competition for Overseas Bases: The Geopolitics of Access Diplomacy* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), 27.

12. Although Algerian authorities have consistently denied any US presence in the country, there is evidence that the US enjoys a soft presence in the Algerian desert near the southernmost city of Tamanrasset.

and 2,097 public servants lost their lives. The enduring conflicts and chaos cost Washington a direct loss of $805 billion.[13] At one point the US deployment peaked at over 150,000 troops and over 100 hard military bases throughout the country. However, the question as to whether US should continue to run hard military bases or have a soft military presence in Iraq in the future caused continuous debate in Washington. As early as June 2006, a policy report by the Pentagon suggested that the US should continue to operate at least four big military bases in Iraq, mostly air bases, including Tallil in the South, Al-Asad in the West, Balad in Central Iraq, and Tal Afar in the North. Among the four, Balad air base was the largest; it boasted 20,000-25,000 American troops at the peak. The base was protected by a 25 km-long security zone and was the gateway to Baghdad.[14] Joseph Gerson, a historian of American military bases, commented that "the Bush administration's intention is to have a long-term military presence in the region... For a number of years the US has sought to use a number of means to make sure it dominates in the Middle East... The Bush administration sees Iraq as an unsinkable aircraft carrier for its troops and bases for years to come."[15]

In 2008, a report by the think tank RAND put forth a similar suggestion. The authors of the report argued that after the US troops were demobilized in Iraq, Washington should maintain one or two permanent military bases. For instance, US air bases in Balad and Al-Asad may be frequently used to deploy US Predator drones. Meanwhile, the report said, the bases could contribute to such military operations as air support, military rescue, assistance, and tactical airlifting. The two military bases would also be used to coordinate with the larger US Central Command military bases in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries on issues such as intelligence, pre-warning, reconnaissance, aerial refueling, attacking high value targets, and military deterrence.[16]

The Obama administration's priority in the Middle East has been similar to that of the earlier administration's; its objective is to secure US regional leadership in the region. However, the means that President Obama uses to achieve this end is very different. During the Bush presidency, Washington attached great importance

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13. Hannah Fischer, "Iraq Casualties: US Military Forces and Iraqi Civilians, Police, and Security Forces," *CRS Congressional Report,* June 11, 2010, 1.

14. David E. Thaler, *Future US Security Relationship with Iraq and Afghanistan: US Air Force Roles* vol. 681, RAND (2008), 115–16.

15. Deborah White, "An American Palace in Iraq and Four Permanent US Bases," *About.com,* http://usliberals.about.com/od/homelandsecurit1/a/AmerPalace.htm.

16. Thaler, *Future US Security Relationship,* 116.

to building and expanding military bases in the Middle East, a practice that was harshly criticized by the governments and people, particularly Islamic radicals and extremist groups. From 2001 to 2008, apart from Germany, Japan and South Korea, US military forces abroad were concentrated mainly in the Middle East and Islamic countries, such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the UAE, and Djibouti, with the number of US armed forces in Iraq topping others in the early 21st century.

Table 7. 2: Cumulative time that individuals have deployed to Iraq between September 2001 and December 2011, by year

Years of Deployed Duty	Army	Navy	Air Force	Marine Corps
Not yet deployed	153,341 (27.3%)	108,021 (34.0%)	133,989 (40.9%)	77,233 (38.6%)
1 year (1 - 12 months)	131,057	141,232	118,035	66,459
2 years (13 - 24 months)	135,876	57,460	55,885	44,148
3 years (25 - 36 months)	94,574	9,479	15,498	10,584
4 years (37 - 48 months)	35,705	1,564	3,501	1,362
5+ years (49+ months)	5,959	368	1,029	161
Total	**554,512**	**318,124**	**327,937**	**199,947**

Source: Dave Baiocchi, "Measuring Army Deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan," RAND Corporation Research Report Series, 2013, 5.

Since Barack Obama took office, the US government has attached greater importance to a small-scale military presence with stronger mobility and flexibility. This soft military presence, at facilities called Cooperative Security Locations (CSL) also referred to as "lily pads," is less offensive to the host governments and local residents, and therefore, can effectively reduce the chance of "politicization" of foreign military presence in the Islamic countries. This is the internal dynamics of the US deployment of a soft military presence in Iraq.

After much wrangling, the Iraqi Supreme Court passed a resolution on August 15, 2011, which denied diplomatic immunity to the US military forces in the country, and thereafter US troops were denied extra-territoriality in Iraq. Surprised and rather embarrassed, the Obama administration promptly decided to pull out all armed forces from Iraq and close all military bases there soon after. By the end of December 2011, both the United States and NATO stated that they had no troops stationed and no military bases to run in Iraq. Thus, the Western military operations

that followed the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 came to an end. On December 31, 2011, thousands of Iraqi civilians from all walks of life celebrated peacefully throughout the country the withdrawal of foreign troops. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki declared at a gathering in Baghdad that the day would be "Iraq Day", symbolizing the formal end to the nine-year-long US military occupation of the country. This is the external reason why the US has deployed only a soft military presence in Iraq.

Iraqi hatred of US military bases is multi-dimensional, and the most important factor is US sense of arrogance and superiority over the Iraqis. The United States "took on too many large projects and often did not consult sufficiently with the Iraqis about which projects were needed and how best to go about them," according to the people's complaints; Prime Minister Maliki also noted that one highly promoted project, the Basra Children's Hospital, ran far over budget and was still not finished. The project was more than 200 percent over budget and four years behind schedule.[17] After the withdrawal of troops, the US declared that its "mission" was fulfilled and President Obama had abided by the promise to "pull out all armed forces from Iraq" that he had made during his presidential election campaign.

Since assuming power, President Obama has readjusted the US military strategy. With a slogan of "implementing US smart power," the Obama Doctrine was less aggressive, relying more on allies and multilateralism and advocated the projection of a US global force in an intangible, flexible, and mobilized way. US soft military presence in Iraq, therefore, was smaller but more effective and useful in recent years.

By the end of 2011, the US had closed all hard military bases in Iraq, but its "soft" military presence remained using private security contractors, military and intelligence officers located in the US embassy and in US consulates, US military training officers and consultants, and deployed special operation forces. Such soft military presence is of great significance.

Forms of US Soft Military Presence in Iraq

Influenced by Obama's views on military deployment, Washington abandoned the previous scheme of "maintaining several permanent military bases in Iraq" and decided to close all military bases there by December 31, 2011, a goal it ostensibly reached. However, a careful study reveals a different version: Pentagon has not

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17. Michael R. Gordon, "Report Details Mistakes Made by U.S. in Improvement Projects for Iraq," *New York Times, March* 6, 2013.

yet pulled out all the military personnel; instead, it has maintained a soft military presence in Iraq focused on a number of areas.

First, US soft military presence is in the form of private security contractors. On the one hand, Washington withdrew all troops from Iraq; on the other hand, the US still employs a number of private security contractors. The US government hired such private security contractors to maintain Iraqi security and escort American nationals in the country. These security contractors, albeit troublesome and even somehow harmful to US national image, are still an asset. Since US military bases were no longer visible, the soft military presence has minimized antipathy from Iraqi society. From August 31, 2010 to 2012, the US Department of State had employed over 6,000 private security contractors, a large increase from 2,700 in 2009. In December 2011, Academi, a Virginia-based US private security contractor, said it has trained 50,000 people and conducted more than 60,000 protective security missions around the world in the past seven years,[18] including in Iraq. By January 29, 2012, US private security contractors numbered 5,000 in Iraq, mainly performing such tasks as military preparation, security operations, peacekeeping, and security checks.[19]

Second, the US soft military presence is also in the form of security and intelligence officers at the Baghdad embassy and other consulates. After the new Iraqi government denied US military forces' diplomatic immunity and extra-territoriality, the Pentagon has to keep a certain number of security and intelligence officers in the US embassy and consulates in Iraq. Statistics show that the American embassy in Baghdad is the largest and the most expensive around the world; it served as a "green zone" and "bridgehead" for US power projection. The $730 million embassy, as large as the Vatican in Rome, covered an area of 104 acres and was equipped with its own water supply, electricity facilities, and drainage systems, making it virtually "a state within a state."[20] According to reports, it is the largest embassy in world history and the only building project in Iraq that is on time and on budget; is a bomb-proof super-bunker with a 15-feet thick perimeter wall; has 21 buildings and is the size of nearly 80 football fields; is equipped with state-of-the-art communications and surveillance technologies; was built at a cost of $592

18. Nathan Hodge, "Company Once Known as Blackwater Ditches Xe for Yet Another New Name," *Wall Street Journal*, December 12, 2011.

19. Eric Schmitt and Michael Schmidt, "US Drones Patrolling Its Skies Provoke Outrage in Iraq," *New York Times*, January 29, 2012.

20. James Denselow, "The US Departure from Iraq Is an Illusion," *The Guardian*, October 25, 2011.

million; has two huge blocks of offices for 8,000 US staff workers; and has the biggest swimming pool in Iraq.[21] One of the most vocal critics is anti-American Shiite cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr, who demanded that Iraq open a similarly large embassy in Washington "in order to preserve the dignity of Iraq and to save the US Embassy (in Baghdad) from the fire of weapons that have not yet been laid down."[22]

As of 2011, the US Embassy in Baghdad boasted 16,000 staff and officers, including diplomats, military attachés, as well as security and intelligence officers, most of who were endowed with diplomatic immunity.[23] According to the Washington Post, after the military occupation of Iraq, Washington had dispatched about 300 intelligence officers and 500 intelligence staff, making Iraq an area with the largest number of intelligence personnel since the end of the Cold War, comparable to Sai Kung, South Vietnam in the late 1960s.[24] After the US withdrew its forces from Iraq in late 2011, there were still about 16,000 diplomats, security and intelligence officers in the embassy of Baghdad. In addition, the three consulates in Basra, Kirkuk, and Mosul, staffed with 1,000 people each, also had a certain number of security and intelligence officers.[25]

A third aspect of US soft military presence could be seen in military training officers and consultants. After conquering Iraq, the US dispatched military officers and consultants to help the Iraqi transitional government train combatants and the police. In 2008, Bradley L. Bowman, a Council on Foreign Relations international affairs fellow, argued that to lessen antipathy from the local Iraqi people Washington should rely on military training programs and encourage US combatants and intelligence officers to infiltrate Iraq, so that US presence can be less conspicuous.[26] Raymond Odierno, a US top military official in Iraq, admitted that after pulling out its forces, some US forces would remain in the Iraqi local security checkpoints. Their main task would be training, supervising, providing medical care, assisting in air traffic control, and giving helicopter support. The Office of Security Cooperation

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21. White, "An American Palace."

22. Associated Press, "US Diplomatic Presence in Iraq Shrinking Fast," PhilStar.com, March 21, 2013; available at: http://www.philstar.com/breaking-news/2013/03/21/922357/us-diplomatic-presence-iraq-shrinking-fast.

23. Scott Stewart, "US Diplomatic Security in Iraq after the Withdrawal," *Security Weekly*, December 22, 2011.

24. Bruce Hoffman, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Iraq," RAND Corporation, *Occasional Paper* 127 (2004), 7.

25. Denselow, "The US Departure from Iraq."

26. Bradley L. Bowman, "After Iraq: Future US Military Posture in the Middle East," *Washington Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (2008), 83–84.

(OSC), for instance, was located in the US embassy in Baghdad, and was made up of several dozen American officers, to train Iraqi Special Forces. Cooperating fully with the Iraqi armed forces, these officers were both trainers and consultants. As Martin E. Dempsey, US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff put it, although limited in number, the team of US trainers and consultants would help the Iraqi transitional government to improve their combat skills and carry out training programs, so that the Iraqi government would be ready for procurement of US arms in the future. US training programs concentrated on about ten Iraqi military bases; they not only trained Iraqi troops and police, but they also engaged in counterterrorist campaigns with their Iraqi counterparts.[27]

Due to the presence of American military officers and consultants, the US became the largest supplier of arms to Iraq, a position previously occupied by the Soviet Union/Russia and France. By 2011, the US and Iraq had signed about 400 military cooperation agreements with a total value of $10 billion. The deals included 18 F-16s with a value of over $2 billion as well as other $6 billion worth of weapons and military facilities. In that year, Washington and Baghdad embarked on negotiations for another arms deal with a value of $900 million.

According to the new agreements, the US would send 160 more civilians and military attachés to participate in various Iraqi training programs, and there were 750 more American civilians who would stay permanently in Iraq to supervise the US military aid program in Iraq. After leaving Iraq in December 2012, Washington left about $400 million worth of military facilities, and in 2012 the US offered Iraq about $6 billion worth of additional aid programs – these programs could not transact smoothly without coordination from the US military officers and consultants.[28] To improve its training in Iraq, the US set up about 10 offices in Iraq and dispatched 3,500 American staff for various programs. For instance, the US 402nd Army Field Support Brigade (AFSB) assumed the maintenance of Iraqi troops; this was obviously part of the military presence. Undoubtedly, US training officers and consultants will maintain their presence in Iraq, thus playing an important role in Iraqi security in the future.[29]

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27. Walter Pincus, "After Iraq Pullout, U.S. Serves A Reminder to Iran," *Washington Post*, October 24, 2011.

28. Dennis Steele, "The Sun Sets on Operation New Dawn, but the Shadows Remain," *ARMY*, January 2012, 53.

29. Ibid., 54–55.

Fourth, US soft military presence was also in the form of special air forces. Despite the fact that the US had demobilized its armed forces in Iraq, the Baghdad air defense force was still under US control through a US special force. US top officials at the Pentagon reiterated time and again that the US was committed to Iraqi security and would reserve the right to combat Al-Qaeda cells in Iraq and jihadists, including the use of targeted killings of Islamic extremists and terrorists with drones. Apart from the larger drones deployed in Iraq by the US Department of Defense and the CIA, such as RQ-1 "Predator" and MQ-9 "Reaper" with 55-feet wing length, the US State Department itself also deployed over 20 small drones with wing length of 18 inches. Although they were not lethal, drones were extensively used for intelligence collection, communication, and for guaranteeing the physical security of diplomats.[30]

Functions of US Soft Military Presence in Iraq

In 2012, US military and security personnel numbered around 15,000 to 30,000, and such soft military presence would indubitably exert a far-reaching influence on US strategy in Iraq, in the Arabian Gulf and around the world.

First, at the state level, the US soft military presence on the ground would help the Obama administration to further influence Iraq. In the past decade, Washington has taken great pains to shape Iraq as a "model" for other failed and failing states, to demonstrate that "Islam and democracy are compatible." Therefore, with Iraq as an example, Washington highlighted that Western democracy and values were universal, and Islam and democracy has compatibility.[31]

Since it is located at the heart of the Middle East, a democratic and Western-style Iraq would have a strong symbolic significance and would produce a "spillover effect," for a successful Iraqi transition to democracy that would in turn set a model for other transitional Arab countries, such as Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen. Therefore, a stable, democratic and prosperous Iraq serves Washington interests, and US soft military presence would serve as a guarantee. On November 26, 2011, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani pointed out that US presence in Iraq after 2011 was a necessity and would be of great significance because Iraqi forces were still weak, ill-experienced, and poorly equipped, and particularly its navy and air forces were

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30. Schmitt and Schmidt, "US Drones Patrolling Its Skies."

31. See Salim Cevik, "Myths and Realities on Islam and Democracy in the Middle East," *Estudios Políticos* 38 (2011), 121–44.

too feeble to defend the country.[32] A continuous US military presence, in the form of military and police trainers, consultants, and private security contractors would effectively prevent Iraq from becoming the target of terrorist attacks and sectarian conflicts, save a democratic constituency of the new Iraq, and consolidate US dominance of Iraq.

As mentioned before, military presence was an essential means for the US to stabilize and control Iraq, but hard military bases would only alienate local residents. Since 2003, the Iraqi people commonly regarded US military occupation and military bases as a form of Western colonial rule, claiming that US soldiers were invaders, not liberators, and Iraqi sovereignty and dignity had been violated. Since Washington's military occupation started a decade ago, Iraq Body Count (IBC) has documented 112,017-122,438 civilian deaths from violence between March 20, 2003 and March 14, 2013,[33] thus causing a serious humanitarian disaster that aroused hatred. That was the root of anti-Americanism and terrorism in the country.[34]

After the establishment of a transitional government in Iraq, the call for complete withdrawal of US troops and for closing all hard military bases became increasingly loud in the Iraqi parliament and among the masses. In addition to Sunni Iraqis, large segments of the Iraqi Shiites and Iraqi Kurds also requested that the US close all military bases. In 2008, the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland carried out a survey, which showed that nearly 70 percent of Iraqi people hoped that the US could pull out its armed forces immediately.[35] In the same year, Bradley L. Bowman argued that US military bases in Iraq had induced Islamic radicals and terrorists to target the US clearly; US military bases in Iraq were not only unnecessary, but were also perceived to be offensive and hostile to the Iraqi people. Consequently, he pointed out that the US should close all its military bases in Iraq. He also argued that the US Central Command's military deployment in the GCC countries was powerful enough to

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32. Alsumaria.TV, "US Presence in Iraq beyond 2011 Is a Necessity," available at: http://www.alsumaria.tv/news/48567/talabani-us-presence-in-iraq-beyond-2011.

33. IraqBodyCount.org, "The War in Iraq: 10 Years and Counting: Analysis of Deaths in a Decade of Violence," available at: http://www.iraqbodycount.org/analysis/numbers/ten-years/.

34. Graf Hans-Christof Sponeck, *A Different Kind of War: The UN Sanctions Regime in Iraq* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 20.

35. Cooley, *Base Politics*, 268.

respond to any Iranian threat.[36] On the other hand, US soft military presence in Iraq since 2011 would not only guarantee US control over Iraqi security affairs, but also lower Iraqi people's dissatisfaction and antipathy.

Second, at the regional level, US soft military presence in Iraq helps to curb alleged Iranian aggression and maintain a strategic balance between the Shiite and Sunni sections in the Gulf region.

Pentagon's key concern was that, following the withdrawal of its forces, Iran might take advantage and "Finlandize" (i.e., "neutralize") Iraq, compelling Baghdad to seek a compromise with Iran.[37] The consequence of such scenario would be an imbalance of power between Sunnis and Shiites in the Gulf. The Obama administration firmly believed that Iranians would attempt to fill the power vacuum created by the US military withdrawal and infiltrate further into Iraqi Shiite heartland. If that happened, the US government reckoned, the Iran-led "Shiite Crescent," consisting of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Hizbollah in Lebanon would materialize, a development unacceptable for Washington. For many years, Tehran was quite complacent with the chaotic Iraqi situation since that provided a barrier against US military intervention in Iran.[38] In November 2011, the United States and its European allies declared that they would implement a new round of sanctions against Iranian oil companies and financial institutions, a decision Tehran harshly decried. Iranians threatened that, if another round of sanctions is imposed, Iran might close the Strait of Hormuz and that oil prices would skyrocket by 50 percent. In the recent report *Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* issued by the US Department of Defense in January 2012, the Pentagon made it clear that to contain Iran and stop its would-be destructive activities, the US would cooperate with the GCC countries and other allies to maintain a military presence in the Gulf.[39] By the end of 2012, almost all Iranian neighbors, such as Afghanistan, Turkey, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia,

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36. Bowman, "After Iraq," 79.

37. Pat Proctor, "The Mythical Shia Crescent," *Parameters* 38, no. 1 (2008), available at: http://www.google.com.hk/url?q=http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/08spring/proctor.pdf&sa=U&ei=atGvUsPQOqSwiQf16IDQAg&ved=0CDMQ_FjAD&usg=AFQjCNEmz66xOTtFwVSu3fvR8--TFlEjIA.

38. Edward P. Djerejian and Frank G. Wisner, co-chairs, proceedings from a working group co-sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations and the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy (2003), 13.

39. US Department of Defense, *Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (January 2012), 2, available at: http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf.

UAE, Oman, and Pakistan had US troops either in hard military bases or as a soft military presence. According to recent CENTCOM figures communicated to Al-Jazeera on April 30, 2012, the number of US troops stationed in close proximity to Iran is close to 125,000.[40] US aircraft carriers, literally floating bases, in the Gulf and in the Arabian Sea, are also part of the chain of military bases.[41] According to CENTCOM, around 15,000-20,000 soldiers are stationed on naval vessels in the Near East area. US soft military presence in Iraq is one of the links connecting those in the GCC countries and in Turkey, playing an essential role for Washington to keep its predominance in the Arabian Gulf. In December 2013, the US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel paid a visit to Bahrain and committed to maintaining a 35,000-strong force in the Gulf region regardless of the interim nuclear deal with Iran. He emphasized that the military footprint includes 10,000 US Army troops with tanks and Apache helicopters, roughly 40 ships at sea including an aircraft carrier battle group, missile defense systems, advanced radar, surveillance drones, and warplanes that can strike at short notice.[42]

Finally, at the global level, US soft military presence in Iraq is conducive to a US strategic shift from the Greater Middle East to the Asia-Pacific region. On the one hand, the soft military presence in Iraq could help to cut the US defense budget and lessen US fiscal deficit so that Pentagon could pour more resources into the Asia-Pacific region. According to statistics, by 2011, US federal debt had exceeded $14 trillion, which virtually equals the US GDP of the same year, while the US debt per capita reached a historical record of $45,000. In 2010 alone, the US federal government paid $414 billion in interest on the federal debt.[43] With the slowdown of the US economy, on December 31, 2011, President Obama ratified an act deciding that the 2012 US defense budget would be $662 billion, a drop of $63 billion.[44] In January 2012, the Pentagon declared that in 2013, the US defense budget would drop to $613.4 billion.[45] President Obama also demanded that, in the next decade, the US defense budget should be cut by $450 billion, of which $78

40. Ben Piven, "US Bases Encircle Iran," Al Jazeera, May 1, 2012.

41. On floating bases in the Gulf, see Thom Shanker, "Floating Base Gives U.S. New Footing in the Persian Gulf," *New York Times,* July 11, 2012.

42. "US to Maintain 35,000 Troops in Gulf Region: Hagel," *Peninsula,* December 8, 2013.

43. Adnan Khan, "Is America Becoming the New 'Sick Man'?" *Khilafah,* March 15, 2009, 19.

44. David Nakamura, "Obama Signs Defense Bill, Pledges to Maintain Legal Rights of US Citizens," *Washington Post,* December 31, 2011.

45. In Fiscal Year 2014, US defense budget reached about $630 billion.

billion would be cut from 2012-2016.[46] To achieve that goal, the US must cut its foreign military expenditure, particularly in Iraq.

In the past decade, the US spent over $800 billion on the Iraq War and on combating insurgents in post-war Iraq. It took Washington over one billion dollars annually to run hard military bases in Iraq alone, which became an unbearable burden for Washington, especially if one adds other military expenditures. Compared with the previous hard military bases in Iraq, the soft military presence is cheaper and more flexible, enabling defense budget cuts. As the report Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense pointed out, although the US would cut the defense budget, US foreign military presence was required and this would be achieved in creative ways.[47] The soft military presence is one of those "creative methods."

Furthermore, US soft military presence in Iraq alleviated the US lack of armed forces in the global base deployment. President Obama underscored that the decade-long US anti-terror war had deviated from its direction and that the US must refocus on the Asia-Pacific regions, for the area was rising in global influence and the US had a big stake countering that influence. On November 17, 2011, President Obama delivered a speech to the Australian parliament, whereby he reiterated the two states' six-decade long strategic alliance. In his speech, Obama declared that the US would increase its military maneuvers in Australia, and US naval forces would be stationed in Australia. With foreign military bases in Australia as platforms, the US would strengthen its military preparations with its Australian ally and at the same time train Australian troops. Obama is convinced that a powerful US military presence in the Asia-Pacific region would reinforce the US rapid response and deployment capabilities and guarantee "regional peace and security." In 2012, the US planned to dispatch 250 marines to Darwin City, in north Australia, and the total US force in the military base would reach 2,500 in the years to come.

On January 5, 2012, President Obama further illustrated the US future military strategy "blueprint", which is three-fold. First, the US will reduce its military presence in Europe, Africa, and Latin America, while containing anti-US forces in the Middle East, particularly Iran. The US will also increase its military presence in the Asia-Pacific region. Second, US Army troops would be reduced from 570,000 to 490,000, while increasing the Navy and Air Force's power projection capabilities. Third, the US will reduce its large and permanent military bases and increase

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46. Department of Defense, Office of the Deputy Undersecretary of Defense, *Base Structure Report*, 6.

47. US Department of Defense, *Sustaining US Global Leadership*, 2.

smaller and mobilized military presence abroad.[48] Since the Obama administration regarded the Asia-Pacific region as key to its military strategies, and since it was determined to consolidate US military bases in Australia, Guam, Japan, Okinawa, South Korea, Singapore the Philippines and Thailand, the US withdrawal of active troops from Iraq, opting instead for a soft military presence, would certainly help Washington to focus on East Asia.

Challenges to US Soft Military Presence in Iraq

As of 2013, US military presence in Iraq is further shrinking. According to the US Ambassador to Iraq, Robert Stephen Beecroft, US military and civilian personnel numbered 16,000 in early 2012, but dropped to 10,500 in March 2013, and by the end of the year 2013, the figure will be around 5,500.[49] The decline of US military presence implies a weakening of US manipulation power in the region. In contrast, dramatic changes have taken place in the Middle East, and Washington's decision to keep only limited soft military presence in Iraq is disputable and will probably sabotage US influence in Iraq and in the Middle East at large.

The first challenge is the worsening Iraqi situation, which has exposed the weakness of the US lack of hard military bases in the country. Since the Obama administration closed all the military bases in Iraq, the number of terrorist attacks has rocketed, and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki has warned that the Sunni and Shiite conflicts are so intense that Iraq is on the verge of a civil war. Moreover, in 2012 and early 2013, violence attributed to Al-Qaeda in Iraq intensified, highlighting the group's attempts to exploit widening sectarian cleavages.[50] The US State Department strongly condemns the terrorist attacks perpetrated throughout Iraq and remains committed to supporting Iraq's efforts to combat and overcome terrorism,[51] but US military response and political resolve are quite limited due to its lack of hard military bases in the country. "Since the end of the Iraq War, many Iraqi insurgents from Anbar and Diyala provinces took sanctuary in Sunni areas of Syria, targeting the Al-Maliki government in Baghdad and the Assad regime

48. Thom Shanker and Elisabeth Bumiller, "Obama Puts His Stamp on Strategy for a Leaner Military," *New York Times,* January 6, 2012.

49. "US Diplomatic Presence."

50. Jonathan Masters and Zachary Laub, "Al-Qaeda in Iraq (a.k.a. Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria," Council on Foreign Relations *Backgrounder* October 29, 2013, available from: http://www.cfr.org/iraq/al-qaeda-iraq/p14811.

51. Embassy of the United States—Iraq, "The United States Condemns the Terrorist Attacks across Iraq," April 16, 2013, available at: http://iraq.usembassy.gov/pr_april_16_2013.html.

in Damascus. The irony is that the US is protecting a pro-Iran Shiite regime in Baghdad against a Sunni-based insurgency while at the same time supporting a Sunni-led movement against the Iran-backed dictatorship in Syria."[52]

Before leaving his post, US Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta complained that the inability of the Obama administration to finalize an agreement providing for an American military presence in Iraq after 2011 had deprived the US of important political leverage in Iraq, and since the Iraqi government is adhering to pro-Iranian and pro-Russian polices, the US government is greatly concerned over Maliki's growing authoritarianism and increased tensions among Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds.[53] The second challenge is Iraqi policy reorientation. Washington calculated that, so long as US maintains a soft military presence in Iraq, it would be a model of democracy for other Middle East countries. Iraq will not only be a beacon for Arab countries, but also a "US backyard." However, the Iraqi government's foreign policy reorientation is worrisome for the Obama administration. On the one hand, Al-Maliki administration in Baghdad seeks a strategic partnership with Iran, the US arch enemy in the Middle East, and helps build a "Shiite Crescent"; on the other hand, Baghdad has shown interest in purchasing arms from Russia. Iraq, according to a report, is negotiating with Russia to purchase air defense facilities.[54]

The third challenge is from the prolonged Syrian civil war. The Syrian situation is worsening, but US diplomatic and military influence is limited due to its lack of hard military bases in Iraq, one of the key neighbors of Syria.

To meet these challenges, the Obama administration seems to be probing the possibility of rebuilding hard military bases in Iraq. In October 2012, the Obama administration reportedly negotiated with the Iraqi government on restoring military deployment in the country. In the same month, a member of the Iraqi Parliament Kazzem Al-Shimri told the media that "given the existing challenges that the US is facing in the region, it is trying to find a base in Iraq and for that reason it is trying to return to Iraq's Al-Assad military base."[55]

52. Tom Hayden, "US Special Forces Deployed in Iraq, Again," TheNation.com, September 5, 2012, available at: http://www.thenation.com/article/170158/us-special-forces-deployed-iraq-again.

53. Gordon, "Report Details Mistakes."

54. "American Special Forces Deployed to Iraq: US General," Press TV, September 29, 2012, available at http://www.presstv.com/detail/2012/09/29/264108/us-special-forces-deployed-to-iraq/. In November 2012, Iraq's Prime Minister Al-Maliki declared the cancellation of the $4.2 billion arms deal signed with Russia.

55. "Iraqi MP: US Trying to Restore Military Presence in Iraq," *Islamic Invitation Turkey,* available at: http://www.islamicinvitationturkey.com/2012/10/08/iraqi-mp-us-trying-to-

In December 2012, despite the claim by the Pentagon that the US has only 157 soldiers in Iraq to implement its diplomatic mission, the Pentagon dispatched 3,000 troops (Army Special Operations) secretly from Kuwait to Iraq for missions pertaining to Syria, according to the western media. It is reported that these troops are "mostly stationed at Balad military garrison in Salahuddin province and al-Asad air base in al-Anbar province" to increase its military influence over Syria.[56] The US troops on the ground in Iraq are in response to concern in Washington over a possible chemical weapons attack against Syrian rebels by embattled President Bashar Assad.[57] It is still too early to judge whether the US is ready to restore some of its hard military bases in Iraq.

Conclusion

For a long period of time, the US sought to keep its predominance in the Arabian Gulf through military deployment. Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq are the top three countries that hold the richest oil reserves in the Arabian Gulf and the world as well. The US soft military presence in Iraq, together with its hard bases in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, among others, has formed a "Persian Gulf Shield," which has consolidated the US hegemonic position in the volatile Gulf and transformed it into an "American Gulf."

Since the end of World War II, the US has habitually stationed troops and established military bases in occupied countries. Nevertheless, the Obama administration decided to close all military bases and pulled out troops from Iraq in a manner suggesting a neglect of the country's geopolitical importance. This paper categorizes foreign military presence into hard military bases and soft military presence, and finds that, although Washington closed all hard its military bases in Iraq, its "soft" military presence has remained, in the form of security contractors, military and intelligence officers in the embassy and consulates, military training officers and consultants, and special operation forces. The "lily pads" in Iraq provide easier mobilization and flexibility, reflecting Obama's "New Thinking" on military deployment in the Middle East.

restore-military-presence-in-iraq/.

56. "3,000 US Troops Secretly Return to Iraq via Kuwait," Press TV, December 9, 2012, available at: http://www.presstv.com/detail/2012/12/09/277127/3000-us-troops-secretly-return-to-iraq/.

57. Carlo Muñoz, "DOD Denies Deployments of US Forces back to Iraq," *DEFCONHill*, December 10, 2012; available at: http://thehill.com/blogs/defcon-hill/operations/272049-dod-denies-deployments-of-us-forces-back-to-iraq-.

Since the closure of US military bases in Iraq in late 2011, the US Department of State and the Pentagon, through close-knit coordination, have planned for a civilian-led presence in Iraq consisting of 16,000-17,000 personnel at 14 sites starting in fiscal year 2012. The State Department had a scheme to reduce the presence to 11,500 personnel at 11 sites by 2013. Even with the reductions, the mission in Iraq would be the largest US diplomatic presence in the world. The Obama administration allocated an estimated $4 billion for the civilian-led presence for fiscal year 2012, 93 percent of which was for security and support costs. In addition, the State Department requested $1.9 billion in police and military assistance and $471 million in other foreign assistance for fiscal year 2012.[58] Washington has attempted to influence regional affairs through that soft military presence and avoid the resentment caused by large military bases, but the shortfalls of this approach are apparent. With the increasing influence of Russia, the chaos of Iraqi sectarian conflicts, the Iran-Iraq rapport and the worsening of the Syrian civil war, US soft military presence is "too soft" to control Iraqi, the Gulf, and the Syrian situations.

Apart from Iraq, Obama attempted to build a soft military presence in other parts of the world as well. For instance, in January 2012, the US declared that it would establish a soft military presence, i.e., drone bases, in Ethiopia and in the Republic of Seychelles.[59] On January 25, 2012, although Washington admitted that it had no interest in building military bases in the Philippines, it was interested in cooperation in joint military exercises, anti-terrorism, and combating piracy.[60] All these steps are in line with Obama's "light footprint" strategy, of establishing a soft military presence similar to the "lily pads" in Iraq.

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58. Michael J. Courts, "Mission Iraq: State and DOD Face Challenges in Finalizing Support and Security Capabilities," US Government Accountability Office, June 28, 2012; available at: http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-12-856T.

59. Schmitt and Schmidt, "US Drones Patrolling Its Skies."

60. Craig Whitlock, "Remote U.S. Base at Core of Secret Operations," *Washington Post,* October 25, 2012.

8

Arabism, Nationalism, and Islamism in Iraq: A Few Scenarios for the Future

Yacoob Abba Omar

Recommendations for GCC Policymakers:

- Purpose-built recurring sub-regional conference, which includes Iran, Iraq and GCC members, be established
- Bilateral trade to be pursued until a comprehensive free trade agreement can be agreed upon. Part of the economic measures would be a commitment by the GCC countries to invest in Iraq and Iran
- Confidence-building measures focusing on security issues should aim at nuclear and joint military cooperation as well heralding the end to a regional arms race
- A common, comprehensive approach be taken on the Kurdish question

Recommendations for Iraqi Policymakers:

- Establish a power-sharing system which takes into account the aspirations of the Sunnis, the fears of the Shii, and the realities of the Kurdish region
- Ensure the independence of the judiciary and that security forces act in a non-partisan, professional manner

- Abide by the two-term limits for the PM position and get impartial international agencies to conduct the 2014 elections
- Invest in basic services especially housing, schooling, health, electricity, and waste removal.
- Reverse the brain drain by creating the right conditions for skilled Iraqis to remain at home.

Introduction

Looking at post-war Iraq, an old African proverb comes to mind: "When elephants fight, it is the grass beneath that gets trampled." The region of the Euphrates and Tigris has long been the center of many ancient trade and civilizational routes. This made it, unfortunately, a lucrative territory for conflict. Contemporary contestation for hegemony over Iraq can be seen in those very broad terms as well, hence making it seem that the future of Iraq appears to be pre-determined. However, as the section on future scenarios for Iraq suggests, this need not be the case. Iraq can follow a different path – but only if it can be moved out of the grooves it seems to have been stuck in over the past hundred years. To do so will need a creative leap, and the chapter's conclusion hopes to provide some pointers toward that.

The policies of various state actors need to be seen in the light of attempts to gain ascendancy over the Gulf region as well as the Islamic world. For example, the manner in which the US withdrew from Iraq in the twenty first century echoes the manner in which the British had to finally accede to Iraqi independence and sovereignty in the twentieth century. Both powers hoped to exercise control over an increasingly assertive and independent Iraq as part of the strategy to control the Gulf. This is evident in the various transitional arrangements – especially in relation to oil production – which were put in place during the British withdrawal and which the US hoped to put in place now, to reduce the independence of Iraq and increase its reliance on the West. To appreciate this better, it is important to locate the future of post-war Iraq in a postcolonial context – a task which the chapter sets out to do in the section titled "Postcolonial Iraq State and Economy." Particular emphasis is placed on how oil has shaped not only imperial interest in Iraq but also the very nature of the state.

Similarly, one can see in the triangle of tensions between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey echoes from the past. The section titled "Arabism's Limits and Potentials" examines the extent to which Iraq has been impacted by the pan-national sentiments of Arabism. On the other hand, the section titled "Current Islamist Discourses" looks at how Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Egypt all play some role

impacting on the situation within Iraq. Attention is then paid to the very specific nature of Iraqi national identity. In the section titled "The Holy Trinity" the forces of Arabism, nationalism, and Islamism are seen as hammers blowing upon the anvil of the Iraqi nation. These forces have to contend with a particular tapestry which consists of threads of tribe and clan, family and ethnic identity (such as that of the Kurds).

The chapter also tries to lay the basis for a creative leap in our thinking of the future of Iraq. In doing so it resorts to using methodologies associated with scenarios. When drawing up scenarios, it is tempting to focus on the very optimistic or the very pessimistic. Our experience shows us that reality is never quite as sharply defined. Instead the better approach is to ascertain which will be the most important variables impacting on Iraq, referred to as "Key Driving Forces," and then arrive at a range of possible ways they could evolve over the long term.

From Ottoman Provinces to Democratic State

Iraq is the archetypal Arab country: throughout its modern history, it has grappled with the forces of colonialism as well as:

- The currents which constitute Arabist thinking. In their most extreme form it would be elements which seek to create a single pan-Arab identity. By Arabism, this chapter refers to the notion that Arabic-speakers belong to a single social group – be it a 'nation' or an 'ethnie.'

- Islamism, which is seen as a pan-national identity, like Arabism, but one which seeks to unite Muslims of different parts of the world with the aim of establishing Islamic political orders where possible or encouraging stricter observance of Islamic precepts when the capture of state power is not the objective or not possible.

- Nationalism. The Arab world, and more broadly the Islamic world, has been shaped and will continue to be shaped by nationalist forces, notwithstanding the appeals to pan-Arab or pan-Islamic identities. In the case of Iraq, these yield national identities which are a result as much of ethnic and cultural dimensions as well as political, tribal and religious elements.

Postcolonial Iraq State and Economy

Postcolonialism has its roots in the anti-colonial thinking of circa mid-20th century. The emphasis of anti-colonial thinking was on modernization or catching up with

the West. The ideology was rooted in the nation-state which was going to uplift its people through education and ambitious development projects.

The anti-colonial discourse of Bandung as well as that of intellectuals such as Anouar Abdul-Malek, Samir Amin, Frantz Fanon and Aime Cesaire mixed with the political issues of the day in the developed world – be they anti-Vietnam demonstrations, civil rights movements, and feminist struggles. This, according to Homi Bhabha, laid the basis for postcolonialism to "emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of 'minorities' within the geopolitical divisions of east and west, north and south."[1]

Edward Said's *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient,* published in 1978, is regarded as the foundational text for the broad postcolonial approach, which developed into two key strands – postcolonial studies and subaltern studies. Said's book opens with a line penned by Marx as an epigraph: "They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented." In doing so it asserted the right of the marginalized Oriental subject to be heard. At the core of Said's contribution was the attempt to identify the tendency in post-enlightenment Europe to produce knowledge of the Orient as "a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire."[2]

Despite the relatively recent emergence of this approach, postcolonialism already has many contesting definitions corresponding to various perspectives. At one level, in the form of postcolonial studies, it has established a firm foothold in the fields of critical literary studies, focussing especially on textual analysis. The other major strand in the postcolonial approach, represented by the subaltern studies group (by its very name acknowledging its debt to Gramsci) which was organized around the *Subaltern Studies* journal launched in 1982 under the editorship of Ranajit Guha. Writing in the inaugural edition, Guha explained that 'subaltern' is used as the "name for the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society, whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office, or in any other way."[3]

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1. Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990).
2. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin Books, 1990).
3. Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India," in *Selected Subaltern Studies,* ed. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 35–44.

Space does not allow this chapter to go into the rich debates within this approach. Two key points of note, though, are:

- As Partha Chatterjee (1993) has pointed out for most parts of the world the identities and institutions of civil society are reserved for the privileged few. Social actors in the postcolonial world disturb the dominant order by raising their issues, but they would normally do so through identities outside of citizenship, civil society, and constitutional entitlements.[4]

- Sami Zubaida has argued that Islamists have tended to reflect orientalist thinking when they have argued that "specific cultural-religious essences persist (over centuries) and ultimately triumph over superficial, imported modernity" (2009:181).[5]

The marginalized will always be with us: it is when they discover their agency that they can be deemed the subaltern. In the case of Iraq, as we shall discuss later, Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki galvanizes the Shii base as the subaltern, the suppressed, or the marginalized.

While Iraq was the first of the League of Nations Mandates to achieve full independence as a sovereign state, British influence continued to be exerted through the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930. A point Charles Tripp makes of this phase in Iraqi history bears testimony to the tenacity of history. He writes that the period of the British Mandate had made of Iraq

> "a British imperial project, corresponding in its shape and in its constitution to ideas current in Great Britain about the proper organization of power…On another level, it had delivered into the hands of those who staffed the state machinery and who commanded its resources a powerful instrument for the acquisition of land, the presentation of privilege, and the maintenance of a landscape ordered to suit particular networks of favour and interest."[6]

The period of the Hashemite monarchy (1932-1958) which followed served largely to act in British interests but saw the established socio-economic relations being consolidated, if not ossified. The most salient of these which persist in some form or the other today are: Kurdish aspirations for full autonomy; the conservative

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4. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

5. Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People, and the State: Political Ideas and Movements in the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009).

6. Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 74.

politics of the tribal shaikhs, notwithstanding which side of the Islamic spectrum they came from; the emergence of parties linked to Sunni or Shia perspectives; the willingness of masses to take to the streets; and ultimately contestation over who controls the vast oil reserves. It also saw the development of a type of politics characterized by the classic Arab strongman. Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki comes at the end of a long line of authoritarian figures such as Nouri Al-Said, who lived a chameleon-like life through the late Ottoman period, the British Mandate and up to the Hashemite Monarchy; the two Arif brothers, especially Abd al-Salam Arif; General 'Abd al-Karim, President Ahmed Hasan Al-Bakr, and the ultimate Iraqi strongman, President Saddam Hussein.

Persistence of myths and memories of historical events necessary for carving a national identity can be maintained by judicious use of propaganda. An example of this is that the coup of 1958, which ushered in the republic and ended the monarchy, was the product of a widespread social movement. Haytham Bahoora points out the limited impact of this moment: "If Iraq's 1958 anti-colonial revolution had national independence as its official aim, the most significant economic component of the nation's post-colonial independence meant ending foreign control over Iraq's natural resources and a redistribution of wealth."[7]

Built-in Authoritarianism

The undemocratic nature of the postcolonial elite is the reason for the focus on the subaltern which is often marginalized even in nominally democratic society. Hence, Tripp concludes that "Saddam Hussein and his dictatorship were the manifestation of a particularly potent narrative in the history of the Iraqi state – one in which exclusivity, communal mistrust, patronage and the exemplary use of violence were the main elements, woven into a system of dependence on and conformity with the will of a small number of men at the centre in the name of social discipline and national destiny."[8]

Nouri Al-Maliki was seen as a compromise Prime Minister in 2005. In 2010, he cobbled together a fragile coalition government after the centrist, secular Iraqiyya bloc led by Iyad Alawi could not hold a government together. In the first half of 2012, members of the coalition government he created accused him of behaving as an autocrat in the mold of Saddam Hussein. His partners in the coalition government pushed through parliament a law that would not allow Al-Maliki

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7.   Haytham Bahoora, Jadaliyaa, April 17, 2013.
8.   Tripp, A History of Iraq, 187.

achieve his aspiration of more than two terms. Al-Maliki's case for extensions to his terms is assisted by the fact that the Constitution is silent on the matter and that he would probably be able to use the pliant Supreme Court to do his bidding. The same situation applies to the security services that are now directly answerable to him, instead of civilian ministries.

A National Democratic Institute poll conducted in 2012 indicated that Al-Maliki had become the most popular Iraqi politician, for the first time surpassing the populist cleric Muqtada Al-Sadr as well as beating the winner of the 2010 elections, Iyad Alawi.[9] Joost Hiltermann suggests that this is due to his "ability to speak to people directly," unlike "the tendency of other leaders to use very proper Arabic reinforcing the image of tone-deaf former exiles who returned to Iraq merely to grab power and amass wealth."[10] Also, Hiltermann points out, Al-Maliki is able to share the persecution complex that many Iraqi Shia feel. This is due to the sense that they have suffered for centuries under Sunni rule. According to this view, it is alleged that the US and the Arab Gulf countries united to support Iyad Alawi in the 2010 elections, hence alienating him further from the electorate.

Diaal-Asadi, a member of the Muqtada Al-Sadr's bloc, told Roula Khalaf of the Financial Times: "It's unusual for a person who heads the government to have all his partners telling him that he should change his policies – and he thinks they are all wrong and conspiring against him and against Shia Islam. There are attempts to bring the cult of dictatorship back. But no one is going to allow it to happen."[11]

Despite the optimism, the prospects for democracy continue to be precarious. As one of the respondents told Khalaf: "We had one oppressive regime but now we have 100 political parties that are oppressive." Hiltermann describes the dilemma faced by Al-Maliki as follows: "Open the system up, and violent spoilers could take advantage of weak institutions to undermine the state; close it down, and state repression could spawn its own violent response. On the continuum between these two extremes, Maliki's Iraq lies somewhere in the center."

The Economist opines that Al-Maliki seeing his term through to April 2014 "is not good news for Iraq, but not entirely bad, either. Just keeping a lid on things, as oil revenue grows and begins to percolate downwards, may be a realistic ambition for a country divided internally and surrounded by strife."[12]

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9. The report was published on October 23, 2012. "Iraq Survey Shows Growing Optimism"; available from: National Democratic Institute: http://Iraq-survey-growing-optimism.

10. Joost Hiltermann, "Iraq: What Remains," Middle East Report 43 (Spring 2013): 266.

11. Khalaf, Financial Times, April 22, 2013.

12. "The Slow Road Back," The Economist, March 2, 2013.

State of the Economy

The Coalition Provisional Authority – a US/British body – ruled in Baghdad from May 2003 to June 2004. According to Nida Alahamad, "It was the only time when the US, in its capacity as occupier, was in charge of Iraq administratively and legally…Securing the flow of oil was the unequivocal top priority for the occupiers upon their entry into Iraq… (T)he flow of Iraqi oil depended on something besides armed protection: a dependable flow of electricity…The oil pumps and refineries operated on electricity, and most of the electrical power plants in turn ran on petroleum products, whether natural gas or fuel oil. Hydroelectric plants generated only 24 percent of the country's power."[13]

Of the litany of mistakes made by the invaders, there can be little doubt that the manner in which attempts were made to secure a constant supply of energy was among the most tragic of civilian-related errors. Before the occupation, Iraq produced 4,000 megawatts of power. This was despite the 13 years of crippling sanctions, which saw Iraq deprived of new technologies and spare parts. However, the electricity grid "was essentially held together with Band-Aids and rubber bands," according to one US official. A month after the invasion power dropped from 4,000MW to 711 MW, to recover to 1,275 MW by April 2004. This was directly related to the Coalition's indiscriminate bombing of civilian targets and the retaliatory looting of the electricity grid. "Stuff happens" was US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's famous description of these tragic developments. All this served to disrupt oil and sewer networks.

Paul Bremer III's infamous Order 1 began the 'deBaathification' of the state. The disbandment of the Iraqi army combined with Rumsfeld's strategy of keeping the number of ground troops to a minimum, in all likelihood, resulted in the very high use of private security firms. It has been estimated that between 2003 and 2008 the Coalition Provisional Authority and USAID contributed $5.3 billion to 77 private security firms to protect US-funded locations. Alahmad has referred to this as the "interconnection of oil, electricity and cash – as well as security."[14] This led to insurgents launching over 70 attacks on pipelines, wells, refineries, and storage tanks, as well as people in the oil ministry. The electricity grid was also subject to attack with strikes on distribution networks, oil and gas supplies, and generators.[15]

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13.   Nida Alahmad, "Rewiring a State: The Techno-Politics of Electricity in the CPA's Iraq," *Middle East Report* 43 (Fall 2013): 266.

14.   Ibid.

15.   Ibid.

Alahmad points out that "Under the CPA, the Iraqi state building project was funded by public money, but overseen, executed and secured by private American firms." While this is not unusual, Alahmad argues, the "expansive scope of the CPA operation and the occupiers' unaccountable use of Iraqi money to fund their myriad projects brought a new degree of moral hazard."[16] There were two sources of funding for the occupation: US taxpayers and Iraqi oil revenue. The former was subject to Congressional oversight while Paul Bremer, as head of the CPA, had complete, direct control of Iraqi funds. He resisted any outside auditing until the very end, and then it was found out that $9.4 billion of Iraqi money had been mismanaged.

What does the current situation look like in terms of Iraq's state and economy? While the OECD/IEA outlook varies from an optimistic, pessimistic, to middle road scenarios, The Economist concludes that "As things stand, Iraq's oil production looks likely to disappoint all but the pessimists." Most of the current production is from Kurdistan, the infrastructure is still creaking, and a law to regulate the petroleum sector has yet to be passed. In 2012, the electricity grid supplied 8,400 MW, but more than 6 percent of this came from a private power plant in the Kurdish region, or from a Turkish plant in Basra, and the rest was imported from Iran. "The grid continues to falter and is not expected to catch up with consumption until 2015."[17]

Similarly, oil production continues to suffer despite Iraq having the fifth largest oil reserves (143 billion barrels, or 9 percent of world reserves) and relatively easy access to oil thus reducing production costs. Pre-invasion levels were at 1.5 million barrels per day. Currently Iraq is producing 3 mbpd, the highest level since 2003. This makes it the third largest exporter after Saudi Arabia and Russia. However, it was hoping to be pumping 12 mbpd by 2017/2020 and has had to revise the target downwards to 9 mbpd. This is due largely to the political instability, the lack of security, as well as the previously mentioned problems with infrastructure especially related to pipelines, pumping stations, and oil storage facilities. The OECD/IEA in its 2012 World Energy Outlook suggests that doubling output to 6.1 mbpd may be a more plausible scenario. If the negative conditions persist, this could reach at best 4 mbpd.

Chazan writes that despite the oil majors being put off by the deals being offered by Baghdad, state oil companies such as China's CNPC have flourished. He quotes an International Energy Agency report saying that a quarter of Iraqi oil

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16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

will be heading for China by 2035. He cites analysts saying that "state companies are much less likely than the oil majors to be deterred by low fees and low returns: for them, the key is access to Iraq's hydrocarbon resources, and the offtake deals that allow them to export crude. But ultimately the winner of the past decade has been the Iraqi state. The IEA predicts Baghdad stands to gain almost $5 trillion in revenues from oil exports to 2035 – offering a 'transformative opportunity' for the economy…The Iraqis are well and truly in control of their own oil industry."[18]

Bahoora strikes a cautionary note when he describes the contemporary Iraqi state's contracting of foreign multinationals for executing development projects as "the neo-liberal, shock-and-awe economic colonization of Iraq." He writes that the Iraqi government hopes that the "promise of future prosperity will somehow ameliorate dissatisfaction with the dismal present."

And what is the condition of the Iraqi people? Asked how the huge oil revenues have impacted ordinary Iraqi lives, Iraq's Foreign Minister Hoshayr Zebair cites "unprecedented freedom, media, travel, access to the internet and satellite" as example of the progress made since 2003.[19] This jolly take on the progress since the US invasion is a worrying indication of the distance between the privileges of the elite and poverty of the majority. Less than 40 percent of Iraqi adults have a job, and a quarter of families live below the World Bank's poverty line. This shows little improvement on the pre-US invasion figures. The state employs 3.5 million people, which is 65 percent of the workforce and accounts for 70 percent of the GDP.[20] Khalaf observed that "Iraq's factories are still idle but there are several new malls under construction, as well as fancy car dealerships and private banks."[21] This is a clear indication of the widening levels of inequality between the haves and those that have been marginalized, the subaltern.

Khalaf points to the increasing acceptance of violence as normal, writing that "The banality of violence is part of a strange combination of simultaneous progression and regression." She suggests that there are signs of hope among the younger generation. Some young Iraqi businesspeople are returning, exploiting their competitive advantage as Iraqis over foreign businesses. Others in civil society are setting up projects to encourage the distribution of books and reading, while

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18. Guy Chazan, *Financial Times,* March 18, 2013.

19. Khalaf, *Financial Times,* April 22, 2013.

20. "Supporting Iraq's Move to Market Economy," Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, available from: http://www.sida.se/English/Countries-and-regions/Asia/Iraq/Programmes-and-projects1/Supporting-Iraqs-Move-to-Market-Economy/.

21. Khalaf, *Financial Times,* April 22, 2013.

some are focusing on greater participation in the political process. For example, a Facebook-based campaign is encouraging people to register their support for a civic state, accumulating votes which can then be channeled towards non-sectarian candidates.[22] Since the US troop withdrawal of December 2011, the civil war that raged, reaching its heights in 2006/07, seems to have abated somewhat. Khalaf reported that "Many people are confident that, however intense the political battles, there can be no return to full-blown civil war."[23]

We can now turn our attention to two key features of the Iraqi discourse: Arabism and Islamism.

Arabism's Limits and Potential

During the late 19th century, while Turkish and Arab nationalism was looking at ways of extending the existence of the Ottoman empire, Egyptian, Tunisian, and Algerian nationalists were responding to European rule, "within a clearly delimited country."[24] Other countries did not enjoy such unified entities where the people and their land corresponded neatly. The arbitrary carving up of Greater Syria and Iraq into smaller entities was similar to that of the Berlin Conference experience of the African continent where often illogical lines were drawn on maps to define the boundaries of countries. Similarly illogical, Zubaida argues, was the denial of statehood to Armenia and Kurdistan.

This period saw the overthrow of the monarchy by a military-led revolution in Egypt in 1952 and the end of British rule in Iraq in 1958 and the ushering in of a republican and socialist agenda. Similarly, the Algerian War of Independence saw an end to French rule in 1962. At that stage, there was already an ambivalent attitude towards democracy and liberalism. Kramer believes an illiberal approach emerged because the Arab rulers had to impose themselves on people who had not chosen to be Arabs.

The roots of these differences in direction lay in how the nation was conceptualized, whether it had existed as an entity before being colonized or if it was the creation of some colonial imagination. Those who stressed al-qawmiya were drawing on the German traditions set by Herder and Fichte with an emphasis on the oneness of the people (the volk) under a unifying language and a continuous historical experience. On the other hand, the Anglo-French school would embrace

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22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002).

al-wataniya, which is nationalism encouraged by state institutions within a geographically limited space, allowing for a variety of religions and ethnic entities to thrive.

The Baath Party came to power in Iraq in 1963 after it overthrew the regime which had come to power through the 1958 coup. There were deep differences between the Syrian and Iraqi versions of the Baathist ideology. Originating in Syria in the 1940s, the Baath ideology was critical of the conservative Arab nationalists. Interestingly, in Iraq it had followers from both Shia and Sunni persuasions. The Nasserist elements within Iraq's Baath Party emphasized pan-Arab unity, while the strand which Saddam Hussein eventually came to represent sought an 'Iraq First' policy. This was because of the pressing socio-economic needs within Iraq. The Arab world became a stage for manifesting Iraq's, and especially the ruler's, power. Because of this, Iraq always felt ambivalent towards the United Arab Republic which was set up between Syria and Egypt. A factor Iraq had to consider was that closer Arab unity impacted on the regime's relationship with the Kurdish population.

The discussion will now look at the genesis of the issues within Islamist discourse and then look at Iraqi manifestations thereof.

Islamic Contestations

Given the global impact of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, it is tempting to overlook the fact that it is Iraq's Shia shrines which are the most venerated. Of these, the city of Najaf, host to the shrine of Imam Ali, plays the same symbolic role that Makkah does for all Muslims. Shaikh Fouad Al-Torf, a Shii cleric who was imprisoned by both Saddam Hussein and the Americans, pointed out that Najaf's seminaries are reclaiming their place after having been overshadowed by Iran's center of Shia training, Qom, during Saddam's rule. Similarly, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani is revered by the 150 million Shias worldwide. Iraq's Shia tend to follow their own interpretation of their ideology. For example, the very Iranian notion of velayat-e faqih, the guardianship of the jurists, does not have traction in Iraq.

The Economist points out that the frequency of sectarian attacks has fallen since they reached a peak in 2006/07 and seven of Iraq's 18 provinces have murder rates lower than Canada's.[25] There have been reasons for the internecine violence continuing unabated in other parts of Iraq. The most scandalous of this has been the supply of the ADE-651 "divining rod" supplied by a British manufacturer which claimed to detect weapons or explosives. So useless were these detectors that

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25. "The Slow Road Back."

people began suspecting security forces for being behind the bombings. Another suggestion put to Hiltermann has been that MPs, who enjoy immunity, may be responsible for these attacks. As a source put it to him: "The Ba'ath and al-Qaeda are still very active. Sunni politicians conduct politics by day, but at night they work with these groups."[26]

Fallujah would always be remembered as the city which hosts the Abu Ghraib prison and for the intense and brutal attack by the Americans after Sunni insurgents there had killed and hung four US contractors. But a peaceful protest is going on currently, triggered by the arrest of the bodyguards of Rafi Hiyad Al-Issawi, the Sunni finance minister. Replete with icons from the Saddam Hussein era and suggestions of "the intifada of Fallujah," these protests began with calls for the repeal of the antiterrorism legislation, which the Sunnis felt is used to target them, and the release of prisoners who are being held without charges. However, by all accounts, this protest is likely to remain exactly that and not flare into a full-blown conflagration. What is worrying are calls for a tribal army to protect local people.

Apart from these internal dynamics, how does the contestation within Islam impact on the region? To start with Iran, it is in Tehran's interest to have an Iraq that does not go to war against it again. There have been suggestions that Iran has sponsored armed and virulently sectarian Shia factions in Iraq. Also, the Al-Maliki government does not have the wherewithal to prevent Iran flying over its airspace to bolster the Assad regime in Syria, making it complicit in what is turning out to be a regional conflict.

Secondly, there have been intense clashes between Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Erdogan and Iraq's Al-Maliki, with the former seeing the latter as Iran's proxy. In return, Al-Maliki accuses Turkey of promoting Kurdish and Sunni agendas. The visit by the Turkish Foreign Minister to Kirkuk in August served to strengthen that view. The relationship will have to be managed carefully if for no other reason than the $17 billion trade between the two countries. Turkey's role in Syria, where it supports the Sunni opposition against the Alawite regime, and its provision of sanctuary to Iraq's VP Tareq al-Hashmi, and other close links with the Iraqi Sunnis and Kurds has led many Iraqi Shia to describe Recep Erdogan as an 'Islamist Gamal Abdel Nasser' who has neo-Ottoman aspirations.

Thirdly, Iraqis have reason to be concerned about the direction in which the conflict in Syria is going. The Iraqi government fears what will come in place of the Assad regime if the Syrian uprising is successful. According to Hiltermann,

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26. Ibid.

it is a "new fundamentalist Sunni order… That battle could easily be extended to include Iraq's fractured terrain with its many unresolved conflicts and its politics a shambles."[27] Patrick Cockburn believes that "The revolt of the Sunni majority in Syria is making the Sunni minority in Iraq feel that the regional balance is swinging in their favour."[28] The Al-Maliki regime has resorted to violence to put down the protests, as was seen in Hawijah in April 2013, killing at least 50 people.

Fourthly, the coup which ended President Mohammed Morsi's reign in Egypt is likely to bring back the antagonistic relationship which existed between Iran and Egypt during the Mubarak era. Morsi had been at the vanguard of attempts to deepen a rapprochement with Iran. This would have been in keeping with the Muslim Brotherhood's pan-Islamist vision, especially as a broad front against the West. This relationship has deep roots on both sides of the divide. For example, in 1954 the Muslim Brotherhood hosted the radical Iranian cleric Navvab Safavi, who was responsible for the execution of many secular Iranian politicians. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is known to have translated the works of Sayyid Qutb, successor to the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood Hassan al-Bhanna, into Persian. In fact, one of the criticisms voiced by the Egyptians against the Mubarak regime was that it took the side of the US in its fight with Iran. However, Morsi's dalliance with Ahmadinejad did not go down well in Egypt. Fuad Gadallah, Morsi's legal adviser, described the move to open Egypt to Iranian tourists as risking the "return of the Fatimid state and an infiltration of Iranian money and interests in the service of their goal of eliminating the Sunni sect from Egypt."[29]

We can now focus on how the hammers of Arabism and Islamism have fallen on the anvil of Iraqi nationalism.

The Holy Trinity: Arabism, Nationalism, and Islamism

The "Arab Awakening" was the label George Antonius had applied to the stirring of nationalism in the Arab world circa the beginning of the 20th century. There were two sources for the Arab Awakening: firstly, the minority communities of Arabic-speaking Christians centered in Beirut; and secondly, rivalries among the Arabic-speaking Muslim elite, especially for appointment within the Ottoman government. The former argued for "a secular Arab culture, to which Christians and

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27. Joost Hiltermann, "Iraq: What Remains," *Middle East Report* 43 (Spring 2013): 266.

28. Patrick Cockburn, "Is It the End of Sykes-Picot?" *London Review of Books* 35, no. 11 (2013): 5.

29. *The Economist,* May 4, 2013, 37.

Muslims had supposedly contributed in equal measure." The latter was Damascus-based, was much more deeply attached to Islam, and argued for greater autonomy from Istanbul. The Reform Society of Basra, established by Sayyid Talib Al-Naqqib on February 28, 1913, was an important Iraqi embodiment of the above forces. It pushed for greater independence from Istanbul and came to focus on Iraqi and Arab nationalism.

By the 1940s, individual Arab nation-states were being consolidated, leading to the creation of the Arab League in 1948. The Charter of the Arab League recognized the sovereignty of individual states. The image of Arab states acting in concert against emerging Israel in the 1948 war is belied by the separate arrangements each state arrived at. These compromises served to stir in some parts of the Arab world an avowedly "revolutionary" outlook, which connected with socialism, and which espoused what Breuilly called "a unification nationalism."

In the 1950s, this ideology took two distinct forms: Baathism and Nasserism. The Baath (Resurrection) Party had its origin in debates among the Syrian elite about their national identity and how they should relate to other Arabic speaking communities. There was a particular urgency to this because their borders had little to do with their national or historical boundaries. The Baathists' goal was the creation of one Arab state, and they believed that the differences among Arabs would disappear once that was achieved. Michel Aflaq, a key theorist of the Baath Party and who was Christian, asserted that "There was a single Arab nation, with the right to live in a single, united state. It had been formed by a great historical experience, the creation by the Prophet Muhammad of the religion of Islam and the society which embodied it."[30]

In this definition, the Baathists, with their emphasis on pan-Arab unity which shared a single historical experience, manifested al-qawmiya. Aflaq's words are important for another reason: the privileging of Islam in the definition of the Arab identity. By the mid-fifties, the ideas of socialism were included in the Party's ideology and it spread to Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and parts of the Arabian Peninsula.

Nasserism, on the other hand, could be seen as a form of Arab nationalism that sought to unify the entire Arab nation against imperialism. Arab socialism was regarded as the form appropriate for the Arab nation. Nasserism sought to relegate the role of Islam, and it was respected so long as it was consistent with socialism and Arabism. However, the clergy was not allowed to have any say in matters of state. By the 1960s, the differences between Arab nation states became sharper: there

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30. Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples,* 405.

were those like Egypt committed to rapid change and those ruled by conservative dynasties, suspicious of the spread of Nasserist ideas.

The loss the Egyptians suffered at the hands of the Israelis in the Six Day War of 1967 forced the Arab world to reexamine its self-identity in relation to the Other – that is the West/Israel. It also resulted in the "radical failure of the nationalist/ socialist Arab project (especially Nasserism)…and inaugurated a new phase in the relationship of Arab dependency on the capitalist West."[31]

Two distinct strands emerged from this cathartic period, both opposed to Arabism: that of nationalism at state level and that of Islamism. Egypt under Sadat manifested the first thread of state-level nationalism. He borrowed heavily from Islam to buttress this nationalism. Other Arab states behaved in a similar manner in the name of their own national interests. By the 1980s, Salibi was advising that "No Arab country today need feel any guilt about accepting its actual existence as a willful or willful departure from an Arab national historical norm." He argued that Arabs were trying to cling to a "highly idealized Arab nationalist vision of their past" which they needed to get rid of so they could collaborate more closely as a "coherent political community"[32] (1988:218).

How is nationalism being experienced in Iraq today? Iraq continues to be torn apart along the same fault lines of the past: religion, ethnicity, and tribe. It is estimated that during 2012 alone, 10,000 people, including a disproportionately large number of Sunnis, have been arrested or detained on terrorism charges. The state had suspended salaries of Sunni militiamen which used to be paid by the Americans. The government has since claimed that it has reinstated payment and even increased the salaries of the 74,000 personnel affected. Al-Maliki has been accused of being behind the arrests of entourages of the Sunni deputy prime minister, Tariq al-Hashemi, and the Sunni minister of finance, Rafi Al-Issawi. The latter triggered mass protests by Sunni adherents in December 2012, which as mentioned earlier, is becoming worryingly militarized either as jihadi groups such as Al-Qaeda or the "Neo-Baathist" Army of the Men of the Naqshbani Order. Myriam Benraad points to a "relentless splintering of the Sunni Arab landscape, and a decline in the influence of established forces, including Iraqiyya and the Mutahidin, or United, coalition in Ninevah led by incumbent Atheel al-Nujaifi."[33]

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31. Ibrahim Abu-Rabi, *Contemporary Arab Thought. Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).

32. Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1990), 218.

33. Myriam Benraad, *Daily Star,* July 29, 2013, available from: http://www.dailystar.com.

Khalaf observed that "The tribes have always been powerful in Iraq, and were bolstered by Saddam before the 2003 war. They are now even more influential as police and security forces, busy chasing car and truck bombers, have little time to uphold the law." She cites Hana Edward, a leading human rights activist, who points out that despite the huge expansion of security agencies in Iraq "tribes and militias still get their way if they don't like a doctor or a judge or if a teacher fails a student…There's no state, no institutions, no system to protect you. Even if someone is sentenced by the courts, the tribes will interfere and try to find a different solution."[34]

It has also been an uncomfortable period for the Kurds in Iraq. The 30 million Kurds spread across Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey should have been granted a state of their own at the time of the unraveling of the Ottoman Empire. Developments in the region do look promising for the Kurds: in Syria, they have taken control of their towns and villages, the Turkish government has gone quite far in its negotiations with the PKK, while Iraqi Kurdistan has been an autonomous region running its own affairs for the last 20 years. It has signed 50 deals with the oil majors, hoping to raise production from current levels of 200,000 bpd to 1 mbpd by 2015.

Chazan writes that "The production sharing contracts offered by Kurdistan are more generous to the majors than the technical service contracts on offer in southern Iraq, where all companies earn a flat fee per barrel of oil produced and the lion's share of earnings goes to the government. But Baghdad considers the Kurdish deals illegal and refuses to pay oil companies operating in Kurdistan their share of export revenues. In retaliation, the KRG has stopped oil exports through Iraq's main pipelines."[35] As a result, tensions have been growing between the Kurdish region and the central government. The Kurdish Alliance did not take kindly to the national budget being passed without the Kurdish regional government's involvement – it boycotted parliament and does not participate in PM Al-Maliki's Cabinet.

A Tough Neighborhood

Probably the most crucial set of factors which will shape the future of Iraq is its relationship with the GCC. Some aspects of this have been explored previously, but it is examined in more detail here with regard to economic and security cooperation. The relation between Iran and Iraq on the one hand, and Iran and the GCC countries on the other, has a direct impact on how Iraq relates to the GCC.

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34. Khalaf, *Financial Times,* April 22, 2013.
35. Guy Chazan, "Statoil in Fresh Tanzani Gas Find," *Financial Times,* March 18, 2013.

Ambassador Seyed Hossein Mousavian has captured some of the key issues impacting Iran and GCC relations as follows[36]:

- Demographic, where Iran's population of 80 million people is three times more than that of the GCC population. Which sphere of influence Iraq, with its more than 33 million people, falls is thus of strategic importance. Iran also has the advantage of having a skilled population, which is in demand in the GCC countries. Also, there have been close connections for centuries among the various families in the Gulf.

- Political, given Iran's avowedly revolutionary outlook, compared to the more conservative perspectives of the GCC governments. This takes the form of very strong support for the Palestinian cause, and support for Hamas and Hezbollah and equally strident opposition to the GCC's dependence on western powers to underwrite its security. In fact, Iran sees the GCC as having been established to confront Iran.

- Historical, given the support the GCC countries rendered Iraq in its war against Iran. Also, there has been contestation between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Iran over three islands. Episodes such as the killing of a large number of Iranian pilgrims to Makkah in 1987 came to mind when Saudi King Abdullah's call to the US to "cut off the head of the snake" was revealed in the Wikileaks' cache of diplomatic cables.

All this has resulted in a very shallow level of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iraq, with the Saudi Ambassador to Jordan only as recently as 2012 being accredited to Baghdad. Observers saw this as the beginning of a thaw in the frosty relations. Gregory Gause dismissed this as a "blip, basically generated by Iraq's desire to get a good turnout at the (Baghdad) summit." However, he did argue that Al-Maliki does not want to be a client of Iran: "he wants to have better relations with Saudi Arabia to give him some options vis a vis Iran."[37]

Fahad Nazer argues that Saudi Arabia and Iran are playing by a set of rules established after decades of distance from each other. "The problem for Saudi-Iraqi relations is that such rules of the game have yet to be established for these two countries, meaning that while Saudi relations with Iran follow a cool but

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36. Seyed Hossein Mousavian, "A Great Partnership: Iran, Iraq and the GCC," Forum for Arab and International Relations, Doha, December 2, 2012, available from: FairFoum.org: http://www.fairforum.org.

37. F. Gregory Gause III, "Iraq in the Middle: Iraq's Relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council," *Small Wars Journal,* May 23, 2012, available from: Brookings Institution: http://www.brookings.edu/research/interviews/2012/05/23-iraq-gause.

predictable path, the deep mistrust between Riyadh and Baghdad has led to a certain unpredictability that risks serious miscalculation on either side."[38]

At the same time, it must be noted that the different members of the GCC share varying levels of relations with Iraq, with Bahrain being the only one which will follow the Saudi line. Kuwait, notwithstanding the problems it had in the past with Iraq, has developed a genuinely warm relationship with its neighbors. Gause correctly argues that the Kuwaiti parliament would not allow the relationship to go any further until issues such as reparations and the border are resolved. The UAE, Oman, and Qatar have been actively pursuing business opportunities with Iraq.[39]

Paul Salem has argued for a sub-regional framework, involving Syria, Turkey, Iran, Iraq and the GCC to emerge. He points to precedents such as the US-led Neighbors of Iraq and Iranian President Ahmadinejad's call at the December 2007 GCC Summit in Doha for a regional pact. He argues that energy supplying countries such as the GCC countries, Iran, and Iraq depend on Turkey and Syria for transporting their oil and gas. Iran and Iraq need to attract investment into their energy sectors – the various investment arms of the GCC countries have the capital for that. Such regional collaboration can contribute to the sharing of water resources and, given the limited number of jobs in oil- and gas-based economies, employment opportunities for Gulf citizens.[40]

Mousavian argues in the same vein as Salem, suggesting that security concerns could trump issues which drive the GCC away from cooperation with Iraq and Iran. These include avoiding a fourth war in the Gulf, and fighting organized crime, terrorism, and drug trafficking. Regional cooperation would underwrite secure passage through the Hormuz Straits as well as lie at the core of unity in the Muslim world.[41]

Scenarios for Iraq

The preceding theoretical and historical discussion on Iraq lays the basis for considering the key variables which will shape its future. It is then argued that two of these variables can be described, in scenario-speak, as Key Driving Forces (KDFs).

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38. Fahad Nazer, "Iraq-Saudi Ties: Another U.S. Headache?" CNN World, November 15, 2013, available from: http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2013/11/15/iraq-saudi-ties-another-u-s-headache/.

39. Gause III, "Iraq in the Middle."

40. Paul Salem, "Building Cooperation in the Eastern Middle East," Carnegie Papers 24 (June 2010).

41. Mousavian, "A Great Partnership: Iran, Iraq and the GCC."

KDFs are those very few variables which have an overwhelmingly powerful impact on a situation. At the same time, they display the greatest degree of uncertainty as to what their long term behavior could be. On that basis, a few narratives of possible futures for Iraq are presented.

Variables Impacting upon Iraq

From the foregoing, the following can be identified as variables impacting upon Iraq's future:

- Increasing interference by Iran
- Increasing influence of Turkey
- Regionalization of the conflict in Syria
- Unification of Kurds in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran
- Increasing production of oil
- More authoritarian rule
- Increasing poverty and unemployment of majority of Iraqis
- Higher levels of government corruption
- Shortages in availability of fresh groundwater
- Higher levels of violence
- Rising level of interference by GCC countries
- Rising public expenditure
- Persistence of sectarianism/tribalism
- Declining public infrastructure
- The debasement of transitional justice
- Revitalization of civil society

From these variables we can discern two KDFS:

The impact of regional geopolitics. This could evolve in any number of directions:

> **A1**: At one end of the spectrum we could have a situation where Iran, under its recently elected President Hassan Rouhani, decides to pursue peace with its neighbors by sponsoring a diplomatic resolution to the situation in Syria, improving relations with Turkey, Egypt and the GCC, opening up intra-Islamic conversation, and pursuing a multinational dialogue on the status of the Kurds in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran.

A2: At the other end of the spectrum we could have a situation where Iran tightens the Shii Alliance with Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, and the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. It follows a belligerent agenda, moving untrammeled towards the development of its nuclear capacity. This results in more economic hardships for the Iranian people and increased sectarian violence in Iraq.

State of the Iraqi people. This could also evolve in a variety of ways:

B1: Iraq moves to an increasingly pluralistic society, where Shia, Sunni and Kurd, the secular and the religious, all feel equally comfortable in being part of the Iraqi nation. Oil revenue is used to increase investment in infrastructure, education, and overall well-being of the people, thus reducing poverty and inequality.

B2: Iraq remains dominated by the strongman, playing off different groupings against each other, while benefitting personally from the fortunes coming in through oil exports. The prospects for democracy diminish, poverty increases, there is growing inequality and ongoing sectarian strife.

A combination of A1 and B1 leads to a scenario which we could call "the Rose Garden of the Martyrs" as all Iraqis comprehend the scale and fruitlessness of the sacrifices that they have made and commit to building a new Iraq. A combination of A2 and B2 can constitute a scenario which could be labeled "The Burning of the Bridges," as hope to move to a higher level of national well-being diminishes given the squandered opportunities.

9

Religious Use of Social Media in the Gulf and Iraq

Safa Mubgar[1]

Recommendations for GCC and Iraqi Policymakers:

- While the youth's use of social media in the GCC has been much remarked upon and reported, the use by conservative forces has gone comparatively unnoticed. A closer study of social media use by such forces and its impact on youth activists and GCC society at large is critical.
- Consider the changing platforms and applications which these groups use, together with their traditional means, and then encourage greater plurality by promoting comparable but moderate voices to run parallel to that.
- This chapter identifies the general outliers to standard patterns and suggests some reasons for this divergence. In light of this, GCC policymakers should assess and develop more nuanced and cohesive (rather than reactive) policies to deal creatively with modern day transnational social media networks.

- Iraqi social media use is growing despite the very traditional structure of Iraqi society. However, moderate Iraqi politicians are not (with possible notable exceptions, such as Mahmoud Othman and Ayad Allawi) as proactive in utilizing social media as their more religious counterparts. This balance needs to be redressed by local moderate voices engaging with the people.
- Young Iraqis are now far more news and media savvy and are calling for reforms to fight corruption and improve social services across the sectarian, race, and religious divides. Promoting youth social activism and good citizenship through open, free, and interactive social media will be a stepping stone to greater future social cohesion.
- Both government and opposition figures and civil society actors should take to social media platforms, to outline, discuss, and debate social programs, development programs, and reforms. Such discussions need to be interactive and independent, allowing people to freely express their concerns, and importantly, to overcome their skepticism of government-controlled media messages or propaganda of the past.
- Iraqis have higher expectations of their government today and are more sceptical of old media, TV and newspapers; many believe social media is the future. External and divisive religious channels should not be permitted to determine this future.

Introduction

Much has been made of the role that modern communications technology, and in particular social media, played in fostering the Arab Spring in 2010/11: in mobilizing and organizing within the countries, in generating support among the diaspora, and public relations/lobbying of foreign governments. The upswelling of democratic yearning was visible not only via the traditional media channels of newspapers, radio and television, but also to everyone who chose to follow any of the actors – or the action – online. Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, all contributed to events in ways and dimensions that would have been unimaginable only 20 years before.

Facebook now has well over 1 billion users and Twitter 500 million, so it is easy to see why an increasingly wide range of religious organizations are also turning to social media to make new contacts and build their public profiles. Although it is too early to say whether these networks have changed the way in which people practice

religion (and research in this area of interest is still very limited), faith-related pages and posts are now undeniably a major feature of many social media sites.

As a result of this cyber-migration, the e-battle for hearts and minds soon acquired more importance than the internal communications organizing and orchestrating the protests, particularly among the helpless but involved diaspora. Similar actions and commentary were also seen during the Tehran Spring of 2009, from which many in the region, and among global youth as a whole, seem to have learned lessons.

Commentaries and analyses have also looked at the response of Arab governments – monarchies and republics alike – to the new media: their responsive e-tactics, hardware and software procurements, and methods of coping with the results. As with any other advance in capability, both sides have learnt from each other: the governments have learnt to be proactive in disseminating information from the activists, while the activists have learnt discretion and dissimulation.

Yet, there is another conservative group whose power is also threatened by the popular revolution but whose position and positioning has received little notice – the clerics. This chapter will attempt to examine how Islamist clerics, both Sunni and Shii, have adapted to the social media age. It will discuss the platforms they use and their means of propagation of their message as they seek to retain their influence, domestically and internationally, in an era when religion is ever more challenged by modernity and secularism and hierarchy by egalitarianism and individualism.

Indeed, the world is now in an age of iCTivism ("i" as in "I have the power to change things", iPhone, iMac etc; ICT as in Information Communications Technology). Online jihad examples aside, religious messages are distributed widely, and the culture of "i" can lead some to act "glocally" (global issues, local impact) – for good and ill – in the search for transnational allies and followers. Extremist voices are currently resonating louder than those of reason and moderation, but the latter are gradually making themselves heard.

Indeed, while non-state actors and transnational networks in the Islamic world currently have a malign connotation, in fact most major Islamic organizations (Sufi, Ismaili Shia, Twelver Shia groups) are both major non-state actors – sometimes their budgets match that of small states – and transnational networks. While not necessarily pro-Western, they are usually a benign and moderating influence in the debate (although there are exceptions) and increasingly so as they expand their online presence.

Given the very recent nature of the online evolution, little research has as yet been carried out in the area of religious use of social media. Sources used therefore

are a mixture of news reports dealing with the subject, online research, and interviews with participants and recipients.

Researching the use of social media is a new and evolving field, and one to which the author comes as a practitioner, rather than an academic. While it is possible to contain one's purview to the religious, to try to limit social media to a geographical area – in this case the Gulf States and Iraq – is almost impossible because social media has no boundaries. It exists across cultural and regional divides, bridging languages and time in an instant: raw information is pushed and opinions traded in this online sea of words and pictures.

It is probably worth pointing out here that the periodic calls for the Internet to be controlled clash not only with cherished democratic values, but also with the equally important right of freedom of religion. This applies whether it is government which tries to control the medium, or the major ISP, social media and search companies. There are ample legal tools to address bigoted articles and messages, whatever medium carries them: lawyers have successfully – and profitably – adapted from the age of newsprint, to broadcast media, and now to electronic and social media.[2]

Mass Media to Social Media

Clerics of all varieties have written epistles to their flock from the earliest days. Often they have adjusted their message to the modern era: magnetic tapes of the exiled Ayatollah Khomeini's sermons were dispensed overtly and covertly in souks and bazaars throughout the Middle East. Similarly, terrestrial television and radio has long been a staple for government-approved clerics.

The development of satellite television was an important intermediary step in the evolution of quasi-independent media platforms, in so far as the state governments had little control over the message received in their citizens' homes and meeting places. Political Islamist clerics such as Shaikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi took advantage of the opportunity afforded by Al Jazeera to propagate their messages. The states hit back: the head of Al-Azhar – appointed by Hosni Mubarak – called for a ban on religious programs broadcast on satellite stations.[3]

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2. Somini Sengupta, "Twitter Yields to Pressure in Hate Case in France," *New York Times,* July 12, 2013 available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/13/technology/twitter-yields-to-pressure-in-hate-case-in-france.html?nl=todaysheadlines&emc=edit_th_20130713 (accessed July 13, 2013).

3. "Al-Azhar Head Calls for Religious TV Ban," Maktoob, March 23, 2010, available at:

Subsequently, with the development of the Internet (late '90s), 3G mobile telephones (2001), Facebook (2004), and Twitter (2006), the clerical community took the next major step: social media.

Clerics and Clergy

There are interesting contrasts in the use of new media by Islamic and Islamist clerics, but not necessarily the generational issue one might expect. Rather, the major differences are those between Sunni and (Twelver) Shia clerics and those between the "activist" Shia clerics and their "quietist" counterparts.

Certainly, some older clerics are very traditional in their use of media, eschewing the use of more interactive platforms. Many, such as Shaikh Al-Qaradawi, content themselves with television appearances. Shaikh Al-Qaradawi does have a Twitter account[4] (from which he has yet to tweet), a Facebook[5] account (which is verging on the catatonic), and an active and up to date eponymous website.[6]

However, this apparent technophobia seems to be less a generational issue (Al-Qaradawi is only four years older than Al-Sistani), and more about sect and audience: Shia clerics do indeed tend to use more interactive media, and younger and more technically aware clerics, such as the populist preacher Amr Khaled[7], are comfortable with interactive media. Conversely, there may also be an audience issue – many of Al-Qaradawi's audience are poor, rural, and illiterate, and thus have no access to the gadgets and education of Khaled's middle class following. Indeed, Khaled's audience may receive his thoughts by CDs, television/You Tube[8], Twitter[9],

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http://business.maktoob.com/20090000450758/Al-Azhar_head_calls_for_religious_TV_ban/Article.htm?utm_campaign=Night-Newsletter&utm_medium=Main-News11&utm_source=Night-Newsletter&utm_content=.(accessed March 23, 2010).

4. Available at: https://twitter.com/qaradawi. (accessed April 30, 2013).

5. Available at: http://www.facebook.com/pages/Yusuf-Al-Qaradawi/24024767384 (accessed April 30, 2013).

6. Available at: http://www.qaradawi.net/ (accessed April 30, 2013).

7. Formally, Amr Khaled is not a trained cleric, but for the sake of this paper has been regarded as one.

8. Available at: http://www.youtube.com/channel/HC1uGB20TXgso (accessed April 30, 2013).

9. Available at: https://twitter.com/_AmrKhaled. (accessed April 30, 2013).

Facebook[10] (despite a prescription[11]) and through his website.[12] The website has buttons cross-linking to Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, as well as the ability to set up an RSS feed. Another 'Sunni' cleric who has enthusiastically embraced social media is the Saudi cleric Salman Al-Auda (also Al-Odah.) He was jailed for political activism during al-Sahwa uprising in the 1990s and subsequently hosted a television program, which has since been banned by the Saudi government. Undeterred, he published an open letter[13] on March 15, 2013 in which he criticized the Saudi government for their handling of the emotive prisoner issue, inter alia. While the tenor and content of the letter, which was published on Twitter, are regular, the sentences are short which makes them ideally suited for re-tweeting by his 2.5 million Twitter followers.

Figure 9.1: An open letter, in 140-bit couplets

(Credit: Twitter / al-Odah)

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10. Available at: https://www.facebook.com/AmrKhaled (accessed April 30, 2013).

11. "Fatwa Forbids Facebook," Maktoob February 7, 2010, available at: http://business.maktoob.com/20090000431458/Fatwa_forbids_Facebook/Article.htm?utm_campaign=Night-Newsletter&utm_medium=Main-News7&utm_source=Night-Newsletter&utm_content=. (accessed February 7, 2010).

12. Available at: http://www.amrkhaled.net/suggested/index.php. (accessed April 30, 2013).

13. Salman Al-Oadah, "An Open Letter," March 15, 2013 available at: https://twitter.com/Salman_Al_Odah/status/312719206133157888%84%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A9_%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%AB%D9%84%D9%86%D9%8A--%D8%AE%D8%B7%D8%A7%D8%A8_%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A9 (accessed April 29, 2013)
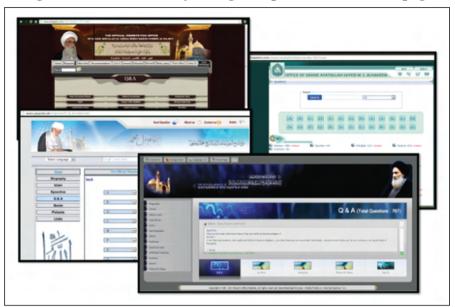
Figure 9.2: Hawza al-Najaf religious question & answers pages

(Picture Credit: al-Najafy, al-Hakeemi, al-Sistani, al-Yacoobi)

Twelver Shia Clerics

Twelver Shiism – which some term the Roman Catholicism of the Islamic World – has a far stronger relationship between clergy and laity than Sunni Islam, or indeed Zaydi or Ismaili Shiism, particularly since the dominance of the Usuli trend over the Akhbaris in the late 18th century (Fundamentally, the Akhbaris hold that a cleric can only intervene in politics where there is Quranic precedent; the Usulis – by the use of ijtihad – maintain that a cleric may involve himself in politics on any matter. Politically and demographically, the Akhbaris are now irrelevant in both Iran and Iraq)

Not only does this relationship now extend to a network of ayatollah's representatives (wakil) wherever there are sizeable Twelver Shia populations, but there is also a more dynamic relationship between the follower muqallid and marja' (exemplar - usually conducted via the wakil.) The khums tax paid by muqallidun funds a number of issues, but in return functionally entitles a muqallid to receive responses to formal questions on religious doctrine. Usuli clergy take their roles as religious authorities and exemplars very seriously. This is clearly shown in the preponderance of "Q&A" on the websites, as well as the detailed contact forms to be filled out if the question is not already published.

However, another aspect of the Usuli/Akhbari division was the further subdivision of the Usuli trend into "Activist" and "Silent" currents. The latter tend towards the Akhbari position, in that they hold that while a cleric may technically get involved in politics, he should not. (It is worth noting as an aside that this is involvement in party politics: Grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani and the Hawza have certainly involved themselves in measures to set the political conditions since Saddam Hussein's fall. Al-Sistani even had his Basrawi wakil elected to the interim majlis to partake in negotiations to frame the new constitution, but nothing else. In this, Al-Sistani seems to be in accord with the new Archbishop of Canterbury who has declared his intention to be active in national politics on a non-partisan basis.)

By contrast, the Activist trend holds that not only can a cleric participate in politics, but he should – as a moral exemplar. This concept was taken – reductio ad absurdum – by Ayatollah Khomeini to form the theologically contentious position of Wilayat al-Faqih, or Rule of the Jurisprudent.

Online Finances

It is worth noting that currently there is marginally little in the way of social commerce (f-commerce – Facebook and t-commerce – Twitter), or even a means for donations, on the clerical websites and social media – not even the otherwise ground-breaking 'teleda'wist' Amr Khaled. Yet there appears to be no particular distaste in Islam for mixing religion and profit – many clerics publish learned tomes and, as previously noted, their speeches have long been sold.

One simple answer is that Twitter did not come to an agreement with PayPal until 2011, and is not without problems of security and hacking. Also there is the possibility that many web-viewers may not have a credit card (or even a bank account.) However, for most "3G actors," if they can afford a 3G telephone, they would usually have the means for electronic payment.

For Sunnis, with their more decentralized faith, there is less of a direct link to a particular cleric. Thus there is likely to be less two-way communication, whatever the nature of that communication.

For those Shia in Iran, the restrictions set by US sanctions on financial services doubtless prevents Western payment methods, but that does not explain why others outside Iran do not use online systems. There may be some reticence over the capitalist model (most such services charge a percentage as a fee. However, this is not strictly interest and thus not forbidden; indeed, both khums and zakat are calculated on a percentage basis.) For Twelver Shia clerics, the khums is formally

apportioned,[14] with most being sent back to the marja' but some being retained by the wakil for good works as directed. It would be difficult for such a system to function if all funds were collected centrally. Cynically, one might also observe that if religious questions can be now posed online, and khums and zakat also paid online, there would be little need of a wakil, and so a career would be denied to those who do not achieve the highest religious ranks. A similar careerist issue can be seen in the prohibition on following a deceased marja'.[15]

The clue probably lies in the usual means of transmission of funds: the hawala system, a sort of Arab Western Union. Not only is this (mostly) immune to US financial sanctions, but since it is also a private, commercial means by which physical money is rarely actually moved, the amounts being transmitted – sometimes eye-popping sums of money – are difficult for states to quantify, and thus tax. (There may also be commercial benefit, if the hawala owner is a muqallid of the marja', he may be prepared to offer beneficial terms where Western Union would insist on full – and expensive – rates being charged.)

Quietist Clerics

This Activist-Quietist divergence is clearly represented in the Twelver clerics' differing use of social media, in particular the different platforms used. The Quietist clergy – typified by the Hawza 'Ilmiyya of al-Najaf in Iraq – have Twitter accounts, but use them little, if at all. They also have Facebook accounts, which are friendly, but little – if anything – more than placeholders. Rather, the main medium for their interaction with followers is their websites (and their physical wukala[16]), in particular their extensive library of religious Questions and Answers[17] – the guidance that their followers seek to live a righteous life.

Most of the Quietists' websites are also available in a wide variety of languages – both those likely to be accessible to followers (Arabic, Persian, Urdu), and also English and French, as "generic" languages that other followers might be able access (although it should be noted that London is now one of the foremost seats of Twelver Shia learning in the world.)

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14. In accordance with Surat al-Anfal, Ayat 41.

15. Juan Cole, "Patel on Muqtada al-Sadr," Informed Comment, April 9, 2004, available at: http://www.juancole.com/2004/04/patel-on-muqtada-al-sadr-david-patel.html (accessed April 22, 2013).

16. Available at: http://www.sistani.org/index.php?p=361968#26. (accessed April 22, 2013).

17. For example, http://www.yaqoobi.de/englisch/Q_&_A/index.htm. (accessed April 24, 2013).

It is also worth noting that the Quietist clergy were early adopters of social media (al-Sistani's website is copyrighted 1995), while the Activist clerics were later adopters. The reason for this divergence appears to be that the "religious"/Quietist clerics were more interested in making information available to their (paying) followers than the Activists, who wish to push their message to the wider Islamic world.
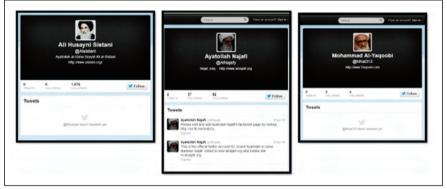
Figure 9.3: Twitter accounts of the Hawza al-Najaf

(Credits: Twitter/al-Sistani, Twitter/al-Najafi, Twitter/al-Yaqoobi)

Activist Clerics

The Activist clergy – predominately in Iran – are completely different in their online presence. As typified by the Rahbar (Supreme Leader), their websites are mostly silent on religious Q&A,[18] while their Twitter and Facebook accounts are highly charged and extensively used, but for political purposes,[19] not religious ones. Unusually, Ayatollah Khamenei has multiple language options on his website,[20] but as head of state, he has access to more resources than others. He has also declared his wish to be a marja' for the fewer non-Iranian Twelver Shia, due to the weight of his civic responsibilities.

This choice of medium is unsurprising, given the differing nature and urgency of the product: for the Quietists, the issues are steady and considered and of relevance for all their followers. For the Activists, the issues tend to be pressing, and – given the nationalist confines of their politics – usually confined to one language alone.

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18. For example, http://english.khamenei.ir//index.php?option=com_content&task=category&sectionid=4&id=4&Itemid=18 (accessed April 22, 2013).

19. Available from: http://english.khamenei.ir/ (accessed April 22, 2013).

20. Available from: http://www.khamenei.ir/ (accessed April 22, 2013).

The Activists are not above "managing" their competition: reformist or anti-establishment websites have been filtered and blocked.[21] This is particularly the case in the run-up to the presidential elections,[22] suggesting an overt understanding of the political nature of their use of social media. Indeed, there are reports that Iran is in the process of rolling out an Irannet, a national version of the Internet.[23] How this will impact on Twelver clerics' use of social media has yet to be seen.

Table 9.1: Collated social media activity of prominent Islamist leaders as of May 2013

	Twitter (Tweets)	Facebook	You Tube	Website Languages	Website Q & A	Website date	TV	CD
al-Qaradawi	0	Minimal	Yes	A	No	09 Jan 97	Yes	Yes
Khaled	4,739	Extensive	Yes	A	No	08 Jan 02	Yes	Yes
Al-Oadah	25,045	Limited	Yes	A, F, E, Chinese	Yes	17 Mar 00		
Al-Sistani	0	Limited		A, P, E, F, T, U	Yes	17 Jan 02 (© 1995)		
Al-Hakeem	0	?		A, E, U	Yes	06 Aug 98		
Al-Fayadh	?	?		A, (E*), P		12 Apr 06		
Al-Najafi	2	Placeholder		E, F, P, U, A	Yes	23 Aug 05		
Al-Yaqoobi	0	Placeholder		G, E, F, T, A	Yes	13 Jul 03 27 Jul 10	?	
Issa Qassim (Al-Bayan)	123 109	Placeholder		- A	- Yes	05 May 01		
Nimr al-Nimr								
Muqtada Al-Sadr	349	Placeholder		A, E	No	Pte 21 Aug 08		
Mesbah - Yazdi	?	Placeholder		E A	(No*)	Pte		
Al-Khamenei	3,482	Extensive		E, F, T, U, A, I, P, G, S, H, R, Sw	(No*)	Pte	Yes	

Note: Languages: Arabic; Persian; English, French, Turkish, Urdu, German, Spanish, Hausa, Russian, Indonesian, Swahili

* - Nominally existing, but non-functional/empty

21. Golnaz Esfandiari, "Senior Clerics' Websites Blocked in Iran," Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, October 4, 2010 available at: http://www.rferl.org/content/Senior_Clerics_Websites_Blocked_In_Iran/2176474.html (accessed October 4, 2010).

22. "Dimming the Internet: Detecting Throttling as a Mechanism of Censorship in Iran," CGCS Media Wire, June 20, 2013, available at: http://cgcsblog.asc.upenn.edu/2013/06/20/dimming-the-internet-detecting-throttling-as-a-mechanism-of-censorship-in-iran-2/ (accessed July 16, 2013),

23. Farnaz Fassihi, "Iran Kicks Off Its Internal Internet with Government Email," Wall Street Journal, July 12, 2013, available at: http://blogs.wsj.com/middleeast/2013/07/12/iran-kicks-off-its-internal-internet-with-government-email/(accessed July 12, 2013).

Conclusion

The conclusions that can be drawn from such an overview are more confirmatory than radical. The more political the cleric, the more they use immediate media, such as Facebook and Twitter. Their websites tend to be less central to their messaging. This messaging tends to be in one language – that of their "electorate" – whatever the platform. For Twelver Shia political clerics, religious Q&A is of secondary importance. Activist clerics seem to guard the privacy of their websites extensively as well, although this may be an issue of the orientation towards the Islamic Republic of Iran by these clerics, rather than their activism per se.

Interestingly, the Sunni Islamist Shaikh Salman Al-Oadah is both a prolific Tweeter and has a polyglot website. Unusually for a Sunni, he also has a (semi-) Q&A page on his site, in the form of a fatwa library.[24]

Conversely, the more "religious" a cleric, the less use he makes of rapid tempo social media, as compared to websites. This knowledge is likely to be imparted in the languages of the cleric's global muqallidun, rather than that of the cleric's country of residence.

Clerical use of the Internet and social media is but a fraction of the region's output. Despite this limitation, the differences in attitude are intriguing: if they tweet, they are activists. By their Tweets ye shall know them!

The GCC plays a key role on the world geopolitical chessboard, with some socio-political divergences among its constituent states. Iraq is slowly emerging from the ashes of war and faces challenges to its democracy as evidenced by recent developments and uprisings. All these countries have growing youth populations and alarmingly divisive conservative forces. Organized religious elements and figures are increasingly embracing modern technology to propagate their faith and deliver their message with profound implications for religion in the region.

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24. Available at: http://en.islamtoday.net/Fatwa-Archive (accessed April 29, 2013).

About the Contributors

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Memory and Urban Spaces between Past and Future], (Storia Urbana, 2013); Attractiveness of WMD for Radical Islamist Movements, in Security and Stability in the Middle East, ed. Barry Rubin (Routledge, 2011).

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GCC Relations with Post-War Iraq: A Strategic Perspective

This volume contains the contributions to the Gulf Research Center workshop entitled: "Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Relations with Post-War Iraq: A Strategic Perspective," held during the July 2013 Gulf Research Meeting in Cambridge, UK.

The papers examine the history and future of the often fractious relationship between Iraq and the GCC countries. The backdrop is the US dominance of security arrangements in the Arabian Gulf region for most of the post-war period. Prior to the new millennium, the region's major security threat was perceived to be the mounting rivalry between a GCC-US camp on the one hand and an Iranian camp on the other. Some semblance of equilibrium had been achieved through the late 1990s, but the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 created new fault lines. In the invasion's aftermath, regional peace was maintained by the overwhelming presence of US troops both in Iraq and in the GCC more generally. The 2011 withdrawal of US troops from Iraq plunged the region into a state of disequilibrium, and current developments suggest a trajectory of mounting instability.

The volume's contributions explore the underlying reasons for the region's instability from a variety of perspectives and with an emphasis on the GCC's relationship with Iraq. Topics covered include: Iraq's federal architecture, the highly controversial role of Iran, the effects of regional sectarianism, the possibility of Iraq becoming a member of the GCC, the impact of Chinese oil demand, the evolving nature of US regional military deployments, and the expanding use of social media by religious clerics.

The volume's goal is to produce operational recommendations for senior government figures. To that end, each author provides two lists of recommendations for improving the region's stability: one targeting GCC policymakers and the other targeting their Iraqi counterparts. There is a strong consensus concerning the need for a more inclusive and multilateral approach to regional security, and for any such approach to be spearheaded by the region's principle stakeholders: Iraq, Iran and the GCC countries themselves. However, the precise nature of a potentially successful common security strategy remains an area of considerable controversy.