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Strategic Implications of Intercommunal Warfare in Iraq

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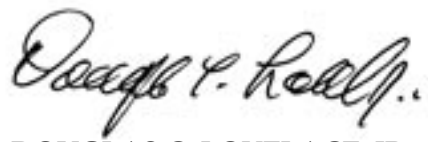
FOREWORD

The future of Iraq is uncertain. The country is in a dangerous phase. The removal of a brutal dictatorship by coalition forces in April 2003 has given the Iraqi people hope for a new and better political system, where individuals do not have to live in continuing fear and uncertainty. Nevertheless, the Iraqi people must also address the difficult challenges of self-government for a diverse population, with major ethnic and sectarian groups that often maintain widely divergent agendas. If they fail to do this and an ethnic/sectarian war ensues, the consequences will be dire, not only for Iraq, but for the entire Middle Eastern region.

This monograph, by Dr. W. Andrew Terrill, does not predict an Iraqi civil war, which is the worst-case outcome for the current struggle in Iraq. Neither can this monograph fully rule out this possibility since the responsibility for preventing such an eventuality is ultimately Iraqi and not American, and U.S. analysts cannot predict with certainty what Iraqis will do once they take full control of their own country. Rather, this monograph underscores what is at stake in the Middle East by a comprehensive discussion of potential region-wide consequences should an ethnic and sectarian war actually occur. This work therefore serves as an important warning of how an Iraq civil war could offer new strategic opportunities, but especially dangers, to many of the states within the Middle East. Dr. Terrill's work performs this important task by examining how an Iraqi civil war may develop and how this could influence the internal stability and foreign policies of regional countries.

The Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to offer this monograph as a contribution to the national security debate on this important subject as our nation grapples with a variety of problems associated with the U.S. presence in Iraq and the new strategic reality following Saddam's removal from power. This analysis should be especially useful to U.S. military strategic leaders as they seek to understand the complicated interplay between Iraq and its neighbors at this critical point. It reflects analysis conducted with an information cutoff date of December 2004.



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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

W. ANDREW TERRILL joined the Strategic Studies Institute in October 2001, and is SSI's Middle East specialist. Prior to his appointment, he served as a Middle East Nonproliferation analyst for the International Assessments Division of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL). In 1998-99, Dr. Terrill also served as a Visiting Professor at the U.S. Air War College on assignment from LLNL. He is a former faculty member at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, and has taught adjunct at a variety of other colleges and universities. He is a U.S. Army Reserve lieutenant colonel and a Foreign Area Officer (Middle East). Dr. Terrill has published in numerous academic journals on topics including nuclear proliferation, the Iran-Iraq War, Operation DESERT STORM, Middle Eastern chemical weapons, and ballistic missile proliferation, terrorism, and commando operations. Since 1994, at U.S. State Department invitation, Dr. Terrill has participated in the Middle Eastern Regional Security Track 2 talks, which are part of the Middle East Peace Process. He holds a B.A. from California State Polytechnic University and an M.A. from the University of California, Riverside, both in Political Science. Dr Terrill also holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, California.

SUMMARY

Contemporary Iraqi society is comprised of Shi'ite Arabs, Sunni Arabs, ethnic Kurds, and a variety of smaller ethnic or religious minorities. In the post-Saddam era, differences among these groups will either emerge as a barrier to political cooperation and national unity, or they will instead be mitigated as part of the struggle to define a new and more inclusive system of government. Should Iraqi ethnic and sectarian differences become unmanageable, a violent struggle for political power may ensue. Democracy, if it can be established, can regulate and then alleviate the hostility leading to such events, but this function usually occurs only after the development of strong, largely unbiased political institutions and political parties, which transcend ethnic and religious differences. Ethnic and sectarian-based political parties, even if internally democratic, often feel pressure to tolerate or even embrace extremism in order to retain their base of power and undercut rivals who might claim more expansive rights for the community. Except for the fear of intercommunal conflicts, such political parties often have few political reasons to consider the rights of rival communities since they are outside of their base of power.

This monograph does not predict an ethnic or sectarian civil war in Iraq, nor does it assume that a civil war will necessarily be based on ethnic and sectarian differences if it occurs. Rather, the author assumes that the post-Saddam political situation in Iraq can have a variety of possible outcomes, only the worst of which is intercommunal warfare, either in the near or medium term future. This work holds out the strong hope that the current Iraqi awareness of the danger of civil war will be an important factor in reducing the possibility of this conclusion. Nevertheless, this report also assumes that the prospect of this sort of civil conflict is sufficiently serious as to warrant detailed consideration despite the fact that it is only one of many possibilities and hopefully not the most likely outcome for the future of Iraq.

The scope of this monograph is confined to the Middle East, which is where Iraqi ethnic and sectarian strife will almost certainly have the greatest implications for regional stability and U.S. foreign and military policy. If Iraqi violence erupts along religious/sectarian

and ethnic lines, this conflict will have thunderous echoes throughout the area. Group identity, which is critical throughout much of the Middle East, will provide a compelling context for regional bystanders watching ethnic and sectarian bloodshed. Such a conflagration will undoubtedly influence regional co-religionists and ethnic kin of the embattled communities within Iraq. Many individuals and nations would feel compelled to take sides. Some, perhaps many, young men will consider traveling to Iraq to join the fight. Moreover, various nations would involve themselves in the fighting in ways up to and including the possibility of military intervention. Additionally, intercommunal harmony and tolerance in other regional states may suffer as the result of Iraqi fighting and the responses of neighboring governments to that fighting.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF INTERCOMMUNAL WARFARE IN IRAQ

Introduction: The Challenge of Avoiding Catastrophic Ethno-Religious Conflict.

Iraqi is a heterogeneous society divided along ethnic, tribal, and religious lines as well as those of political orientation and ideology. Around 60-65 percent of Iraqis are Shi'ite Arabs, 15-20 percent are Sunni Muslim Arabs, and 15-20 percent are Kurds. Turkomans, Assyrians, and other minorities constitute about 5 percent of the Iraqi population, according to unclassified Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) figures.[1] Divisions among these groups are, to some extent, mitigated by urbanization and intermarriage among Sunni and Shi'ite Arabs. Such intermarriage is both accepted and widespread among Sunni and Shi'ite Arabs in Iraq, but has not eliminated intercommunal differences or the danger of intercommunal violence in the post-Saddam era.

The toppling of the Saddam Hussein regime in April 2003 ended an era in which Iraqi sectarian, religious, tribal, regional, and other differences were contained and manipulated (but not always suppressed) against a background of unyielding tyranny. Saddam's strategy for rule included numerous circumstances of manipulating ethnic and tribal loyalties, although repression was always his ultimate fallback position to control the population.[2] The future of Iraq is now uncertain, as the country must address its internal difficulties in ways that are entirely different from those of the Saddam regime.

This report is an attempt to address some of the issues associated with these concerns. It assumes that the strategic implications of an Iraqi civil war are sufficiently serious as to warrant detailed consideration despite the fact that this is only one of many possibilities and not necessarily the most likely possibility for the future of Iraq. Serious ethno-religious conflict and especially a full-scale civil war in post-Saddam Iraq would present the United States, the West, and the region with a variety of severe strategic problems. Such an outcome is only one of Iraq's potential futures, but a number of key observers have noted that such an Iraqi civil war is at least possible. United Nations (UN) Ambassador Brahimi has warned of this danger, while various academic and research organizations have expressed similar fears.[3] Some U.S. journalistic sources, citing what they describe as leaked documents,

also suggest that the U.S. CIA is concerned about the danger of an Iraqi civil war.[4] Indeed, public opinion data also indicates that many Iraqis are concerned over the possibility of a civil war in the post-Saddam era, while some foreign Arab leaders have expressed similar concerns.[5]

Obviously, the danger of civil war is particularly pressing for the United States, if this eventuality occurs while significant numbers of U.S. military forces remain in Iraq. Civil war under these circumstances is nevertheless unlikely since U.S. and allied troops in Iraq are currently serving as a deterrent to serious intercommunal fighting. Another more realistic scenario is that widespread ethnic and sectarian fighting breaks out during or shortly after a major U.S. troop withdrawal, when these forces are no longer able to prevent Iraqi communities from challenging each other over conflicting demands for political representation, power and resources. It is also possible that civil war will be staved off for years, but then finally break out in response to changing internal political events or efforts by one group to consolidate disproportionate levels of power. The most desirable alternative is, of course, for Iraqi sectarian groups to resolve their differences without resorting to violence of any kind. A key requirement for achieving this outcome will be the development of a broad based and legitimate Iraqi government supported by respected and professional Iraqi security forces willing to protect that government.

If the new Iraqi leadership fails in its efforts to prevent catastrophic levels of sectarian violence, leaders throughout the region will feel the need to respond to the unfolding crisis. Most of Iraq's neighbors fear a deeply-fragmented Iraq as a potentially destabilizing threat to their own domestic politics and tranquility. Many are especially concerned about the possibility of an Iraqi civil war. Yet, many of these governments will also face domestic political pressures to involve themselves ever more deeply in Iraq's troubles, should an intercommunal war break out. Some governments will also see opportunities to expand their influence in Iraq in ways that either contradict or support U.S. goals in the region. Seasoned terrorists and inexperienced, but angry, young men may also enter the strategic equation as they involve themselves with Iraqi ethnic or sectarian warfare.

How an Ethnic-Sectarian War Might Ignite and Develop in Iraq.

Many Western observers reflexively view Western-style democracy as the way to address the divisions within Iraq society that may

lead to severe civil conflict. Nevertheless, the birth of democracy and development of ethnic and sectarian harmony are not always closely related, and a number of important challenges will have to be addressed for Iraq to evolve into a viable democracy that protects the rights of all religious and ethnic groups.[6] Should Iraqis be unable to meet the challenges of accommodating and regulating key differences while forming a functioning government, civil war becomes a serious possibility.

Currently, Iraqis of differing ethnic and sectarian background are discussing and agitating for alternative futures for their country in ways that were forbidden during Saddam's era. Disagreements over Iraq's future are, in some cases, undergoing a natural sharpening as issues and competing visions of the future are discussed more fully and as various groups demand what they perceive to be their rights. The danger is that current disputes may become more angry and intractable over time. In countries with well-established democratic institutions, patterns have developed whereby parties, factions, and groups relinquish political power with the certainty that they will be able to compete to regain such power at a later point, such as a new election. Strong institutions do not yet exist in Iraq, and many Iraqi citizens will be unwilling to accept the actions of any government that they perceive as slighting their ethnic or sectarian interests. These slighted groups may perceive violence as a preferable option to waiting for future redistributing of power through nonviolent means.[7]

A breakdown in civil order in Iraq, should it occur, would therefore most likely be on ethnic and sectarian grounds, although ideological and tribal differences might also be reflected in the fighting. Ethnic and sectarian fighting in any country is often particularly bloody and is usually viewed by many of the participants as zero-sum. Moreover, Iraq's brutal history may lead some among all three of Iraq's major groups (Kurds, Sunni Arabs, and Shi'ite Arabs) to assume any such struggle is not subject to compromise. Saddam's murder of vast numbers of Kurds and Shi'ite Arabs looms large in the consciousness of both communities, which would correspondingly be reluctant to scale back claims for power or autonomy. Additionally, smaller groups such as the Turkomans have less capacity for self-defense, while maintaining extremely serious differences with the Arabs and Kurds over such issues as the future of the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk. Their most effective strategy in a civil war would be to seek Turkish diplomatic and perhaps military intervention.

As noted, this work does not predict an inevitable civil war, but there are aspects of such a crisis that will start to emerge before any large-scale fighting, and observers need to be attentive to these factors. An important indicator of problems associated with intercommunal civil war is the development of uncompromising political leaders within Iraq's ethnic and sectarian communities. Ironically, these people can be particularly dangerous in a democratic setting, where power is redistributed periodically through elections because leaders must outbid each other for a following within the community. Sociologist Andreas Wimmer and ethnonationalism scholar Donald Horowitz have examined this process in depth, and each has warned that it can lead to a radicalization of ethnic politics whereby ethnic and sectarian divisions are sharpened and rendered increasingly difficult to resolve.[8]

Major national leaders seldom plan to ignite civil wars within their own countries. Rather, such conflicts usually result from escalating societal confrontations that cannot be resolved peacefully by compromise or the use of domestic institutions. Violence, in turn, sometimes spirals to exceptionally high levels. At such a point, it is likely that even individuals who have given little thought to their ethnic or sectarian identities would have to reemphasize them in response to any escalating intercommunal crisis. Few people will have the luxury of neutrality under such conditions, and most would be forced to choose sides. Long-standing friendships across ethnic and sectarian divides usually end under these circumstances, and mixed ethnic or sectarian families are forced to choose one side or another or split.[9]

One particularly serious indicator of a developing crisis would be an unwillingness of Iraq's major communities to compromise on issues of power sharing. There may also be considerable difficulties in dividing resources, such as oil wealth, among communities in a way that satisfies all of those involved. Moreover, an easy or amicable division of Iraq into separate political entities is virtually impossible. In many areas, populations are highly mixed. Baghdad itself is almost evenly divided between Shi'ite and Sunni Arabs by some estimates, and it also has a sizable Kurdish population.[10] Additionally, many of Iraq's economic resources, including a large portion of the oil industry, are in disputed territory. This situation suggests that the stakes associated with any kind of a territorial division will be staggering. It is inconceivable that any of Iraq's major groups will give them up without at least considering violence.

The danger of civil war is much closer if political differences appear to become irreconcilable and negotiations between groups break down. The factor that allows these types of disputes among communities to devolve into civil war is the capacity of various sides to employ violence effectively. In Iraq, this capacity now exists among all major groups due to the rise of regional and sectarian militias, a process that began occurring immediately after Saddam's removal. Some of these groups returned to Iraq after political exile following the elimination of the former regime. Others existed in Iraqi Kurdish areas outside of Saddam's control since 1991, while still others were established within Iraq following Saddam's ouster. The growth in militia activity is a natural by-product of an insecure political environment in which security is not effectively guaranteed by national level political and security organizations. Since the individual cannot depend on the state to provide security, self-defense becomes imperative. A variety of militias are thereby able to assume the tasks of self-defense and security for various portions of their sectarian or ethnic community. These militias may also be used as instruments of domestic political aggression and are usually only accountable to a small leadership core. Militias may therefore protect some members of an ethnic or sectarian group from outsiders, while simultaneously exploiting and intimidating the same people to ensure their own dominance over them.

Immediately following Saddam's ouster, the U.S. leadership hoped that militias would not take root in the Iraqi political system, and strong efforts were made to pressure them into dissolving.[11] This hope has now proven illusory, and senior U.S. officials acknowledge the need to tolerate some militia activity.[12] Kurdish leaders even took offense at having their forces referred to as militias.[13] Senior U.S. policymakers currently suggest that militias will become unnecessary as legitimate governmental security institutions are strengthened, and militias are replaced or absorbed by national and regional governmental security forces.

Most major Iraqi militias are associated with religious and ethnic political parties, although some are also tribal. As such, these militias would be expected to fight in the interests of their sectarian or ethnic communities, should relations among Iraqi communities decline or collapse. A massive Shi'ite electoral victory will unquestionably serve as a spur to the further development of Sunni and Kurdish militias since the Shi'ites would then appear closer to the control of national military

institutions including security forces. Sunni Arabs and Kurds could at that point wonder if the national military could eventually evolve into a force devoted primarily to the welfare of the Shi'ite community.

If fighting among the radical fringes of Iraq's major communities develops, various sectarian and ethnic militias could be drawn into the fighting. Once mainstream militias begin fighting each other, full scale intercommunal war may well follow, unless Iraqi security forces can contain and then suppress (although not necessarily eliminate) the fighting. Moreover, under these circumstances, individual Iraqi soldiers, national guardsmen, and other security forces would be subjected to strongly conflicting loyalties. They would have to either remain in the Iraqi military or desert, depending upon the circumstances of the civil conflict, particularly regarding their home community. It is especially likely that numerous soldiers would desert if they felt that that army was being used to crush the aspirations of their own ethnic or sectarian group. Such individuals would probably desert with their weapons and join the militias associated with their home communities in a similar process as that of the disintegration of the Lebanese Army during Lebanon's 1975-91 civil war.[14] Such a collapse can be quite rapid and difficult to reverse once it has started.[15]

Other problems exist as well. Border security is a major problem in contemporary Iraq and will become an even more serious predicament should Iraq be engulfed by civil war.[16] Currently, U.S. and other coalition forces are providing at least some limited border security. Most of the projected Iraqi border security force is still undergoing extensive recruiting, training, and organizational development. The effort is, however, moving forward, and border security will improve as these new units are equipped and put into place. Unfortunately, the Iraqi border force will almost certainly crumble without a functioning central government to provide logistical support and pay should civil war conditions begin to develop. Iraq's borders would thus become much more porous and subject to infiltration by terrorists and criminals. Moreover, a civil war in Iraq could also be expected to produce significant and perhaps severe levels of cross border refugees, creating the possibility of a humanitarian crisis. Large refugee camps associated with humanitarian relief programs would become centers of discontent and could correspondingly serve as recruitment pools for terrorists fighting inside Iraq.

An Iraqi civil war would also undoubtedly attract and generate extremely high levels of terrorist activity just as the Lebanese civil war

did in that country. Without a strong central government, international terrorists would have considerable leeway to establish enclaves and power bases, while local combatants could be expected to allow terrorists to operate in exchange for money, weapons, and other support. Additionally, established terrorist groups, such as that of the Abu Musab al Zarqawi group, will seek to expand their power and influence in the aftermath of a breakdown of internal security. Under civil war conditions, some terrorists would support their co-religionists in sectarian fighting, while others may simply seek to remove any last vestiges of U.S. influence from Iraq. Indeed, based on a variety of evidence, Zarqawi is widely believed to be seeking to foment an Iraqi civil war as the price of a radical new government that he hopes will emerge from the ashes of such a conflict.[17]

Moreover, the prestige of Islamic terrorists in the Muslim World could be expected to rise dramatically if they managed to wrest control of substantial portions of Iraq's territory from a pro-American government in Baghdad or appear close to victory in a civil war. The spectacle of victorious Islamists in Iraq would be a powerful source of attraction for unemployed, directionless young men across the Muslim World seeking to find some meaning for their lives. Young men without serious economic prospects and harboring strong but muddled anti-American feelings may see an anti-American jihad as an adventure that would give meaning to their lives. Thus, an Iraq in civil war could become an incubator for anti-American terrorists because of the desire to bring forth an anti-American vanguard state out of the civil war, the need for what radical Palestinian leader George Habbash once called an "Arab Hanoi."[18]

If civil war breaks out in Iraq, the United States will also be widely blamed in the Arab World, despite strong U.S. efforts to prevent such an eventuality through the thankless job of refereeing Iraqi factions. The U.S. decision to invade Iraq and restructure the Iraqi political order will be seen as the essential cause of any failure. Moreover, in Iraq and the rest of the Arab World, the United States will probably be widely assumed to have incited a civil war deliberately. Many Arab commentators have clearly stated their belief that the United States invaded Iraq to exploit its oil resources and to protect Israel and not because the United States had any particular concern about liberating the Iraqi people from Saddam Hussein.[19] Arab conspiracy theorists would undoubtedly latch on to the outbreak of civil war as a deliberate

U.S. plan to safeguard both of these goals, however unlikely this may seem to more dispassionate observers.

The Shi´ite-Sunni Arab Divide in Iraq.

Sunni Muslim Arabs have dominated all Iraqi governments from the formation of the state until the ouster of Saddam Hussein. Sunni preeminence in Mesopotamia dates back to Ottoman times, although mass conversions from Sunni to Shi'ite Islam also occurred during the 1800s throughout what is now southern Iraq.[20] Following World War I, the British installed a monarchy under King Feisal of the Hashemite family to function as Iraq's leader. King Feisal, himself a Sunni, enjoyed some genuine popularity in Iraq, but nevertheless depended heavily upon Sunni officers (especially Mesopotamian officers) who served with him during the Great Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Turks (1916-18).[21] The Hashemites also formed political alliances with Iraq's Sunni urban elite, and displayed favoritism to Sunnis for administrative and military positions.[22] Some British officials may also have favored bringing Sunnis into the government because they considered Sunnis as less complicit in the nationalist Revolt of 1920 (although the British were also quite confused about the revolt's origin and causes).[23] Iraqi military officers during the initial years of the monarchy were almost all Sunnis.[24] Sunni ascendancy survived the 1958 revolution, and reached its height during the era of Saddam Hussein.

During their years of political hegemony, many Sunni Arabs worried that they would be forced to pay for their history of discrimination against the Shi'ites if the roles were ever reversed and the Shi'ites were able somehow to dominate Iraq. This concern became especially pronounced during Saddam Hussein's years in power, which included an 8-year war against Shi'ite Iran. Additionally, Iraq's Sunni Arab community did not join in the post-DESERT STORM 1991 Shi'ite rebellion to oust the Ba'ath, and many Sunnis instead rallied to Saddam. Republican Guard tanks crushing the rebellion were often painted with the slogan, "No more Shi'ites after today."[25] These forces razed villages, massacred civilians, and established a horrendous death toll while crushing the rebellion. The Sunni community's quiescence during this period may have further widened the gap between the two communities.

Currently, many Iraqi Sunni Arabs feel politically besieged, and some appear to believe that the United States seeks to punish them for

Saddam Hussein's crimes and that the United States favors a Shi'ite dominated government.[26] In the aftermath of Saddam's removal, Sunnis lost a brutal dictator who was nevertheless a member of their community and a leader who favored Sunni Arabs over Iraq's other ethnic and sectarian groups. Promises of democracy are not always attractive to the Sunnis since they can never constitute a electoral majority by themselves. Should sectarian divisions become entrenched political divides, their limited numbers will marginalize them indefinitely. Many Sunni Arabs were also alienated by the de-Ba'athification process, which they felt was directed primarily at them throughout the beginning of the post-Saddam era. A variety of critics, including Prime Minister Ayad Allawi (a secular Shi'ite), now feel that the sweeping initial de-Ba'athification policy was one of the most serious U.S. mistakes in the post-Saddam era.[27] Additionally, the abolition of the Saddam era army was of special concern since the officer corps of that force was heavily Sunni Arab.

Iraq's Sunni Arabs are also faring poorly in the effort to reorganize themselves to compete politically in post-Saddam Iraq. No Sunni-oriented political parties currently appear equipped to accomplish this task, and some Sunni leaders call for a boycott of the January 30, 2005, elections. Well-organized, mass political parties, which can vastly increase voter turnout, operate in the Kurdish and Shi'ite communities, but not in the Sunni community.[28] The resistance to the U.S. presence and the new Iraqi government is also currently strongest in the Sunni community, and support for the insurgency may distract from any potential Sunni effort to take hold of a share of power within the framework of the new government. Many non-Iraqi Sunni Arabs, especially in the Gulf, fear a possible U.S. decision to align with Shi'ites Muslims as a strategy for influencing the Muslim World due to exasperation with the Sunni insurgents.

Some Sunni Arab leaders are also worried about the Kurds and may fear Kurdish-Shi'ite cooperation directed against them. At least some Sunnis also believe that Kurdish military units played a major role in coalition attacks against Fallujah in April 2004. While many individual members of the Iraqi Civil Defense Corp (later renamed the Iraqi National Guard) units operating in Fallujah were Kurdish, it is not clear that these forces were operating as primarily Kurdish units.[29] It is possible that disproportionately Kurdish units moved against the Fallujah radicals since the Kurdish members of the National Guard are often the most reliable troops in that organization, and since the fighting

in Fallujah was particularly intense. True or not, this interpretation of events gathered force, and many Kurds living in Fallujah chose to leave afterwards.

Yet, if the Sunnis carry the psychological baggage of lost dominance, Shi'ites must address a heritage of horrific sectarian repression that has thoroughly traumatized their community. Saddam, who was an untrusting leader at best, always kept an especially wary eye on the majority Shi'ites. This concern reached new heights in 1979 with the rise of a militant Shi'ite Islamic regime in Iran. Iranian calls for regionwide Islamic revolution and the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War caused the Ba'ath leaders to view Iraqi Shi'ites as a potential fifth column that was all too willing to side with Iran under the right circumstances. Iraq's Shi'ite Arabs nevertheless remained loyal to their country during this conflict, probably because they were fighting a foreign enemy. In 1991, however, a different set of circumstances applied in the aftermath of Saddam's defeat during Operation DESERT STORM. Shi'ites rose against Saddam and the Ba'ath party to overturn his government in an action that may have been viewed as equally patriotic as resisting the Iranians.

Virtually all Iraqi Shi'ites view any return to a system of Sunni domination of Iraq as unacceptable due to the horror of the recent past. The Shi'ite political leadership, including Iraq's most senior cleric, Grand Ayatollah Sistani, have repeatedly emphasized that they favor an Iraqi democracy as promised by the United States when it ousted Saddam. To these leaders, democracy is a majority rule political system, which they may also view as a winner-take-all system. Moreover, most major Shi'ite leaders have resisted all formulas to increase Sunni representation beyond that of their numbers to encourage their integration into the political process. Grand Ayatollah Sistani, for example, took an exceptionally dim view of an early post-Saddam American plan to use "regional caucuses" as a voting device, since this program would have diminished the importance of Shi'ite numbers. He and other Shi'ite leaders have also told their followers that voting is a moral duty.[30]

Violence between Iraq's Sunni and Shi'ite communities exists but appears limited and confined to the fringes of each community. One particularly appalling incident of possible anti-Shi'ite violence occurred with the assassination of Shi'ite political leader, Mohammad Bakr al Hakim, and at least 80 other people by a bomb set in front of a Najaf mosque in August 2003. This attack is suspected of being either anti-Shi'ite or a product of an inter-Shi'ite power struggle. Other attacks have

been made against Shi'ite Mosques or pilgrims to Shi'ite shrines and are sometimes suspected to be the actions of Sunni Muslim extremists. The period immediately prior to the January 30 elections seems to have been particularly tense. Some Sunni clerics accused "poisonous" Shi'ite religious leaders of ignoring the U.S.-coalition November 2004 attack on Fallujah, which was widely unpopular among many Sunni leaders.[31]

Incidents of suspected anti-Sunni violence by Shi'ite Muslims are less common at the time of this writing. Many Shi'ites are widely believed to be seeking to dominate the new Iraqi polity by force of numbers, and therefore do not see violence as a first resort. Nevertheless, anti-Sunni violence widely attributed to Shi'ite extremists has occurred. In September 2004, for example, two prominent Sunni clerics were assassinated in separate incidents in Sadr city, the Shi'ite area in Eastern Baghdad.[32] The rise of populist Shi'ite radicals, such as Muqtada al-Sadr, increase the danger of sectarian violence should the radical fringes begin to engage each other further and then threaten to expand their conflict to the larger communities.

Strikes against Iraq's tiny Christian community, apparently by Sunni radicals, have also occurred on a recurring basis throughout the post-Saddam era. Such persecution, while reprehensible, is not itself an indicator of civil war since the Christians are too small as a group to emerge as significant combatants. The attacks do, however, indicate an ongoing problem with religious intolerance, which can expand to other groups.[33]

Iraqi Kurdish and Turkoman Ethnic Challenges.

The Kurdish question looms large in Iraq's future and is closely entwined with the danger of civil war. Currently, there are between 28-35 million Kurds throughout the Middle East, making them one of the largest nationalities in the world without their own state.[34] In addition to Iraq, other large Kurdish communities are located in Turkey, Syria, and Iran. All of these states are concerned about the future directions of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq, which they view as an important factor influencing their own Kurds. Moreover, the closer a Kurdish state comes to reality in northern Iraq, the more likely that these other regional powers will find ways to unify their efforts against it.[35]

In an important study of ethnic identity, Donald Horowitz suggests that Iraqi Kurds went through a process of partial Arabization under a succession of Arab regimes, but that they later experienced a cultural

revival reflecting awareness that they could lose their group identity.[36] A succession of Iraqi governments has nevertheless sought to suppress the Kurdish identity, while the mainstream Kurdish leadership has strongly resisted this effort. Moreover, the Kurds engaged in a series of rebellions against Baghdad that, at times, threatened to unravel the Iraqi state. Iraqi Kurds also collaborated with the Iranians during the Iran-Iraq war in the hopes that they would make political gains following an Iraqi defeat. Iraq was not defeated, however, and Saddam's post-war efforts to crush separatist Kurdish aspirations reached a new intensity as he waged a genocidal campaign against Iraq's Kurds to punish them for their support to Tehran.[37]

Since 1991, Iraqi Kurds have enjoyed a semi-independent status because of the creation of a UN-sponsored "safe haven" in northern Iraq in the aftermath of Operation DESERT STORM. The safe haven was protected by a U.S./UK-enforced "no fly" zone (1991-2003) where Iraqi aircraft were prohibited from operating. Theoretically, Iraqi troops were not allowed to enter the area either, although this prohibition was violated when Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani sought and obtained Saddam's military support against Kurdish rival Jalal Talabani in 1996.[38] The Kurdish areas have mostly flourished since 1991, and the Kurds have reveled in their separate non-Arab/non-Iraqi identity. The Iraqi Kurds substituted their own red, yellow, green, and white flag in place of the Iraqi national flag throughout areas under their control.[39] Many young Kurds have stopped learning Arabic and have no apparent interest in a joint Arab-Kurdish future.[40] Now, in the aftermath of Saddam's capture, almost 2 million Kurds have signed a petition demanding a referendum on Kurdish independence, although it is widely understood that such independence would produce an angry backlash within Iraq and throughout the region.[41] In the Kurdish media, universities, and public opinion, pro-independence sentiment is clear and overwhelming.

Faced with the danger of a regional backlash, the major Kurdish leaders have asserted that "federalism" is the most acceptable solution for governing Iraq, although when asked to describe the nature of such an arrangement, their ideas appear more like a very loose confederation.[42] Moreover, most non-Kurds seem to view Kurdish-style federalism as an intermediate step toward Kurdish independence. The Kurdish leaders call for a federation of "nations," with a partnership between the Arab and Kurdish regions.[43] Such "federalism" implies the Kurdish control of northern oil, a particularly inflammatory issue. A significant portion of Iraq's total oil infrastructure is in northern Iraq,

especially around Kirkuk. The June 2004 assassination of Ghazi Talabani, the head of oil field security in northern Iraq, for example, is widely believed to have been a warning against Kurdish ethnic and economic separatism. Ghazi Talabani was from the same Kurdish clan as Jalal Talabani, the head of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), one of the two major Kurdish political parties, advocating a more decentralized form of Iraqi federalism.[44]

Iraqi Kurds seek to retain the militias associated with their major political parties and ban non-Kurdish military units from their region. Additionally, disarming Kurdish militias is not a realistic prospect. The Kurds are aware that ethnic conflict is a realistic possibility, and they are much more inclined to improve their military capabilities rather than disarm. Moreover, the U.S. leadership has good reasons not to press too tenaciously on this issue. The disarmament of the Kurdish militias could lead to a power vacuum that will allow the expansion of the al-Qa'ida affiliated terrorist group, Ansar al-Islam, which is based in Kurdistan. Mainstream Kurdish militia forces include about 50,000 fighters.[45] Kurdish members of the New Iraqi Army openly state that they will desert and return to Pesmerga (Kurdish irregular fighters) units if their Kurdish homeland is threatened.

Many Iranian, Syrian, and Turkish leaders doubt that the Iraqi Kurds would be satisfied with their own independence, even if they were able to achieve it. Rather, they assume that an independent Kurdish state in territory carved out of Iraq would serve not only as an inspiration to their own Kurdish populations, but also as a base for subversion against the national unity of their respective countries. The Kurds are also faced with solid opposition to "federalism" by most of the major leaders within Iraq's other communities. Indeed, Shi'ite religious leader Grand Ayatollah Sistani denounced elements of the Interim Iraqi Constitution that were designed to reassure the Kurds. To face these rivals, Iraqi Kurds have attempted to bring the United States into their disputes, apparently in the hope that the United States will lose patience with the prospect of working with Shi'ite and Sunni Arabs. Many Kurdish leaders have, for example, indicated that they favor an indefinite U.S. presence in northern Iraq.

Additionally, the Kurds have engaged in at least a limited forced expulsion of non-Kurdish Iraqis from disputed areas of northern Iraq including the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, and this type of activity could expand dramatically in a period of increased sectarian strife.[46] These

population shifts involve ethnic Kurds returning to Kirkuk, Mosul, and other areas of northern Iraq, while seeking to expel the Arabs that were transplanted there during the "Arabization" effort.[47] This effort began in 1963 and was designed to replace the Kurds of northern Iraq with Arabs. By April 2003, around 250,000 Arabs had been transplanted to the Kirkuk area, and an equal number of Kurds were displaced. The Kurds claim that Kirkuk is their "Jerusalem" and should serve as the capital for the Kurdish region. This has been presented as a non-negotiable issue for them, and Kurdish leaders suggest that Arabs brought to Kirkuk under the Arabization program must leave, along with their descendents.[48]

Another important ethnic group with a key role in the future of northern Iraq and very different views from the Kurds and Arabs on Kirkuk is the Turkomans. Turkomans are of ethnic Turkish heritage and speak an archaic version of Turkish. They also write their language according to the pre-Ataturk, non-Latinized version of the Turkish language, using Arabic-style script. The Turkomans view Kirkuk as their ancestral home and are deeply opposed to the idea that it may become a Kurdish city. U.S. statistics suggest that the Turkomans are only about 3 percent of the population, but they strongly object to this characterization, maintaining instead that they constitute 10-15 percent of the total population of Iraq.[49] They have also contested the Kurdish domination of the instruments of local government in Kirkuk, and tensions between the two groups appear to be serious and perhaps rising.[50]

Iran: Dangers and Opportunities Resulting from an Iraqi Civil War.

Turning from the internal situation in Iraq to that country's neighbors, Iran has an especially strong stake in Iraq's future. It is likely that Tehran might find significant opportunities to advance its regional agenda as the result of an Iraqi civil war, but Iran may also be faced with severe, perhaps regime-threatening, dangers because of such an eventuality. Tehran fought an exceptionally bloody 8-year war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq from 1980-88, and the Iranian leadership knows the price of a powerful and unfriendly regime in Baghdad. Correspondingly, the Iranian regime will almost certainly feel compelled to intervene in any Iraqi civil conflict, although it may do so in ways short of military force. Tehran can also be expected to claim that it strongly supports Iraqi

national unity, while the Iranian leadership nevertheless realizes that a dismembered Iraq fragmented into multiple "de facto" states offers Tehran a less threatening and more easily dominated western neighbor. Additionally, Iranian policy directed at Iraq may not always appear coherent due to internal Iranian divisions which can cause various intelligence and foreign policy bureaucracies to act independently of each other and sometimes even at cross-purposes.

It is unclear if the Iranian leadership, behind closed doors, favors a unified Iraq or a weak chaotic Iraq. There are advantages and drawbacks to each option. The possibility of a strong and stable Iraq is undoubtedly of serious concern to the Iranians since such an entity could develop into a committed and dangerous enemy. Currently, a number of outstanding differences remain between Iraq and Iran over territory, Iran-Iraq War reparations, and other issues. A strong and assertive Iraq would be in a good position to challenge the Iranians over these differences. Additionally, tensions have already developed with the Iraqi interim government. The Iranians have described Prime Minister Iyad Allawi's government as U.S. "lackeys," and Allawi has returned the charge by stating that Iran is engaged in a vigorous espionage campaign within Iraq. Defense Minister Hazem al Sha'alan, for example, has stated that Iran seeks to "kill democracy" in his country.[51] Sha'alan is also reported by *al Jazirah* television as having referred to Iran as "Iraq's arch-enemy," suggesting that current Iranian meddling in Iraq is simply the latest manifestation of continuing Iranian efforts to dominate the Iraqis.[52] Although other Iraqi leaders have backed away from Sha'alan's statements, such remarks undoubtedly reflect the sentiment of many Iraqi citizens who deeply distrust Iran. Iraqi officials have also charged that Iranian intelligence organizations are deeply involved in Iraqi politics, and some Iraqi leaders privately state that Iranian spies and saboteurs have been executed.[53] While execution claims are unconfirmed, they do reflect a vehemence that may be instructive on the level of hostility between at least some members of the two governments.

The Tehran leadership also fears that a unified and pro-Western Iraq could help facilitate an attack against the Iranian homeland at some future point. At least some of the Iranian leadership felt their own government was slated for near-term regime change after the fall of Baghdad. The U.S. identification of the Iranian regime as part of an "axis of evil" was of serious concern to the ruling clerics, many of whom seemed to fear that the United States would attack them after Iraq had

been stabilized through military means. Shortly after the fall of Baghdad, former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani suggested that the United States and Iran restore diplomatic ties in a symptom of nervousness about future U.S. action against Iran.[54] Calls for U.S.-Iranian dialogue by Iranian leaders have continued periodically up to the present date, but new problems have also emerged.[55] Current differences over the Iranian nuclear program are particularly serious. Tehran claims to be interested in a full fuel cycle nuclear program for exclusively peaceful purposes, the most important of which is power generation. The U.S. Government fears that Iran is also seeking a nuclear weapon. The possibility of a U.S.-Iranian military confrontation over this issue cannot be ruled out, although there would be enormous difficulties for the United States in conducting such military operations at this time.[56]

Tehran also fears an Iraqi government that is willing to accept permanent U.S. military bases that may be used to threaten and intimidate the Iranian regime, even if a U.S. attack is not immediately forthcoming.[57] Since the 9/11 attacks against the United States, Iranian leaders have watched their strategic situation erode as the United States has expanded its influence and military presence in states near Iran to a degree that some view as "encirclement."[58] The United States reinvigorated its ties with Pakistan and expanded military links with Islamabad in order to confront the Taliban regime. Additionally, Washington has established strong military relationships with a variety of former Soviet Central Asian republics to Iran's north. These relationships remain important with ongoing U.S. military operations in Afghanistan against a resurgent Taliban.[59] Moreover, Washington also installed a new government in Afghanistan, although that government appears willing to co-exist with pro-Iranian figures in Western Afghanistan.[60] While the Iranians were never close to the Taliban regime and in 1998 almost went to war with Taliban Afghanistan, a U.S.-dominated Afghanistan may not be seen as much of an improvement.[61]

Iran has other serious concerns about a united Iraq even in the absence of a strong U.S.-Iraqi relationship. The Iranians, at some level, would favor an Iraqi religious theocracy, but there are dangers here as well. Tehran could feel threatened by an Iraqi government heavily influenced by clerics who outshine the Iranian theological leadership or are in a position to challenge the Iranian leadership's interpretation of correct principles of Islamic government and policy. Some Iranian media sources have even expressed fear that the United States seeks to work against the Iranian government through domination of Iraq's

Najaf clergy.[62] The current Iranian Supreme Religious Guide (*rahbar*), Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, is probably particularly concerned about highly respected religious figures advising the new leaders of Iraq, since he maintains only modest credentials as an Islamic scholar. Moreover, in a possible harbinger of serious problems, Iranian dissidents have approached Grand Ayatollah Sistani in an effort to persuade him to issue *fatwas* (religious opinions) on issues involving the Iranian political process.[63] Should Sistani reverse himself at some point and intervene, this would present unpleasant complications for the Iranian regime's already flagging domestic political legitimacy. While Sistani's *fatwas* are only authoritative for individual Shi'ites who have accepted him as their *marja al taqlid*, or "source of emulation," they may also carry at least some weight for a wider body of people throughout the Shi'ite community.

Yet, if Tehran does not want an Iraqi government guided by independent-minded religious scholars, neither does it desire a government led by reckless, radical Islamists. Such individuals might help to drag Tehran into confrontation with the United States by committing irresponsible acts that are then perhaps incorrectly linked to the Iranians by U.S. policymakers. The Iranians must therefore be careful not to support radicals they cannot control, while nevertheless avoiding the alienation of clerical and other leaders who are willing to cooperate with them. The case of Muqtada al-Sadr and other members of his movement may be particularly problematic, although the Iranians are almost certainly providing him with support and clearly seek to influence him. It is, nevertheless, unclear if Tehran can restrain and control him during a time of crisis, and this is probably the most pressing question for Iran in its dealings with Sadr. Tehran also has concerns that he may be an extreme Arab nationalist with an ethnic bias against the Iranians.[64] The Iranian leadership may not have come to grips with these conflicting views of Sadr.

Some Iranian leaders appear to view Sadr as a useful potential ally with whom they might cooperate in the same way they have worked with the leadership of the Lebanese group, Hizballah. Hizballah, under the leadership of the radical and relatively young Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah, is an important political party in Lebanon with an extensive following among the poor and considerable influence over the future of the country.[65] In its early stages of existence, the group received Iranian money and was especially receptive to Iranian influence without being dominated by Tehran.[66] Iranian influence over Hizballah has

continued to decline as the party has become more institutionalized and entrenched in Lebanese politics, but the relationship remains friendly and cooperative. Sadr's movement has parallels with Hizballah, and Tehran may view the Hizballah model as instructive to Iraq under current circumstances. Nevertheless, Sadr is not as intelligent or sophisticated as Nasrallah, and Sadr's actions can attract unwelcome U.S. activity to Iran's doorstep in a way that Hizballah activity in Lebanon cannot.

While the Iranians may envision potential difficulties with an independent minded, Shi'ite-dominated government, they are even more deeply concerned about the possibility of an Iraqi government that is once again led or heavily influenced by Sunni Muslims, even if these people are hostile to the United States. Currently, the pro-insurgent portion of the Sunni community appears dominated by Sunni Islamic extremists known for their view of Shi'ites as apostates and former regime loyalists who once supported Saddam's Arab nationalist aversion to the Iranians and their regime. Obviously, a strong Iraqi government influenced by either of these factions would provide difficulties for Tehran.

Yet, while Iran may face severe problems with a unified or powerful Iraq, it could face even more severe problems with an Iraq in civil war. The Tehran leadership would find the formulation of an Iraq policy to be an exhausting and divisive exercise for their already badly divided government. Different factions within the Iranian government would favor different levels of risk associated with different levels of intervention and may also seek dissimilar results. Hardline Iranian Islamists would probably seek a like-minded Iraqi leadership in Baghdad to pressure moderates within Iran. Iranian reformers would be more likely to seek a liberal Islamic government in Baghdad. Additionally, Iran also has a Kurdish population that may be inspired if a strongly autonomous or independent Kurdish entity arose in northern Iraq. Iranian efforts to address these domestic problems, while simultaneously seeking to expand its influence in Iraq will be a major challenge. Finally, the West may blame Iran for aggravating civil war-related problems, thereby threatening Tehran's dialogue with Europe and potentially further antagonizing the United States.

On balance, the Iranians therefore probably do not favor an Iraqi civil war, but it is certainly likely that Tehran will take advantage of any such eventuality should it occur. Tehran's perceptions of its own vital interests would probably propel the Iranians to become heavily

involved with Iraq, although they would probably intervene in ways that do not involve large-scale conventional military operations. They would also attempt to conceal their involvement to the greatest extent possible.[67] Neutrality in such a conflict is unthinkable because Iran has vital interests related to the future Iraqi government. Rather, the Iranians would seek to support the Shi'ite community, while simultaneously bolstering pro-Iranian elements within that community. Moreover, the emergence of a strong, Arab nationalist government in Baghdad may increase the Iranian interest in supporting centrifugal forces, since such a government can reasonably be expected to emerge as an important rival to Tehran.

An Iraq in the midst of sectarian war would allow Iran some latitude to support pro-Iranian Shi'ites at the expense of their secular or anti-Iranian co-religionists, and thus help enable pro-Iranian groups to dominate the Shi'ite community and perhaps prevail in a sectarian war. Tehran will seek to formulate policies that maximize its own interests within Iraq, while minimizing the influence of the United States and potential regional rivals such as Saudi Arabia. Such an approach would involve supporting some factions at the expense of others, in a policy that would create enemies as well as friends. Tehran will also seek to expand its influence in ways that do not produce a significant backlash with either the United States or the Iraqis themselves. The vigilance of U.S-led coalition forces in the region, and the long history of Iranian-Iraqi conflict makes such a task difficult.

Iran can also be expected to be able to make use of a wide spectrum of individuals, institutions, and organizations to influence the outcome of a civil war. Some of these organizations are arms of Iranian foreign policy, such as the Iranian intelligence services. Others are Iraqi exile groups which have had close working relations with the Iranians for years or even decades. Two of Iraq's largest political parties, *Da'wa Islamiyya* and especially the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), have long histories of political cooperation with Iran. SCIRI is now emerging from a dependent relationship with Iran and currently has at least the option for increased independence. *Da'wa* was once one of Iraq's most important political parties but was badly decimated in its confrontations with Saddam, and subsequently became radical and pro-Iranian. Its ties to Tehran were never as strong as those of SCIRI, and *Da'wa* is probably somewhat more willing to act independently of Tehran. Nevertheless, Iranian backing still has

advantages for all parties involved, and *Da'wa* and SCIRI are currently maintaining friendly relations with Tehran.[68] Additionally, the Iranians have also sought influence with a variety of secular Iraqi leaders, including Ahmad Chalabi.[69] Some observers have also suggested that Iran may even compete for influence with the Iraqi Kurds under some circumstances. Iran may also seek a mediation and power-breaking role among factions, although such activities make enemies as well as allies.

Turkey, Syria, and Lebanon.

Turkish goals for Iraq have considerable overlap with those of the United States. Ankara is not threatened by the possibility of a democratic Iraq, and the Turks also strongly favor Iraqi national unity under most future circumstances. Additionally, most Turkish leaders strongly approve of a secular Iraq, rather than an Islamic, republic. The Turkish leadership operates within the framework of a secular Westernized state as envisioned by the Turkish Republic's revered founding President Kamal Ataturk. Over the last decade, Ataturk's ideals have been challenged by a growing Islamic movement in that country, but there has also been a strong backlash against the Islamists. In this regard, it is important to look beyond the current self-described "conservative" Turkish government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party, which includes many Turkish leaders who have previously tilted towards Islamist principles. The Prime Minister is among this group, although he now claims that religion is a private matter and that he is loyal to the secular vision of Ataturk.[70] Additionally, the Turkish military leadership is deeply concerned about radical Islamist activity, and military leaders are in a strong position to insist that it be opposed forcefully. Turkey's 1982 Constitution and the 1961 Turkish Armed Forces Internal Service Law charge the military with the duty of protecting and promoting the Ataturk system. The military views this responsibility as quasi-sacred.[71]

Turkey traditionally has also been concerned about any autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq that exhibits the characteristics of an independent state and perhaps sets the stage for a formal declaration of independence. Turkish suspicions of Iraqi Kurdish separatist intentions run high due to a history of difficulties with the restive portion of Turkey's own Kurdish population. The modern Kurdish insurgency in Turkey began in 1984 and was led by Kurdish Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkari Kurdistan*

[PKK]). It reached its height in the early and mid-1990s. By spring 1999, it appears to have been defeated, and Kurdish rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan was captured in Nairobi Airport.[72] Nevertheless, the Turks are extraordinarily sensitive about any threat to their national unity, and they view any sign of Kurdish unrest as a serious concern.

A revitalized Kurdish insurgency in Turkey remains a potential threat of ongoing concern to the Turkish government. Around 5,000 Kurdish guerrillas of the former PKK, now known as Kongra-Gel (Kurdish Peoples' Congress) have retreated into the mountains of northern Iraq. These fighters maintained a cease-fire with the Turkish government from 1999 until May 2004. In May 2004 Kongra-Gel made an announcement that it would resume guerrilla warfare against Turkish military forces, and has followed this announcement with some minor attacks.[73] Should Kongra-Gel escalate this effort, they would be faced with the strong possibility of forceful Turkish military intervention in northern Iraq. Turkey has requested that Iraq take action against Kongra-Gel units in Iraq, but the Iraqi leadership responded that it is unable to do so at this time due to shortcomings within its still developing military.[74] Moreover, even if Iraq did have the military capability to confront Kongra-Gel, it is doubtful that it would do so, as such actions would inflame already fragile Arab-Kurdish relations within Iraq.

Additionally, the Turks traditionally have been reluctant to grant the Kurdish minority wide-ranging cultural and language rights or allow outspoken Kurdish nationalist politicians to serve in the Turkish parliament.[75] Rather, Ankara has consistently viewed serious concessions to the Kurds as intermediate steps leading to demands for new concessions. This outlook is now being challenged, and a "go slow" approach to Kurdish political and cultural rights is replacing the more rigid policies of the past. This new approach allows such things as a limited number of radio programs in the Kurdish language and the teaching of Kurdish in private schools.[76] The Turks therefore are working actively against the possibility of a Kurdish state, while at the same time giving their own Kurds small doses of cultural liberalization.[77] There is also some tension over issues of liberalization. The Turks seem determined to go forward with these reforms, but they also recognize that risks are involved and that concessions on Kurdish culture and language could lead to increasing political demands.[78] This sensitive situation could be severely aggravated by events in Iraq.[79]

The Turkish government leaders will also become extremely apprehensive about the situation in Kirkuk during any future Iraqi

civil war. Kirkuk is viewed by the Kurds as a natural capital for any emerging Kurdish state. This view is sharply contested by the Arab and Turkoman populations of the city. The well-being of the Turkoman population is an ongoing concern for the Turkish public, and it would be difficult for the Turkish government to ignore this issue, even if they wished to do so.[80] The Turkish leadership's fiercely protective outlook concerning the Turkomans was underscored in September 2004 during U.S. operations in the northern Iraqi town of Tel Afar. U.S. military operations against insurgent forces in the area became a subject of deep Turkish unhappiness when Turkoman officials claimed a number of civilians had been killed as part of the struggle for control of the area. Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul threatened to end Turkish cooperation with the United States over Iraq if the action continued. The crisis ended a day after Gul issued these threats, when U.S. military actions in this area were completed.[81]

Under these pressures, the Turkish leadership is searching for creative ways in which to address unfavorable developments in Iraq. One scenario that is increasingly popular among Turkish academics is for Ankara to offer cooperation and protection to the Iraqi Kurds should a radical Islamic regime arise in southern Iraq.[82] This scenario assumes that, if Islamic radicals seize control of the Iraq government, Iraqi Kurds will then be willing to overlook potential differences with Turkey in order to avoid subservience to an Islamic regime in Baghdad. The Turks by intervening establish a powerful check on future Iraqi Kurdish moves towards independence and also insure that a relatively secularized population of Kurdish Muslims serve as a barrier to Islamic agitation and militancy against the Turkish homeland. Turkish leaders had to cope with Iranian subversion and agitation in the years immediately following the declaration of the Islamic Republic there, and the Turks have no desire to repeat the experience with a militant Islamic Iraq.

In addition to Turkey, another secular regime, that of Syria, would face a number of challenges resulting from an Iraqi civil war. The circumstances of the Syrian dictatorship are, however, immeasurably different from those of democratic Turkey. Syria is a Ba'athist police state where unrest is quickly and brutally suppressed. Paradoxically, the authoritarianism of the Syrian regime masks certain regime fragilities, and it is uncertain that Syria would be immune to unrest and civil disorder in Iraq.[83] Additionally, a successful pro-American Iraq would present serious problems for Damascus on a number of levels. Syria, in this instance, would be almost totally encircled by pro-American nations

and regimes. It would also face an unwelcome example of post-Ba'athist political development in a neighboring country. Moreover, some Syrian leaders seem to view U.S. hostility as based upon the very existence of a Ba'athist Syria. In their minds, this means that Syrian cooperation with the United States on issues such as terrorism will not ultimately prevent the United States from seeking regime change in Damascus.[84]

Despite numerous problems associated with Iraqi unrest, Damascus may see some benefits in such an eventuality. In particular, the Syrian leadership seems to feel that it has had every reason to believe that it will be a future target of U.S. pressure, and perhaps even military action, if democracy and stability were brought to Iraq.[85] Moreover, the proximity of a large U.S. military force to the Syrian border is of serious concern to the leadership of the Assad regime.[86] If the U.S. enterprise in Iraq ends in failure or if U.S. troops are bogged down in an effort to contain an Iraqi civil war, the perceived U.S. appetite for further intervention may well disappear. Indeed, some U.S. accusations that Syria is "facilitating" or at least allowing the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq appear to be based on the premise that Syria views the current insurgency in Iraq as its first line of defense.[87] Such statements may underestimate the serious concerns that Damascus maintains about provoking a U.S. attack, and are probably designed to prod Syria into additional border security measures.

Nevertheless, Damascus also has good reasons to fear an Iraqi civil war. It is uncertain how an Iraqi civil war might influence or inflame ethnic and sectarian divisions within Syria. The key leadership in Syria is composed of the Alawite sect of Islam, which comprises about 10-12 percent of the population. About 74 percent of the population is Sunni Muslim (including both Arabs and ethnic Kurds), with the remainder of the population being Druzes, Kurds, and other smaller groups.[88] Sunni Arabs probably constitute about 63 percent of the population.[89] Many traditionally-minded Sunnis view Alawites as heretics and deviationists from the true path of Islam, as well as their social inferiors.[90] The Alawites, however, maintain that their religion is a branch of Shi'ite Islam. This claim has been supported by two towering figures of Shi'ite history, Lebanon's Imam Musa Sadr and Iran's Imam Ruhollah Khomeini, although their declarations are somewhat tainted as they were made at times when each leader was seeking Syrian support.[91] Syria's Alawite leaders hoped such declarations might reduce tensions with the Sunnis, although the ultimate guarantor of the regime was always the Army and security forces.

Syria is probably concerned about the rise of Islamic extremism in an Iraqi civil war and will be especially concerned about Sunni Islamic extremism, which became a serious and perhaps regime-threatening problem for the Syrians in the early and mid-1980s.[92] The potential for Iraqi unrest to spread to Syria is uncertain, but Syrian citizens will think carefully before provoking their government, which is willing to employ a great deal of force to ensure its survival. Nevertheless, Syria is already reported to be experiencing an upturn in religious devotion in conservative neighborhoods within the cities and small Sunni Arab towns for a variety of reasons, including the disappointment associated with President Bashar Assad's stillborn reform and liberalization movement.[93] Increased religious devotion and anti-regime Islamic activism are two distinct phenomenons, but this trend is still unlikely to reassure the government. Syria's long border with Iraq provides many opportunities for Islamic rebels in both countries to coordinate, even if they see only temporary or tactical value in doing so, and Syria has a continuing concern over the potential rise of a regime-threatening Islamic opposition in Syria. U.S. insistence that Syria improve its border security appears to have led to some improvements, but complete control of the border is beyond the reach of the regime.

There are also between one and two million Kurds in Syria, although exact estimates vary widely.[94] Kurds in urban areas seem to have assimilated much more fully into Syrian society, and some of the lower estimates may not count all of them as Kurds. Other Kurds, particularly from the rural areas, maintain a highly-distinct Kurdish identity and are not fully integrated into Syrian society. Some Kurds from northeast Syria refused to register in the 1962 census to avoid military conscription and were thus denied citizenship. Others were denied citizenship on various other pretexts, including an inability to prove that they or their parents had lived in Syria since 1945.[95] These policies prevented these Kurds and their descendents from obtaining Syrian nationality, furthering their status as outsiders. Between 200,000 and 360,000 Syrian Kurds currently do not have Syrian citizenship.[96] Not surprisingly, one of the first post-Saddam challenges to Damascus came from Syrian Kurds. During a March 12 soccer match, a brawl erupted between fans of teams supported by Arabs and Kurds.[97] In the aftermath of the riots, more clashes took place, and statues of the late President Hafez Assad (the current President's father) were defaced in Syria's Kurdish areas.[98] The Syrians reacted to these actions with characteristic harshness.

Additionally, the leaders of various "unofficial" Kurdish political parties were told by senior intelligence officials that the state would no longer tolerate their activities, and they must disband.[99] Kurdish parties unanimously rejected this demand.[100] The potential for Syrian Kurdish unrest is therefore serious and may increase, should Kurdish-Arab military strife break out in Iraq.

A civil war in Iraq will also have important implications for Lebanon. In the event of an Iraqi civil war, Lebanese Muslims, and especially the numerically dominant Shi'ites, can be expected to be concerned with the fate of Iraq's Shi'ite community, and a few young Shi'ite men may further choose to go to Iraq.[101] Leaders of the Lebanese Shi'ite militant group, Hizballah, have made numerous statements about Iraq, and will probably seek to support like-minded Shi'ite radicals in Iraq, should civil war break out. Some Israeli sources have even gone so far as to suggest that Hizballah seeks foreign adventures as a way of keeping their militant identity and avoiding being turned into just another Lebanese political party.[102] While this viewpoint is probably excessive, Hizballah will be reluctant to simply ignore a civil war in Iraq in which its co-religionists are threatened and Shi'ite shrines are bombed.[103] A circulation of fighters could occur between Iraq and Lebanon under conditions of protracted sectarian fighting.

Egypt, Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinians.

The Egyptian government of President Husni Mubarak strongly opposed the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and issued a number of warnings about negative consequences for U.S. interests in the Arab World if the invasion proceeded. In the aftermath of the invasion, the Egyptian government periodically has distanced itself from the United States to avoid becoming the subject of domestic popular anger. Mubarak has also attempted to present himself as a seasoned leader who warned the U.S. administration against the invasion of Iraq but was ignored by the U.S. leadership.[104] Yet, beyond polishing his own image with the Egyptian masses, it is not certain that Mubarak or the remainder of the Egyptian leadership believes that they have large stake in the future of Iraq. Currently, Egyptian government leaders are more likely to express anger toward U.S. policy on Israeli/Palestinian issues rather than Iraq.

Most Egyptians have never felt a special relationship with Iraq. Iraqi claims to Arab leadership have surfaced periodically since the 1950s

and are especially poorly received by the majority of Egyptians who see their country as the natural leader of the Arab World. Competition between Iraq and Egypt for Arab leadership was particularly bitter at various points during the Presidency of Gamal Abdul Nasser in Egypt (1952-70). Nasser had an intense rivalry with the Iraqi monarchy, which developed into an even more sour and angry "cold war" with the successor Iraqi government of Brigadier Abdul Karim Qassim (1958-63).[105] Later, under the Ba'ath party, Iraq led the effort to isolate Egypt's Sadat government after the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty of 1979.[106] Iraqi-Egyptian relations nevertheless improved dramatically within a year because of Baghdad's scramble for support during the Iran-Iraq War.

Saddam's claims of Arab leadership were sometimes off-putting to Egyptians throughout his years in power, although there was also sympathy for his Arab nationalism and struggle against the Iranians. Additionally, the barbarity of Saddam's regime disgusted a number of Egyptians, but Ba'athist cruelty was not always viewed as atypical for Iraq. Compounding problems, Egyptian workers who traveled to Iraq in the 1980s to perform labor while Iraqi men were at the front with Iran were often treated quite poorly. Egyptian public opinion during this period was infuriated by stories of the abuse and murder of Egyptians at Iraqi hands. Later, in 1990, Egypt supported Kuwait and joined the multinational coalition against Iraq during the first Gulf War. The Cairo leadership did this after Saddam lied to President Mubarak in July 1990, privately promising not to invade Kuwait.[107] Saddam asked Mubarak to reassure U.S. President George H. W. Bush that the crisis over Kuwait could be expected to end soon. Saddam's manipulation of the Egyptian president publicly embarrassed Mubarak when it became clear that Saddam was using him as a pawn in the overall strategy for seizing Kuwait.[108] Egypt also reaped considerable economic gains by joining the coalition since the United States and Gulf Arabs forgave a vast amount of Egyptian debt.

Current problems in Iraq probably do not have the same emotional impact for Cairo as other key issues, since Egypt is not faced with sectarian differences that might be aggravated by an Iraqi civil war. The Egyptians, however, do have to cope with periodic problems from violent Islamic dissidents, the most recent of which appear to have been mostly defeated in the late 1990s. It remains unclear if this defeat of the radical Islamists will remain a lasting victory for the Egyptian

government. Critics point out that Egyptian security forces destroyed radical terrorist organizations primarily by using repression, whereas the root causes and misery leading to extremist appeal remain in place.[109] This situation suggests that extremist solutions may again find a popular following.

Egyptian radicals (including those associated with al-Qa'ida) previously have made good use of international ties to other terrorists, and they may be able to coordinate with Iraqi-based terrorists should civil war conditions develop in that country. Such coordination would be a problem for Egypt, but it should probably be manageable. While the Egyptian government could face new radical challenges, such developments will probably have only a limited relationship to what happens in Iraq. The more dangerous problem will be if there is a general upsurge in radical Egyptian terrorist activity at some point where the government is particularly vulnerable. President Mubarak's refusal to appoint a Vice President, and his general unwillingness to prepare the country for his death or departure from power, suggests that such a period of vulnerability may occur in the foreseeable future as the result of a succession crisis. Mubarak is 76 years old and seems to favor his unpopular 41-year-old son, Gamal, to be the next president. Gamal Mubarak would nevertheless find it excruciatingly painful to consolidate power after taking office due to a lack of clear support from any other source than his father.[110]

Jordan has an even stronger stake than Egypt in a stable, united, and prosperous Iraq, and to the extent it can, is supporting U.S. efforts to achieve that goal. Both before and after Saddam's ouster from power, Iraq was Jordan's most important export market.[111] Should Iraq devolve into civil war, such economic relations would be difficult, if not impossible, and the Jordanian economy will suffer accordingly. Additionally, Jordan, as a small country of limited resources, is particularly vulnerable to any refugee crisis, which would almost certainly follow an Iraqi civil war.

The Jordanian government traditionally has governed by balancing alternative interests and perspectives, including those of conservative tribal members, Palestinian nationalists, and those Islamists who are willing to work within the political system. Mainstream Islamists who oppose terrorism are an important force in Jordan, and organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood and its political arm, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), have serious followings. In the event of an Iraqi civil war, these groups undoubtedly will sympathize with Sunni Iraqi Islamists

and will pressure the Jordanian government to be at least passively supportive of the actions of these types of individuals. The prestige of the Islamic organizations would also rise due to their vociferous opposition to U.S. policy, which they would blame for any civil war. Mainstream Islamists could become a much more serious domestic center of political power and could perhaps constrain the ability of the monarchy to conduct the pro-Western foreign policy with which it is most comfortable.

There is also the issue of terrorism. Al-Qa'ida and its radical allies have engaged in operations against Jordan just as they have against Saudi Arabia, and a shadow war is believed to be occurring between the radicals and the Jordanian intelligence services.[112] This problem is likely to intensify if Iraq enters into a civil war. A key leader of the current Islamist insurgency in Iraq is Abu Mus'ab al Zarqawi, a Jordanian whose early forays into terrorism occurred in his own country in 1993, where he sought to help overthrow the government. Zarqawi was imprisoned in Jordan because of such actions but was later pardoned as part of a far-ranging amnesty for Jordanian prisoners. His time in prison did not make him any more sympathetic to the Jordanian government, and, despite diversions to Afghanistan and elsewhere, Zarqawi's organization is suspected of the assassination of a U.S. diplomat in Amman, Jordan, in October 2002.[113] Moreover, Jordanian authorities allege that Zarqawi was responsible for a 2004 plot to attack Jordan's General Intelligence Department, the Prime Minister's Office, and the U.S. Embassy in Amman with three trucks laden with 20 tons of explosives and toxic chemicals. Jordanian sources maintain that such an attack could have killed 80,000 people, although other sources consider this claim to be highly exaggerated.[114]

According to Jordan's King Abdullah, the situation in Iraq and the Palestinian territories "feed off of one another."[115] This statement reflects Amman's concerns that the Jordanian government must simultaneously deal with two of the most significant regional concerns in the contemporary Middle East in ways that could harm the monarchy's long-term political legitimacy, if progress is not made on these issues. A highly destabilized Iraq thus could be a truly difficult challenge for the monarchy. Iraqi Islamists who may rise to prominence in a civil war would probably view Jordan as a key target beyond Iraq for both its strategic location and its cooperative relationship with the United States.

The Jordanian government, in addition to addressing its legitimate concerns about Iraqi instability, is also seeking to appear active and concerned over Iraq as a way of maintaining domestic support for the government.[116] To these ends, Amman has attempted to mediate with the United States to reduce tensions with Iraq's Sunni Arabs. These measures include urging the United States to reach out to Sunni leaders and to ease the de-Ba'athification process.[117] King Abdullah has also stated that the United States may be insufficiently concerned about Iranian domination of Iraqi Shi'ites' leading to an Islamic government in Iraq.[118] Nevertheless, the Jordanians may have much less to fear from a Shi'ite-dominated government than do other Sunni Arab leaders. King Abdullah is a Sunni Muslim, but he is also as a member of the Hashemite family, and, as such, claims direct family descent from the Prophet Mohammed. This lineage has salience to a variety of Muslims, and it is well-received by many Shi'ites worldwide. The original break between Shi'ites and Sunnis occurred because of the Shi'ite belief that members of the Prophet's family are the most legitimate leaders of the Muslim community. While contemporary Shi'ites do not seek their leadership from the family of the Prophet, many do have considerable respect for the Hashemites. King Hussein's widow, Queen Noor, for example, has commented on what she perceives as Shi'ite esteem for the Hashemite family.[119]

Israel is, of course, a special case in the Middle East, and Israelis, not surprisingly, had radically different views from the rest of Middle Easterners about the opportunities presented by the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Most Israeli leaders, as well as the Israeli public, strongly favored a U.S. invasion of Iraq because of Saddam Hussein's suspected strategic weapons programs and his perceived willingness to use such systems against Israel.[120] Additionally, Saddam provided extensive financial support to the families of Palestinian suicide bombers killed in operations against Israeli civilians. While the Iraqis attempted to present such actions as a humanitarian effort to support the dependents of martyred fighters, the Israelis considered Iraqi actions as an incitement to the Palestinians to commit murders that they might not otherwise carry out.[121] On the eve of war, close to 80 percent of the Israel public favored a U.S. invasion, despite the perceived possibility that it could trigger a missile strike—perhaps even with chemical or biological weapons—against Israelis cities.[122]

Those Israelis who held high hopes for improved relations with Iraq have been overwhelmingly disappointed by the aftermath of Saddam's

removal from power. Prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, some Israeli commentators viewed various Iraqi exiles, including Ahmad Chalabi of the Iraqi National Congress (INC), as potentially friendly to Israel. They made this assessment due to Chalabi's ties with pro-Israeli figures in Washington.[123] Former American-based exiles, however, did not emerge as serious contenders for power in Iraq despite initial U.S. financial support for some of their groups and agendas.[124] Additionally, these people were not in a position to push for improved ties with Israel, even if they wished to expend their political capital to do so (which is doubtful). The new Iraqi government even briefly indicted one Chalabi supporter under a 1969 Ba'ath party law for contacts with Israel, although the charges were quickly dropped.[125] Additionally, the INC even chose to expel the individual involved in this action, perhaps underscoring the unrealistic nature of hopes for strongly improved Iraqi-Israeli relations.

Whatever future path Iraq takes, it now seems doubtful that any major leader will seek strong political or economic ties with the Israelis. Iraqi interim Prime Minister Iyad Allawi already has strongly defended his government against charges of undue Israeli influence, and he and other government leaders have promised not to normalize relations with Israel before other Arab nations do so as a part of an overall Middle Eastern settlement.[126] Any discussions of serious economic ties between Israel and Iraq also seem increasingly farfetched.[127] Moreover, even in the absence of Iraqi-Israeli ties, Muqtada al Sadr and other Iraqi radicals have voiced their suspicions about potential future government dealings with the "Israeli terrorist enemy."[128] Islamic leaders and radical Arab nationalists within Iraq are clearly positioned to cry betrayal at the slightest movement in Israel's direction.

An Iraqi civil war would present Israel with a mixed but mostly worrisome strategic result. One of Israel's greatest fears has been a strong, united, anti-Israeli Iraq, with a vibriant economy and strong military power, including weapons of mass destruction. Such an entity may eventually emerge from a united and nationalistic post-sanctions Iraq, but is unlikely to emerge from an Iraqi entity at war with itself. Thus, one aspect of the strategic threat to Israel would be diminished under these conditions. Nevertheless, other key problems remain.[129] A weak and divided Iraq would allow the development and strengthening of Islamist and other anti-Israeli terrorist organizations that support the training and financing of radical anti-Israeli groups within Iraqi

borders.[130] Should a highly energized Islamist regime emerge from the chaos of civil war, Israel would face a new enemy that may become much more threatening than Saddam ever was in his last years in power. Moreover, if Iraqi-based terrorists were able to help overthrow the Jordanian government (which is moderate and maintains diplomatic relations with Israel) this could mean a militant Islamist regime on Israel's longest border. This scenario is horrifying for the Israelis.

Currently, Israel is widely reported to maintain strong political and military links with Iraqi Kurds. These links are not new and date back to at least 1973.[131] Israeli leaders at that time sought to destabilize the Ba'athist regime, which they viewed as part of an "Eastern Front" that could bolster the military threat against them. The Israelis have also been accused of providing military training and aid to the Iraq Kurds in the post-Saddam era, but they strenuously deny these claims.[132] Should intercommunal civil war break out in Iraq, the natural inclination of the Israeli leadership will be to find ways to support moderate Kurds, with whom they have a long-standing relationship. Israeli political leaders may view the development of a powerful Kurdish state as an improvement in their geopolitical standing, although clear and decisive support for such a goal would seriously endanger the alliance with Turkey. The Turks tolerated Israeli efforts to support Iraq's Kurds when they sought to destabilize Saddam Hussein's regime, but see little justification for Israeli support for the Iraqi Kurds under current circumstances.[133]

The Palestinian reaction to an Iraqi civil war will vary according to the circumstances of such a war. Should Islamists continue to rise to leadership in the Iraqi insurgent movement, it is likely they will seek to expand and consolidate their ties to Palestinian Islamic radicals. Nevertheless, many Palestinians, including Islamists such as the members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, are deeply troubled about the danger of having the Palestinian cause lost inside a larger anti-Western struggle and delegitimized with the West should it become identified with al-Qa'ida and its supporters.[134] The Hamas leadership, for example, is known to be concerned about the possibility that it will be identified with al-Qa'ida and correspondingly considered as terrorists who must be eradicated as part of the U.S. Global War on Terrorism. Two leading experts on Palestinian Islamist movements note that, on at least one occasion, Hamas and Islamic Jihad agreed to a unilateral ceasefire against Israel to reduce the chances that they would be viewed as allies

of al-Qa'ida and that the Palestinian cause would be "subsumed as simply another front in the wider conflict." [135]

Thus, a civil war in Iraq in which Islamists become important will probably lead to increased ties between Iraqi and Palestinian radicals, although these ties may not be as extensive as might initially be suspected. Additionally, such ties will be controversial among Palestinian Islamists and Palestinians in general. Palestinian "localists" concerned primarily with their own problems with Israel will come into conflict with Palestinian "regionalists" in attempting to determine a response to the issues raised in an Iraqi civil war. While the localists may be dominant now, it is uncertain they will remain so indefinitely. Al-Qa'ida leaders are interested in recruiting Palestinians to their cause, and do have at least a limited following in Lebanese refugee camps, such as *Ayn al Hilwah* near Sidon.[136] Al-Qa'ida supporters from within the Palestinian community could therefore find themselves involved with Iraqi Islamists. Nevertheless, the pressures to become involved in an Iraq civil war will probably not be greater than those to become involved in the current struggle between Iraqi insurgents and the United States. Palestinian involvement in the current Iraqi fighting appears to be marginal.[137]

Saudi Arabia and the Arab Gulf States.

The conservative monarchal leadership of Saudi Arabia has a deep stake in the future of Iraq. An Iraqi civil war could be cataclysmic for the Saudis, although a strong, independent, and democratic Iraq is not a preferred option either. The underlying goals of the Saudi government have been to support conservative states in the region, limit the spread and appeal of anti-Saudi Islamic radicalism, and maintain ties with the United States in ways that do not provoke excessive domestic and international criticism. These policies are seen as a key to regime survival. If the Saudi leadership were to have its choice of governments in Iraq, they would probably prefer to see Iraq led by a conservative Sunni Arab strongman, or at least a respected Sunni Iraqi elder statesman such as Adnan Pachachi. Either of these developments seems virtually impossible under current conditions.

A democratic and pro-Western Iraq poses a number of problems for the Saudis. Democracy in the Gulf has been a long-standing worry for Saudi Arabia, and an Iraqi example could lead to pressure on the

House of Saud to democratize. The Saudis also suspect that the United States might be seeking a client state in Iraq as a counterweight to the U.S.-Saudi relationship. The Saudis are not likely to favor an Iraqi democracy because of such problems, but an Iraqi civil war probably remains the worst possible scenario for the future of Saudi Arabia, as it would complicate an already severe security crisis that exists within that country.

The potential weakness of the Saudi regime and its tough and continuing struggle with al-Qa'ida terrorists, both in exile and within its own borders, suggest that a civil war in Iraq would be catastrophic for the current government. Since May 2003, "Al-Qa'ida on the Arabian Peninsula" (QAP) has shown itself to be a resourceful adversary within the Kingdom capable of challenging the Saudi regime's ability to provide security for its citizens and for foreign residents, although at this time unable to threaten the existence of the regime itself. QAP has made extensive use of bombings and kidnappings to wage war against the House of Saud and its allies. The spring 2004 U.S. and Western decisions to urge the evacuation of their citizens from Saudi Arabia indicated that some governments believed the Saudis, at least temporarily, had lost control of important elements of their internal security situation.[138] Moreover, the Saudis cannot easily afford to have Western expatriates driven from the kingdom by terrorism threats, since they are still needed to keep the oil industry operating. This situation is already a problem for the Saudis, since terrorist attacks such as a May 1, 2004, shooting spree in Yanbu and various kidnappings/executions are targeted specifically at Westerners.[139]

The possible decline in the Iraq situation is, therefore, a complicated and dangerous challenge for the Saudis linked to their current security problems. If a Shi'ite-dominated Iraqi government unleashed a campaign of military conquest against Iraqi Sunnis, or if Shi'ite militias gain the upper hand in a civil war, the Saudi Arabian government may face some particularly painful choices in formulating its foreign policy towards Iraq. Sunni-Shi'ite violence in Iraq under these circumstances would have an intense influence on Saudi domestic opinion, and public opinion would probably seek governmental action to reign in Iraqi Shi'ites. A passive Saudi Arabian policy towards Iraq would anger a variety of Sunni Wahhabi Saudi citizens who view Iraq's Sunni Muslims as their co-religionists, while considering Shi'ites as little better than apostates.

Yet, a Saudi policy of supporting, or even simply tolerating, increasingly radicalized Sunni fighters traveling to Iraq from Saudi Arabia could bolster enemies who might later turn on the House of Saud, should they achieve their goals in Iraq. In particular, Saudi men choosing to fight in Iraq or going there to disperse funds could then return to Saudi Arabia with radical ideologies, military skills, and terrorist contacts, paralleling the experience of Saudis in Afghanistan but possibly on a much larger scale.[140] The Saudi government is not currently tolerating such activity and would become even more stern about such activities, should civil war conditions occur in Iraq.[141] Nevertheless, some radical Islamists within the Kingdom are deeply concerned about remaining on the sidelines, even under current conditions. Hinting at potential future problems, a group of 26 Saudi Islamic scholars unaffiliated with the Saudi government issued a *fatwa* in November 2004, calling for jihad against U.S. forces in Iraq.[142] Radical clerics, bypassing the government, may issue other such *fatwas* in response to an Iraqi civil war, although such opinions may also be widely ignored as going against the conscience of the individual. One individual in Saudi Arabia has even sued the "group of 26" clerics, claiming they corrupted the mind of his son and caused his death in Iraq.[143]

The Saudis also fear an empowered Shi'ite majority in Iraq, which could align with Iran against them and perhaps direct subversive messages at Saudi Shi'ites in the oil rich eastern province of Saudi Arabia. This province has been calm recently, although there were pro-Iranian and anti-government demonstrations in December 1979. Additionally, Shi'ites in Saudi Arabia continue to have important grievances against the Riyadh government.[144] This distrust is sometimes aggravated by Saudi Arabian differences with the Shi'ite theocracy in Iran. At the height of these differences in the 1980s, Saudi political attacks against Iran and Shi'ite Muslims in general often seemed to blend into one set of charges.[145] Rival Saudi-Iranian efforts to shape the future of Iraq could severely damage relations between the two countries. Additionally, a post-civil war Shi'ite-dominated government in Iraq may believe that it has a score to settle with the Saudis should the civil war itself be characterized by clearcut Saudi support for Sunni elements.

Another aspect of the potential problem is that many of the foreign radicals currently in Iraq have placed the destruction of the Saudi regime as a high priority. Should these individuals flourish in a civil

war setting, the Saudis would face an even more serious subversion threat. Should these elements prevail in an Iraqi civil war, they would be flushed with victory and fully prepared to press forward with an anti-Saudi agenda. Should al-Qa'ida-oriented radical groups gain an increased foothold in Iraq, they would be able to threaten Saudi Arabia to an even greater extent.

Ironically, for the Saudis, the most favorable side effect of an Iraq civil war would be to push the United States much closer towards Riyadh than it has been for at least a decade. Should Iraq devolve into chaos, the value of Saudi Arabian oil to both the United States and the West in general would skyrocket. The prospect of both Iraq and Saudi Arabia dissolving into a nightmare of civil war and radicalism would galvanize the West to support the Saudi regime to the greatest extent possible. Yet, a huge infusion of last-minute help may or may not be enough save a Saudi regime engulfed by radicalism. The return of a highly-visible U.S. presence could further complicate the relations of the Saudi government with its citizens. Saudi views of the United States have consistently declined in the last few years as the result of U.S. policies toward Iraq, Israel and the Palestinians, and U.S. homeland defense measures that directly impact Saudi travelers. A heavy-handed U.S. presence in the middle of a crisis may help the Saudi government, but it would certainly have negative consequences as well, including the furthering of Saudi Arabia's image as a U.S. client state.

Of the other Arab Gulf states, only the tiny island nation of Bahrain has a Shi'ite majority (along with a Sunni monarchy), although some Gulf Arab states have substantial Shi'ite minorities. Kuwait, in particular, has concerns about the danger of a divisive civil war taking place in Iraq due to Sunni-Shi'ite national unity issues. Shi'ites constitute about 30 percent of the total Muslim population of Kuwait. In the years immediately following the 1979 Iranian revolution, an energetic and sometimes effective Shi'ite terrorist network arose and perpetrated serious acts of violence.[146] These strong Iranian-supported terrorist networks no longer exist in Kuwait, although extremist Shi'ite groups still distribute literature and audiotapes deemed subversive by the government.[147] Sunni Kuwaitis may therefore worry that an Iraqi civil war will inflame Shi'ites in Kuwait, and that any pro-Sunni actions by the Kuwaiti government will create pressures for some Shi'ite radicals to return to terrorism.

Wahhabism also has a following in the smaller Gulf Arab states, although its most puritanical aspects are not always recognizable

to Western visitors in the same way they are in Saudi Arabia. The Kuwaiti government is already worried about its young men fighting in Iraq, and fears a radicalization problem if this process expands, as it probably would in a civil war.[148] In this regard, Islamic Affairs Minister Abdullah al Maatuk has announced the creation of teams of experts and clerics who are to direct educational efforts to combat extremism.[149] Kuwaiti police have also been reported to close down rings of religious extremists recruiting fighters to go to Iraq from Kuwait. The number of Kuwaitis who have gone to Iraq to fight is uncertain, but young Kuwaiti men have clearly engaged in this type of activity in Afghanistan in the past. Many of the other Gulf Arab states may also have concerns about how a civil war in Iraq may influence their youth, although Kuwait's problem may be especially disconcerting due to its proximity to the Iraqi border.

Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are more insulated from Iraqi events than Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, or Bahrain. Qatar has not suffered any recent terrorist incidents, and has introduced an ongoing program of reform.[150] It also does not have a border with Iraq, but it could feel any ripple effect of events in Saudi Arabia. Thus Doha is somewhat inoculated from the immediate problems of an Iraqi civil war, although it may face internal and external criticism for its high levels of cooperation with the United States, should the United States be widely blamed for Iraqi civil unrest (as is likely).[151] Qatar is likely to simply accept such criticism since the protection of the United States may become particularly important following any development of large-scale civil unrest in Iraq.

The UAE has been only marginally influenced by the events in Iraq thus far, although, like Qatar, it could feel substantial impact from the collapse of the Saudi system. The UAE's long history of political and economic stability will almost certainly continue even following the November 2004 death of its founding statesman, the much-respected Sheikh Zayid Bin Sultan.[152] Due to its staggering wealth, the UAE has found it useful to seek a strong relationship with the United States. The UAE, and especially its constituent emirate of Dubai, has sought to consolidate ties with the United States through strong and noticeable ties with American business, and these associations would help that country deal with stability problems following the outbreak of an Iraqi civil war.[153] Additionally, the UAE will undoubtedly help Iraq to the extent possible with humanitarian aid, and will pay particularly close

attention to the plight of Iraq's Sunni Arabs, perhaps using diplomatic and other efforts to aid them in a civil conflict.

Yemen and Oman have also been quite insulated from many events in Iraq. The initial impact of an Iraqi civil war on these countries would probably be minimal, although Yemen has had a problem with al-Qa'ida-supported terrorist activity on its soil, and a noticeable number of its young men have joined radical movements both in Yemen and overseas. A few Yemeni fighters have already been captured in Iraq fighting the U.S.-led coalition, and it is possible that some, including Yemeni Shi'ites (who are almost entirely a Shi'ite sub-branch, the Zaidis), would also participate in an Iraqi civil war. Nevertheless, the overall political and security situation in Yemen will probably not change dramatically as the result of an Iraqi civil war. Yemen will have a terrorist problem in the indefinite future and will deal with it through force, and bargaining with tribes that may protect the terrorists. The impact on Oman will probably also be extremely limited.

The Issue of the International Oil Market.

Apart from the effect on specific regional countries, a civil war in Iraq will also have important implications for the international oil market. Prior to the war, the Iraqi oil industry was burdened by a large number of problems including a deteriorating infrastructure, bad management, international sanctions, and exceedingly corrupt business practices that were designed to enrich Saddam and his family rather than improve the country's export capacity. Exports conducted under the UN Oil for Food Program (OFF) or smuggled out of Iraq, often in collaboration with the Iranians, usually occurred only after the payment of extensive bribes to the Iraqi leadership.[154] In the aftermath of Saddam's ouster, hope existed for a new, more efficient Iraqi oil industry unburdened by extensive corruption. Yet, under widespread civil war conditions, the oil export situation would deteriorate from the Saddam era rather than improve.[155]

The disorder resulting from a civil war will make it difficult, if not impossible, for the Iraqis to continue to export oil, should civil war conditions prevail throughout the entire country (which they may not). Moreover, even if some Iraqi factions retain control over portions of the Iraqi oil infrastructure and can export oil, it will not be a simple economic decision for nations interested in buying it from them. Rather,

purchasing oil from any Iraqi faction will infuse that faction with funds, which they would almost certainly use to improve their position within the ongoing struggle against other Iraqi groups. A decision to buy oil from one group may also endow that group with an increased amount of international legitimacy and may be seen as bolstering their claims to rightful authority. International deals with the Kurdish leadership, for example, may be viewed as tacit endorsement of any future Kurdish claims to independence.

Additionally, oil infrastructure in the hands of any one faction may face constant sabotage efforts from other factions. Since sabotaging oil infrastructure can be quite simple, it is likely that such sabotage would emerge as a major problem should civil war conditions develop.[156] Targets vulnerable to such strikes would include pumping stations, refineries, and especially pipelines. Some 250 guerrilla attacks against pipelines have already occurred in Iraq since the removal of Saddam Hussein.[157] Such attacks may be easier and more frequent should a civil war develop. Additionally, skilled Iraqi workers needed to keep the industry performing may be threatened or killed. Foreign oil specialists would find Iraq an uninviting place to work under such conditions and would not be able to keep the system functioning. Thus, Iraq, with 10-11 percent of the world's oil reserves, may be removed from the international oil market, except for a small trickle resulting from smuggling.[158]

The problem with Iraq may be intensified if further political problems develop in Saudi Arabia or among the Arab Gulf states. The Saudis, as noted, are currently under siege from a terrorist group that seeks to both destabilize the country and to drive foreign workers from Saudi Arabia. The strikes against foreign workers directly threaten the productivity of the oil industry. Simultaneous disruption of Iraqi and Saudi oil activity would therefore become a serious economic crisis, since the two countries combined control around 35 percent of the world's known oil reserves. The economic welfare of the West consequently depends on maintaining some level of political stability in at least one, and preferably both, of these countries.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations.

As noted throughout this monograph, the author does not intend to convey the impression that a civil war in Iraq is inevitable. The Iraqis are deeply concerned about this danger, and this awareness

may encourage them to find ways to compromise and avoid this grim scenario. Moreover, if the beginnings of civil war do occur in one part of the country (for example, the city of Kirkuk), it may still be possible, although difficult, to contain and reverse the conflict before it spreads throughout the entire country.

The avoidance of a civil war is primarily an Iraqi responsibility, despite the problem that the United States will be blamed widely for such a development if it does occur. The United States cannot prevent such a conflict if Iraqis are determined to create the preconditions for such a struggle, and then to follow through with a violent effort to define the future political system of Iraq. It is therefore reasonable for the United States both to take preventive actions to the extent possible and to consider possible options in case the worst happens and this eventuality becomes a reality. In this spirit, the following recommendations are offered.

1. **The United States needs to make helping Iraqis prevent an Iraqi civil war its first priority in dealing with that country despite the limits on U.S. power noted above**. Civil war is probably the only consequence of the U.S. invasion of Iraq that could lead the population into a situation that is worse than the one they lived with under Saddam, while simultaneously threatening U.S. interests to a greater extent than Saddam ever did. If a civil war can be avoided for the time being by deemphasizing rapid democratic development, then this sacrifice will need to be made. Some of Iraq's sectarian differences may not be solvable through democratic means unless a yet uncertain spirit of compromise becomes more apparent in intercommunal relations in Iraq.
2. **The United States must make it clear to Iraqi community leaders that it is their responsibility to reach compromise with responsible leaders of other ethnic or sectarian communities because the United States cannot remain in Iraq indefinitely, nor can it adjudicate Iraqi factional disputes indefinitely**. In this regard, U.S. troop presence cannot be allowed to become a crutch for intransigent Iraqi leaders to refuse to explore the possibility of compromise, knowing that civil war probably will be prevented by the U.S. presence. Additionally, if the Iraqi government reaches out to some of the insurgents through amnesties and concessions, this may be part of the price to bring important factions back into the political system.

3. **The United States must begin serious multilateral planning and regional discussions for coping with a civil war**. A civil war in Iraq will not simply be a U.S. problem. The United States should maintain and expand its relations with moderate Arab states that fear an Iraqi civil war just as U.S. policymakers do. If radicalism takes a foothold in Iraq, the United States will need allies to contain and reverse the consequences of radical empowerment. This means working with moderate Arab states, including Egypt, Jordan, and the Gulf Cooperation Council States. The United States will need all the help it is able to obtain to contain and to reverse a civil war should this occur.
4. **Should Iraq explode into civil war after U.S. withdrawal, the United States must seek to avoid large-scale military reintervention with ground forces and must instead, if possible, support a regional or international force that would help to stabilize Iraq**. A renewed U.S. presence in many circumstances will probably only inflame differences among the warring factions, while further alienating elite and public opinion in at least some allied and especially Arab countries.
5. **The United States must make strong efforts to work with Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf Arab states in waging the war on terror**. Saudi Arabia has been the subject of public U.S. hostility and anger since the 9/11 attacks, although the U.S. Government has not allowed such anger to be translated into seriously counterproductive policies. While reform in Saudi Arabia will remain the ultimate bulwark against radicalism, the violent overthrow of the regime by Islamic radicals will become an even more serious short-term threat should its northern neighbor devolve into civil war. Should Iraq and Saudi Arabia be plunged into turmoil simultaneously, the economic consequences for the West would be catastrophic.
6. **The United States needs to discourage Iraqi Kurds from declaring an independent state, and it must dissuade Iraqi Kurds from supporting activities in neighboring states that could provoke foreign military intervention**. This will not be easy as the Kurds do have a strong moral case for self-determination. Nevertheless, the Kurds will only be able to achieve self-determination by engulfing the region in blood, probably including a great deal of Kurdish blood. Rather, the

United States must support respect for Kurdish human rights and community rights within their respective nations.

7. **The United States may need to consider opening a dialogue with Iran on Iraq-related matters**. Iran and the United States have widely divergent interests in Iraq, but they may at times be able to find common ground on important issues. Temporary and tactical cooperation with Iran may be permissible so long as the fundamental differences between the United States and Iran on long-term goals are always kept firmly in mind.

ENDNOTES

1. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *World Factbook*, 2004, Iraq, internet. Please note that the actual figures for the Iraqi population are subjects of heated debate among of the various Iraqi groups.

2. Amatzia Baram, "Neo-tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies 1991-96, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 29, February 1997, pp. 1-31.

3. *Iraq in Transition: Vortex or Catalyst?* London: Chatham House, September 2004, p. 9; John Daniszewski, "Report Warns of Regional Tumult, *Los Angeles Times*, September 2, 2004, internet. Also see Anthony H. Cordesman, "Act Now or a Civil War May Hit Iraq," *Los Angeles Times*, May 7, 2004, internet.

4. Douglas Jehl, "U.S. Intelligence Shows Pessimism on Iraq's Future, *New York Times*, September 16, 2004, p. 1; Warren P. Stobel and Jonathan S. Landay, "CIA: Iraq at Risk of Civil War," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 22, 2004, p. 1.

5. Michael Georgy, "Poll Suggests Civil War Tops Iraqi Fears," *Boston Globe*, January 25, 2004, internet. Also see Reuters, "Mubarak Fears Outbreak of Civil War in Restive Iraq," *Chicago Tribune,* April 13, 2003, internet; and Neil MacFarquhar, "Arabs Worry Over Extremism While Evoking Vindication," *New York Times*, April 9, 2004, internet.

6. On some of the problems associated with democratizing but ethnically divided states, see Andreas Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict, Shadows of Modernity*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004, especially chapter 6. Also see Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence, Democratization and Nationalist Violence*, New York: Norton, 2000; Demet Yalcin Mousseau, "Democratizing with Ethnic Divisions: A Source of Conflict," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 2001, pp. 547-567; and Ted R. Gurr, "Peoples against the State: Ethnopolitical conflict in the changing world system," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 38. No. 3, September 1994, pp. 347-377.

7. For a useful and detailed exploration of this problem, see Andreas Wimmer, "Democracy and Ethno-religious Conflict in Iraq," *Survival*, Vol. 25, No. 4, Winter 2003-04, pp. 111-134. Note Wimmer's conclusion that "Iraq fulfils all conditions for a pervasive conflictual politicization of ethnicity," p. 113.

8. *Ibid*., pp. 120-123; and Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2000, chapters 7, 8.

9. *Iraq in Transition*, p. 3.

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