

VOLUME 11

What can Europe do in Iraq?

Recommendations for a new U.S.-European collaboration

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Recommendations



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Volume 11 in the publication series on Democracy
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FOREWORD

Almost six years after the invasion of Iraq by US-led Coalition forces, violent conflicts continue despite a clear improvement in the security situation. It is high time for a fundamental political debate in the European Union and in Germany about the conflict, its consequences, and Europe's own interests. It should lead to a consistent Iraq policy for the years to come.

As 2009 begins, there is a critical need for this debate and it presents a pressing challenge for two reasons: On the one hand, Iraqi polity and society have been hoping for a stronger European (civilian and diplomatic) engagement for a long time. On the other hand, the new US administration offers an opportunity for a new approach to stabilize Iraq and to refresh transatlantic cooperation toward the region.

Ending the conflict in Iraq and moving toward a durable and lasting political resolution of the deep-rooted conflicts among the main political forces, as well as the ethnic and religious groupings, demands a broad-based internal push supported by an outstanding international effort.

President Barack Obama assumes office facing a multitude of foreign policy challenges. Just weeks prior to his inauguration, his predecessor George W. Bush and the Iraqi government agreed on the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), which was initially proposed by Bush early in the summer of 2008 and agreed with some modifications by the Iraqi Parliament in November 2008. With it, the key parameters have been set to withdraw US troops by the end of 2011, with a gradual reduction of troops starting in 2009. At his inaugural speech, President Obama himself made clear that he intends to move responsibly, but as quickly as possible toward this date.

The war in Iraq might seem less of a top priority than just a few months ago. Such an assessment would be misleading. The political, security, and economic situation in Iraq is far from a sustainable consolidation. Even though the "surge of 2007" helped produce some tangible results in the decline of violence, developments in Iraq will remain extremely fragile and volatile for the foreseeable future.

The war in Iraq posed one of the biggest challenges to transatlantic relations prior to and early into the US invasion. While tone and attitude between Europe and the United States changed considerably throughout George W. Bush's second term, the election of Barack Obama as the 44th President of the United States produced a wave of public enthusiasm on both sides of the Atlantic in the hopes of mending fences and making a new beginning of the Euro-American partnership.

Apart from working together in Afghanistan, trying to prevent a nuclear bomb in Iran, and jointly engaging in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the process of stabilization and democratization of Iraq is of key importance to the region, to global security, and to the transatlantic alliance. European governments came to realize that Iraq is not just America's war anymore. Too much depends on a stable and viable Iraq, such as the regional stability and territorial integrity of Iraq, in addition to a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the tensions caused by Iran's nuclear program.

US President Obama is expected to call on Europe to take on more responsibility and a stronger commitment vis-à-vis Iraq. This indeed would be not just a contribution to improving transatlantic relations, but essential for the European Union's own interests. Europe, as the region's direct neighbor, would be the first to experience the economic and security effects of any future spread of conflict and chaos in the region. A stable, peaceful situation in Iraq and a security arrangement that includes its neighbors should thus be a key objective for European foreign and security policy in the next few years.

While many have been putting all their hopes into a new American President, and much optimism for change in US policies has been expressed since the election of Barack Obama, the Heinrich Böll Foundation was convinced early on that a new transatlantic chapter could only be opened when Europe itself started co-writing the story, telling where and how to meet the United States halfway.

In this spirit, the Foundation commissioned a compilation of policy papers covering a number of topics by a group of outstanding international experts. We asked them to analyze developments in and around Iraq with respect to security interests of the European Union and to formulate specific policy recommendations for the European Union and its Member States. While the individual papers may not entirely reflect the views and positions of the Foundation, they all include valuable findings and useful suggestions, from which we have drawn a set of policy recommendations of our own to be disseminated and discussed with political decision-makers and the academic communities in Europe, the United States, and the Middle East.

It is our hope to contribute to a new start of cooperation between Europe, the United States, and regional partners in the Middle East to tackle the challenges in Iraq and to help bring peace, stability, and sustainable development to the wider region.

We are extremely honored and grateful to Layla Al Zubaidi, Bülent Aras, Megan Chabalowski, Richard Gowan, Faleh Jabar, Daniel Korski, Sami Moubayed, Daniel Serwer, and Heiko Wimmen for having agreed to donate their time and their depth of knowledge to provide these following chapters.

As a starting point, we asked **Faleh Jabar** to take a comprehensive look at socio-logical dynamics and the role of different levels of identity in domestic developments in Iraq. We aimed at providing some understanding of internal trends, without which viable strategies for European and international support of Iraq's stability and path to democracy could not be developed. Based on Jabar's analysis, **Sami Moubayed** examined Iraq's current political and economic challenges to develop particular and concrete policy options for the European Union.

Leading to the regional implications of Iraq's stability and development, **Layla Al Zubaidi** and **Heiko Wimmen** provide insight into the challenges and strategies to cope with the refugee crisis stemming from the Iraq War. They take into consideration both the future of internally displaced people as well as of Iraqi refugees across the region, calling on Europe and the United States to support the Iraqi government in providing the basis for a sustainable return.

Neither Europe nor the United States will be able to provide long-term security and a stable development in Iraq unless key regional players are included in solving the crisis. **Bülent Aras** has followed recent political developments in Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, and points out that all four depend on Iraq's national integrity and stability. Aras proposes a set of policy options for Europe to foster regional

cooperation on and with Iraq, which might lead to peace-making across the region of the Middle East.

The two concluding chapters develop comprehensive and concrete policy recommendations for the European Union. We asked **Daniel Serwer** and **Megan Chabalowski** to take a constructive yet critical look at Europe's engagement from an American perspective. What does the United States need from Europe at the beginning of a new presidency? Serwer and Chabalowski call on Europe to use its soft power and experience in state-building for the stabilization of Iraq. "[...] the experience that the EU has acquired in mentoring other countries is precisely what Iraq needs."

Daniel Korski and **Richard Gowan** complete the series by evaluating the European Union's engagement with Iraq with a critical eye. Taking into account some political constraints, they ask Europe to considerably step up its engagement with regard to institutional development within Iraq as well as make a strong push to bring regional players to the table.

We hope that this report will be a valuable contribution to the political debate for the future of Iraq.

Ralf Fücks and Barbara Unmüßig
Executive Board, Heinrich Böll Foundation

The Dilemma of Political Uncertainties

With the sixth anniversary of the US-led invasion of Iraq approaching, Iraq's transition to normalcy – meaning peaceful, institutional politics – is still threatened by the specters of a failed state with inter- and intra-communal uncivil war, mafia lawlessness, and a communitarian type of Islamist fundamentalism. But there is a ray of hope for normalcy as a moderated type of communitarian democracy.

Despite improvements in security in 2008 in Baghdad, Anbar, Mosul, and other provinces, the prospects for normalcy are daunted by inter-Shiite-Sunni and intra-Shiite-Shiite (the south), Sunni-Sunni, Kurdish-Kurdish, and Kurdish-Arabic conflicts and tensions.

Iraq's reality is far from being the “beacon of democracy” that the former US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, had heralded prior to the 2003 invasion. The macabre years of transition had one thing in common: continuous mid-course correction of tactics and aims, and incessant lowering of expectations on part of the United States (US); and continued polarization of communal/sectarian and ethnic politics, and fragmentation of sectarian and communal blocs at one and the same time. Amidst this pluralistic chaos, however, state-legitimate institutions made tangible steps forward. The army, the police, the intelligence services (however infiltrated by militias and mafia), and the bureaucracy (yet segmented by partisan gangs and sectarian fiefdoms) are functioning somewhat and growing in capacity and numbers. Central institutions of the parliament, cabinet, presidential council, and regional and local government, as well as the federal court are in place – as weak as they are or may seem to be.

These institutions were established under conditions of fierce, bloody competition mainly between communities defined by identity politics. Now it is these holistic, identity-based communities that are fragmented and segmented from within by city location, class, tribe, and family. These fissure lines, devouring the unity of holistic communities, have rendered their differentiation, the rise of new social forces, and the disintegration of the holistic political blocs of Kurds, Shiites, and Sunnis, or the activation of dormant schisms.

These dual-track conflicts, as within seemingly holistic ethnic communities and religiously defined sects, have come about as a result of two sundry processes: the construction and spread of sub-national identity politics of ethnicity and religion, on the one hand, and the fragmented nature of communities caused by primordial and traditional social organization of tribe, family, and city solidarities, or by different schools of theology (in case of religion), or by modern differentials of class and ideology.

The dynamics of identity politics in post-conflict transition in Iraq has been crucial in motivating, shaping, cementing, and fragmenting community-embedded political blocs, generating both political certainties and uncertainties, constructing and de-constricting voting patterns, and enhancing drivers of cooperation and conflict over power and resources since 2003.

Despite the obvious improvement in security and relative political stability in 2008 that followed the surge of 2007, the unifying tendencies of identity politics seem to have waned, whereas the active or dormant fragmenting proclivities of identity politics have now reached a new phase. Big electoral and political blocs have sustained a measure of disunity or degeneration, new forces have emerged, and the old coalition and voting patterns have subsequently changed. This involves the potential to disruptively modify, or perhaps undo, the nascent power structures necessary for stable governance in the coming 2009 elections.

This essay is an attempt to examine the sociological dynamics of identity politics and the uncertainties they involve in shaping the political and social order. We shall focus on three major sociological categories: religion, tribe, and the middle classes, and the movements and actors flowing from them.

The meaning of identity politics in the case of Iraq

Iraq's peculiar strands of identity politics is best grasped in a comparative outlook with the nature of other identity politics elsewhere. For example, in the ex-Soviet Union and ex-Yugoslavia, the official and declining socialist and internationalist ideologies were gradually replaced by the promotion of nationalism that soon caged the power struggle into ethnic infighting once the central authority and central-command economy melted down.¹ In Iraq, by contrast, failure of socialist nationalism had a different trajectory. Throughout the 1990s and up to 2003, religion and tribalism were encouraged and their institutions and networks were partly rehabilitated by state patronage, but they soon took on a life of their own across the Arabic parts of Iraq.² Once the authoritarian central authority and its central command-oil rentier economy collapsed, tribe and religion emerged.

In the Kurdish region, Kurdish ethnic identity politics invited responsive identity politics on the part of the Assyrians-Chaldeans and Turkmen, spreading new forms of social and political action.

1 Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars, Organized Violence in a Global Era*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), pp. 81–2.

2 On religion, see Amazia Baram, "State-Mosque Relations in Iraq," USIP papers, (Mar. 2004); Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies, 1991-1996," *Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 29 (1997): 1–13; see also my *Tribes and Power* (London: Saqi Books, 2003), and "Sheikhs, Clerics, Tribes, Ideologues and Urbans in the South of Iraq: The Potential for Rebellion," in *Iraq at the Crossroads - State and Society in the Shadow of Regime Change*, Toby Dodge and Steven Simon, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); "The State, Society, Clan, Party and Army in Iraq: A Totalitarian State in the Twilight of Totalitarianism," in *From Storm to Thunder, Unfinished Showdown between Iraq and the U.S.* (Tokyo: Institute of Developing Economies, 1998), pp.1–28;

Juan Cole, "The Rise of Religious and Ethnic Mass Politics," in *Religion and Nationalism in Iraq*, D. Little and D. Swearer, eds. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Modern middle classes, co-opted by the old authoritarian regime, changed direction and joined the newly invented politics of religion, tribe, and ethnic and counter-ethnic identity politics. As they had been impoverished by sanctions (1991–2003), crippled by state police control over their “autonomous associations,” and controlled by economic state patronage, they found in the new forms of religion, tribe, and ethnicity the only available means of mobility.

Prolific identity segmentation and fragmentation that characterized Iraq pales the holistic trilogy of Kurds, Shiites, and Sunnis and rendered them segmented by the power of the other layers of social organization of religion, tribe, and middle classes.

The other trilogy of various religious institutions and movements, tribe, and modern middle classes played different and overlapping roles in constructing and deconstructing identity politics in pre- and post-war Iraq – a feature that either eluded examination or was disregarded by socio-political studies, yet it was gradually but not fully grasped by international and native actors on the ground.

The categories of religious institutions, tribe, and middle classes have specific dynamics of their own, as well as specific dynamics of their correlation, interaction, and overlapping. Their pre-war dynamics, however, were quite different from that of post-conflict transition. These dynamics were mutated in many ways by obtaining new conditions, which will be discussed further below.

Transition and communal division

The demise of the Ba’ath regime in April 2003 resulted in the end of the police-state control over social institutions, and the abrupt termination of state patronage to them. In that sense, all old and new social institutions and the social movements flowing from them were freed in a dual sense, relieved of police control, but also deprived of patronage. The US-sponsored transitional politics that followed opened the arena for socio-political and economic-cultural contests between major communities (however these are defined) as well as within each. But the US also destroyed state patronage that was the very lifeline of rehabilitated tribes and all salaried and propertied middle classes. This condition raised religion to a paramount force, and reduced the influence of tribes and middle classes. The latter had to join religion as the only efficient vehicle of social and political mobility, although they did not entirely give up their attempts to act on their own as well.

Thus, in the first phase of transition, grand communal identity politics among Shiites and Sunnis began to crystallize, catching up with the previous grand ethnic identities of Kurds, Turkmen, and Chaldo-Assyrians that took shape in the 1990s.

As the new state-formation (the creation of political structures: provisional cabinet, army, police, judiciary, and provisional legislator), and nation-building (the distribution of levers of power and resources) began, political actors constructed their communal blocs and vied for slices and layers of political power and resources, and strove to secure proportionate representation in the Governing Council (GC) (July 2003–June 2004) in the drafting of the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) (March 2004), and in the provisional cabinet of Iyad Allawi, a replica of the GC.

In the realm of state-formation, the nascent power and administrative structures were also approached by different contenders in a similar vein. Community labels were represented as demography, and demography as democracy. Proportionate

quotas in the administration, police, army, and other agencies, among other things, assumed a paramount importance in communal politics.

The Kurdish catch word was federalism; that of the Shiites was that demography is democracy (the Shiites being the majority in the nation); that of the Sunnis was restoration.

Within these grand blocs, communal labels and unity were conceived as an assured vehicle to reach out for power and fair distribution of national wealth. By dint of their overwhelming demographic weight, the Shiite-Sunni polarization and confrontation were at the heart of the new, macabre identity politics. This identity was projected so forcefully that it overshadowed all other modern and primordial identities. This is best seen in the grand electoral blocs that emerged in the first and second constituent and general elections of January and December 2005. But the different segments within each community – in which tribe, clan, city-family, and class were crucial ingredients – never waned. Once the major contests to shape the political order and lay down the key foundations for the new distribution of power and resources was ensured in the elections and constitution-writing, sub-identities came out again so vehemently that it shattered the façade of holistic unity, the Sunni-Shiite communal uncivil war of 2006 notwithstanding. Sub-communal identities of tribe, city, and family or class, brought about Shiite-Shiite, Sunni-Sunni, Turkmen-Turkmen, and, to some extent, Kurdish-Kurdish fierce or ‘soft’ conflicts, cutting across areas of compliance and agreement.

A universal tendency toward rift, split, and ruptures began to engulf communal politics from within. As a result, the large electoral blocs and communal-embedded alliances and coalitions began to falter.

The reason why religion became so powerful and why it has lost some of its unifying potency, and the reason why tribe was overshadowed, but managed to revive itself, and the reason why modern middle classes progressively lost their autonomous political appetites and largely acquiesced to sectarian and tribal politics, have to do with their relevant dynamics. We shall examine these three categories of religion, tribe, and middle classes under the conditions of the US-led transition. We shall first examine the US policy in this regard, and then move to religion, tribe, and middle classes as follows:

1. The new US policy.
2. The dynamics of institutional versus political religion (Islam); and the dynamics of city-family and native-exile dynamics within political religion.
3. The dynamics of tribes, tribal chiefs, and tribal “modern” associations.
4. The dynamics of middle classes.
5. Maliki’s new drive to impose law and order.

Belated lessons of the new US policy

Perhaps former US President Bush’s announcement of the new policy in January 2007, known as “the surge,” implied an admission of partial failure to grasp the nuances and interaction of sub-national against sub-communal politics. A number of initial US assumptions were faulty. The list of assumptions follows. The primary challenge to the US and its transition policy was an un-differentiated Sunni insurgency. But the real challenge turned out to be Sunni and Shiite extremism, foreign terrorism,

and a mafia underworld. The political process would dampen the insurgency, but with the flawed constitutional process and a majority hegemony, the process exacerbated conflict, causing the moderate center to erode. The electoral process would attract a critical Sunni mass, but this mass was disappointed with the results of the process, and the insurgents managed to gain ground by discrediting the political process and advancing their sectarian strategy. The US could train and equip a national army and police force in time to deal with emerging threats, however, the threats turned out to be much larger than anticipated, the training and equipping process proceeded sluggishly, and the new forces were compromised by infiltration, corruption, and sectarian agendas. Iraqi enthusiasm for “liberation” and “democracy” would overshadow security and reconstruction concerns. However, liberation quickly changed in people’s perception to occupation, democracy’s results were welcomed by some and rejected by others, but security concerns soon overshadowed all else. National reconciliation and the writing of a new constitution would be difficult but manageable, but in reality the constitution-writing process failed to achieve national reconciliation, and the Iraqi nation began to fall apart into ethnic and sectarian subcomponents. The Coalition forces and a rebuilt Iraqi state would be able to contain the influence of regional powers, especially Iran and Syria, but in reality, a monopoly of military force has never been achieved, and Iranian and Syrian influence in Iraq grew through powerful proxies and clients.

This list is not exhaustive. It reveals, however, some recognition of how far original assumptions, and consequent strategies, were removed from hard realities. Perhaps the Baker-Hamilton report forced a rethinking of US strategy; it also forced a public recognition of what many, even within the Bush Administration, were already admitting in private.³

Religious sects: unity and division⁴

Institutional religion: Religion is more like Janus, the Greek god of doorways – it has many faces. It is an informal institution of authority, and as such it has multiple centers. It is also a system of theology that has diverging nuances and conflicting schools, with various trends within each school. It is also a value system constrained by the social nature of its advocates (urban, rural, Bedouin, traditionalist, or modernist). It is also social movements that have diverse political, economic, or social interests (pragmatists, radicals, or centrists). Informal institutions of religious authorities, networks of mass rituals and pilgrimage, and legal or clandestine social movements adjacent to or flowing from them were now free players to act and fight.

Informal religious authorities of Shiite and Sunni Islam were first disconnected from the ministry of religious endowments (as of July 2003); the flow of funds for these institutions was also liberalized. Overnight, the informal religious institutions emerged as powerful players, wielding vast infrastructure (hundreds if not thousands of mosques), staff (hundreds of well-coordinated but loosely disciplined mosque preachers), domestic political connections (with the Ba’ath, Islamist Kurds, tribal

³ This is based on a US National Security assessment from late 2006.

⁴ This relies heavily on my forthcoming book, *Multi-Dimensional Iraq – From Totalitarianism to Sectarian Liberalism*.

chiefs, old institutional staff) regional relations (governments and Islamic groups across the Middle East), official and lucrative private and public funding from worried or hopeful constituencies and/or political and social actors.⁵ With such a powerful machine, the informal institutions of religious authority, notably on the Shiite side, acted more like a political agent, information and ideological center, and, in the Sunni case, a recruitment, mobilization, and insurgent agency.

Shiite political Islam: While the Shiite highest religious authority was already in place, the Sunni counterpart was wanting and fragmented. The Shiite institution had the benefit of this new freedom; the Sunni counterpart did not. It lost state patronage and lacked a unifying figure, such as Ali Sistani.

While the Shiite institution has multiple centers of authority, seniority of age, and status of higher learning, together with political prudence and moderation, this would ensure Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani outshine all and ensured his uncontested influence.

This forceful rise of Shiite institutional religion overwhelmed the socio-political scene, outshining the social movements of Shiite Islam and their native and exile political elites, who, with few exceptions, voluntarily and necessarily placed themselves under the wing of the grand authority in Najaf. These elites were still weak, unknown to the public at large and lacking legitimacy, resources, and commanding symbols. Thus Sistani could literally decide every detail of the newly formed, predominantly Shiite electoral bloc – the United Iraqi Alliance – in late 2004. But Sistani was alien to the leadership of the jurisprudent (*wilayat al-faqih*) authored by his Iranian rivals. Paradoxically, this theology opened up the opportunity for the Shiite Islamic political groups to strive for independence from Sistani's patronage, and as the political elites leading Shiite Islam assumed power and vast state resources (of the oil-rentier state), they grew stronger, bolder, and autonomous to such an extent that Sistani could not have any say in the formation of the second United Iraqi Alliance just 13 months on. The new United Iraqi Alliance was decided by the Islamic Shiite leaders who limited the share of "independents" (non-partisans had 50% of the positions in the first United Iraqi Alliance), and increased their shares in the electoral bloc. The more powerful the Shiite political elites were, the less powerful Sistani was. Correlations between institutional and political religion will continue along these lines unless some unforeseen factors take place.

In Sunni Islam, the opposite occurred. Religion was divided between three groups: alien Salafis of al-Qaeda, native Salafis of Abdullah Janabi, and nationalist Islamists of Harith Dhari. The decline of the Ba'ath in the insurgency caused a leadership shift to Salafis, alien and native. Gradually, this change of leadership triggered a conflict between the rigid fundamentalist ideology of Salafis and the native ideology of kinship and solidarity wedded with nationalism and pragmatism. In the end, a rift between informal Sunni institutional Islam and political groups developed.

A deeper and more precarious cleavage within Shiite and Sunni political Islam was now to develop and cause the fragmentation that we now observe.

5 Religious taxes (*khums*) poured into Najaf. The Shiites of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia increased their contributions notably to Grand Ayatollah Sistani as a symbol of peaceful Shiite power. Private and official donations poured in also from the Gulf into Sunni groups to prevent their marginalization and to "resist Shiite hegemony."

Shiite political Islam was first divided between exile and native groups.⁶ Unlike the singular authority in Najaf, these were diverse groups, divided by city-family as well as by ideology and even individual rivalries. Perhaps the inclusion of exile groups in the new US-UK-sponsored Governing Council (July 15, 2003) enhanced Shiite political Islam in general, but it over-empowered exile (and Najafi groups) at the expense of native, non-Najafi forces (Sadr and Ya'qubi).⁷ The freedom of action enjoyed by all factions helped them build their networks and remold the political culture of the Shiite community at large into the communal themes focused on the assertion of Shiite identity via affirmation of Shiite proportionate representation and the performance of Shiite public mass rituals.⁸ This in turn enhanced the status of the Shiite grand authority in Najaf. But the same process invited competition and thus sowed the seeds of discord and eventually armed rivalry within the Shiite camp.⁹

Having uneven political empowerment, funds, regional backing, and militias, they set out to redistribute levers of power among themselves by institutional and extra-institutional means. They were now powerful statesmen dependent on mass mobilization and community approval, and they felt the growing need for private political and armed machines. As the political importance of Sistani's patronage was diminishing, the factional competition over the levers of power was exacerbating, the Sunni-Shiite mini civil war notwithstanding.¹⁰

Thus, during the first years, institutional and political religion could marginalize and even absorb the energies of other social institution and formations, namely the tribe and middle classes.

-
- 6 The various factions of the Islamic Da'wa Party, Muhammad Baqir Hakim-led ISCI, Muhammad Taqi Mudarissi-led Islamic Action Organization (Munazamat al-'Amal al-Islami).
 - 7 The composition of the Governing Council and the interim and provisional governments speak for themselves. The ratio of exiles and Najafi figures far surpassed native and non-Najafi personalities. See, for example, my report, "Post-Conflict Iraq," USIP, paper no.120 (Washington DC: 2004).
 - 8 The most important of which are the *'Ashura* ritual and the Arba'in visitation or pilgrimage to Karbala in the lunar month of Muharram (1–10 Muharram), and 40 days thereafter.
 - 9 As the formation of the Governing Council signaled the birth of empowered major groups of politicized Shiism, it triggered a fierce responsive Sunni identity. While Shiite-Sunni lines of division were hardening, the rift within Shiite political Islam (native versus exile groups) offered an opportunity of rapprochement between Sadr and major Sunni factions under an Iraqi nationalist umbrella hostile to occupation. The military and political rapprochement in Apr. and Aug. 2004 during the battles of Najaf and Falluja signaled this line of cooperation that was soon ended by the Sunni fundamentalist groups from or around al-Qaeda, which pursued a professedly anti-Shiite strategy.
 - 10 The Shiite-Sunni divide in Islam is more than 14 centuries old. Under successive Sunni-dominated political regimes, attempts to politicize it in the modern era were never fully successful until the rise of political Islam in Iraq and the greater Middle East, and the impact of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. But the greatest quantum leap in the rise of sectarian religion occurred in post-conflict Iraq. Religion was totally delivered from state control. And the Sunni-Shiite divide was not only politicized but also militarized.

Tribes: the cycle of decline and rise

If religion is the first sociological category to be reckoned with, tribal clans, tribal chiefs, and tribal association are the second. Their role in Iraq's conflictive transitional politics has been subject to contradictory, extreme assessments: all powerful, or simply marginal. In different regions and circumstances, they were both.

As noted earlier, tribes under the Ba'ath were all mobilized as a substitute for modern mass politics of the ruling party. In post-conflict Iraq, they seemed to be marginalized by the overriding power of institutional religion and political Islam. Their political and social roles seemed to be comparatively diminishing. They could hardly emerge as an independent political force; they fared miserably in the municipal, constitutional, and parliamentary elections of 2005.

Tribal organization has long been on the descending curve; from powerful socio-economic cultural and military entities they went down to mere extended families, or sub-clans, thriving in rural domains (30% of the population), and agrarian, provincial towns, but died out in large urban centers. Tribal chiefs and their leadership sustained their social power in four ways: 1) landownership and/or capital (economic factor); 2) armed militia (called *Zilim*, tough men, or *Hushiya*, bodyguards – autonomous armed force); 3) tribal customary law (cultural power); and 4) state patronage (political power).

But decline came: loss of economic assets (of land, political patronage, and military autonomy); permanent migration to cities, divergent economic interests, and diverse political orientations weakened or, in some cases, tore tribal unity apart. In the end, what remain of the tribes and clans to this very day are the lower tiers of the tribal organization with a name, a leading family, few kinship networks and some neighborly friends. And these constantly bifurcated and assumed new names and pretended to be new full-fledged sub-clans or even clans in their own right.

It is due to state patronage and rehabilitation that the process of decline was partly reversed in the 1990s. Tribal chiefs, old and new, began to receive cash benefits, or retrieve some of their estates that had been confiscated through agrarian reforms. It was thanks to the weakness of the state as well as to state patronage that tribalism could ever reemerge before the 2003 war. Since then the correlation between these two conditions has changed. State weakness reached a peak, but state patronage reached its lowest level. Loss of state sponsorship meant political marginalization. The rise of political-sectarian Islam made things even worse for tribes.

However, tribes seemed oblivious of their failings and continued to display their political appetites for gaining recognition from the CPA.¹¹ In the first year of transition, tribal associations of every color invaded urban life, even in the capital. Provincial tribal and kinship groups were even more active in various locations (small townships, or city neighborhoods)¹² and kept their traditional ways of action.

11 In Baghdad (June 2003), I came across several tribal associations that conveyed pledges to the CPA to get some authority, such as issuing IDs, and licenses for firearms for civilians, and so on.

12 Tribal associations should not be confused with tribes proper. The latter are more or less social movements inclusive of tribes. Tribes proper are more local kinship groups that may act alone or in conjunction with the tribal association.

The hopes of tribes and tribal associations were shattered in the 2005 elections. Theirs was a phenomenal failure.¹³ They discovered the power of their new rival: institutional religion or political Islam, with its nation-wide appeal compared to their local organization, its huge infrastructure compared to their small guesthouses, its fierce militias compared to their few armed men, its ideological supremacy compared to their outdated traditionalism. All in all, tribes in 2005 arrived at the right conclusion – that they actually were local organizations with no national appeal. They could only mobilize support in their locality. They could offer their security services on a local scale, no more or less, however much these roles were of use or of no use. To avoid total marginalization and neutralize the invasion of political Islam to the younger generation, they showed readiness to join ranks with clerics, or resist them where they had some military means.

But this weakness harbored the desire of tribal chiefs to compete with local clerics even when they were unable to override them. Their potential to neutralize clerics remained strong, as their ability to bargain with local Islamic organizations in certain instances.

The weakness of a nascent central authority in the face of insurgency and unruly militias brought the tribes gradually back to the scene, first as local security contractors (guarding pipelines, for example), and second as political partners in the US-led surge. The crusade against Sunni insurgents and Shiite militias made tribal support and cooperation in provincial towns and regions more crucial. The *Sahwa* (Awakening) groups, led by tribal chiefs from the Risha clan of the Dulaim tribe, were funded, equipped – and liaised with – by the US military directly. A similar drive by Prime Minister Maliki toward the tribes soon came. In the campaign for law and order, the looming confrontation with fellow Shiites of the Mehdi Army, Sadr's militia in Sadr City (Baghdad), in Basra and in 'Amara provincial capitals, masterminded by Maliki, required grassroot support that, for Maliki as well as for his Da'wa party, was waning. Again, tribes received this new gift from heaven: a weak state in search of allies and ready to oil the hands of tribal chiefs with gold.

Tribes, tribal chiefs, and tribal associations would grow weaker the less state patronage they received, and the more non-primordial associations of religion or of modern middle classes developed, the stronger central government would be. But the conditions obtained in 2007–08 were exactly the opposite: weak state, state patronage, and hunted rebellious militias. Tribes moved backward from an appendage to cleric to autonomous actors.

Middle classes, growth, marginalization, exodus, and loss of direction

Modern middle classes are the third body in the sociology of fragmented identity politics. These strata constitute the core matrix of urban social, cultural, economic, and political life, at least in several major cities: Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, Sulaymaniya,

¹³ While most tribal chiefs sought state recognition (CPA), and were bent on playing a political role as a lobby or as a political entity (getting into elections), local sheikhs competed with clerics and continued their social roles as referees in the local informal justice system, or their roles as mediators to settle disputes, or even mediate in insurgent-government negotiations (Sadr City, Falluja, or Najaf episodes); this lent them and their groups or associations an air of a social function to reckon with.

Najaf, Karbala, Kirkuk, and Erbil. The 27 million Iraqis are almost evenly divided into one-third rural and two-thirds urban. More than half of the urban population are middle classes with property, capital, and/or salaries. The remainder are mostly lower class, such as workers, marginal groups, and the unemployed. It is among all categories that provincial, semi-rural, and semi-tribal groups are to be found. They are either new provincial migrants, or semi-urban in terms of culture, values, and social organization. Their average dwelling in urban habitats is anywhere between 10 to 15 years – a fact that explains the ease with which urban dwellers can shift from modern to traditional organizations and back.

The economic, organizational, and political fortunes of the modern middle classes have been less propitious than those of the tribes, despite their massive social weight as 54 percent of city populace. The vast majority of middle strata met the new era of transition with awe, shock, fear, apathy, and inaction.

First, they lost state patronage and protection. The disruption of the ancient bureaucratic and family-tribe patronage networks left them exposed. This hit the propertied and the salaried segments alike. De-Ba'athification laws and procedures hit the salaried segment harder – they were expelled from state agencies and became targets of retribution, adding much to their economic hardships and pauperization from the long years of sanctions.

To the loss of state patronage and state protection, another disadvantage was the loss of autonomous associations. The chambers of commerce, industrial league, contractors unions, professional associations, and unions (workers' trade unions can also be added here) were all shattered and rendered ineffective.

Having no political platform and no social instruments of their own, modern middle classes lost direction. Those who had been part of the Ba'ath single-party system were understandably fearful of retribution. Some fled the country, others joined the ranks of their enemies (mostly Shiite Islamic parties) to avoid physical elimination. Some groups supported the growing insurgency under communal-Islamic or Islamic-nationalist or Iraqi-nationalist banners; perhaps a majority adopted a wait-and-see position. But all were politically in shock and bewilderment. The new structural changes that these social milieus sustained should have been advantageous and politically favorable.

For one thing, these strata were delivered to pauperization through years of sanctions; liberalization of the market, the stabilization of the currency, and the flow of some foreign and Arab capital generally improved their economic conditions. The middle strata also grew in number as a result of the return of their middle-class fellows from exile (Kurds and Shiites) and the rise of some marginal groups that were enriched by the war economy.

With liberalization of the economy, the state-employed salaried sections of the middle class, mostly technocrats and bureaucrats, went down from some 90 percent to 50 percent. This meant the growth of middle-class property and capital, as its function in the market is independent of state control and/or patronage, and it is politically autonomous from the state, old or new. The introduction of private foreign capital helped even some salaried middle-class groups to find their upward mobility in the free market economy, rather than the state machine.

Middle classes had the chance not only to escape the centralized command economy, but also to escape the centralized state patronage, as the structure of this

patronage was now fractured by the reality of a multi-party system. No more were there middle-class contractors, import-export firms, or professionals in need of some state-party benefaction to trade loyalty and submission in return for government contracts, export-import licenses, or largesse. Oil-rentierism – the major national economic asset and the basis of state authoritarian hegemony over socio-economic formations – was not concentrated anymore in the hands of a singly political entity. Thus, decentralization and liberalization of the political order and economic life brought about a unique opportunity for enhancing the independence and clout of middle classes. But this opening was compromised. Political violence by insurgency, sectarian militias, and mafias created a condition of lawlessness that inhibited an economic revival and spread insecurity. The rise of religious institutions and sectarian Islamic parties dampened discourses of moderation and stiffened the communal divide. Neither tribal associations and groups nor secular middle-class politics seemed to have prospects. In the January 2005 elections, some 1.5 million voted for secular groups, and some 300,000 for tribal and other non-sectarian groups. In December of the same year, the figure for secular groups dropped to less than 1 million.

Fear of retribution, of de-Ba'athification, and of the spread of communal themes and ethos that dampened the discourse of Iraqi nationalism and cosmopolitan aspirations led to the greatest exodus of the middle classes into exile.¹⁴ This was the second massive exodus in less than 20 years. If the first wave of migration drained the country of some 3.5 million professionals, technocrats, businessmen, and bureaucrats throughout the two decades of the Iraq–Iran War, the 1991 Gulf War, and sanctions, the new wave of outflow sent an estimated 2.5 million into exile in the span of just a few years.¹⁵ This de-accumulation of middle classes has become a Middle Eastern socio-political feature. Among its many negative impacts is the social vacuum that is filled by the “fourth estate,” by what Hanna Arendt once called the “social debris” of such conditions; that is, the urban poor underclass, which constitutes the spearhead of the mafia world, militias, and insurgency.

New conditions are evolving. The relative improvement of security is a major change. Another is the rehabilitation of tribes as social and political forces. Last but not least, the rift or detachment between Islamic political groups, on the one hand, and the informal religious institutions, on the other hand, coupled with the macabre schisms between different Shiite and Sunni Islamic groups hold some potential for non-sectarian, trans-communal middle-class politics.

Formation, disintegration, and divisions of sectarian and ethnic blocs and alliances

The dynamic sociology of religion, tribe, and middle class outlined above may well explain the amorphous, fluid nature of grand ethnic and communal identities

- ¹⁴ As a result, different middle-class groups had to find their way out of the abyss through different ways: Those fearful of retribution joined the new powerful Shiite Islamists for protection, or moved to the insurgents' camps; those who sought to break the icy world of inaction joined tribes; and those cosmopolitans who could not put on the sectarian mantle of religious identity politics, took another option: withdrawal.
- ¹⁵ These are UN estimates which differ slightly from official figures provided by Iraq's neighbors that host migrants.

against their supposedly “monolithic” hold in the realm of politics. The complexities of such dynamics quickly became apparent. As noted earlier, during the first phase of transition, the contest over state formation and nation-building took place in the open arena of conflict bereft of regulatory institutions or commonality of norms and rules. The contests soon fell foul, and the macabre competition for slices of resources and layers of authority flared up under sectarian labels. Grand identity politics was successfully constructed and easily mobilized, benefiting from centuries-old cultural-theological differences that were already, though partly, politicized. These grand identities seemed all-powerful, and were best seen in the formation of electoral blocs, notably the United Iraqi Alliance under ‘Aziz al-Hakim, or the Tawafuq bloc under Tariq Hashimi, or the Kurdish Front under Barzani-Talabani.¹⁶ But they could not conceal the fact that other sub-communal primordial or non-communal modern identities of every color existed in society at large as in the imagined “community” of the religious sects or ethnic groups. In many cases, the latter were only barely hidden under this thin layer of grand unity. Once power was more or less institutionally secured, a second, new phase ushered in the temporarily dormant dynamics of division in action again. As a result, the unity of the large electoral blocs and coalitions that dominated the constituent assembly eroded and finally succumbed to a factional feud. This was almost universal.

The divisions came gradually to the surface during the surge, the military political campaign started in early 2007 which continued well into 2008, to curb and dislodge the two major flanks of violent extremism – the Sunni al-Qaeda and its satellites, and the Shiite Mehdi Army; in the Anbar, (Ninawa) Mosul, Diyala, and Baghdad provinces, on the Sunni side; and Baghdad, Najaf, Kufa, ‘Basra, Misan (‘Amara), (Qadisiya) Diwaniya and (Thi Qar) Nasiriya, on the Shiite side. The Shiite United Iraqi Alliance was the first to suffer chain schisms.

The pre-surge contest over premiership set the Hakim-led Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) candidate Adil Abdul-Mehdi against Sadr’s nominee, Ibrahim Ja’fari; the contest was carried with the nomination and accession of Nuri Maliki, who won by dint of the Sadr’s and Da’wa’s votes, only to lose the unity of his own party: the ex-PM Ja’fari walked away from the Da’wa with a splinter group.

But a larger cleavage in the UIA was between Muqtada al-Sadr and the rest. Though this cleavage has its roots in the native-diaspora rivalry (Hakim versus Sadr families) and was exacerbated by the uneven distribution of power (Sadr had nothing in the Governing Council, but received 10 seats in the first and 30 in the second national assemblies), it was now a conflict between institutional versus extra-institutional monopoly of means of violence, and the unlawful bloodshed sustained on the Shiite side, mostly, but not exclusively, by the Sadr militia before, during and, most importantly, after the Shiite–Sunni civil war that erupted following the bombing of

¹⁶ In the first constituent elections (Jan. 2005), the UIA was constructed under the auspices of Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, who divided the slots 50-50 between Islamic Party leaders and independent non-partisan figures; he also added Sunni Arabs, Turkmen, and other figures to the list. In the second general election, the UIA was reconstructed this time by Shiite Islamic Party leaders, lending their list a professed Shiite character, and asserted their supremacy by marginalizing the slots allocated to “independent figures.” By contrast, the Islamic Party (Sunni) did not take part in the first constituent elections, but entered the process in the second general elections.

the two holy Shiite shrines in Samara. Sadr's notoriety among Sunnis, Kurds, and the US was only matched by his growing popularity among Shiites as the true defender of their community in the face of Sunni aggression. But Sadr's growing military prowess revealed its true nature as a bid for supremacy in the Shiite world, and, by extension, in Iraq; thus it was soon turned against his archrival, Hakim, and his Badr Organization, a discrete paramilitary-political outfit of Hakim and his ISCI.

Shiite-Shiite inter-fighting thus erupted between Sadr and Hakim factions in provincial towns, Diwaniya, 'Amara, Basra, Nasiriya, and in Najaf as well¹⁷. The gradual, timid, official crusade against the Mehdi Army strongholds in Baghdad (Sadr City), Kufa, Basra, and finally 'Imara developed into full-scale war to uproot it. The political price was the withdrawal of the Sadr and Fadhila Party ministers from the cabinet, and ultimately from the UIA front, which is now a shadow of its former communal self.¹⁸

The surge, however, had its political and sociological sides: On the political front it envisaged and pressured for the promotion of national reconciliation, amnesty, distribution of resources (hydrocarbon law), and constitutional amendments, among other things. On the sociological side, it targeted disfranchised groups in Sunni areas, mostly drawn from old institutional forces that were largely embedded in constellations of tribal networks. In addition to the military side, both these aspects of the surge had their impact on the Sunni side, and caused ruptures. The Sunni front was already the realm of fierce division and competition, lacking single leadership and unity of purpose and method: The Twafuq bloc (45 seats in the parliament) consists of three different groups: the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP), led by Vice President Tariq Hashimi; the Ahl al-Iraq, led by the conservative Adnan Dulaimi; and a smaller group of "independents" led by MP Khalaf Al-Ulayayn. The Al-Hiwar al-Watsni (Patriotic Dialogue) of Salih al-Mutlaq group (11 seats) had its independent voice. All these Sunni parliamentary parties were trying to maximize their gains in the process of "national reconciliation," allegedly to serve their Sunni community through legal institutions, but actually to justify participation in what is largely seen by insurgents as violence and restorationists. This drive toward maximization was intensified by the sociology of the surge: the rise and empowerment of the Sahwa movements. The latter served to dislodge al-Qaeda and restore a reasonable level of normalcy, but it also increased the number of Sunni players and posed a threat to the present and future influence of the Tawafuq and its main protagonist, the Islamic Party, as the Sahwa groups were bent on political inclusion and representation. In this atmosphere of Sunni-Sunni rivalry, the Tawafuq heightened its oppositional stance to the Maliki cabinet, which was teetering, caused by the withdrawal from government of 17 ministers from the Fadhila Party (March 2007), from the Shiite Sadr faction (April), and later from Sunni and secular groups, who followed suit.

17 The public calls it: Sadr-Badr War.

18 The Shiites have the United Alliance bloc (with some 124 of 275 seats in the national assembly) that has been fragmented into two, perhaps now three Da'wa parties (led successively by current PM Nuri al-Maliki, ex-PM Ibrahim Ja'fari, and Abdul-Karim al-'Inizi), the Aziz al-Hakim-led Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), the Sadr Movement and its militia, the Mehdi Army, led by Muqtada Sadr; the Fadhila (Virtue) Party, led by ayatollah Mahmood Ya'qubi, and the Islamic Action Organization led by ayatollah Muhammad Taqi Mudarrisi.

The Sunni Tawafuq and their allies were thus willing to compromise stability in favor of strengthening their bargaining position versus the actual rise of and the potential threat to their strongholds by the Sahwa groups, who signaled the resurgence of the tribal factor as an independent political force that may well attract middle-class segments.

The secular, middle-class-based Iyad Allawi bloc, al-Iraqia (23 seats), endured fissions and erosion. While the al-Iraqia was supportive of the surge, its centralist tendencies have some anti-Kurdish and anti-federal shades – a fact that alienated the communist partners from Iyad Allawi. The latter's determination to stage a comeback to premiership was instrumental in his bid to destabilize Maliki's government. Seizing the moment, Allawi saw in the withdrawal of 17 cabinet ministers (Sadr, Fadhila, Islamic parties, and others) a ripe moment to bring on the downfall of Maliki.

Thus Iyad Allawi took the initiative in the summer of 2007 to bring Sadr, Fadhila, and the Saleh al-Mutlaq al-Hiwar group into an oppositional unified bloc to replace Maliki. Although this attempt symbolized the precarious fissions at the helm of Iraqi politics, it surprisingly invited counter-efforts to create a workable alliance, encompassing the Maliki-Da'wa and Hakim-ISCI on the Shiite front, Talabani and Barzani on the Kurdish front, and Hashimi-IIP on the Sunni front. This was labeled the Alliance of the Moderates.¹⁹ The alliance of "moderates" promoted the "quartet rule," involving the three members of the presidential council (President Talabani, Kurd; Vice President Adel Abdul-Mehdi, Shiite – ISCI; and Vice President Tariq Hashimi, Sunni – IIP), and the Da'wa-Shiite PM, Nuri al-Maliki, a device to end institutional fission, notably the power vacuum at the ministerial level, and introduce a decision-making fusion.

At the heart of this arrangement was a tri-polar system of diverging, and, of course potentially destabilizing, interests. First, this was a Shiite-Kurdish compromise to endorse the hydrocarbon law, revenue sharing law and federation, and form a basis for the 80 percent option of majority rule, should other alternatives fail. Second, it was a Sunni Arab-Kurdish compromise to amend the constitution and subsidiary laws (notably de-Ba'athification, and the law regulating authority of provinces), and incorporate a sizable number of Sunnis in the army, police, and bureaucracy, among many other demands. Third, a covert Hakim-Hashimi-Maliki understanding to outflank and exclude radicals, such as Sadr and Fadhila (possibly also Ja'fari) on the Shiite side, and sideline Adnan Dulaimi, Khalaf al-Ulayan, the Sahwa tribal forces (led in Anbar by the Abu Risha family-clan), on the Sunni side.

Lastly, the Kurds were neither free of fission nor of conflict. Unlike the Arab communal identities, the Kurds were divided by ideology as by sociology of tribe,

¹⁹ The new "alliance of the moderates" is not that moderate. Hakim's ISCI is a conservative Islamic outfit, so is the IIP. Perhaps only Da'wa is bereft of such fundamentalist credentials. Its "tool of governance," the "quartet core" is hardly cohesive. Its most alarming weakness is its lack of a sufficient parliamentary power to sustain a quorum, let alone a decisive majority. Perhaps the best illustration is the failure of the government to endorse the hydrocarbon law, or the implementation of Article 140 relative to the final status of Kirkuk (Tamim province). An anti-Kurdish voting bloc easily formed to oppose Kurdish demands on the oil and Kirkuk issues. Much to the dismay of the Kurds, they discovered that Shiite and Sunni foes, killing each other with much pleasure, were willing to unite ranks against the Kurds. Centralist or chauvinist sentiments did not want to be among both communal camps of the Arab stock. Even the text of the new law on the authority of the provinces dealt a blow to 'Aziz Hakim's decentralization drive.

family, and class. The nationalist movement was split and fought its uncivil war in the 1990s. In transitional politics they were united: They fought the elections in 2005 in one large front (with the exception of the Islamic League). The fracture lines harbored tensions that were soothed by US pressure (before the war) and the threat of Arab centralist proclivities. Unity was thus the outcome of factors external to them. Perhaps an added element was the presidential council that the constitution envisaged, which offered and delivered a high-ranking position to one of the two major contenders of Kurdish leadership: Talabani vs. Barzani. To this very moment, the unification of the two mini-administrations of Sulaymaniya and Erbil has been sluggish.

The latent major divisions were brought home with the serious ailment of President Talabani, which uncovered the intricacies involved in his departure. This would disrupt the balance of power within his own PUK Party (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan), disrupt the power relation in the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), and disrupt the KRG's relations and balances with the federal government, in such ways that may well cause chaos. Three factions are competing against each other for supremacy within the PUK. The breakup of the PUK may end up with a necessary but conflictive restructuring of the KRG polity by the Barzani-led Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP). The KDP in its turn is not tension-free. The silent competition within the Barzani family that has been reported may be soothed for a while by the dissolution or degeneration of the PUK, but tensions within the KDP, which most probably could become stronger and more powerful, would grow harsher. Another corollary to the departure of Talabani (before or on the eve of 2009 elections) would be a constitutional vacuum of the presidency that most certainly would ignite fierce competition between Sunni Arabs and Kurds for the presidency.

In addition to President Talabani's ailment, the Kurdish-Arab relations, in particular the Kurdish-Shiite one, are already soured by a number of factors: the differences over the hydro-carbon law, over the oil contracts in the KRG region, over the provincial electoral law, and over the final status of Kirkuk. They constitute a series of confrontations that ended earlier Kurdish-Shiite understanding and cooperation.

The meaning of the break up of grand identities

The focus of this study on the inner structures of holistic entities – Kurds, Shiites, and Sunnis versus the institutions of religion, and the social organization of tribe and middle classes – is meant to elucidate the complexity of identity politics, how identity politics – a novel feature in Iraq and the world politics – is conditioned by existing formal and informal institutions and socioeconomic formations, and how these identities are constructed in the arena of political contest, and how changes in the distribution of slices of resources and levers of power alter or fracture identities from within and ultimately rework or modify power relations within each. This “internal” transformation spreading across the national scale would eventually leave its imprint on political transition ahead. We have noted at the beginning that these transformations have the capacity to either usher Iraq into a “consolidation phase,” or simply undo the newly founded power structures.

The result is contingent on how the examined transformations would influence the forthcoming 2009 provincial and general elections and who would emerge victorious in the ballot contest. These transformations will render next elections different,

with new polarization, solo lists, new electoral law, and some new prospects. There are a number of variables.

First, while the influence of the Shiite and Sunni religions will continue to be strongly felt as cultural and social markers, communal identities will become weaker as pan-communal political mobilizers. This may allow for trans-communal tendencies to grow.

Second, institutional religion, or Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, would play a new, more neutral role. Sistani will not patronize the very United Iraqi Alliance he created for the first elections as a pan-Iraqi front, but which bypassed his direct patronage in the second elections, using his images and symbolism for mobilizing Shiites at large. Sistani did everything to create the UIA in the first instance, but literally did nothing to prevent the exploitation of his name in the second instance. At present the UIA has splintered, and Sistani seems determined to distance himself from all Shiite political outfits. His aides suggest he is bent on asking Iraqis to “choose those whom they think serve their interests best.”²⁰

Third, Sistani’s *fatwas* (religious edicts) against the “wilayet al-faqih” doctrine have been asserted several times in response to the queries of his emulators, sending a strong message not only against fundamentalist doctrines and their protagonists, but also against meddling religion with politics.²¹ While this is not the final “disenchantment of the world” of Shiite politics, it is a step toward it.

Fourth, a similar, though different, course is evident among Sunnis. Pragmatic discourses of gradualism, or Iraqi nationalist themes, or tribal traditions, are all set against al-Qaeda’s fundamentalist-communal ideology and against sectarian politics in general.

Fifth, the new electoral law has an impact. The old electoral law of 2005 was based on proportionate representation. As it tied representation of different communities to the size of the electoral turnout, it exacerbated communal polarization and caused overrepresentation of the Shiites and Kurds, and underrepresentation of the Sunni bloc in the constituent elections of January 2005. The second electoral law, by contrast, amended for December 2005, divided the 275 seats into 230 seats for proportionate representation within provinces as constituencies, and 45 seats for open proportionate contest nationwide. The law had the potential to reduce sectarian contests, and intensify competition between different groups of the same sect over reigns of power, at least in homogeneous provinces.²² The 2008 amendments to the provincial constituencies’ principle augments the potential for furthering electoral intra-communal antagonisms, since voting in the new law is not tied to a political list but rather to individual candidates in any list. This amendment gives more freedom of choice to voters, exposes candidates to more scrutiny, and reduces the “enchantment” of charismatic leaders to conceal the weaknesses of candidates deployed in local contests.

Sixth, the resurgence of tribes as local political forces poses another challenge to the supremacy of political clerics, Islamic parties, and, by extension, pan-communal

20 Interview with Grand Ayatollah Sistani’s aides, *Baghdad August*, Beirut, Nov. 2008.

21 See “Sistani’s Political and Religious Fatwas,” Beirut, 2006.

22 This kind of rivalry was already observed in the provincial elections even when grand Shiite or grand Sunni identities were at their political peak.

identity. Rehabilitated by lucrative funds, and empowered by influential statesmen, or incorporated into the body of the state machine, they seem in a more favorable position to run the electoral race, compared to their weak performance in the general and provincial elections of 2005.

Seventh, there is a measure of apparent unpopularity of the Islamic parties. Their weak performance in provincial governments, the flagrant display of the power of their illegal militias, their authoritarian ways of imposing conservative ethics (code of dress, of conduct, attacks on women, prohibition of the Internet, closure of women's hairdressing shops, prohibition of alcohol and music, forcible segregation of sexes, incursions into the university campuses), all increased modern, mostly middle-class, displeasure at Islamic conservatism. Perhaps the greatest source of unpopularity is the greedy armed struggle of Sadr-Badr, or Badr-Fadhila, which claimed lives and plagued urban life with illegal, extra-institutional violence, corruption, and lawlessness.

All these factors may well alter politicized grand sectarian identities beyond recognition, and change the voting patterns observed in 2005. This involves an alarming measure of political uncertainty at the center of federal (Baghdad), regional (Erbil), and provincial politics.

Elections will not change the number of representatives from each community, but it most certainly will dramatically change power relations within them by bringing in new forces and creating new alliances. As the weight of single parties will vary, so will the course of developments ahead. The victors will determine the form and content of coalitions and alliances in the new parliament and new provincial councils, and decide the new course. There is no guessing as to who has the better chance, or in plain words, who the victor will be.

Three possible scenarios

Needless to say, the nature of the victory in the Shiite community will be crucial, since the greatest bloc in the parliament will evolve from it. But the question is what composition it will have, and what leadership it will yield. A Sadr victory could bring Iraqi politics to the brink of a failed state and/or radical sectarian-fundamentalism, at least in the Arabic part. A Hakim victory may avoid the failed-state syndrome, but most certainly lead to a sectarian-conservative Islamism in the Arab section. A Maliki-Da'wa victory has the potential to develop moderate democracy following the Turkish model. In all three cases, there is a strong anti-Kurdish centralist drive; in two cases, there is strong anti-Sunni mistrust and misgivings.

How do Sadr, Hakim and Maliki fare at the beginning of 2009? Sadr's movement is still vibrant, although it has lost much of its military strength. It still commands the charisma of its forefather, Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr (killed in 1999). It still benefits from the material spoils it had gathered during the years of cabinet empowerment, but the structure of the movement is rather weak and undisciplined. It had also clashed with some local tribes that turned against it. Its political capital as a defender of Shiism during the 2006–07 Sunni–Shiite civil war has been shattered by its loss in the military confrontation against the Maliki government in 2007–08, a fact that made Sadr's movement look more like a troublemaker, hostile to law and order and the much wanted security and stability. Staging a comeback in the coming

elections cannot be altogether discounted, although the time span (one year) is perhaps too short for a speedy recovery.

On the other hand, Hakim's ISCI seems in a better position; it is better organized, it is more disciplined, less radical, more pragmatic, more prudent in displaying its militia force, it has greater material resources, and a vast network of bureaucratic-type organizations (recruitment and liaison offices across urban centers), but ISCI lacks the charismatic aura of Sadr. Its attempts to redeploy Sistani's images in the forthcoming elections have thus far been futile, curtailing their mobilizing capacity.²³ Nevertheless, ISCI is a force to reckon with. While Sadr may find strong allies in the Fadhila Party, Da'wa-Iraq, and Ja'fari's political group, ISCI seems to rely on its treble existence as Majlis, Badr, and Shaheed al-Mihrab movements.²⁴

In the current Hobbesian situation of the war of all against all, Maliki may seem the weakest. His party is small and had a very poor performance in the provincial elections.²⁵ It also has an insignificant presence (10 seats) in parliament; it sustained a major split right after Maliki's accession to power. Moreover, Maliki himself owes his ascendancy to premiership in 2006 to Sadr and his allies, in as much as Maliki's campaign against his previous benefactor, Sadr, was the result of support extended to him by Hakim. Maliki was weak, but he emerged from the anti-militia, anti-Qaeda crusade with tremendous political capital. His success in restoring law and order in Anbar, Mosul, and Baghdad in tandem with the US is enhanced by his solo success in Basra, 'Amara, and other southern Shiite provinces.

The impact of security is strongly felt across the country: An atmosphere of social relaxation and a measure of liberty has prevailed. Maliki's popularity soared beyond his wildest dreams. To keep and invest this political capital, Maliki desperately requires an effective political machine that could match the chain of bureaucratic offices and religious charities under Hakim's control; or the charismatic symbols that Sadr wields. The Da'wa Party has been and continues to be a Leninist-type organization of a mostly middle- and lower-middle-class lot with no religious infrastructure (mosques and Husaynias) and no militia. And as such it has been battered by long years of clandestine activity, and suffered at the hands of its foes and friends alike (Iraq and Iran).

The concept of the Sahwa movement that exploited the rift between ideological fundamentalism and traditional groups living by their customary law and nationalism, to mobilize and empower local tribes, was the brain child of US military commanders (General David Petraeus in particular). The Sahwa concept seemed to have ignited the imagination of the Maliki entourage, who cast their hesitation

23 Prime Minister Nuri Maliki resisted Hakims desire to use the Sistani symbol by the ISCI. The matter was discussed in the cabinet, and ISCI could not secure any support for its demand to freely use religious symbols of identity. Interview with cabinet ministers, Baghdad, May and Aug. 2008.

24 All three belong to one movement, although they are officially different. They are led by Aziz al-Hakim, Al'Amiri, and 'Ammar al-Hakim.

25 The formation of pan-Communal electoral fronts did not allow for measuring the strength of single political entities. And the distribution of seats, for example, was random, constrained by leaders' subjective appetites to accommodate differences. In the provincial elections, single parties and small limited coalitions entered the race and made it possible to examine their performance.

and misgivings and took to heart the campaign to spread Sahwa across Iraq, first in the Sunni provinces, and then well beyond. The movement was given a new name: Majalis al-Isnad (Councils of Support). Indeed, the Majalis attracted old and new tribal and local formations that were eager to gain central patronage and reassert themselves, compared to other groups, such as clerics and militia leaders.

Maliki's Majalis al-Isnad, a mimic of the US-invented Majalis al-Sahwa, came at a crucial moment: Shiite populist, radical politics hinges on two fundamentalist-minded and extremely conservative outfits: Hakim-led ISCI and the Sadrist. The decline of the latter as a result of the crackdown on the Mehdi Army, left the Shiite political and cultural spaces open to the Hakim-led ISCI, which has the potential to overwhelm Iraqi politics by weakening Sadr. In the eyes of the Da'wa and Maliki, the deterioration of Sadr's movement might seem a blessing for peaceful transition, but it looked like a curse in the power relations within the Shiite camp. Maliki's Da'wa Party is not only weak vis-à-vis Sadr, but could even be weaker vis-à-vis Hakim.

Maliki used Majalis al-Isnad to increase his "political capital" as a champion of law and order and the supremacy of state as the sole agency to monopolize legitimate means of violence. True, Majalis al-Isnad has played a crucial role in shifting the balance of power in the Shiite provinces and in Baghdad in favor of the rule of law, but most importantly, these very Majalis al-Isnad have also, at least thus far, been instrumental in extending Maliki's patronage and enhancing his power base, which may prove vital for his and his party's political career. It is perhaps this dual function of the Majalis al-Isnad that brought unfavorable reactions against them on part of Maliki's ally, Hakim, as on the part of his foe, Sadr. Maliki is paying lavishly to tribal groups, middle-class intellectuals, and even some local clerics, to expand his constituency with an eye on the fierce rivalry of Sadr and Hakim. This drive intensified the triple polarization among Shiite politics: Sadr-Hakim-Maliki.

Political discourses changed accordingly. Maliki is deploying the language of law and order, of religious impartiality, of the legalities of a central authority as the sole agency of monopolizing means of violence, and of Iraqi nationalism in as much as he is using state patronage in contradistinction to the old religious identity idiom. Maliki extended his drive to mobilize Majalis al-Isnad to the sensitive provinces of Mosul and Kirkuk, targeting not only Arab but also Kurdish tribes.²⁶

If the Majalis al-Isnad in the south enhance Maliki versus Hakim and Sadr; and the Majalis al-Isnad in the west and north create trans-communal bridges with Sunni groups, approaching Arab and Kurdish tribes in Mosul and Kirkuk signals a confrontation with the Kurds on the heels of a series of parliamentary battles between federal (Baghdad) and regional (Erbil) authorities over a host of issues in which Maliki was defeated.²⁷ His move may have been prompted by the desire to build on the anti-Kurdish Sunni-Shiite alliance that emerged during 2008.

26 Such as Zibar and Sorchi in Mosul, who are traditional foes to the nationalist Kurdish movements and have a long history of collaboration with central authorities as mercenaries fighting Kurdish Pesh Merga.

27 As has been mentioned earlier, differences grew after the parliamentary debate over the hydrocarbon law (distribution of oil revenues), and the provincial elections law, which has to be amended. Maliki's relations with the Kurds may have been further soured by the Khanaqin incident when Kurdish troops refused to follow orders from Baghdad. Prime Minister's Office Press Release, Nov. 13, 2008, <http://www.cabinet.iq.aspx?NewsNo=850>.

Maliki won the Majalis al-Isnad as an extension to his government and, most importantly, to his own power base. But he has brought the wrath of his formidable rivals: Sadr, Hakim, and Barzani.

In conclusion, the competition among Sunnis, the triple contest among Shiite political contenders, the ambiguities of succession among the Kurds, and the Arab-Kurdish polarization, brought about by the abrupt shifts to and away from identity politics could spell trouble and prove too heavy a burden for the nascent and fragile power structures.

Internal Trends and Perspectives: Security, Politics, Economy

Executive Summary

The situation in Iraq underwent a fundamental change with regard to the balance of power after ratification of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) by a slim majority in the Iraqi Parliament in November 2008. Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki survived the political turbulence of the years 2006 to 2008 and managed to hammer out an agreement that many believe contains minimal damage for Iraq. SOFA gave him the chance to finally reconcile with the Iraqi Accordance Front, a Sunni bloc that controls 44 seats in Parliament that had withdrawn from his government in August 2007, in exchange for a variety of incentives that would empower the Sunnis and give them a greater role in political decision making. This would increase their political representation and, thereby, their commitment to bringing security to Iraq. By giving them power, Maliki hopes that they will also shoulder responsibility in nation-building. By pacifying the Front and having already mended his relationship with Iraqi tribes that constitute the bulk of the US-backed Awakening Councils (formerly the so-called Sunni insurgency), Maliki's only real "Sunni challenge" now comes from al-Qaeda. With the Sunnis finally back onboard with the political process – for now – relative security and stability can be restored to Iraq, which will have immediate effects on growth of the Iraqi economy.

Along with Sunni support, Maliki needs the backing of fellow Shiites and Kurds, in addition to cooperation of regional heavyweights like Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. The Kurds also supported the passing of SOFA, in exchange for similar promises made to them by the Prime Minister, vis-à-vis protection from further Turkish attacks on northern Iraq (Kurdistan), a blind eye to the activities of their militia, the Peshmerga, greater autonomy for the Kurdish district, and, possibly, a solution regarding the controversial oil-rich city of Kirkuk, which the Kurds want to incorporate into Kurdistan. As for the 30-man bloc of rebel leader Muqtada al-Sadr, which spearheaded the anti-SOFA campaign, they continue to speak out and demonstrate against the agreement. At first glance, this may seem contradictory to what the Prime Minister is trying to achieve: a delicate balance between US demands and Iranian ambitions in Iraq. A closer look, however, shows that Sadr and Maliki are possibly two sides of the same coin. They once enjoyed a marriage of convenience, when the Prime Minister protected Sadr from harassment of US troops, and gave him powerful portfolios in the Iraqi cabinet, in exchange for Sadr's support in the slums and poorer districts of Baghdad. That relationship broke off in 2007, when the two men parted ways over Maliki's inability to stand up to the United States (US) and resulted in Sadr's cuddling up to the Iranians instead. Both are now closely allied to the mullahs

of Tehran, with varying degrees of visibility. Iran has given Maliki the green light to approve SOFA, so that he can continue in his post as Prime Minister. It simultaneously gave Sadr the approval to voice its concerns on SOFA. Maliki would play the negotiator with the Americans, while Sadr would play the rebel, in anticipation of an American withdrawal by 2011. Iran, Maliki, and Sadr are actually concerned about what Iraq will look like “the day after the Americans leave Iraq” on December 31, 2011. They want to make sure that the paramount status of Iraqi Shiites – won in 2003 after many years of persecution under Saddam Hussein – will be safeguarded. They are now working against a tight schedule – 1,080 days – to infiltrate and control every aspect of Iraqi security, police, army, municipalities, and government, thereby making it very difficult for any person or party that comes to power in 2012 to eject them from power. That is why they decided to back SOFA – and twist it in their favor – rather than defeat it from within the political system. The first objective (carried out by Maliki) was for them to stay in power, through an alliance with the US, via SOFA. The second objective (carried out by Sadr) was to remain close to the people, keeping an exit strategy ready in case SOFA is defeated in a national referendum that will be held in Iraq in July 2009.

Current political situation and challenges

Nuri al-Maliki's days in power were seemingly numbered in mid-2008, when he was struggling to balance American and Iranian ambitions in Iraq while also trying to bring security and stability to the Iraqi people. His Baghdad Security Plan had failed. His promises of reconciliation evaporated when he failed to get the Sadrists, the Accordance Front, or the National List of former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi to rejoin his cabinet. The Bush White House was insisting on signing a pact with Maliki's Iraq before December 31, 2008. Iran was curtly refusing, believing that any agreement would be used by the US to launch a war against Tehran. Spearheading the anti-agreement camp was none other than the highest authority in Iran, Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The proposed pact with the US made the situation more difficult since it initially carried clauses that would have tarnished Maliki's already shaky image in the Iraqi street, for example granting US personnel long-term immunity on Iraqi territory. It also gave the Americans the right to maintain long-term military bases in Iraq and gave them use of Iraqi water, ground, and airspace. The pact forbids holding prisoners without criminal charges, and limits searches of homes and buildings. Coalition forces and contractors will be subject to Iraqi law if they commit major and premeditated crimes while off-duty and off-base. To make the pact more reasonable, and to give Maliki the ability to sign it while saving face before his own constituency, the US promised not to use its privileges in Iraq to launch war on any of Iraq's neighbors – a clear reference to Iran. That explains why Iran-backed politicians like Maliki and senior members of the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA), who were not too enthusiastic about the pact when negotiations started last February, muzzled their opposition and eventually said yes to SOFA in Parliament.

Bargaining of Sunnis, Sadrists, and Kurds

Maliki had to do a lot of bargaining to get political players in Iraq to cooperate on SOFA. By succeeding, he actually emerged more powerful than anytime before coming to office in 2006. Iran played along, pretending that the Prime Minister had acted on his own without consulting the Iranians, to project an image that he is not a stooge of Tehran's. Less than one week after ratification, the Iranians called on Maliki for compensation for war damages inflicted by Iraq on Iran during the 1980–88 war under Saddam Hussein. Iran was showing the world that although they are allied to Maliki, he does not take orders from Tehran and has certain room to maneuver politically on his own. For its part, the Sunni Iraqi Accordance Front approved the pact in exchange for a promised general amnesty, setting thousands of political prisoners (all Sunnis) free, and establishing a greater role in the Iraqi government. Some in the Sunni bloc have broader ambitions and plan on blackmailing the Prime Minister during the 2009 elections to make sure they get maximum concessions from him before reelecting him to office. One would be amending the de-Ba'athification laws that were passed by the US in 2003, and which mainly target all Ba'athists who had held office under Saddam Hussein (mainly Sunnis). Another would be a clear promise not to endorse any federal ambitions of Iraqi Shiites, like Maliki's ally Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (SIIC). Hakim, a staunch US and Iranian ally, had proposed an autonomous Shiite district in southern Iraq, inspired by the Kurdish model in the north. Hakim still dreams of this project, which sends shivers throughout the Sunni community because it divides the country's oil between Kurds and Shiites, leaving the Sunnis, who are located in central Iraq, with no oil. Another Sunni ambition that was voiced in 2005 and is likely to resurface in 2009 is to demand the presidency, which was abruptly taken from them in 2003 after having been in their hands since the establishment of the Iraqi Republic in 1958. The Sunnis were never too pleased with the post-Saddam balance of power, which gave them the post of speaker of the Parliament but gave the powerful post of Prime Minister to the Shiites, and the presidency to Jalal Talabani, a Kurd. Additional Sunni demands would be a clampdown on Shiite and Kurdish militias, and a new constitution that places greater emphasis on Iraq's Arab identity.

If Maliki agrees to any of the Sunni demands, he will automatically alienate the Kurds and fellow Shiites. Amending de-Ba'athification laws would be frowned upon by both communities, who feel there is more revenge to be taken against the Sunni community at large for having produced Saddam Hussein. Preventing an autonomous district for the Shiites would put a damper on Kurdish ambitions in Kirkuk, since Sunnis (and both Turkey and Syria) would curtly refuse transforming the oil-rich city to Iraqi Kurdistan. That, after all, would fuel the ambitions of Kurds in both countries. Damascus in particular is the traditional haven for Iraqi Sunnis, who turn to it in times of need, just like their compatriots from the Shiite community turn to Iran. They would never tolerate giving up Kirkuk, and remember only too well the words of Saddam's Vice President Tarek Aziz, who once told a Kurdish delegation, "The only right you will ever have in Kirkuk is to weep when passing by it, because you will never have it!" Maliki had promised to implement Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution, which calls for a referendum on the future of Kirkuk, claiming that this clause was "obligatory." In preparation for the referendum, which was supposed to

take place by December 2007, Maliki helped uproot thousands of Arabs from Kirkuk, claiming that they had been illegally placed there by Saddam Hussein to challenge the city's Kurdish identity. To reverse the process, he encouraged Kurds to move "back to Kirkuk" so that when a referendum does take place, the city's overwhelming Kurdish population will vote in favor of annexation to Kurdistan. Kurdish politicians rushed to bolster Maliki's tottering government – in appreciation for his goodwill – after Sunnis, Sadrists, and Allawi's men walked out on it in 2007. His honeymoon with the Kurds came to an abrupt end when Maliki was unable to deliver on Kirkuk by December 31, 2007, and repeatedly failed to halt Turkish attacks on northern Iraq targeting the terrorist group the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK).

As for the Shiites, there are two heavyweights that Maliki must deal with: Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim, who is aged and ailing, and Muqtada al-Sadr. The real problem is Sadr, who controls 30 seats in parliament and is the only leader who matters, at a grass-roots level. Sadr, only 35, managed to establish himself not only among young and deprived Iraqi Shiites, but more recently, he has also started attracting Iraqi Sunnis as well – former enemies who now admired his firm stance in refusing to endorse SOFA. Previously, as mentioned above, Sadr had been Maliki's ally, legitimizing the Prime Minister on the Iraqi street, in the eyes of ordinary Iraqis. Maliki, after all, had been launched into his job by the UIA in 2006, having spent long years of exile in Syria. He had no power base in the Shiite community of Iraq and was more or less a political nobody. The Prime Minister needed a young, credible, and popular leader like Sadr by his side, so as not to be viewed as a puppet of the Americans. Sadr drummed up support for Maliki and, in exchange, was given important posts like the Ministries of Health and Education. This enabled him to establish a medical and charity network, modeled after Hizbullah in Lebanon, and control what was being taught at schools, making Shiite indoctrination throughout Iraq all the easier. Maliki in turn refused to clamp down on the Mehdi Army, which is controlled by Sadr, and ignored the activities of what was once called "the death brigades" that roamed the streets of Baghdad by night, striking at traditional enemies in Sunni neighborhoods. The two men parted ways when the activities of the notorious Sadr became too much to handle, but rejoined once again when the Iraqi Shiite community at large came under fire from Iraqi Sunnis for the execution of Saddam Hussein in December 2006. Sadr then withdrew his ministers from the Maliki government – thereby also withdrawing legitimacy as far as many people were concerned – in an attempt at pressuring Maliki to take a tougher stance against the Americans and demand a clear timetable for US troop withdrawal. The relationship has once again returned to normal, with both sides now working with Iran after the passing of SOFA.

Iranian intervention is critical – at a political level – to the future development of Iraq. Since the war of 2006, Iran has been planning for what Iranian scholars are describing as "the day after Hizbullah leaves the scene in Lebanon." That would deprive Iran of its major paramilitary proxy in the Arab world if:

1. Another war were to erupt between Hizbullah and Israel, taking into account that neither the US nor Israel were satisfied with the results of 2006. United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1701 was an end to a battle, they believe, and not the end of war with Hizbullah. The new war, it was reasoned, would be far more damaging to Hizbullah than in 2006 and might incapacitate – at least temporarily – the Lebanese group.

2. Hizbullah was to get worked up in another civil war, which was on the verge of happening in May 2008.
3. If Syria signed peace with Israel and terminated its support for Hizbullah.

If any of the above were to happen, Iran believes that its only alternatives for proxy in the region would be either the Badr Brigade of the SIIC or the Mehdi Army. Badr currently lacks leadership; Hakin is old and his son Ammar is far from being a reliable or charismatic leader. The militia's reputation was badly tarnished by the Iran–Iraq War of 1980–88, during which it sided with the Iranian Army against Saddam Hussein. Badr would be a losing horse from 2008 onwards, Iran believes, which explains why Tehran has shown a newfound interest in Sadr and his Mehdi Army. All the ingredients that led to the creation of Hizbullah in 1982 can be found in the Iraq of 2008. There has been a security breakdown, a lack of a strong central government, civil war, plenty of arms, occupation, and Shiites willing to take up arms to defend and promote their cause. This explains why Sadr called for a six-month freeze on the activities of the Mehdi Army – with the aim of restructuring the party and filtering the wild and uncontrollable elements that give it a bad name. This also explains why Sadr himself decided to resume his religious education, rising within the Shiite hierarchy from the current title of Sayyed to that of Ayatollah and, eventually, Grand Ayatollah. At present he cannot issue religious decrees, and has to listen to more senior clerics – like the moderate Ali al-Sistani. When he reaches the rank of Ayatollah and has a strong and disciplined militia under his command, he can repeat the Hizbullah model in Iraq. Some believe that the man charged with revamping the Mehdi Army into another Hizbullah was none other than Imad Mughniyyah, the top Hizbullah commander who was assassinated in Damascus last February 2008.

To date, Iranian support for Sadr remains visibly soft so as not to enrage his traditional Shiite rival, Abdul-Aziz al-Hakim. As Sadr matures politically over time and increases his power base in the streets of Baghdad, his importance to the Iranians increases – and therefore, to Maliki as well. The Prime Minister can distance himself from Sadr – so as to remain politically correct when dealing with the US – but at the end of the day, he needs to submit to all of Sadr's requests (*vis-à-vis* political representation and protection for the Mehdi Army). The more Maliki humors the rebel-turned-politician, the more he will be frowned upon by Kurds and radical Sunnis, especially tribesmen in the Awakening Councils that were created by the US in 2007 to help combat al-Qaeda. It looks bad when the Prime Minister promises to disarm militias and does nothing in Sadr City to the arms of the Mehdi Army. More recently he tried charting a new course and created so-called Support Councils to legitimize Shiite arms, thereby encouraging Sadrists and independent Shiites to join, claiming that these councils were needed to bring about public security. This was in response to the creation of the all-Sunni Awakening Councils. He warned the Americans that once the Awakening Councils finish fighting al-Qaeda, they will turn their arms on both the Americans and the Shiites, since they are Sunni radicals who see all three parties as nothing but threats to Sunni hegemony in Iraq. The Sunnis called on him to disband the Support Councils, and so did the Kurds, who felt that they challenged the power of their own Peshmerga and gave the Shiites another unnecessary military advantage over their fellow citizens. Still afraid of the Awakening Councils, Maliki is calling on Shiites to join the police department at the Ministry of Interior (currently

controlled by his Shiite ally, Jawad al-Boulani), to legitimize Shiites carrying arms, provide an umbrella for their activities, and make sure that once the Americans leave in 2011, the Shiites would be everywhere in the state apparatus of Iraq.

Potential policy options for Europe

The Iraqis – and regional players like both Syria and Iran – believe that there are differences between the US and Europe over the future of the Arab world. The former Bush Administration was seen as fixated on Iraq, and less interested in countries like Lebanon. Europe, however, is perceived to be more interested and involved in the affairs of Lebanon and the Palestine–Israeli Conflict. Repeatedly since 2003, Europe has missed one opportunity after another to re-enter the Iraqi scene, first put forward by Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, and more recently, by Nuri al-Maliki. While European analysts and journalists continued to call for more engagement with Iraq, decision makers in the European Union (EU) preferred to steer clear from a war-torn country that from 2003–08 seemed to provide no opportunities and only troubles. It was feared that greater involvement in the unpopular occupation of Iraq would fuel radical Islamists to strike in the heart of Europe, citing the terrorist attacks in Madrid, and then London. The Iraqis were eager for a European role to reduce their reliance on the US, somewhat believing that the Iraqi street was less sensitive to dealing with the EU than America. Europe's colonial past has been forgotten by ordinary Iraqis, and it was nothing compared to what America had been doing in Iraq since 2003. Iraq never collapsed under British rule, for example, and nor had Syria or Lebanon under the French during the 20th century.

Speaking to *The Times of London*, Prime Minister Maliki recently said, “The Iraqi arena is open to British companies and British friendship.” Earlier in July 2004, Prime Minister Allawi had invited France and Germany to help train Iraqi security forces. France was not too eager to venture into American territory, as it was busy back then in working for a UN resolution to get the Syrians out of Lebanon, with the US. Only Germany agreed while France and the rest of Europe kept distance. Things changed when Nicolas Sarkozy came to power in 2007, and his new Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner expressed a desire for France to reenter Iraq – a country with which it had enjoyed excellent bilateral relations under Saddam Hussein. In August 2007, symbolically signaling a French comeback to Iraq, Kouchner landed in Baghdad. Speaking to Syria's English monthly, *Forward Magazine*, in 2008, Kouchner commented on France's Iraq policy, saying: “In less than nine months, I visited Iraq twice. Each time, I made a point of spending several nights there and during my second trip I visited different parts of the country – the Shiite south, Baghdad, Kurdistan – in order to emphasize France's interest in the country. France's economic, cultural and health-related cooperation with Iraq make it one of that country's most important partners. Our warm reception by the Iraqis shows their interest in our commitment, which they consider more independent as we were opposed to the war in 2003.”

Kouchner's visit was soon copied by his Swedish counterpart, Carl Bildt. Europe's sudden interest both alarmed and pleased the Americans, causing Ambassador Ryan Crocker to comment, after taking the lead from Washington, that the US welcomed “expanded European engagement in Iraq.” America was interested in Europe shoul-

dering responsibility – for failure as well as success – in Iraq and wanted to make use of Europe’s fresh image in the minds of ordinary Iraqis. The Bush Administration was equally worried, however, that because of this relatively unblemished image, Europe could outflank the Americans in Iraq, and even challenge them for supremacy once US troops withdrew by 2011. Crocker added, “It seems to me that some major European countries are now taking another look, a new look at Iraq, and recognizing four-and-a-half years after the fall of Saddam that they have long-term interests in how things turn out in Iraq.” Even German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier expressed interest in traveling to Iraq, although when asked by *Die Zeit* newspaper in 2007, shortly after the Kouchner visit, he said, “There isn’t a competition to see who can make the most trips to Baghdad! Our position on the Iraq issue is well known, and I don’t want to give the impression that we in particular could achieve anything decisive there at the present time.” Maliki realizes that “economy” is the key to a better relationship between his country and Europe. Earlier this summer, he appealed to Germany to invest in Iraq in the domain of energy infrastructure. He called on Germany to open a new chapter with Baghdad, citing German exports, which currently amount to only US\$150 million. One of the biggest construction companies in Germany, for example, is Hochtief, which is still reluctant to do business in Iraq, because of the security situation.

Europe’s involvement can be divided into two spheres, economic and political.

a) Political

Steinmeier is probably right when stating that Europe cannot achieve much in Iraq, given the current state of affairs and the bitter ongoing rivalry between the US and Iran. Europe can compete with neither power in Iraq. It does not know the territory well enough, is not familiar with the numerous powerbrokers in Iraq, and cannot distribute money lavishly in a manner similar to the Saudis or Iranians to increase its political clout and influence decision making. It can invest in Turkey’s proximity to Iraq, however, and use Ankara’s desire to enter the EU to pressure Turkey into limiting its activities on the border with Iraqi Kurdistan. That in turn would give Kurdish politicians in the Iraqi Parliament less reason to be critical of Nuri al-Maliki, and foster more dialogue between Shiites and Kurds, now that SOFA has been ratified (which both camps agree upon).

If Europe were to increase its contact with Iraqi politicians – Sunni, Shiite, and Kurd – it would need some kind of guarantee from the Americans as to the exact nature of Europe’s future involvement in Iraq and what domains Europe would be allowed to enter: for example, security buildup, training of the Iraqi Army, administrative reform, or cultural affairs. Europe needs to feel that it is a real stakeholder in Iraq, not just a supplementary force to the US, helping to carry out its mandate until American troops withdraw in 2011. Europe should be given a say in decision-making processes on the future of Iraq. European public opinion is uninterested in deploying forces in Iraq or in sustaining any more losses. European involvement has to be cost-effective to the EU and walk a tightrope of helping Iraq without appearing to be a split image of the US. Any European involvement must not ignite Islamic sensitivities and inspire terrorist attacks within the EU. Jimmy Carter’s former National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, best put it by saying that once Iraqi fundamentalists

are done with fighting the Americans and al-Qaeda, they will turn to another enemy – Europe – to take revenge, if the Europeans are involved in the Iraqi swamp.

In this respect, Europe has much to learn from its colonial past. The Americans after all, are not staying indefinitely in Iraq. On December 31, 2011, they will have to leave – if not earlier, depending on a referendum in 2009. When the Americans leave, there will be a vacuum that only Europe can fill. Colonialist history in this sense would be reversed. It was the Americans who engaged in the final stages of World War II to enter into territory that had once been controlled by Europe in the Levant. When the US realized that France was about to leave Syria in 1945, they invaded the Syrian economy with banks, investment deals, and political support. Because of accumulating anti-French sentiment in Syria, the Americans realized that once the French left in 1946, the Syrians would want assistance in nation-building, but would not ask for help from the French. That would be politically incorrect, from a Syrian perspective. The US was seen as unblemished; it had not been guilty of any of the wrongs committed by France since 1920. The French were not pleased at being replaced in political and economic influence by the Americans, but there was nothing they could do after 1946 to force the Syrians to deal with them. The example still stands – in reversed order – with regard to Europe and the US in Iraq. Once the Americans leave Iraq in 2011, no Iraqi in his right mind will want to do business with the US. Iraq will still need plenty of economic, technical, and administrative assistance to get their nation back in order, and the only power able to provide that will be Europe.

b) Economic

There is plenty of gas in Iraq that Europe can make use of. According to Syrian oil expert Mustapha al-Sayyed, this reserve “Can easily provide Europe with gas for the upcoming 10 years.” The European gas network, he said, is linked to the Turkish one, which in turn will be connected to the Syrian one, “in no more than 6 months.” Once the Syrian gas network is in full operation with the Turkish and European one, he said, this will be a tremendous source of additional power to Europe. The Iraqi gas reserve is estimated at more than 112 trillion cubic feet, larger than that of both Algeria and Egypt combined. In the Akkas field, for example, near the border with Syria, there is an estimated seven trillion cubic feet, representing up to 6% of Iraq’s full reserves. This reserve would relieve Europe from its reliance on Russia, which currently provides nearly 40% of the continent’s need, said Sayyed, who is closely involved with the Akkas gas fields. “Akkas is expected to produce up to 50 million cubic feet/day by 2011, when the Americans leave Iraq, and given a mutual will between both the European Union and Iraq, this could increase to more than nine-fold, after the Americans leave Iraq.” He added that 35 licenses have currently been given access to Akkas, “11 of them are European, including France’s Total, Norway’s StationiHydro, and Italy’s Edison, and Shell, which is Dutch.” A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between Brussels and Baghdad in April 2008 after a visit to the EU by Prime Minister Maliki and Oil Minister Hussein Shahrastani. For its part, Iraq has pledged to initially supply five billion cubic meters of gas a year to Europe with the likelihood of much more in the future, pending on improvement of bilateral relations. This is the domain in which Europe can safely venture into Iraq, increasing its clout and influence and benefiting without endangering its interests in the country or the

greater Arab region. EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner recently said that Iraq is a “natural energy partner for the EU, both as a producer of oil and gas and as a transit country for hydrocarbon resources from the Middle East and Gulf to the EU.” In addition to cooperation on extracting gas, Europe can provide plenty of technical assistance to Iraq. France gave the EU its head start in this respect when, according to *Le Figaro*, it agreed to sell up to 50 helicopters to Iraq as its contribution to nation-building. According to sources in Iraq, the deal includes 30 surveillance and rescue helicopters. Europe might face resistance from neighboring countries, like Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, who do not want to see the emerging Shiite power become too strong militarily, due to its relationship with the Iranians. Earlier this summer, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown made a landmark visit to Iraq, wanting to promote investment in Iraq, now that security had relatively improved, showing that Europe was getting the head start from France and Germany.

Recommendations for the European Union

- Start planning for the “day after the United States leaves Iraq” on December 31, 2011. This would include preparing a comprehensive strategy for all Member States in the EU, dividing roles politically, administratively, technically, and economically, depending on emerging needs, by 2011.
- Creating contacts with Iraqi decision makers and potential leaders during the period of 2009–11. Europe currently does not come to the mind of Iraqi politicians; they think of the US, Iran, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. Europeans must forcefully impose themselves on the Iraqi scene, promote their services, meet with Iraqi decision makers, and showing that – contrary to what ordinary Iraqis may think – Europe is not another side of the US coin. Iraq is preparing for upcoming elections in 2009 and so is Iran. A change in command in Tehran might lead to a lighter Iranian role in Iraqi affairs, especially if the reformers are elected to power under the guardianship of ex-President Mohammad Khatami, who is unimpressed by increased Iranian involvement in Iraq and has been quoted as saying that this “diverts” from the principles of the Iranian Revolution. If the reformers come to power in Tehran, this might lead to a change in power in Iraq, and the ousting of the UIA, which is backed by Tehran. The EU must be prepared for a change in command in both countries, and have established contacts with whoever might succeed Maliki and his team. Whoever wins will likely be in power when the Americans withdraw in 2011.
- Keep distance from whatever policies are pursued, from internal political bickering to the avoidance of falling into the same trap as the US, which took sides with Shiites against Sunnis after the downfall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. The EU must stand at arms length from Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds – especially Kurds on the sensitive issue of separatism.
- Foster relations with rebel-turned-statesman Muqtada al-Sadr. He is a rising name in Iraqi affairs who will likely increase in influence as he grows older with age and matures politically to become the single most influential leader once the Americans leave in 2011. Sadr is likely to be rewarded with a large share of important portfolios in the immediate future, which would include the important Ministry of Commerce. He is eager to deal with parties other than the US.

- Invest in young people, those who are struggling to get a better education, or escape the misery of their difficulties in Iraq. Scholarships should be provided for promising Iraqi students to study at European schools, visit Europe to learn more about European culture, and then return to their countries, to “spread the influence.”
- Further help with the issue of Iraqi refugees, who are eventually to return to their country once matters settle and normalcy is returned to Iraq. Many of them are poor, but some are among Iraq’s finest and brightest. In 2006, for example, more than 19,494 Iraqis applied for asylum throughout the EU: 9,065 sought refuge in Sweden, 2,585 in Germany, and 2,506 in the Netherlands. Fewer than 950 applied for asylum in Britain, for example, because of the United Kingdom’s image as an ally of the US. Bringing them to Europe and granting them opportunities and safety would build permanent representatives of Europe in Iraq, similar to the scores of Arabs who studied in Europe in the 1950s and 1960s, who returned to become decision makers in their respective countries and brought their countries closer to the EU.
- Make the best of the current desire in Iraq to provide alternatives to the American option when it comes to industrial development, commerce, real estate, oil and gas. Due to rising anti-Americanism in Iraq, as a result of SOFA, the Iraqis are ready and willing – more than ever – to turn elsewhere for salvation.

Resolving the Iraqi Refugee Crisis

Executive Summary

War, occupation, and civil strife have forced between one and two million Iraqis to seek refuge in neighboring countries, where they eek out a precarious existence at the fringe of local societies that have little to spare. Depleted savings and lack of gainful employment are pushing an increasing number into abject poverty, while international humanitarian responses have been slow and, thus far, insufficient.

Despite their increasingly desperate situations, the overwhelming majority of refugees are not prepared to return to Iraq, with mostly good reasons. Security is still precarious in many parts of Iraq, often precisely in those locations to which refugees would return. Many have lost their shelter, or will be unable to return to homes that are now occupied by internally displaced people (IDPs), who are themselves victims of ethno-sectarian cleansing and cannot return to their areas of origin. The dismal state of the economy implies that many of the already impoverished returnees will find themselves without gainful employment and sustenance.

The international community has failed the Iraqi people for far too long, and has a clear moral responsibility to support the victims of this negligence. Beyond providing humanitarian aid, a certain number of Iraqi refugees – possibly up to 100,000 – will not be able to return to the country in the foreseeable future, and will have to be resettled in third countries. Such support for the weakest in the refugee community should be combined with a comprehensive strategy to support the return of both refugees and IDPs by improving the three key conditions: security, shelter, and sustenance. Western and in particular European countries should also urge Iraq to adopt a comprehensive return strategy, and may provide valuable assistance in fields that will be of key importance for it (training the security sector, providing temporary shelters, economic cooperation, and job creation).

The leverage created by such assistance may help to nudge the Iraqi government into accepting some responsibility for the refugees. Banking on increasing destitution as a “push-factor” to prompt return – as appears to be the sole strategy of the current Iraqi government – is cynical and has so far been ineffective. It may even turn out to be counter-effective if it causes host countries to restrict the entry of new refugees, making those who are already in the country even more reluctant to go back for fear of not being readmitted. Assistance to the host countries may be of help to achieve improvements in the legal status of refugees while they are there, and facilitate a process of gradual return. First and foremost, however, such return must be voluntary and, above all, safe.

The crisis

The US-led war against Iraq and its aftermath have triggered massive population displacement. In the five years following the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein, some 1.8 million Iraqis fled their homes and took refuge in other parts of the country, adding to the roughly one million who were forced from their homes by the prior regime. An even larger number has possibly left Iraq altogether. Syria and Jordan have absorbed the vast majority of these refugees; smaller communities have reached Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, and Turkey. Between four and five million Iraqis (approximately 20% of the population) are on the move, making this the third-largest refugee crisis in the world at the time of writing.¹

Civil war and the concomitant breakdown of security and public services and the untenable living conditions and rampant criminality (in particular abductions for ransom) resulting from those developments certainly played an important role in triggering these massive population movements. However, a significant number of the refugees are also victims of systematic and targeted violence, that is, ethnic and sectarian cleansing. In a survey carried out by the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), among Iraqi refugees in Syria, nearly 70 percent of the interviewees reported that they were subjected to interrogation or harassment by militias or other groups, including receiving death threats. About 16 percent endured torture, in most cases perpetrated by sectarian militias.²

“In essence, people flee to areas where they feel safer. Sunnis go to Sunni areas. Shi’a go to Shi’a areas. Kurds – and some Arabs – go to the Northern provinces and Christians go to parts of Ninewah province. And most of those who can leave the country do so. The result: the radical groups hold sway over ‘cleansed’ territories, and have steadily increased their power. [...] The more mixed a city is the more sectarian violence there is likely to be.”³

This pattern of ethno-sectarian separation becomes most apparent in Baghdad, for a long time the epicenter of the carnage, which accounts for some 80 percent of all refugees. Maps displaying the changing sectarian composition of Baghdad demonstrate the demise of patterns of co-existence and mixing formerly characteristic of the city. Between 2006 and 2007, urban areas with a mixed sectarian character have receded significantly and are now restricted to a narrow island in the center, while the rest of the city has become clearly divided into Shiite and Sunni areas. The division

- 1 After the Afghan and Palestinian refugee crises. Across the countries mentioned, some 300,000 refugees are registered with the UNHCR. Surveys and official statistics suggest that a medium ratio of five unregistered for every registered refugee may be a reasonable estimate (1.2 million Iraqis reside in Syria with valid visas, according to the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, around 220,000 are registered with the UNHCR; a study by the Norwegian FAFO estimated 250,000–300,000 Iraqis in Jordan (the number was later set to 500,000 for political reasons), 54,000 are registered. See UNHCR, *Statistical Report on registered Iraqis in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey and Egypt*, 2008, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/iraq?page=statistics>.
- 2 UNHCR, *Trauma Survey in Syria*, Jan. 22, 2008, <http://www.unhcr.org/news/NEWS/4795e6222.html>.
- 3 Ashraf al-Khalidi and Victor Tanner, “Iraq Bleeds: The Remorseless Rise of Violence and Displacement”, special issue of *Forced Migration Review, Iraq’s Displacement Crisis: The Search for Solutions*, June 2007, p. 8; <http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/Iraq/full.pdf>.

roughly corresponds to the two banks of the Tigris River, with Sunnis in the west and Shiites in the east, investing the division with a “geographical” and hence “natural” dimension that seems to bode ill for future attempts at reconciliation.⁴

Women are exposed to gender-specific violence in the form of rape, be it as a result of the breakdown of public order or in the course of ethno-sectarian violence. Iraqi security forces allegedly perpetrated numerous rapes over an extended period of time,⁵ while sexual crimes committed by members of the occupation forces have received wide media attention. In addition, the rise of armed groups with retrograde interpretations of “Islamic” behavioral norms – and the growing importance of tribal values and power structures as a result of the breakdown of the central state and, recently, the counter-insurgency strategy adopted by the occupation forces⁶ – have further increased violence against women. “Women are being strangled by religion and tribalism,” summarizes Iraqi women’s activist Muna Saud.⁷

Situation in the host countries

The host countries, and in particular Jordan and Syria, have to be credited for their readiness of taking in a number of refugees that has severely strained their limited resources. Nevertheless, those resources, as well as the readiness of the host population to share them, have long since reached their limits. A sharp rise in the cost of living over the past years – in particular for housing and food – is associated with the additional demand created by the influx. While these additional economic burdens hit citizens of limited means especially hard, the benefits from the additional cash injected into the economy by the refugees, many of whom were initially affluent, have been largely limited to owners of real estate and wholesale traders. The refugees are thus blamed for developments that are part of larger trends toward increased economic inequalities and deteriorating public services resulting from macroeconomic strategies adopted by the host countries. Despite such pressures, the Syrian government has so far refrained from a stringent enforcement of the visa regime it adopted in the fall of 2007. Jordan, on the other hand, has practically closed its borders to new arrivals after the terrorist attacks of 2006, and an increasing number of Iraqis are thought to be living there illegally. Lebanon still issues instant three-month

4 Cf. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/in_depth/baghdad_navigator/; Ghaith Abdul-Ahad, “Baghdad: City of Walls,” *Guardian Films/ITV News*, Mar. 17, 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/video/2008/mar/17/baghdad.city.of.walls>.

5 See “Rape’s Vast Toll in Iraq War Remains Largely Ignored,” *Christian Science Monitor*, Nov. 24, 2008, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/1124/p07s01-wome.html>.

6 See Charles Tripp, “Local Power in Iraq,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Jan. 2008, <http://mondediplo.com/2008/01/02iraq>.

7 Sudarsan Raghavan, “Iraqi Women, Fighting for a Voice,” *Washington Post*, Dec. 7, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/12/06/AR2008120602289.html?referrer=emailarticle>.

visas for Iraqis who present \$2,000 in cash and a hotel reservation, and many stay on after the visas expire, despite the risk of imprisonment and deportation.⁸

Both Lebanon and Jordan offer refugees limited opportunities for (illegal) work and hence sustenance, while Syria has its own domestic low-wage sector and rampant unemployment. Refugees there have great difficulty finding gainful employment and often work under extremely exploitative conditions, including child labor. Depleted savings mean that more and more refugees have to rely on transfer payments from relatives for mere survival, and suffer severe deprivation when such help is not available. In March 2008, a UNHCR survey found that 20 percent of interviewees lived off less than \$100 dollars per month, up from 5 percent in November 2007. The worst aspect of the crisis – and probably the most telling indicator of the degree of desperation among the refugees in Syria – is the steady rise in the number of sometimes very young women and girls who are forced, frequently by their own families, into survival prostitution, reportedly leading to an all-time low in the price for such “services.” In particular for the protection of such especially vulnerable refugees, UNHCR has introduced a financial support-scheme based on the distribution of ATM cards (monthly support of \$100 per family plus \$10 per child). Food and health assistance are also provided, yet overall, the situation of the refugees in Syria as well as in the other host countries remains woefully inadequate, and is likely to deteriorate even more. A particularly critical case is that of the approximately 2,500 Palestinian refugees who are former residents of Iraq and who have remained stranded in camps in the no-man’s land between Syria and Iraq since late 2005 under extremely harsh conditions.⁹

This state of affairs is not only troubling from a humanitarian perspective, but bodes ill for the eventuality of a renewed surge of flight and displacement, should the situation in Iraq deteriorate again. After being left alone with the cost, Syria may consider reversing its so far rather benevolent role, while Jordan will most likely be reluctant to reverse its currently restrictive stance.

“The increased restrictions on Iraqi refugees are at least partially a response to the lack of support received from the United States (US) and other donor governments, as well as the government of Iraq itself, to lessen the tremendous burden that the host countries are assuming.”¹⁰ While Western donors have slowly stepped up support, however belatedly and insufficiently, the Iraqi government has made it abundantly clear that, despite the availability of disposable funds due to high prices of oil during much of 2007 and 2008, and the difficulty to spend those funds under the conditions prevailing in Iraq, the only support it is willing to give to refugees is to

8 While Syria and Jordan mostly desist from deporting Iraqis with invalid residency status, until the end of 2007 any Iraqi found without a valid residency permit or visa would be detained indefinitely by the Lebanese authorities until he or she would agree to “voluntary” repatriation. See Human Rights Watch, *Rot Here or Die There: Bleak Choices for Iraqi Refugees in Lebanon*, Nov. 2007, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/47565c202.pdf>. In early 2008, Iraqis were granted a grace period of six months to legalize their residency status (a difficult and expensive procedure that implies finding a Lebanese sponsor), and the Internal Security Forces are now said to show some leniency on Iraqis who are registered as refugees with the UNHCR.

9 UNCHR, *Syria Update*, Nov. 2008, p. 2, <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?tbl=NEWS&id=4926c9d52>.

10 Refugees International, as quoted by *The Daily Star*, Nov. 15, 2007.

help them return. It has openly demanded that European governments desist from resettlement, and has even refused appeals to grant one-time support for religious occasions such as Ramadan. This attitude has been criticized as “callous neglect” by critical observers, such as the International Crisis Group,¹¹ but it may also be appropriate to see the neglect as strategic: From the perspective of the Iraqi government, the continuing presence of these refugees constitutes an unflattering and visible verdict on its own performance, while growing numbers of returnees could be touted as a clear indicator that things are moving on the right track, as indeed happened in the fall of 2007. “Returnees have essentially become a currency of progress,” summarized the *New York Times*.¹² And while creating “pull factors,” that is, conditions that make return appear an attractive and sustainable option, is obviously an arduous task and will require a significant investment of financial and political capital, banking on the push-factor of deteriorating living conditions requires nothing more than ignoring the problem, and obstructing third-party support through diplomatic pressure as far as possible.¹³

Accepting responsibility

While the primary responsibility for the situation of the Iraqi refugees falls on the shoulders of those countries that participated in the war and the occupation regime – and here in particular the US, which largely set the terms of that regime and thus bear responsibility for its adverse results – the larger international community has the obligation to assume a share of this responsibility for moral, humanitarian, and pragmatic reasons. While it is probably correct to argue that no amount of international pressure or opposition could have deterred the US from invading Iraq and toppling the regime of Saddam Hussein, countries such as Germany that stood aside during the war could have asserted themselves more during the immediate post-war period, and could have attempted to work for a more effective international participation in the decisions that ultimately led to the disaster. Furthermore, and despite the apparent intransigence of the US administration regarding its post-war reconstruction strategy, the international community should have at least made serious attempts at influencing the implementation of this strategy much earlier. The institutionalization of sectarian representation, the blanket purges of civil servants, security personal, and experts, and the almost complete exclusion of the Sunni community from the initial phase of institution-building and constitution-drafting were all recognized by observers, at the time, as clear signs that things were moving in a very

11 International Crisis Group, *Failed Responsibilities: Iraqi Refugees in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon*, Middle East Report 77, July 10, 2008, p. 1, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5563&l=1>.

12 Damien Cave, “Pressure for Results: The Politics of Tallying the Number of Iraqis Who Return Home,” *New York Times*, Nov. 26, 2007.

13 A European expert working in Damascus reports a conversation with a high Iraqi official who asked for European donors to co-fund the transportation of refugees willing to return. According to the expert: “this is absolutely ludicrous: they are not after the funds – they have more than enough money to pay for the few people who actually want to go back – but if the Europeans fund it, it means they are getting *political* support for promoting return that is not safe,” (interview, Nov. 2008).

dangerous direction.¹⁴ But no determined and concerted action was taken to change the course of events and modify the underlying strategic priorities.

From a humanitarian perspective, it is obvious that the situation of the refugees warrants urgent assistance, in particular in Syria where opportunities for gainful employment are particularly scarce. Increased child labor and survival prostitution clearly show the toll that the situation takes on the weakest segments of the refugee population. At the very minimum, these particularly vulnerable groups deserve support and protection from a situation that is not of their making. At the same time, the amount of hardship that most of the refugees are prepared to endure attests to the magnitude of the fears that they associate with a return to Iraq. Approaches that bank on destitution as an effective push-factor for returning are not only cynical and callous but have so far also proved ineffective. But even if they were eventually to succeed, chances are that they may only change the *location* of the humanitarian crisis – when returnees are unable to find shelter and sustenance – to one that is far more difficult to reach for providing assistance, that is, inside Iraq. On the other hand, concerns that increased handouts or work opportunities could render a refugee status in Syria or Jordan as an attractive long-term prospect for a significant number of refugees appear out of touch with reality.

Furthermore, a clear message to the host countries – that they will no longer be left alone in carrying the burden of providing for the refugees – will help to convince these countries to accept new refugees, should the situation in Iraqi slip out of control again. Providing assistance for one such new wave of refugees will be immeasurably easier in Syria and Jordan, where security is guaranteed and institutionalized support systems are already in place, than in the largely lawless border regions of Iraq, where the displaced may end up stranded on their flight to safety.

Finally, mid-term and long-term pragmatic considerations also suggest focusing on alleviating the situation of refugees in the host countries, and refraining from a precipitous push for return. In the short term, large numbers of returnees will most likely swell the ranks of the IDPs. This will not only strain the already insufficient support systems for this group, but may also destabilize the recent security gains by adding to the reservoir of destitute and embittered people available for recruitment into the various militias.

“We’ve seen in other research we’ve done the close relationship between IDPs and peace. Half of all peace agreements that are concluded are followed by an outbreak of violence and often, it’s because IDPs aren’t able to resume their lives, aren’t going back to their place of origin, or unable to support themselves in their place of displacement to begin new lives.”¹⁵

14 Heiko Wimmen, “Democracy in the Balance: The Elections for Iraq’s Provisional National Assembly of January 30, 2005,” <http://www.boell-meo.org/en/web/245.htm>; International Crisis Group, *Unmaking Iraq: A Constitutional Process Gone Awry*, Middle East Briefing 19, Sep. 26, 2005, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3703&l=1>; *The Next Iraqi War? Sectarianism and Civil Conflict*, Middle East Report 52, Feb. 27, 2006, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=3980&l=1>.

15 Elisabeth Ferris, intervention at the conference “Iraq’s Displacement Crisis and the International Response,” Heinrich Boell Foundation, North America / Center for American Progress, Washington, Dec. 6, 2007.

Toward sustainable return

For the large majority of the refugees, return to Iraq will and should remain the long-term objective. Besides the political limits to the resettlement of large numbers of Iraqis in third countries, the Iraqi government is correct in its claim that the skills and qualifications of these people will be needed to rebuild the country. Moreover, since Iraq potentially has large amounts of funds at its disposal, a significant number of the refugees – many of who are well-educated and from a middle-class background – will easily find jobs once reconstruction kicks off in earnest. Such a development could also help to recreate a middle class that is more likely to support political positions and parties that cut across ethno-sectarian lines, thus adding a valuable element to attempts at building security, stability, and democracy.

However, the responses to efforts mounted by the Iraqi government, sometimes with great media fanfare, to convince refugees to return, have been lackluster thus far,¹⁶ and most of those who do return appear to be doing so with great apprehension. There is ample reason for the latter, and, as the International Crisis Group puts it, “it would be reckless in the extreme to encourage Iraqis to return before genuine and sustained improvement takes place.”¹⁷ The UN refugee organization UNHCR “does not at this time promote voluntary return to Iraq as it considers that the basic requirements for sustainable, large-scale return of Iraqi refugees in conditions of safety and dignity are not yet in place.”¹⁸

Any responsible and sustainable attempt to address the refugee issue beyond (urgent and necessary) relief work will have to look for ways to address and tackle at least some of the main obstacles in Iraq that are deterring refugees from returning. Foreign and, in particular, European actors may make valuable contributions on this account, not only through financial support but also through experience gained elsewhere.

Security still remains the most central concern. Terrorist attacks have decreased but never really ceased, and a string of clashes in contested areas such as Basra, Mosul, and Kirkuk attest to a still volatile and fragile security situation. Beyond the pervasive danger of random violence, some refugees have reason to fear direct and targeted violence. Even in exile in Syria, some are reportedly receiving death threats over their mobile phones,¹⁹ indicating that at least some political forces in Iraq have the capacity to monitor and track opponents abroad. From the perspective of the refugees, this must dim prospects for their chances of escaping the attention of these networks once they are back in Iraq. Similar concerns apply to minorities such as Yezidis, Sabaens, Assyrians, and Chaldeans, who have been exposed to systematic pressure amounting to ethnic cleansing during recent months. As the Iraqi state has increasingly been

16 According to Iraqi government sources, some 8,000 returned during the first 10 months of 2008. In October UNHCR put the figure at around 300 per month. Figures compiled by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) suggest a cumulative number of returnees of around 16,000, <http://www.iom-iraq.net/Library/IOM%20Iraq%20Returnee%20Assessment%20August%202008.pdf>. See Michel Moutot, “Refugees Want to Return Home to Iraq, But Not Yet,” *AFP*, Nov. 7, 2008, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/KSAI-7LG8WV?OpenDocument>.

17 ICG, *Failed Responsibilities*, p. 2.

18 UNCHR, *Syria Update*, Nov. 2008, p. 2.

19 Interview with European expert in Damascus, Nov. 2008.

carved up between the three main ethno-sectarian groups (Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds), and provisions for minority representation are abolished, it is difficult to imagine a situation where such small minorities could trust the state to effectively protect them. Finally, with the increasing hostility toward women's independence in society now present in many parts of Iraq, return prospects for the many female-headed households among the refugees also appear dim. Refugees are especially reluctant to return to areas where they will be part of the local minority, and possibly at the mercy of militias (some of which are now in the process of becoming part of the official security forces) that are sometimes politically close to those groups who originally displaced them, and whose future allegiances are not always certain.²⁰

As security matters are increasingly laid into Iraqi hands, and as most of the European participants of the "Coalition of the Willing" have drawn down or terminated their military presence in Iraq, it has become even more difficult for European actors to influence the handling of the security situation. However, provided the political will to reverse the effects of ethno-sectarian cleansing on the part of the Iraqi government, there may be potential to improve the performance of the Iraqi police forces, in particular with regard to the protection of minorities and minority returns. Beyond providing funds, European governments may also contribute valuable experience that has been accumulated through similar missions, in the Balkans and elsewhere.

Shelter is the second central concern for anybody who considers returning, and closely linked to the security issue. Polls that have been conducted by the International Organization for Migration among IDPs show a strong relation between continuing displacement and the inability to reclaim property.²¹ In some areas, houses of the displaced were systematically dynamited, whereas in other areas, returnees may find their homes occupied by people who are themselves IDPs, are facing similar obstacles to returning to their original areas, and may be under the protection of local militias. Official attempts to address the issue have so far been restricted to largely unsuccessful "eviction warnings" directed at those who occupy the houses of others, with no provisions taken for those who would become homeless in the process. Press reports also indicate that a number of refugees sold their property under duress, either to raise the money necessary to flee the country or under direct threat by militias, meaning that there may be a substantial number of cases where the new occupants can claim lawful ownership and a torturous process of contesting and vetting exchanges of property will be required.²²

For those who are faced with such a situation, it is of crucial importance that a credible and transparent process to reinstate them into their property rights should be initiated, or at the very minimum that appropriate compensation should be paid in cases where return to the original property is unfeasible. Such a process and the neces-

20 See Hugh Sykes, "Awakening Fears for Iraq's Future," *BBC News*, Oct. 1, 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7645647.stm.

21 Across Iraq, only 16.7% said that their property was accessible; among people displaced from Baghdad – the origin of more than 80% of the refugee community – nearly two-thirds said that they did not have access to their property, <http://www.iom-iraq.net/Library/IOM%20Iraq%20Displacement%20Assessments%20and%20Statistics%201%20Jan%202009.pdf>.

22 In the same poll, 35% of those who had no access to their property said the reason was that it was "occupied by a private citizen" (presumably, squatters originally or still under militia protection); in Baghdad this ratio was close to 60%.

sary legal and institutional framework already exist: Property claims and conflicts that resulted from actions of the ancient regime, that is, for cases that date before 2003, have been processed by the Commission for Resolution of Real Property Disputes (CRRPD), an Iraqi government agency supported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).²³ The mandate of the commission has recently been expanded to include property claims originating up to June 30, 2005. However, in order to cover the majority of claims related to civil strife and ethno-sectarian cleansing, it would have to be extended to at least mid-2007. To process the huge caseload that will result from such an extended mandate, CRRPD will not only need more funds but also significantly more sophisticated human resources, as property disputes resulting from the activities of non-state actors tend to be more diverse, complex, and difficult to assess than those originating from the procedures of an authoritarian state bureaucracy, and may pose greater challenges to the integrity of the persons involved. Funding and training for more and better-equipped staff will certainly help to improve the efficiency and credibility of the process. In the meantime, since such processes are necessarily time-consuming, intermediate shelters for returnees will be needed as well as legal arrangements between owners and occupants of property in order to avoid tensions that could arise when people feel compelled to take matters into their own hands. Finally, as at least some of the returnees will be permanently unable to return to their dwellings and unable to obtain new ones, support for permanent housing solutions will also provide a valuable contribution.²⁴

Sustenance: Despite the improved security situation, improvements on other accounts such as basic infrastructure and public services have been slow in coming.²⁵ Consequently, employment and gainful economic activities are still hard to come by, and many returnees will face economic hardship upon return. That said, not only is the situation hardly any better in the host countries, but there is also no hope for significant improvement in the long run, and most Iraqis with professional skills are unlikely to ever acquire occupations that are in line with their potential and expectations. In Iraq, on the other hand, opportunities will certainly improve once reconstruction picks up in earnest. This, however, remains closely connected to a further stabilization of the security situation and substantial improvements in the political process, none of which can be influenced by European actors at this point in time. At best, European agencies and donors may consider giving preferential employment to returning refugees and IDPs once they are able to get involved in reconstruction on the ground – a policy that may, however, be liable to further aggravate already potentially difficult relations between the returnees and the remaining population.²⁶

23 See <http://www.ipcciraq.org/en/index.php> and <http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/claims-programmes/iraq-claims-programme/cache/offonce>.

24 The Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration has drawn up ambitious plans to tackle this issue (more than \$400 million to be invested over five years); however, falling oil prices prompted the government to cut the relevant annual budget line to less than \$7 million in 2009.

25 For a concise account, see Michael Schwartz, "Wrecked Iraq," *Asia Times Online*, Oct. 18, 2008, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/JJ25Ak02.html.

26 While a number of refugees have been able to hold down public sector jobs through prolonged periods of exile, the Iraqi government has reportedly recently been threatening employees with immediate dismissal should they fail to report to work, even in areas where security is deteriorating, such as Mosul.

On the other hand, it should be recognized that returning from exile is a strenuous and expensive process that many refugees will be unable to shoulder without assistance. For this end, the reintegration help of one million Iraqi dinar (less than \$1,000) promised by the Iraqi government to would-be returnees is far from being sufficient.²⁷ Rather than providing financial aid, Europeans may offer assistance and human resources to the Iraqi government to streamline and coordinate efforts to assist return, ideally in the form of a comprehensive return strategy.

Finally, as return is a risky and taxing procedure, it should be realized that only the most destitute refugees are likely to take this step without first carefully collecting information and testing the ground. The most likely scenario appears to be what may be described as a “return in installments,” whereby individual family members are dispatched to assess prospects for and take concrete steps toward securing the three key conditions of security, shelter, and sustenance before the whole family unit – and, in particular, the more vulnerable and dependent parts of it – are finally moved. For this reason, imposing restrictions on refugee movements may yield the paradoxical result of prolonging the stay of those refugees who are already in the country, since they will no longer be able to prepare for a return that they may be considering. In addition, if refugees know that upon returning to Iraq the door to their precarious but relatively safe exile will be shut behind them for good, they are likely to wait for much more substantial improvements on the aforementioned key conditions.²⁸ Paradoxically, initiating a sustained trickle of return to Iraq may work better and faster if the way out for new or repeat refugees is kept open.

Resettlement

Finally, a significant number of the refugees – estimates run up to some 100,000²⁹ – are qualified as “especially vulnerable” by UNHCR, and may only be able to return after a considerable time, if ever. Many have reason to fear targeted violence from militias upon return, or have been victims of violence and are in need of trauma treatment. Many women have been subjected to sexual and gender-based violence and may be at risk due to the associated social stigma, while minorities who have been systematically cleansed from certain areas and are increasingly excluded from the post-conflict balance of power may not find state institutions ready to protect their return.

Politically and morally speaking, it needs to be emphasized that the Iraqi state has a clear obligation to protect precisely those especially vulnerable refugees, who it has failed in the past, and that the capacity to do so amounts to a litmus test for the emergence of an Iraqi state that deserves that name, as opposed to a mere truce between the most powerful groups. From a more pragmatic and humanitarian position, however, it appears unacceptable to make this point on the backs of the weakest part of the refugee community, who may have to spend extended periods of

²⁷ Reportedly, applicants for return assistance from the Iraqi government initially received stamps in their passport invalidating the documents for foreign travel for a period of five years. UNCHR Syria offers an assistance of \$100 per adult and \$50 per child (maximum of \$500 per family) for returnees. The Iraqi government now offers free flights for any refugee willing to return. UNCHR, *Syria Update*, Nov. 2008, p. 2.

²⁸ See ICG, *Failed Responsibilities*, p. 8.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

time in limbo before such a state finally comes into existence. Accordingly, a significant number of them will have to be resettled in third countries. With the US boosting their admission capacity to 13,000 in the 2007–08 fiscal year and aiming for 17,000 in 2008–09, European countries should significantly step up their so far meager contribution. They should not, however, privilege certain ethnic or sectarian groups, and in particular the Christian communities. Such an approach would not only pander and give additional legitimacy to the rising tide of Islamophobia in Europe, but may also reflect negatively on the remaining communities in Iraq by singling them out as protégés of the West, and delivers the dangerous and wrong message that there is no future for multiethnic and multi-religious societies in the Middle East.³⁰

Recommendations

1. Resist attempts to politicize return. In particular, resist attempts to pressure refugees into unsafe and unsustainable return.
2. Offer assistance to the Iraqi government to develop a workable and applicable strategy to assist prospective returnees. Make sure that all measures taken benefit refugees returning from abroad and IDPs alike.
3. Support and enhance the capacity of the Iraqi security services to protect minorities and minority return.
4. Support and enhance the capacities and the performance of the structures put in place for the processing of property claims.
5. Create temporary shelters for people whose property is occupied by others, and plan for permanent shelters for those who will be unable to return to their original homes.
6. Capitalize on such assistance to convince the Iraqi government to accept responsibility for the refugees and to share the cost incurred for their support.
7. Send a clear message to the host countries that they will no longer be left alone with the refugee crisis.
8. Step up support for basic needs (food, health, shelters, education), and support income-generating and educational measures that also benefit the host population.
9. Increase the number of especially vulnerable or endangered refugees accepted for resettlement. Apply the criteria of the UNHCR without a bias toward certain ethnic or sectarian groups.
10. Capitalize on the measures mentioned from 7–9 above to encourage host countries to improve the legal framework for refugees (limited work permits, access to public services, long-term residencies). In particular, promote visa regimes that enable refugees to shuttle between the host country and their potential return destinations.

30 See Muriel Asseburg, “Falsche Signale in der Diskussion über Irak-Flüchtlinge,” *Berliner Zeitung* June 6, 2008, <http://www.berlinonline.de/berliner-zeitung/archiv/.bin/dump.fcgi/2008/0606/meinung/0025/index.html>.

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The Regional Context: The Role of Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Saudi Arabia

Executive Summary

The situation in Iraq is of serious concern to Turkey, Syria, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Developments in Iraq have been followed by policymakers in these countries with anxiety and a focus on two potential threats. First, it is feared that any Kurdish or Shiite independence or autonomy would have a contagion effect on the Kurdish or Shiite populations. Second, the policymakers fear that a weak central government would lead to the strengthening of the PKK and PJAK (Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan) in northern Iraq, resulting in attacks on Iran, Syria, and Turkey; create opportunities for radical Sunni and Shiite groups in central and southern Iraq to pose a separatist challenge to Saudi Arabia; and turn Iraq into a safe haven for international terrorists that would pose a threat to all of them. These rogue elements are likely to use Iraqi territory as a base for their activities. Moreover, Turkey and Saudi Arabia want to see a strong central government in Iraq “that is not only capable of bringing back political and economic stability, but that will also be robust enough to become a future counterweight to Iran in the region.”¹ These threats are not only about these countries’ futures in the region but, more importantly, they reflect the fundamental threats that have shaped domestic politics in these countries since the Iraqi invasion. Hence, the territorial integrity of Iraq has become a “red line” for the civilian and military bureaucracy and limited the options of the governments in following a flexible and constructive policy line toward Iraq.

Introduction

The Iraqi situation changed the reality of the Middle East. The new situation has been defined by territorial delimitations, ethnic and sectarian clashes, and Jihadist terrorism challenges. It is not a cliché to say that nothing will be same in the region. The regional players – Turkey, Iran, Syria, and Saudi Arabia – feel the immediate challenges but also see opportunities. The European Union (EU) has historical relations with the region and was expected to lend a historical perspective to the policies applied in the region. However, the Iraqi situation did not prove this assumption true. The EU has failed to develop an influential policy. The developments in Iraq has tested the EU’s capacities for a common foreign and security policy. The EU

¹ Henri Barkey and Omer Taspinar, *Turkey on Europe’s Verge? Great Decisions. A Briefing Book* (Washington, DC: Foreign Policy Association, 2006), p. 2.

was not only unable to develop a common stance, but it also experienced a serious division between “old” and “new” Europe as well. However, it is not too late. The EU has different levels of relations with Iraq’s neighbors. It has a special relationship with Turkey through its membership process. Turkey had appropriated the European position in the Middle East and follows a policy of fostering peace and stability in Iraq. This study holds the view that Turkish policy may help the EU develop a policy strategy of depth in the Middle East. This analysis aims at providing a broader picture of a constructive EU position in its discussion about policies toward Iraq with Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Syria. Reflecting the EU value and spirit in policymaking, Turkey’s policy has succeeded in reconciling differences between the neighboring countries.

Turkish policy toward Iraq

The Turkish government adopted a new position toward Iraq in the aftermath of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. The new policy was shaped within the democratization process and reflected the emergence of new, wider regional policy approaches in Turkey. It contributed a new regional profile that has created more room for maneuvering in terms of Ankara’s Iraq policy. Turkey’s new orientation seems more flexible and adaptive to the challenges in Iraq. It aims to develop initiatives regarding the emergence of an Iraqi state while also planning to provide security for Kurds and Turcomans in northern Iraq.² Turkey’s new active policy strives to develop relations with the different segments of Iraqi society regardless of ethnic and sectarian differences. This is not only a pragmatic response to the inevitability of more Kurdish autonomy in the northern region, but also the result of a departure from the tradition of perceiving threats as coming from outside. The decline in Kurdish separatist terrorism in Turkey has contributed to a more relaxed attitude toward Iraqi Kurds, although there are still certain anxieties, especially among hardliners in the civilian-military elite. Turkey’s Iraq policy integrated regional legitimacy concerns in the policymaking process and left former red lines behind for the opening of new horizons. For example, the former Undersecretary of the National Intelligence Agency noted during an interview that “there is no red line anymore. There is a reality – read an autonomous Kurdish state in Northern Iraq – and Turkey has to live with it.”³ This can also be seen as an outcome of democratic progress within Turkey.

Turkey did not join the US-led occupation forces in Iraq, but put enormous effort into mobilizing regional support for a stable Iraq. As part of its new regional profile, Turkish policymakers present Turkey as the only country that can pursue constructive relations with all Iraqi actors and its neighbors. Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan noted that his government pursues continuous and equal relations with all ethnic groups to motivate them for Iraq’s unity and welfare.⁴ In order to contribute to political stability in Iraq, Turkey has followed four different paths of diplomatic relations: through the United Nations Security Council, the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), through Iraq’s neighbors, as well as through the various ethnic and religious groups

² Gokhan Cetinsaya, *Irak'ta Yeni Donem, Ortadogu ve Turkiye* (Ankara: SETA, 2006).

³ *Milliyet*, Oct. 26, 2007.

⁴ Prime Minister’s speech, Feb. 28, 2006, <http://www.basbakanlik.gov.tr>.

in Iraq. Among these initiatives, the Platform for Iraqi Neighbors has arguably been the most important one. The platform met for the first time in Istanbul on January 23, 2003, to find a peaceful solution to avoid a US-led invasion, and continued its activities after the beginning of the Iraq War. As part of this platform, the foreign ministers of neighboring countries met multiple times in various regional locations. Through the platform, Iraq's neighbors all agreed on the need for territorial integrity and political unity in Iraq. Some of the meetings were attended by representatives from the EU Commission and the United Nations as well as the Secretary General of the Arab League and of the OIC. The United Nations Security Council has taken these meetings seriously and has requested further regional cooperation on the Iraq question. The UN Secretary General, inspired by this initiative, established a consultation group involving the platform members.

Turkey also plays an active role in making the Arab League and the OIC more sensitive to this issue. Turkey also engaged in backstage diplomacy by bringing together Americans and Sunnis on several occasions. During one such meeting prior to the elections in Iraq, Sunnis agreed to bring an end to Sunni terror while the Americans agreed to provide the conditions for a just election.⁵ In addition, Ankara brought major Sunni opposition figures and US envoys together to ensure Sunni participation in Iraqi national elections on June 30, 2005, and for them to take part in the political process. A prominent Sunni leader, Tariq al-Hashimi, Vice President of Iraq, met former US envoy Zalmay Khalilzad in Istanbul during one such initiative.⁶ In order to contribute to the democratic process in Iraq, Turkey also organized training programs for Iraqi politicians from various political parties that were attended by 350 politicians.⁷

Despite the new attitude toward Iraq, Turkey's political focus has turned toward the escalation of PKK terrorist attacks. The Turkish people's psychological mood seems to be converging with the political and security elite's decisive will to initiate a new and intensive struggle against the PKK terror. Despite popular opposition to US policies in Iraq and increasing nationalist pressure, Turkey's new regional profile has tried to employ diplomatic measures for conflict resolution and management in Iraq. This new profile seems to have found a receptive audience in the region. Turkey's Iraqi diplomacy has also paved the way for Erdogan's invitation to the Arab League as a special observer. Turkey's participation in a mainstream Arab international political organization was something that could not have been easily imagined, even in the previous decade. In the minds of policymakers, Turkey's new regional rhetoric sows the seeds of future support and sympathy for its Iraq policy, which consolidates and strengthens new regional rhetoric and orientation.⁸

Turkey's decisive stance and the backing of the motions on military operations against PKK bases in northern Iraq started intensive diplomatic efforts in the region. In October 2007, Syrian President Bashar Assad paid an official visit to Turkey and expressed Syria's support for Turkish actions against the PKK, including a possible military operation in northern Iraq. Iraq's Vice President, Tariq al-Hashimi, paid a

5 Taha Akyol, "Neden Türkiye Basardı," *Milliyet*, Dec. 6, 2005.

6 Semih Idiz, "Türkiye'nin 'Kolaylaştırıcı' Rolü Ağırlik Kazanıyor," *Milliyet*, Dec. 5, 2005.

7 Prime Minister's speech.

8 Ahmet Davutoglu, "Turkey's New Foreign Policy Vision," *Insight Turkey* 10:1 (2008).

quick visit to Turkey, and Prime Minister Erdogan talked to his Iraqi counterpart, Nuri al-Maliki. The Turkish Foreign Minister, Ali Babacan, paid visits to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Egypt, Iraq, and Iran. These visits followed the earlier visits to Syria, the Palestinian territories, Jordan, and Israel. Turkey is now pursuing an intensive regional diplomacy and putting pressure on the Iraqi central government to take action against the PKK cells in Iraq.

The Extended Iraqi Neighbors meeting in Istanbul in November 2008 was a sign of Turkey's ability to pursue regional diplomacy for the Iraqi cause. Turkish sensitivities on the territorial unity of Iraq and the PKK terror dominated the agenda of the meeting and generated support from the Iraqi neighbors as well as the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, and the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon. The final declaration underlined the urgent need for cooperation against terrorist groups in Iraq.

Baghdad is closer to the Turkish position than ever before. Despite his continuous change in positions, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani said in reference to the PKK that "we do not want to sacrifice our cultural and economic relations with Iraq because of a terror organization."⁹ Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari added that "we have agreed that the position we should take is a common one to fight terrorism. We will not allow any party, including the PKK, to poison our bilateral relations." Massoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdistan Regional Government, stated that Iraq should not be a launching pad for terrorist activity.¹⁰

Turkey's dilemma concerns the contradictory policies of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq. The central Iraqi government seems closer to the Turkish position but does not seem capable of taking measures against the PKK. Barzani also has his own dilemma. There is an ongoing Kurdish nation-building process in northern Iraq. Barzani supports this process and does not want to be in a position of harming any Kurdish group.¹¹ On the other hand, there is increasing pressure from within Iraq and other regional countries, particularly Turkey, as well as the international community that PKK terror should not be tolerated. Barzani is also aware of the fact that he needs to open up to Turkey at one point to secure their existence in northern Iraq. Barzani must take action against the PKK if he wants to preserve the image of a responsible politician and keep good relations with Turkey. He is caught between Kurdish nationalism and the responsibility of a statesman. Increasing pressure on Barzani may force him to pay more attention to Turkish security concerns. Turkey's intensive diplomatic attack and possible economic measures concentrate on this. One may speculate that if Barzani moves in this direction, Ankara may adopt a milder approach toward him in return.

Turkey's incursion into northern Iraq rang alarm bells in the United States (US). Following the motion in parliament in November 2007, Undersecretary of Defense, Eric Edelman, a former US ambassador to Ankara, and Assistant Secretary of State, Dan Fried, paid a visit to Ankara to meet with senior Turkish officials. The relations between Turkey and the United States had already been deteriorating because of the

9 *Hurriyet*, Oct. 23, 2007.

10 *Ibid.*

11 A former MP in Turkish Parliament and leading figure in Kurdish politics in Turkey, Leyla Zana, calling for a Kurdistan regional government, said that "no honorable Kurd delivers his brothers to end up their lives in prison." This statement shows the sensitivity of the issue and burden of Kurdish nationalism on Barzani. See, *Milliyet*, Oct. 26, 2007.

Armenian Genocide Bill, which defines the casualties of Ottoman Armenians during their deportation in 1915 as “genocide.” Then US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, and Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, talked to their counterparts and asked the Turkish government for time. With the Turkish side losing patience, Erdogan’s visit to the US on November 5 resulted in further US guarantees for collaboration in the fight against terror. Erdogan made it clear that Ankara would not spend more time with previously inefficient mechanisms – like triple coordination of the United States, Turkey, and Iraq – and reserved the right to pursue cross-border operations in Iraq against the PKK.

In the midst of the debate about a possible military operation, Erdogan paid a visit to Britain in October 2007, underlining Turkey’s decisive stance to employ every possible measure to put an end to PKK terror. His British counterpart, Gordon Brown, stated that Britain would “step up” counter-terrorism cooperation with Turkey.¹² In addition, Turkey’s signing of the “Strategic Partnership Document” with Britain was a major achievement for Turkish diplomacy in the EU. Brown’s support was followed by that of the EU Enlargement Commissioner, Olli Rehn, who underlined that the EU “condemns all terrorist attacks and understands Turkey’s need to protect its citizens.”¹³ However, the EU line is still in favor of diplomatic measures and has reservations about Turkish military operations.

Iranian, Syrian, and Saudi perspectives on Iraq

Iran’s role in the region changed after the US-led invasion of Iraq. Iran acquired a balancing role in the new web of relations stretching from Afghanistan to Iraq and Lebanon. Iran’s geopolitical location between Iraq and Afghanistan has made it an important regional player for the US-led operations in these countries. In addition, the crises in these countries influence Iranian domestic and foreign policy through a number of challenges and opportunities. The emergence of a new Shiite power in the Middle East brought Iran to the fore as a potential protector of different Shiite factions in the Middle East.

Iran’s first and foremost concern has been Iraqi security. There is a widespread perception of a threat stemming from Iraq due to the Iran–Iraq War and activities of Kurdish separatists in northern Iraq. The immediate response of the Iranian government was to establish close ties with the Iraqi government to prevent any spillover of insecurity into Iran. Iranian policymakers liked the idea of having a friendly Shiite government in Iraq, but they also made it clear that they were willing to engage in close political and security cooperation with any Iraqi governments.

The Iranian government is also aware of the fact that the Iraqi situation poses new security threats largely related to the domestic security situation in Iraq. While the Iraqi resistance, Kurdish, and Shiite militia groups created security concerns for Iran, Iran’s position vis-à-vis these groups has been closely followed by the United States, regional countries, and the international community. Iranian policymakers follow a delicate policy line on this issue and have the utmost interest in proving themselves as responsible players in the Iraqi theatre.

¹² “Iraq Pledges to Tackle Kurdish Fighters,” *Guardian*, Oct. 23, 2007.

¹³ “EU Tells Turkey to Think Twice Before Military Action,” *Today’s Zaman*, Oct. 26, 2007.

The US presence in Iraq is a serious security concern for Iranian policymakers. The toughening critical tone of the US against the Iranian nuclear program and discussion of human right issues led to speculations of a possible US strike against Iran. The former Bush Administration did not hesitate to escalate the rhetoric with Iran. The Iranian security establishment takes this threat seriously and considers the US presence both as a direct threat to Iran and as an obstacle in pursuing Iranian interests in Iraq. Iran always had reservations about the existence of foreign powers in Persian Gulf, but this time they foresee a more immediate threat.

The US presence in Iraq creates a dual dilemma for the Iranian regime. First, the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq made Iran a regional power after putting an end to the Taliban regime and rule of Saddam Hussein. The invasions removed two serious enemies of Iran from power and created a new regional position for Iran. Second, Iran's interest in Iraq presents a dilemma. The fragile situation creates opportunities for the Iranian regime to create trouble for the US at minimum cost, while at the same time being threatened itself by the security situation. There is an ongoing debate within Iran as to whether the Iranian position may be used to bridge the gap with the US, particularly with President Barack Obama. However, Iranian society is not entirely optimistic on this issue. There is concern that Iranian support will not produce any positive results and that even the new US administration will continue to classify Iran as a rogue state. Iranian policymakers consider the Afghanistan situation as a litmus test. In that theater, the United States did not respond positively to Iranian goodwill.¹⁴ Under these conditions, concrete results from US-Iran talks on Iraq remain questionable.

When former President Bush decided to invade Iraq and to overthrow the Hussein regime, Syria, then a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, refused to support any resolution that authorized war against Iraq. No country in the region would benefit in the long term from chaos created by US involvement in Iraq, and the existence of a new player in the game would definitely disturb the neighboring countries. Regional countries expressed concern that "the long-term US presence could allow the Americans to use Iraq as a staging ground for attacks against its neighbors,"¹⁵ even though the Iraqis have insisted otherwise.

Syria, as one of Iraq's largest neighbors, had the ability to influence events within Iraq and avoid chaos.¹⁶ However, its criticism of the US placed Syria on the "wrong side" of the game. Although Syria condemned the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon and announced its support for Washington in its fight against terrorism, Syria ended up being included in the "axis of evil," which increased tension between the two countries. In doing so, the United States raised other issues that illustrated Syria's attempts to undermine stability in Iraq. These concerns included Syria's soft security precautions at its border with Iraq, its support for terrorists groups such as

14 Kayhan Barzegar, "Iran, New Iraq and the Persian Gulf Political-Security Architecture," *Iranian Journal of International Affairs* 20:1 (2007/08).

15 "Iraq Politicians Warn Raid into Syria Could Hurt US Security Pact," *New York Daily News*, Oct. 27, 2008, http://www.nydailynews.com/news/us_world/2008/10/27/2008-10-27_iraq_politicians_warn_raid_into_syria_co.html.

16 "Assad Defiant on Border Security: Syrian President Tells CBS News Anchor Katie Couric He Supports a Stable Iraq," *CBC News*, Sep. 6, 2007, http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/09/06/america_in_iraq/main3238903.shtml.

Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hizbullah, its military presence in Lebanon, and possible possession of “mass weapons of destruction.”¹⁷

The pressure of the ongoing chaos in Iraq led Syria to shift its policy. The political developments after the “Cedar Revolution” in Lebanon and the killing of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri led to the withdrawal of Syrian military forces from Lebanon in April 2005. However, the border security issue remained unchanged. US officials have complained that insurgents, including Islamic militants linked to waves of suicide bombings, have been crossing into Iraq from Syria. In October of the same year, President Bush told reporters at the White House that he “expects Syria to do everything in her power to shut down the transshipment of suiciders and killers into Iraq.” He added that he “expects Syria to be a good neighbor to Iraq.”¹⁸

In 2006, Syria put significant efforts into reestablishing its “diplomatic” relations with Iraq. Especially in the case of growing numbers of Iraqi refugees crossing the Syrian border, Syria welcomed the chance to participate “to support and reinforce security and national reconciliation” in Iraq.¹⁹ In 2007, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad met with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and discussed the situation in Iraq. They issued a joint statement condemning “all forms of terrorism plaguing the Iraqi people and their institutions, infrastructure and security service.”²⁰ Assad and Talabani expressed readiness to work together and do everything possible to eradicate terrorism. After the consensus of both sides, Syria started to impose tough visa restrictions on the Iraqis. This was very unlikely for Syria, which had an unchanged policy that any Arab citizen could enter Syria without a visa. The same year, both the EU and the US relaxed their attitudes and reopened talks with Syria. A suicide attack in Damascus in 2008 that was linked to al-Qaeda was thought to be intent on “destabilizing the region” and “it was the revenge for Syria’s long relationship with jihadi elements.”²¹

Saudi Arabia

Saddam Hussein’s rule was no less than a nightmare for the Riyadh government. There was a period in which Saddam was considered the protector of the Sunni Arab countries by countering Iran in the region and suppressing the Shiite majority in Iraq. However, this perception changed in a short period of time and Saddam’s rule turned out to be a major destabilizing factor for Saudi regime. The US move to withdraw Saddam, however, did not change the situation much. Although the nature of the threat has changed, Iraq is still a destabilizing factor for the Saudi Kingdom.

The Saudi regime has generally benefited from the status quo in the region. However, the current situation in Iraq has made the protection of regional order

17 Anders Strindberg, “Syria Under Pressure,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 33:4 (2004).

18 “Bush Demands Syria Be ‘Good Neighbor’: Damascus Told to Control Iraq Border, Not Interfere with Lebanon,” *CNN World News*, Oct. 12, 2005, <http://edition.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/meast/10/12/bush.syria/index.html>.

19 “Syria-Iraq Tackle Border Security,” *BBC World News: Middle East*, July 25, 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3922353.stm.

20 “Iraq’s Talabani Meets With Syrian President Assad in Damascus,” *Global Security*, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iraq/2007/01/iraq-070114-voa04.htm>.

21 Sami Moubayed, “Syria Back on the Terror Map,” *Asia Times Online*, Oct. 1, 2008.

almost impossible. In addition, the Saudi policy of approaching regional problems with minimum involvement is not likely to work in this case. Saudi Arabia has a public and private view on the US presence in Iraq. The House of Saud admitted on special occasions with top US officials that American forces should stay in Iraq as long as possible.²² However, Saudi rulers condemn the foreign and illegal occupation in Iraq on every possible occasion domestically.

Saudi Arabia has three foreign policy priorities. The main tenet of Saudi policy is to remain the leader of the Islamic world. Saudi rulers host the holy sites of Islam in Mecca and Medina and have been the main sponsor of the OIC. Second, there is a desire to protect their leading role in the Arab world. The Saudi position has been challenged in the past by a number of other Arab countries, but it is important for the House of Saud to maintain an influential role in Arab matters. The third tenet of Saudi policy is to remain a leading oil producer and exporter. The Iraqi situation has influenced all of these foreign policy priorities and Saudi Arabia has been trying to balance these priorities in light of the Iraqi challenges since the invasion.

As a responsible member of the international community, Saudi policy toward Iraq is to help Iraqi administration to provide stability and security in Iraq. The Saudi priority for Iraq is to limit the role of Iranian. They fear that a Shiite-dominated Iraqi government may fall into the orbit of Iran. There may be a possibility for Iran to extend its influence on other Shiite communities, including the Shiite population in Saudi Arabia. It is no secret that Saudi rulers expect a tougher US position against Iranian activities in Iraq.

The Saudi administration has pursued milder policies toward its own Shiite population in the oil-rich eastern part of the country. They have also started a new policy line of reconciling differences with Shiite scholars. The Saudi Kingdom invited Sunni and Shiite scholars to work on those differences, which have fed violence between Shiite and Sunni groups in Iraq and other places.²³ The scholars ended the talks with a call against Muslims killing Muslims in any pretext. However, the Mecca document approved by the Shiite and Sunni scholars could not end the violence between Shiite and Sunni groups in Iraq.

The Saudi leaders keep the Shiite-dominated Iraqi government at arms length. They do not like the idea of Sunni groups losing power in Iraq and the rise of Kurdish and Shiite Arab groups in the new Iraqi government. From the Saudi perspective, Sunnis in Iraq have been marginalized and left out of the new power structure. Sunni resistance groups and al-Qaeda-related Jihadist groups tempt some groups in the Kingdom to fight against US forces. There has been speculation that Saudi groups support the Iraqi resistance and Jihadist groups, including Saudi fighters in Iraq. However, the Saudi-Iraqi border has proved reliable in terms of foreign fighter infiltration to Iraq.

Saudi Arabia has a serious terror problem of its own. Terror networks staged several successful attacks on Saudi soil. Saudi rulers have come to a point of zero tolerance for any terrorist group or activity. Thus, Saudi rulers pay enormous attention to the security situation in Iraq, which may turn into a base for an international

22 Helene Cooper, "U.S. Feels Sting of Winning Saudi Help with Other Arabs," *New York Times*, Mar. 30, 2007.

23 For more information, see the website of the OIC, <http://www.oic-oci.org>.

terror network. The Saudi priority is to establish strong links with the Iraqi government and persuade the neighboring countries to agree on a common security protocol to ensure the struggle against terror and organized crime. Another priority is to prevent the territorial division of Iraq, which may lead to emergence of a new Shiite state challenging the territorial unity of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain in the Gulf region.

The Iranian role in Iraq is a source of tension in the Persian Gulf region. The idea of a Shiite-dominated Iraqi state is a challenge to the region's Sunni members, who used to live with a Sunni-led Iraq for centuries. While trying to absorb this challenge, anything more would be serious blow to Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Arab states in the region. The idea of a Shiite crescent was pointed out by Jordanian King Abdullah. Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad visited Riyadh in March 2007. This visit did not seem to settle the issue of distrust between Tehran and Riyadh. Saudi rulers spend a great deal of energy on regional and international levels to balance Iran in regional politics and to limit Iranian influence in Iraq.

Policy recommendations for regional countries and the European Union

The still evolving situation in Iraq requires the neighboring countries to follow a multi-dimensional, complex, and dynamic policy to tackle the challenges. So far only Turkey has been able to adjust to the new situation, whereas Saudi Arabia and Syria have been focused on the dilemmas concerning the Iraq question. Turkey achieved considerable progress with the new measures both at home and on the international level. In other countries, there is a certain need to reshape the domestic and international context in a way to facilitate engagement with the Iraqi situation. There are, however, a number of issues that need to be dealt with carefully in regional policies toward Iraq.

1. There is a need to reconcile democracy and security in a manner in which democratization will bring more security to the countries neighboring Iraq. The fight against terrorism should not lead to the emergence of authoritarian processes and reverse the achievements in political liberalization. The crucial issue is to pay attention to the sensitivities of the ethnic and sectarian differences and address the communal violence and terror problem in a way that will not lead to the marginalization of the large Kurdish and Shiite populations in the neighboring countries.
2. There is a consensus that the governments should follow strict measures against the new terror threat emanating from Iraq. Neighboring countries could face a delicate situation in managing security concerns, and keeping the public consensus and support behind the renewed war on terror.
3. A new challenge is the emergence of Kurdish and Shiite autonomous positions in Iraq, and the Shiite domination in the new Iraqi government. The countries in the region should continue to pursue the policy of protecting the territorial integrity of Iraq and refrain from actions that may give the Kurdish and Shiite nationalists a pretext to use perceived "Turkish or Arab threats" for their own nation-building. There is a need for an effective public diplomacy to explain the intentions of countries in the region in their fight against terrorism while also playing a constructive role in the solution of the problems of Iraq. The EU should

encourage the countries in the region to follow policies in this direction.

4. Turkey, Syria, and Iran should create an open channel for dialogue with the Kurdish regional government in northern Iraq. There is an emerging necessity to get into a dialogue with the Kurdish leaders in Iraq to reconcile the attempts to fight against the PKK and PJAK and preserve territorial unity in Iraq.
5. The “Iraqi Neighborhood Forum” is an important achievement for the whole Middle East in a time of war and chaos, and Turkey should continue its efforts in interregional diplomacy. The Iraq meetings should be expanded to include economic and cultural issues. It provides a legitimate forum for Iraq’s neighbors and the Iraqi government to express their concerns. The EU should be better represented in the meetings to support this platform.
6. Despite the long list of problems and tensions between Washington and Iraq’s neighbors, relations with the United States are critical. For example, Turkey and the United States have a long-standing history of cooperation. The new Obama-Clinton foreign policy may create opportunities for progress in the Iraqi deadlock. The EU role is vital to bridge the transatlantic gap and help the US administration to gain the required prestige and legitimacy to pursue effective policies in the region.
7. The EU is aware of its own terror threats and should be sensitive to legitimate concerns of countries in the region. A joint platform for dealing with terrorism is necessary. The EU-OIC dialogue was a good start but has so far failed to achieve much. The EU may initiate a new mechanism to deal with the terrorism in the region.
8. There is a need to mobilize the regional international organizations, such as the Arab League and the OIC, and maintain active diplomacy at the United Nations to deal with the Iraqi challenges. As a successful example, extended meetings between Iraq’s neighbors have combined regional diplomacy and international efforts by bringing the UN Secretary General and the US Secretary of State together with the members from the countries neighboring Iraq. These platforms are likely to help in finding solutions to the problems within the region and will foster a new consciousness for addressing regional issues. EU policies and mechanisms should support the developments of regional solutions to the problems in Iraq.
9. Categorizations like Shiite, Sunni, or Kurd in Iraq do not represent the historical and cultural realities in this geography. The problems and clashes are the result of competing political projects. There is an intense struggle for power in Iraq and these factions should not pursue their power struggles over sectarian and ethnic differences. The EU should have a decisive stance to warn the countries in the region that they should avoid taking sides on internal problems. What is worse for the Iraqis and its neighbors would be to have Iraq as a battleground for regional rivalries.
10. The EU should use existing policy mechanisms with the neighboring countries to look beyond Iraq as being solely responsible for all ethnic and sectarian problems. The EU’s soft power could help neighboring countries to develop their own ethnic and sectarian policies.

The US Debate on Iraq: What Do We Have to Expect from the Next President?¹

Executive Summary

The United States' decision to invade Iraq divided Europe. While the European Union (EU) and many European countries have contributed significantly to Iraq's stabilization and reconstruction, there has not been a concerted EU-US strategy, due largely to bad blood between former President Bush and some European leaders as well as the European publics' enduring anger at the US-led intervention. Recently, however, Europe has shown increasing interest in engaging in on-the-ground efforts and security conditions in Iraq have improved markedly. President Barack Obama offers Europe hope of a more multilateral US foreign policy. Both Europe and the United States want to see Iraq stabilized, but only a coordinated EU-US strategy can make it happen.

Europe and the United States (US) share broad vital interests in Iraq that make this cooperation possible. Both want a single, stable state that does not harbor international terrorists, does not threaten its neighbors or export large numbers of people, supplies oil to the world market, and imports goods and services. Cooperation will not be easy, but the United States needs Europe's assistance, especially as the United States begins to draw down its troops in Iraq. The United States does not expect nor need new European military forces. Instead, it needs increased European civilian contributions on the political and diplomatic fronts – the EU's forte.

Europe's options depend on the direction Iraq takes. If security continues to improve – a “continued improvement” scenario – then Europe could contribute more on-the-ground capacity-building support. The most pressing security and governance problem is Iraq's Interior Ministry. The EU has the capacity and experience to mentor the Ministry as it turns toward its proper functions in a peacetime environment. The EU could contribute staff to the UN mission in Iraq and assist with internal political reconciliation. This process will not succeed unless Iraq's neighbors are on board – an effort that would benefit from Europe's diplomatic skills.

If, however, Iraq's increased security is only a pause in an ongoing civil war – a “descent into chaos” scenario – the United States would need Europe's assistance in implementing a regional containment strategy and in dealing with whatever form of state emerges from Iraq's collapse.

1 This paper is an update to “Scenarios for the Future of Iraq and the Role of Europe: How Will Europe Engage?” by Daniel Serwer and Megan Chabalowski, published in *Bound to Cooperate - Europe and the Middle East II*, Christian-Peter Hanelt and Almut Moeller, eds., (Berterlsmann Stiftung, 2008).

Washington, Brussels, and the European capitals should sit down together shortly and plan a cohesive package of European initiatives and American responses to present to the new US President.

Introduction

It has been nearly six years since the US invaded Iraq – a choice that widened the gap between Europe and the United States and divided Europe internally. While a majority of the Member States of the EU have participated in the wartime Coalition, major European countries such as France and Germany have stayed out of the military effort. With a dicey security situation in Iraq and domestic politics weighing heavily against direct involvement in Iraq, Europeans have not been keen to engage in ways that require a strong on-the-ground presence.

This may be changing. Both France and Germany now have leaderships that have signaled interest in improving relations with the United States and in increasing contributions to the reconstruction and stabilization efforts in Iraq. President Barack Obama offers a fresh start. The security situation in Iraq has improved markedly over the past two years, with Sunni tribesmen taking up the fight against al-Qaeda in Iraq, US forces not only surging but also adopting a more effective counter-insurgency strategy, and Shiite extremists deciding to stand down, at least temporarily.

The ultimate outcome of these positive developments is still unclear: This could be the beginning of a new phase in which Iraqis resort more to politics and less to violence in sorting out their differences, or it could be the calm before emboldened Sunni ex-insurgents or refreshed Shiite militias take on the Iraqi Security Forces and the Government of Iraq in a renewed civil war with traumatic regional implications.

We will consider here the implications for the United States and Europe with these two scenarios – they might be called “continued improvement” and “descent into chaos” – and possible policy options for Europe as it seeks to protect its interests there. In either scenario, stronger European engagement seems desirable, though the precise shape it would take clearly depends on which scenario comes to pass.

American interests and options in Iraq

It is important to be clear about the US’ vital interests and options in Iraq, which will have echoes and repercussions in Europe. An expert group spanning the full range of the American political spectrum convened at the US Institute of Peace over the past year and defined US vital interests as follows²:

1. Prevent Iraq from becoming a haven or platform for international terrorists.
2. Restore US credibility, prestige, and capacity to act worldwide.
3. Improve regional stability.
4. Limit and redirect Iranian influence.
5. Maintain an independent Iraq as a single state.

² Daniel Serwer and Sam Parker, *Iraq after the Surge: Options and Questions*, USIPeace Briefing (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, Apr. 2008).

Much as it might like to see Iraq as a reliable supplier of oil to the world market and an importer of US-supplied goods and services as well as a functional democracy, the group did not regard those objectives as vital, that is, worth expending additional American lives and treasure.³

US military options in trying to protect these vital interests are limited. The surge of US troops in 2007 could not be sustained without politically difficult decisions on deployment time and frequency. Former President Bush decided to return the numbers to 138,000 troops – slightly above pre-surge levels – leaving Barack Obama to decide what to do with those remaining.⁴ The Bush Administration had agreed with the Iraqi government that US combat troops would withdraw from Iraqi cities by July 2009 and leave Iraq entirely by the end of 2011. These deadlines are presumably renegotiable, depending on security conditions. Already prior to his inauguration, President Barack Obama argued for an orderly drawdown of US troops and for limits on their role. But the rate of an orderly US troop withdrawal is also limited, to about one brigade combat team (BCT) per month.⁵ This means that the earliest Obama could withdraw US combat brigades would be the summer of 2010.

The new President must also decide how to handle the continuing need for assistance – both military and civilian – in Iraq. On the military side, Iraq will clearly continue to need assistance in building its air force and navy, as well as in filling out logistics and intelligence efforts in support of its army. On the civilian side, Iraq's institutions are still far from consolidated. In a continuing improvement scenario, its ministries, police, courts, and prisons will require assistance for some time beyond the 2010 or 2011 drawdown of US troops if US interests are to be protected.

European interests and options

It can be reasonably assumed that Europe shares the goal of preventing Iraq from becoming a haven or platform for international terrorists. While at least some Europeans might want to see the return of US credibility, prestige, and capacity to act worldwide, that would not be a European vital interest. Regional stability, however, is an interest Europe shares with the US, as is limiting and redirecting Iranian influence, though Europeans might rather see themselves as encouraging Iranian moderation and avoiding provocations. Maintenance of an independent Iraq as a single state would be of considerable importance to Europe, if only because a Turkey unhappy with Kurdistan's moves toward independence will be a problem on the EU's south-eastern flank.

Does Europe have other interests in Iraq? European commercial interests in energy supplies from Iraq and commercial sales to Iraq are at least as strong as the analogous US interests. In addition, Europe is seeing significantly more Iraqi refugees than the US, now totaling well over 130,000 and possibly continuing to rise.⁶ This imposes a burden on social services, especially as many European countries will not

3 Daniel Serwer, *Iraq: Time for a Change*, USIPeace Briefing (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, Sep. 2007).

4 Jeremy Pelofsky, "Bush to Order 8,000 Troops out of Iraq," *International Herald Tribune*, Sep. 9, 2008.

5 Serwer, *Iraq: Time for a Change*.

6 UNHCR, *Statistics on Displaced Iraqis around the World: Global Overview*, Sep. 2007.

accept them for permanent resettlement. It also risks social and cultural strains in a Europe already nervous about its rapidly growing Muslim population.

We leave it to Europeans to decide which of these various interests are vital, but list them more or less in order of American-imagined priority:

1. Prevent Iraq from becoming a haven or platform for international terrorists.
2. Improve regional stability.
3. Maintain an independent Iraq as a single, stable state.
4. End the outflow of Iraqi refugees and enable the return of a significant number.
5. Moderate Iranian influence.
6. Restore Iraq as an energy supplier and importer of European goods and services.

While European and US commercial interests could put the two on a competitive course, there is little inherent conflict between other European interests and those outlined for the US, and considerable overlap. The broad outlines of what the US and the EU want in Iraq are virtually identical: a single, stable state that harbors no international terrorists, does not threaten its neighbors or export large numbers of people, supplies oil to the world market, and imports goods and services.

This apparent synergy between US and European interests looking forward does not mean that Europeans and Americans will find themselves in agreement on everything. Iraq is broken. Many Europeans blame the US. A clear majority in Europe viewed the war in Iraq as not being justified⁷ and believes that European countries should not bear the burden of fixing the problem.⁸ Few European politicians want to risk their reputations arguing for efforts to help the United States in Iraq, and European public opinion is decidedly unfriendly to any effort to engage directly there. But for those who want to look forward to improved security conditions, there is reason to believe that Iraq can become a shared enterprise, albeit with the major burdens for security and civilian reconstruction falling to the Americans.

The question, as one European reader of a draft of this chapter commented, is not so much if Europe will engage but how it will engage: It can either continue to contribute in a piecemeal fashion – with the pieces adding up to a substantial slice, but one with little political impact – or it can engage with a clearer overall vision of Iraq, the region, and the EU's value added. The latter is likely to yield a much better return on the European taxpayer's investment.

What if things get better?

In our first scenario (continued improvement), security continues to improve in Iraq, though gradually and with many ups and downs. Iraq, which is sitting on an enormous fiscal surplus, begins to contract for tens of billions of dollars in infrastructure and services. American and European companies begin to find doing business there attractive and not any more dangerous than other places they work. As conditions become more permissive, what can Europe do?

7 Andrew Kohut, *American Character Gets Mixed Reviews: U.S. Image Up Slightly, But Still Negative; 16-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey* (Washington, DC: The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, June 23, 2005), p. 27.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Europe took an arm's length approach to assistance in Iraq in 2003 and 2004, with most funds channeled through the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq – a joint effort of the World Bank and the United Nations.⁹ 2005 and 2006 were difficult years for civilians in Iraq, as sectarian warfare raged and the security situation deteriorated sharply. 2007 saw significant security improvements, in particular toward the end of the year, and a small shift of European efforts toward bilateral programs.¹⁰ At the same time, the international community as a whole has shifted its emphasis from physical reconstruction, rehabilitation, and equipment – now largely in the hands of the Iraqis, whose oil revenue gives them substantial resources, even at reduced prices – to capacity-building, that is, training Iraqis to run their own country.¹¹

This is the EU's forte. Its most important export product is not Airbus but rather teaching candidates for membership how to run their countries according to the 80,000 pages of the *acquis communautaire* – in other words, state-building, which is precisely what Iraq needs. In the past 35 years, the EU has managed to bring 21 countries into compliance with its norms, more or less – all of them Europeans, but with extraordinarily varied linguistic, cultural, and historical antecedents. Iraq is no European country – the Saddam Hussein regime used random government-sponsored violence to cow its population into submission and prevent the development of its previously thriving civil society. No one would want to impose the *acquis communautaire* on a Middle Eastern country with an Arabic- and Kurdish-speaking population. But the experience that the EU has acquired in mentoring other countries is precisely what Iraq needs.

Some Europeans are already busy on this front. The EU and the United Kingdom, two large donors, have made capacity-building a particular priority. So far, the largest slice of EU-committed funds has supported governance and democracy programs (approximately \$337 million), with education, science and cultural programs receiving the second largest amount (approximately \$117 million).¹² The EU has been a major contributor to UN projects that support Iraq's political process. Among its bilateral projects are ones that reform and enhance Iraq's capacity in rule of law and public financial management.¹³

The United Kingdom has so far pledged approximately \$1.137 billion to Iraq reconstruction efforts, committing the majority of its funds to bilateral projects and disbursing them in particular to projects focusing on governance and democracy development (approximately \$127 million), including voter education and creation of independent TV and radio stations.¹⁴ The British Department for International Development (DFID) provides expert assistance to Iraqi national and provincial governments

9 DFID, *Iraq Country Assistance Plan*, Feb. 2004; DFID, *The European Commission's Delegation to Iraq – Co-operation and Development*, http://delirq.ec.europa.eu/coop_dev/index.htm, accessed Jan. 4, 2008.

10 DFID, *Country Profiles: Asia: Iraq*, <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/countries/asia/iraq.asp>, accessed Dec. 7, 2007; EC, *Information Note: European Commission Assistance to Iraq 2007*, 2007.

11 International Cooperation Department (ICD) 2007, p. 5.

12 Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation (MPDC), the Iraqi Strategic Review Board, and ICD, *Report on Donors' Contributions to Reconstruction Efforts Up to March 31, 2008* (Iraq: Ministry of Planning and Development Cooperation, March 2008), p. 25.

13 EC, *Information Note*.

14 MPDC, *Report on Donors*, pp. 3, 22; DFID, *Country Profiles*.

to help build capacity to provide basic services and security. This assistance goes to bodies such as the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Electricity, the Prime Minister's Office, the Council of Ministers Secretariat, and southern Iraqi Provincial Councils.¹⁵

Unfortunately, these efforts are not as focused as they might be on the most pressing security and governance problem Iraq faces: the Interior Ministry. Three years after the fall of Saddam Hussein, the Interior Ministry was in the hands of a Shiite sectarian who used it to strengthen his co-religionists. That has changed: A new minister has replaced large numbers of police commanders and is trying to build a professional ministry.¹⁶ He is aided mainly by American military officers and civilian contractors not well suited to mentoring a civilian ministry. While some have police experience, these well-meaning and professional officers, supplemented by Justice Department and State Department officials as well as contractors, lack one vital characteristic: careers in an Interior Ministry, which the US lacks (since it lacks a national police force – the FBI is not a national police force and reports to the Justice Department).

Here is one area where Europe could make an enormous difference. It is already undertaking some efforts in this area: DFID has a mentoring mission in the Ministry of Interior, the Italian Carabinieri are providing training to the national police, the EU is providing both high-ranking police and judicial training through its EUJUST-Lex program, and Germany is providing both explosive ordnance disposal training in Germany and Jordan and military training in the UAE.¹⁷ These efforts add, but only marginally, to US police training efforts – an approach Europe has adopted in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Instead, in improving security conditions, the EU could adopt the Interior Ministry, undertaking a major effort to mentor and train its officials and ensure that the police are nonsectarian, right down to the neighborhood level (where it is most important). This would be a high added-value task for which the EU is uniquely equipped and experienced, having done more or less the same job in Bosnia in recent years. The risks are significant – embedding in the Iraqi Interior Ministry requires a great deal of courage and wisdom. But 200 Europeans prepared to move into the ministry and give it the close, hands-on attention it needs would make an enormous difference. The Americans would largely be moved out, freeing them for other tasks for which they are better suited.

Another area in which Europe's experience would help is on the political front. The improved security situation has unfrozen Iraq's previously deadlocked political scene, allowing for fluidity that manifests itself in shifting alliances and political formations. The Kurdish-Shiite alliance that wrote the constitution and formed the original backbone of Prime Minister Maliki's parliamentary majority is fraying.

15 DFID, *Country Profiles*.

16 Matt Sherman and Roger D. Carstens, *Independent Task Force on Progress and Reform*, ed. the Honorable Mitchell B. Reiss (Williamsburg: Institute for the Theory and Practice of International Relations at the College of William and Mary, Nov. 14, 2008).

17 DFID, *Country Profiles*; Council of the European Union (EU), *EUJUST LEX/Iraq*, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/cms3_fo/showPage.asp?id=823&lang=EN, accessed Jan. 2, 2008; German Federal Government, *German Support for Iraq*, Feb. 2008; Spc. Emily Greene, "Multi-National Force – Iraq – Italian Police to Train Iraqi National Police," Combined Press Information Center, http://www.mnf-iraq.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12933&Itemid=128, July 20, 2007.

The Sunni tribes are converting their militia (the “Awakenings”) into political forces that will contest provincial elections in January. While most political parties are still defined by sect, there are serious efforts underway to create alternatives to the Kurdish-Shiite alliance, including a nationalist Shiite-Sunni front.¹⁸

At the same time, it is difficult for politicians to produce results because of distrust and continuing fundamental disagreements on constitutional issues: How should power be distributed between the central government and the regions (only one of which, Kurdistan, exists at present) and between the central government and the provinces (governorates in Iraqi terminology)? What should the relationship between Iraqi minorities and “co-nationals” in neighboring states be? What is the proper role of neighboring countries in Iraq, and how can they contribute to stability?

This is a situation that calls for European political skills. The United Nations has been successful in keeping a lid on the Kirkuk powder keg – Kurdish, Arab, and Turkmen lawmakers accepted a compromise that will create a parliamentary committee to review Kirkuk’s status.¹⁹ There remain, however, difficult issues concerning the physical extent of Kurdistan, which is contested not only in Kirkuk but elsewhere as well. With the clearer and heftier mandate of Security Council resolution 1770, the United Nations has taken on this and the weightier constitutional issues, in addition to organizing provincial elections.

The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) is led by a European and could use stronger European backing. In improving conditions, this might include several hundred more staff, to beef up the current several hundred. Particularly important is the deployment of UN staff outside Baghdad, to help at the provincial and local levels with political engagement and to prepare for provincial elections, which were scheduled to take place by the end of January, 2009, but may be further delayed, and national elections to be held later in 2009. It might also be possible for the EU to add more advisors to Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) or strengthen the UN regional presence.

For the political reconciliation process in Iraq to be successful, it will need the backing of the entire international community, including Iraq’s neighbors.²⁰ Several have been less than fully cooperative. Saudi Arabia harbors continuing suspicions of Prime Minister Maliki in particular and the Shiite-dominated government as a whole.²¹ Iran, while not doing its worst, has pumped money, weapons, and agents into southern Iraq, apparently spreading its bets among the several Shiite factions in an effort to guarantee a win, one way or the other.²² While European sway with both the Saudis and the Iranians is limited, a united US-EU stance would carry weight with both. European influence is also important in restraining Turkey from again intervening forcefully against Kurdish guerillas operating from northern Iraq. European

18 Daniel Serwer and Rend al-Rahim, *Iraq: Politics Unfrozen, Direction Still Unclear*, USIPeace Briefing (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, Jan. 2008).

19 Sudarsan Raghavan, “Parliament Approves Elections Law in Iraq,” *Washington Post*, Sep. 25, 2008.

20 USIP, *Iraq and Its Neighbors*, <http://www.usip.org/iraq/neighbors/index.html>, accessed Feb. 2008.

21 Joseph McMillan, *Saudi Arabia and Iraq: Oil, Religion, and an Enduring Rivalry*, Special Report, no. 157 (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, Jan. 2006).

22 Serwer and Parker, *Iraq after the Surge*.

assistance to Jordan and Syria in managing the burden of Iraqi refugees is vital, as is European help in the process of returning displaced people and refugees to their homes, conditions permitting.

How would the US react to a more aggressive, focused European effort in Iraq? There is sure to be resistance – there are some in Washington who would not want European competition in Iraq, or who simply do not believe Europe has much added value to offer. Overtures by Europeans to engage with the Interior Ministry have been rebuffed in the past. But the overall reaction in a new American administration could be positive, especially if renewed European efforts were presented as a coherent package intended to reinforce Coalition efforts at stabilization. Under improving security conditions, such a package might look something like this:

1. Enhance the United Nation's capacity: add 300 staff.
2. Add European advisors to PRTs: another 200 staff, plus security and logistics.
3. Mentor the Interior Ministry: 200 experienced Interior officials.
4. Beef up diplomacy with Iraq's neighbors.
5. Increase assistance to Syria and Jordan for refugees and to Iraq for returns.

Such a package would not be cheap – a back of the envelope calculation for items 1–4 would put the price tag at a couple of billion euros, plus the price of additional refugee assistance. Nor would it be without risk, even if security conditions become more permissive. It will be a long time before Americans and Europeans can walk the streets of Baghdad, Mosul, or Basra safely. But Americans already go to work in Iraqi ministries – there is no reason why Europeans could not do likewise, provided they adopt appropriate security precautions. Europe would need a substantially increased on-the-ground diplomatic and Commission presence in Baghdad to execute a program like the one outlined here, but the effort and presence required would be commensurate with European interests.

What if things get worse?

There are many ways in which things could “go south” in Iraq: a premature US withdrawal, renewed sectarian fighting, a concerted sectarian effort against the Iraqi security forces, troublemaking by neighbors, collapse of the Iraqi state, a Kurdish move toward independence, violence to protest the creation of a nine-province southern region or to undermine it once it has been created, a strong-man takeover of the Baghdad government that precipitates widespread violence. What can and should the US and Europe do if things go wrong?

Whatever the precipitating factor, one can imagine that this scenario would include a sharp decline in Iraqi oil production and export as well as deteriorating economic conditions, sectarian cleansing in Baghdad, Mosul, and other mixed areas, far larger numbers of displaced people and refugees, exploitation of the situation by al-Qaeda or other international terrorists, radicalization of neighboring populations, and possibly intervention within Iraq by one or more of the neighbors.²³ If unable to quell the violence, Coalition forces would presumably pull out of population centers to

23 Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, *Things Fall Apart: Containing the Spillover From an Iraqi Civil War*, Saban Center Analysis Paper, no. 11 (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, Jan. 2007).

large bases outside Iraq's main cities, and possibly out of Iraq entirely.²⁴ European and US vital interests would remain the same, but rather than trying to achieve them by building effective state institutions, they would have to turn to a containment strategy.

Containment would require above all a robust regional strategy, one that keeps some Coalition troops in Iraq or in the region to strike against international terrorists, dissuades intervention by neighbors, increases their capacity to manage their own sectarian and ethnic strains, and provides ample support to those willing to absorb large numbers of refugees.²⁵ The US is unlikely to be fully effective in bringing Iran and Syria around to a containment strategy, and it will even have difficulty restraining Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

Europe could contribute significantly to these efforts, especially with respect to Turkey and Syria. Turkey's European ambitions are an important constraint on its reaction to Kurdish guerrilla provocations. While Syria's relations with the EU have been strained over the Hariri investigation, the EU could help provide the kind of assistance Syria would need to deal with increased numbers of Iraqi refugees.

Iran is the toughest of the neighbors to deal with, but in the event of a breakdown in Iraq its role will be crucial. Iran would have real concerns: about a flood of refugees, about exacerbated ethnic tensions within Iran, and about the export of arms and extremists from Iraq. If Tehran chooses to manage these problems by a *de facto* takeover of authority in southern Iraq, putting in place its surrogates and ensuring that Iraq's southern oil fields are run for its benefit,²⁶ both European and US interests will be severely damaged and Iran's potential for troublemaking throughout the Middle East will be vastly enhanced.

It therefore behooves Americans and Europeans to encourage Tehran to manage its concerns in other ways. Assistance in dealing with refugees would be important. So too would be restraining Iraq's Sunni neighbors from arming and equipping Sunni militias, which in this scenario would be a bad idea in any event. The US should also avoid encouraging restiveness among Iran's ethnic minorities. Spreading chaos is not likely to be good for either Europe or the US, much as some in the US administration seem anxious to use ethnic minorities to challenge Iran's mullahs.

Iran is particularly difficult to manage because of the nuclear issue. There is a broad political consensus in the US that Iran should not be allowed to obtain nuclear weapons. Sanctions are the most promising avenue if military action is to be avoided. But pressing for sanctions against Iran if Iraq collapses into chaos could provoke Tehran into the kind of troublemaking in Iraq that we would like to avoid. In fact, some of Iran's troublemaking in Iraq so far may have been undertaken in response to efforts to push for sanctions.²⁷

There may be little choice but to postpone increased sanctions against Iran while making it clear that Europe and the United States remain committed to preventing Tehran from getting nuclear weapons. A chaotic Iraq would demand first priority, at least for a time. Once some semblance of order has been restored, Europe and

24 Ibid., pp. 35–37.

25 Ibid., pp. 29, 37–44.

26 Ibid., pp. 16–18.

27 Geoffrey Kemp, *Iran and Iraq: The Shia Connection, Soft Power, and the Nuclear Factor*, Special Report, no. 156 (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, Nov. 2005, pp. 13–16; Serwer, *Iraq: Time for a Change*).

the United States can return to the nuclear proliferation issue and deal with it on its merits.²⁸

The aftermath of a collapse in Iraq would also require US and European attention. Sooner or later, order will be restored, possibly with Iraq split into three or more states, or with a strongman in Baghdad. The strongman scenario is hard to picture: Some measure of democracy in Iraq is not so much a choice as a necessity, since neither Kurds nor Shiites will accept reimposition of a Baghdad-based dictatorship, even one led by one of their own (and in that event, the other group would be highly resistant).

A three-state Iraq seems more likely, and highly problematic as well. A secular, independent Kurdistan may be objectively more attractive from the Turkish perspective than a unified Iraqi theocracy, but it would still rouse Turkey's worst fears about restiveness in its own Kurdish population. The EU would be key to restraining Turkey vis-à-vis an independent Kurdistan.

If a southern "Shiastan" is not to be captured by Iran and used to extend Tehran's influence throughout the Middle East, Europe and the United States will need to provide extensive support, despite theocratic tendencies and the inevitable ambiguities about the extent of Iranian influence. The United States has overcome its hesitations in dealing with the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq (ISCI – Iraq's largest, Iranian-backed political party); it would need to show similar wisdom in dealing with a Shiastan likely to be dominated by the ISCI and the likes of Moqtada al-Sadr, whose nativist rhetoric is ironically closer to what the United States and Europe would like to hear.

Conclusions

The US and Europe not only share common values relevant to the situation in Iraq but also several common interests. These are necessary but not sufficient conditions for cooperation. What is needed in addition is to make Iraq a joint enterprise: a project to which both contribute and on which they share decision making. This is difficult in Iraq because of the bitter history of disagreement over the initial intervention. The United States is not going to surrender overall control over the international intervention in Iraq, and it is likely to hold tight to even small pieces of the puzzle as its influence declines.

This obstacle is not insurmountable. Europe and the US were at odds over Bosnia for four years before they came to agreement on the NATO bombing that led to the end of the war. Even at the Dayton peace talks, friction was far more evident than cooperation. But slowly, "Dayton implementation" became a joint enterprise, one in which Europe played a vital role through leadership of the civilian implementation of bureaucracy, training, and vetting of the Bosnian police, and provision of 85 percent of the peacekeeping troops.²⁹ Something similar happened in Kosovo: the NATO–Yugoslavia war – precipitated under US leadership – ended with a UN protectorate,

28 Ibid.

29 Samuel R. Berger, "A Foreign Policy for the Global Age," speech at conference *Passing the Baton: Challenges of Statecraft for the New Administration* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, Jan. 17, 2001).

one in which Europe again played a key role in leading the UN effort, administering the economic sphere and monitoring the police.

The situation in Iraq is in some respects more amenable: the Coalition forces are clearly under US command, and the United Nations – partly due to newfound US enthusiasm – has recently received a beefed up mandate.³⁰ The United States is acutely aware that it needs help. New European military forces are neither expected nor needed. The main need for European contributions is on the political and diplomatic fronts, where the United Nations shares the lead. Much as European publics dislike the war in Iraq, contributions to the United Nations should be relatively uncontroversial.

Europeans hope the new Obama presidency will abandon what they regard as President Bush's unilateralism and turn toward a more consultative and multilateral approach to foreign and security policy. That may happen – President Obama seems inclined in that direction – but it will not be productive unless Europe responds positively to the initiative. This is particularly important in Iraq, from which the new administration will want to withdraw US forces as quickly as possible. The new President will be looking for increased European contributions worldwide. Top on his list of priorities will be troops for Afghanistan, which the Europeans will be unwilling to provide. It would be a mistake for Europe not to be prepared with a counter offer. A good one would be European civilians to help in the peace-building process in Iraq as the US draws down its forces, assuming that conditions continue to improve.

If instead the US is forced to abandon its state-building project in Iraq in favor of containment, allowing Iraq to break down (if not up), Europe will need to help out. This would be mainly a diplomatic effort with a major humanitarian dimension – not too much to ask of a continent that prides itself on diplomacy and humanitarianism. Coordination on this contingency sooner rather than later would be wise – better to be prepared than to be surprised.

The time has come for the EU and US to recognize that, under either scenario, Iraq will require over the next five years a degree of consultation and burden-sharing not seen in the last five years. It is well past time that Washington, Brussels, and European capitals sat down to take stock and divvy up the enormous responsibilities ahead. Brussels and Washington should launch a concerted effort to design a comprehensive package of European initiatives and American responses on Iraq, to be presented early into the new presidency. Getting ahead of the curve, rather than remaining bogged down in past disagreements, would be a major step forward.

Policy recommendations

- Brussels, Washington, and European capitals should design and present to the new US President a comprehensive package of European initiatives and American responses in Iraq. This package should reinforce Coalition efforts at stabilization and contain plans for continued security improvement or renewed sectarian violence.
- In a “continued improvement” scenario, this package should offer support to the

30 UN Security Council, *Resolution 1770 (2007)*, United Nations, Aug. 10, 2007.

peace-building process. It might contain the following initiatives:

- Adopt the Interior Ministry. The Interior Ministry is Iraq's most pressing security and governance problem. Mentor and train its officials and ensure that the police are nonsectarian. Add 200 experienced Interior officials.
- Enhance the United Nations' capacity. While the political scene is more fluid, it continues to be difficult for Iraqi politicians to produce results. Assist the United Nations with resolving constitutional issues and preparations for provincial elections. Add 300 staff.
- Add European advisors to PRTs, or regional UN offices. Add 200, plus security and logistics.
- Beef up diplomacy with Iraq's neighbors, in a joint US-EU effort.
- Increase assistance to Syria and Jordan for refugees and to Iraq for returns.

■ In a “descent into chaos” scenario, this package should offer diplomatic and humanitarian support. It might contain the following initiatives:

- Assist the United States with the regional dimension of a containment strategy. Help dissuade neighboring countries from intervening and provide humanitarian support to neighbors that take in Iraqi refugees.
- Postpone increasing sanctions against Iran. Stabilizing Iraq would take priority temporarily.
- Assist the United States with the aftermath of collapse. Once order is restored, steer the state or states that emerge in the direction of stability and eventually democracy. Restrain Turkey from interfering with an independent Kurdistan and Iran with a southern “Shiastan.”

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The EU, So Far

Executive Summary

Relations between the European Union (EU) and Iraq have normalized over the last couple of years. But despite committing more than € 900 million to reconstruction efforts since 2003 and having set up a European Commission office in Baghdad in 2005, the European bloc will need to step up its engagement if the country is to manage forthcoming challenges, such as integrating the “Sons of Iraq” into the Iraqi security forces, holding provincial elections, and maintaining security while President Obama leads a drawdown of US combat forces.

Stepping up its engagement will also be in the EU’s interest. For students of EU public policy, the bloc’s reaction during and after the Iraq War represent the same story of impotence that has historically plagued the EU when trying to speak with a single voice. Showing that it is capable of dealing with Iraq will be key to regain the bloc’s foreign policy ambitions.

More practically, instability in Iraq would likely hurt a number of the EU’s strategic interests. It would likely cause Turkey to worry even more about Kurdish separatism than it does already – and less about the domestic reform processes bringing it closer to the EU. Instability in Iraq would also hamper the EU’s drive to secure its energy needs. The summer’s conflict in Georgia and the recent Ukraine-Russian gas feud have exposed the EU’s vulnerability to Russia’s energy production and made the building of strong ties to Iraq – with 10 percent of the world’s proven oil reserves – a key concern. Finally, increased support to Iraq will be needed if the refugee crisis, which has enveloped the broader region, is to be effectively addressed.

The election of Barack Obama in the United States should also allow not only for better transatlantic cooperation on Iraq, but a kind of cooperation based on facts and future considerations rather than disagreements about past policies. Accordingly, in an eight-page “reflection paper” on transatlantic relations, France – recently chair of the EU’s six-month rotating presidency – pushed for the EU to engage in Iraq “without delay.” To do so, however, we argue that the 27-member bloc should focus on: entrenching good governance, especially in the security sector; facilitating forthcoming high-stakes elections; and investing in a framework for regional stability.

Specifically, the EU should strengthen the EU Rule of Law Mission in Iraq, with a particular emphasis on police governance and strategic planning for Iraqi police; Europeanize the existing NATO military/gendarmerie mission in Iraq; and combine these two missions into one European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) mission, and add a third pillar dealing with border management and security. A senior EU Special Representative (EUSR) should be appointed to head this mission as well as an

expanded Commission office in Baghdad, as in the case of the joined-up EU missions in Skopje, FYROM.

Policies focused on Iraq need to be complimented by regional initiatives. The EU should invite the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) heads of state and Iraqi leaders to a summit, appoint a second European envoy to pursue regional diplomacy with the GCC and offer the Gulf states – as well as Iraq – a regional security process based on the Security Pact model in the Balkans. This process should focus attention on border security and maritime security, aiming to develop regional security concepts on both – potentially as the basis for a new “Gulf Conflict Prevention Center.”

Introduction

Few diplomatic conflicts have blown up so publicly yet been patched up so quietly as the intra-European disagreement over the invasion of Iraq. Five years after the “shock and awe” bombing of Baghdad, with Iraq now experiencing a period of relative calm and al-Qaeda at last on the back foot, a consensus is emerging across the EU on the need to normalize relations with Iraq.¹ This is right, but not enough: The EU needs a strategy to sustain stability in Iraq and its uneasy neighborhood that is actively supported by even those European states, like Spain and Greece, whose governments actively opposed the war. The transition process in Iraq is of crucial importance to the EU because of Iraq’s size, its vast oil reserves, its regional importance, and its geographic location on the southeastern border of accession candidate Turkey.

Instability in Iraq – and any consequent moves toward greater autonomy for the Kurdish north – would likely cause Ankara to worry even more about Kurdish separatism in Turkey than it does already, and less about the domestic reform processes bringing it closer to the EU. Continued instability would also hamper the EU’s drive to secure its energy needs. The summer’s conflict in Georgia and the annual gas spat between Russia and Ukraine have exposed the EU’s vulnerability to Russia’s energy production and has made the building of strong ties to Iraq – with 10 percent of the world’s proven oil reserves – a matter of Realpolitik, not just altruism.

Stronger EU engagement in Iraq will also be important for the future of US-EU relations, though the situation in Iraq is currently absent from the transatlantic agenda. Barack Obama can be expected to ask European leaders to increase their support in Iraq, as he seeks to drawdown US forces and implement a new Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), which puts the United States in a supportive rather than directorial role vis-à-vis the Iraqi government.²

Lasting stability in Iraq and a drawdown of US forces will also be key to reinforcing NATO’s Afghanistan mission – an operation which is a much higher priority for European governments, as well as another Obama Administration priority.³

- 1 Richard Gowan, “The EU and Iraq: Starting to Find a Strategy?” *Commentary*, ECFR, Jan. 26, 2008; see also Daniel Korski and Richard Gowan, “On Iraq, It’s Time to Call Europe,” *Atlantic Community*, June 4, 2008.
- 2 US-led Coalition forces participating in the 2003 invasion of Iraq were initially subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of their parent states. Since the handover of sovereign power to an Iraqi administration, Coalition forces in Iraq were nominally subject to Iraqi jurisdiction, but operated without any Status of Forces Agreement. Now there is a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA).
- 3 “More Troops Needed in Afghanistan: US Commander,” *AFP*, Sep. 5, 2008.

Meanwhile, any effort to counterbalance Iran's aspirations to regional hegemony and dissuading Teheran from pursuing nuclear weapons will require a stronger, more independent and cooperative government in Baghdad.

There are also humanitarian factors: Over 2.5 million people are displaced within Iraq, with 2 million more scattered across the Middle East. A survey for the UN's refugee agency in March 2008 found that 20 percent of Iraqi refugees survive on less than \$100 a month – only five months earlier the figure was just 5 percent. So even though Iraq is experiencing an unprecedented period of calm, it is both precarious and reversible. Two immediate challenges – integrating Iraq's Sunni militias, who are instrumental in turning the tide against the insurgency, into Iraqi security forces, and holding provincial elections – raise the risk of a resurgence of violence.

Making matters even worse is the power shift taking place across the Middle East, which includes: a recalibration of US influence; the rise of Iran; and the unprecedented involvement in regional peace-making by new actors like Qatar and Turkey. As Joschka Fischer, the former German Foreign Minister, has written, the US-led invasion of Iraq “has helped give rise to a new Middle East, one which threatens to be more volatile than its predecessor.”⁴

To help Iraq in this period, greater EU commitment is required, especially if the incoming US administration draws down its forces. The United States (US) will be the main player in Iraq for years to come, having now agreed a SOFA and a Strategic Framework Agreement, which sets out a long-term bilateral relationship in the fields of education, technology, culture, etc. But the EU, in the words of the European Parliament, “can do much more and much better” in its relationship with Iraq.⁵

This chapter reviews what the EU has done in Iraq, noting the leading role of the European Commission, but arguing that European policy should now shift to focus on three areas in which the EU has a record of experience: entrenching good governance, especially in the security sector; facilitating forthcoming high-stakes elections; and investing in a framework for regional stability.

The European Union and Iraq: the road traveled

The EU's assistance to Iraq has grown steadily since 2003. In the immediate aftermath of the war, Member States were so bitterly divided that there was no joint European policy toward Iraq – US officials in Baghdad had little desire for one.⁶ But the EU moved beyond this period of recrimination quite quickly. From 2004, there was widespread readiness to contribute to reconstruction, if mainly from abroad. The European Commission took a lead on aid and humanitarian challenges that Member States were still unready or unwilling to stomach.

In mid-2004, the EU agreed on a new strategy paper for Iraq based on an EC draft. It co-hosted, with the United States, an international conference in Brussels to discuss Iraq's reconstruction. In June 2005, an EU ministerial troika visited Baghdad for the first time while a small EC delegation was set up in the grounds of the British

4 Joschka Fischer, “Out of the Ashes,” *The Guardian*, May 5, 2008.

5 “EU Parliament: Europe's Efforts in Iraq Failing; Must Do More to Help,” *AP*, Feb. 27, 2008.

6 For an excellent summary of the EU's initial lack of direction on Iraq, see Richard Youngs, *Europe and Iraq: From Stand-off to Engagement?* (London: Foreign Policy Centre, 2004).

embassy in Baghdad. The bloc's small, police-training mission (EUJUST LEX) was launched the same month (see next section). The European Commission supported Iraq's constitutional process, including the referendum in October 2005 and legislative elections in December 2005.

The EU has thrown a lot of money at Iraq, or at least pledged a lot of aid – \$3.5 billion since 2003, € 900 million of it from the European Commission.⁷ Much of this has not been spent well, or at all. But as proof of Iraq's newfound “normality,” the European Commission is switching from channeling aid through the International Reconstruction Fund for Iraq (IRFFI) to making bilateral agreements.

In 2008 alone, the European Commission expects to have spent € 72.8 million in development and an additional € 20 million in humanitarian aid, primarily on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees. As another sign of normalization, the European Commission is rolling out its first two-year investment strategy and negotiating a Trade and Cooperation Agreement that should provide an overall framework for an even closer EU-Iraq relationship. In a vote of confidence on Iraq's future stability, the European Commission is moving its staff from Amman to a new office in Baghdad.

But while the emerging EU policy has many strengths, it is hard to escape the conclusion it still bears the hallmarks of the pre-Maastricht polity the bloc no longer wants to be: technocratic, apolitical, and excessively reliant on the European Commission. The European Commission should not be blamed for having taken a lead role in Iraq – it was bold to do so – but there are limitations to its leverage and range of tools.

In spite of the European Commission's prioritization of Iraqi IDPs and refugees, for example, some Member States lag behind. The proportion of Iraqi asylum-seekers recognized as refugees in the EU varied from 85 percent in Germany and 82 percent in Sweden to 13 percent in Britain. Five EU countries return Iraqi asylum seekers, although the rest do not. As Barack Obama noted in a policy paper, countries such as “Great Britain, Australia, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark” have done “woefully little to meet the refugee crisis.”⁸ “A dismal performance,” argues Thorsten Benner, in light of the EU's “aspiration of being a ‘normative superpower.’”⁹

The essential step toward a more effective EU strategy toward Iraq is for European governments to develop political and security initiatives to match the European Commission's economic drive. Some omens are good: Whereas France was once the EU's leading Iraq skeptic, Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner has visited Iraq twice, even flying into Nasiriya shortly after the airbase had come under attack. But cooperation remains ad hoc: European foreign ministers have not acted on proposals for an EU Special Representative to Iraq, allowing internal discussions about the Lisbon Treaty – which, if ratified, will rearrange the bloc's diplomatic footprint – to take precedence over effective representation in Iraq. If the European Commission is moving staff to Baghdad, talk of a joint Council/Commission office there has gone nowhere – and only 14 EU countries have embassies in the capital.

EU members know that the EU could never have a leadership role in Iraq, even if wanted one. On political and security issues, the United States will retain its primacy

7 Eneko Landaburu, “Note for the Attention of Mr. Richelle, DG AIDCO,” Apr. 20, 2008.

8 Barack Obama, “Barack Obama: Turning the Page In Iraq,” 2007.

9 Thorsten Benner, “Wanted: An Iraq Strategy,” *The Guardian*, May 14, 2008.

– even if it starts reducing its forces. In as far as there is space for the international community to play a greater political role inside Iraq, the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) already has an established role, and increased its staff and activities in 2008. The EU cannot supplant either the United States or the United Nations, not to mention the increasingly assertive Iraqi government.

But it can play a more significant supporting role in Iraq and its region – and the very fact that its role will remain limited should allow the EU to agree on a tightly focused strategy with a short list of objectives. It should avoid being distracted by secondary tasks best left to the United States, United Nations, or (most likely) Iraqis themselves.

EU interventions from the Balkans to Kinshasa have left it with considerable experience in three areas that are relevant to Iraq: developing good governance, elections (although this is also an area of UN expertise), and nurturing regional security. The EU's objectives in Iraq should thus be to help civilianize Iraq's politics further, support the forthcoming electoral process, and offer backing to a framework for regional stability, including greater intra-regional and EU-Gulf ties.

Governance and electoral issues: a coordinated approach

The key to long-term stability in Iraq is an operationally and politically credible security sector. Although the Iraqi military and police have improved a great deal of late, they still have many deficiencies. The role of Sunni fighters in defeating Islamist factions raised the specter of the country going the way of Lebanon, where the government and army cannot break the hold of militias on politics. Efforts to integrate the Sunni “Sons of Iraq” into the security forces have been flawed, lacking top-level political support. It is essential to continue strengthening Iraq's security forces and ensuring they are under full civilian control.

More specifically, it is important that Iraqi domestic security should ultimately be police-led, not military-led. A permanently militarized society will always risk future autocracy. And, as recent reports of continued guerrilla infiltration from Syria into Iraq show, both the police and military need to step up border security. Finally, security forces are only as good as the administrative support they receive. Unfortunately, Iraq's ministerial capacity has been lacking, with problems particularly acute in the areas of planning, HR, logistics, and procurement.

These are matters on which the EU has expertise and already has a locus in Iraq. The EUJUST LEX mission, founded in 2005 and headquartered in Brussels, has overseen specialized training for the Iraqi police, as well as judicial and penitentiary officials. By November 2008, 1,795 individuals had received training on topics ranging from crowd control to forensic investigation.¹⁰

This training has not only been deliberately very technical in focus, but conducted almost entirely outside Iraq. The results have, unsurprisingly, been mixed. One European diplomat described the EUJUST LEX mission as having “had demonstrably minimal impact on the effectiveness of these [police] institutions due to lack of sound management, lack of follow-up, and the fact that member states have prioritized ‘gesture training’ rather than sought to deliver what Iraq needs.” Catriona

¹⁰ European Council Factsheet, “EU Rule of Law Mission for Iraq (EUJUST LEX),” Nov. 2008.

Gourlay and Annalisa Monaco even argue that the mission may have been “good for ESDP” but “not enough for Iraq.”¹¹

However, on November 10, 2008, European foreign ministers extended the life of the mission and authorized it “to carry out, progressively and on an experimental basis, where security conditions permit, pilot activities in the area of the rule of law on Iraqi territory.”¹² In the background, the Danish and Dutch governments have sought to gather support among European governments for an expansion of EULEX JUST and presented a “non-paper” in late 2008, suggesting ways this could happen. The European Commission, meanwhile, is proposing a set of complimentary activities in 2009, including capacity-building in the Ministry of Interior.

These are good (if cautious) steps forward. While EUJUST LEX should not drop its technical remit, its engagement on Iraqi territory will inevitably lead it to address how the police interact with elected authorities, civil society, judiciary, and the military. Its staff (which will need to be expanded significantly from the current 30 personnel – and considerably better recruited, trained, and managed) should work with the Iraqis to develop new field education modules on police governance and civil-military relations, training soldiers as well as police.

Experience in cases such as Kosovo suggests that particular attention will need to be given to strategic planning by the Iraqi police – it is difficult for local commanders to shift from crisis management to long-term crime reduction and public order challenges. Strategic planning education is, however, a useful vehicle for reinforcing ties between the police, judiciary, society, and the military.¹³ It will also be crucial for the EU mission to take a greater role in building the ministerial capacity needed to manage the security forces. Iraq’s ministerial capacity lags behind its operational capacity, because US advisory efforts to date have done little to build sustainable, indigenous government systems, at the central or provincial level. The EU mission would make a major contribution by helping the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Interior improve their systems for planning, finance, HR management, and procurement.

But the EU will only gain real leverage over civil-military relations if it is prepared to take on military training, too. Here again, the EU has an existing institutional base from which to work. This is NATO’s 150-strong Training Mission in Iraq (NTM-I), which concentrates on educating Iraqi senior military staff and (with Italian Carabinieri participation) National Police training in and around Baghdad.¹⁴ Although NTM-I’s commander is American, most personnel come from the EU Member States.

Focusing hard on Afghanistan and Kosovo, NATO does not need the additional chore of looking after NTM-I. The EU should offer to take this on (resolving tensions in Brussels by formally sharing its reports with NATO HQ) and convert the mission

11 Catriona Gourlay and Annalisa Monaco, “Training Civilians and Soldiers to Improve Security in Iraq: an Update of EU and NATO Efforts,” *European Security Review* 25, p. 1.

12 European Council, “Council Conclusions on the ESDP,” Nov. 10–11, 2008.

13 For a positive assessment of how Iraqi civil society might perceive EU involvement, see Rouzbeh Pirouz and Zoé Nautré, *An Action Plan for Iraq: The Perspective of Iraqi Civil Society* (London: The Foreign Policy Centre, Feb. 2005).

14 For an overview of NTM-I, see http://www.jfcnaples.nato.int/JFCN_Missions/NTM-I/NTM-I.htm.

into the second pillar of its ESDP mission in Iraq to complement EUJUST LEX. It would continue NTM-I's task "to help Iraq develop an effective, democratically led and enduring security sector." Such a move will require close US-EU coordination. Iraq's security forces will primarily be supported by the US; and attempts to offer "joint" support to the army and police have, in the past, floundered (such as with the US proposal for joint staff college). But there should be room for both US and European contributions.

The expanding ESDP mission could take on a number of other responsibilities, offering to take over US programs in areas like judicial training to ease the American burden and avoid duplication. A potential third pillar of its activities should be advisory work on border security, on which the EU has operational experience in the Caucasus (and on which many European personnel have knowledge through work with the OSCE). The new ESDP mission to Kosovo has a border security pillar, and the proposed mission in Iraq could copy this. Such a border role should not only be focused on technical border security, but also on customs reform and in helping Iraq's negotiations with its neighbors on cross-border trade.

Nonetheless, the deployment of the ESDP mission to Kosovo has been complicated by frictions between its police, judicial, and border security pillars. The EU's experience in Bosnia-Herzegovina shows that such frictions are best dealt with through appointing a high-level envoy to oversee ESDP activities. We have noted that similar ideas for Iraq have not materialized, but they must be put back on the table. And, to build on the European Commission's hard work to date, the new envoy should also be double-hatted as the head of the newly-enlarged EC office in Baghdad.

To recap, the proposed ESDP mission in Iraq – the headquarters of which must be based in Baghdad, not Brussels – would consist of three pillars under the EU Special Representative (EUSR): Police/Judicial, Military Training, and Border Security.¹⁵ The EUSR would have separate responsibility for the EC office, but ensure close liaison between these two fiefs. The profile of the mission – its dispersal to regional offices and mix of training and direct advisory functions – would need to be agreed with the Iraqi government, and cleared with the United States and the United Nations. The EUSR's mandate should include instructions on coordination with the UN's Special Representative, European ambassadors, and American commanders.¹⁶ Perhaps most problematically, the mission staff would need to be increased considerably – it seems reasonable to project 400–500 personnel as a goal.¹⁷ In addition, European governments need to be willing to take risks with EU staff across the country. The issue of security for mission staff in Iraq is contentious, but unless European governments are willing to take greater – if carefully calculated – risks, it is hard to see how the EU

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- 15 In Kosovo, the EU mission has separate police and judicial pillars. However, these are both involved in operational, rather than solely training, activities. Where only training is involved, there is no reason to split the two. Penitentiary training would also continue to be this pillar's responsibility.
- 16 UNAMI's current mandate (UNSCR 1770) twice refers to border security, for example, so it would be necessary to avoid duplication in this area. But there is no shortage of work to do on it.
- 17 This assumes: (i) employing roughly 100–150 police and judicial trainers; (ii) a slightly smaller complement of border security advisers; (iii) maintaining or enlarging the military component on the current level of NTM-I; (iv) a central administrative staff in Baghdad to back the EUSR. It does not include EC staff.

will be able to make a difference not only in Iraq but also in other fragile, failing, and failed states.

A shorter-term concern of any EUSR in Iraq would be assisting in the highly sensitive series of elections to be held through 2009 – these should be an EU priority even in the absence of an enhanced ESDP presence.¹⁸ Here, the EU will have to be particularly sensitive to the United Nation's prerogatives in Iraq: the second actionable item in UNAMI's mandate is to “the Government of Iraq and the Independent High Electoral Commission on the development of processes for holding elections and referenda.”

Fortunately, the EU and United Nations have a good track record in working on elections together. This is true in Iraq, where the EU paid two-thirds of the costs of landmark elections held in 2005, and the whole cost of that year's constitutional referendum. This was mainly funneled through UN channels, and External Affairs Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner boasted that “the EU has been the UN's key partner in this essential task.”¹⁹ But EU-UN cooperation on electoral affairs has been even more intense elsewhere: In 2006, the European Commission deployed 200 election monitors to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to observe national elections coordinated by the UN mission there – the European Commission provided € 149 million to fund the elections.

Although the situation in the DRC has deteriorated markedly since, the Congolese elections were generally considered fair and competently-run – no mean feat in an unstable country the size of Western Europe. In terms of both funding and monitoring, the EU should be ready to repeat this level of engagement in the forthcoming Iraqi polls by deploying a substantial Observer Mission. Indeed, the elections offer the EU a significant public relations opportunity (though this is not to diminish the risks involved). If the EU were to appoint a polished EUSR, he or she should be able to win positive attention through championing a free, fair vote. The sooner the EU is able to overcome its wariness of a single envoy in Iraq, the better.

Iraq, Europe, and the Arab Gulf region

Whatever Europe's contribution to stability in Iraq, progress inside the country could be disrupted or destroyed by events in its surrounding neighborhood. Although there is a tendency to exaggerate the potential contribution of Iraq's neighbors to the country's stability, the cooperation of six states – Jordan, Turkey, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Iran – remains crucial to Iraq's transition.²⁰ Iraq is in many ways dependent on its neighbors, most importantly because of its limited access to the Arab Gulf, the vulnerability of its overland oil pipelines, and its dependence on the uninterrupted flow of the Tigris and the Euphrates. In addition, it has a legacy of unsettled disputes with most of its neighbors, most notably Iran, compounded by the regional reverberations of the original US-led invasion of Iraq.

¹⁸ The first elections, at the provincial level, will be held on Jan. 31, 2009. Parliamentary elections will follow later in the year. The advice here applies to the later votes, as there is now little time to prepare new initiatives for the earlier ones.

¹⁹ EC, *EU Biggest Donor for Iraq's Elections and Referendum*, Oct. 21, 2005.

²⁰ David Pollock, ed., “With Neighbors Like These Iraq and the Arab States on Its Borders,” *Policy Focus*, no. 70 (June 2007).

The EU, like all parties interested in Iraq's security, has to think regionally. This comes naturally to European security specialists conditioned by the challenges of inter-connected peace processes in the western Balkans. EU members have direct interests in regional security in the Middle East and Gulf. These include not only the Turkish and energy questions highlighted in our introduction, but also the fate of European peacekeepers in Lebanon and the EU's role in the Middle East Peace Process.²¹ If the "Middle East" is interpreted at its broadest, the 2008 decision to send an ESDP naval mission to fight pirates at the mouth of the Red Sea is another investment in the region's security.

Nonetheless, the EU has played only a small part in a considerable US-led effort aimed at normalizing relations between Iraq and its neighbors (with the initial exception of Syria and Iran). US-backed diplomatic efforts included a two-day international conference on Iraq in November 2004 at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. This included representatives from Iraq, its neighbors (Iran and Syria included), the G8, the United Nations, the Arab League, the EU, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference. The European leaders present only attended the second day of the event – the first day had been for regional leaders only (the United States accepted the same terms).

This set the precedent for a series of ministerial conferences of Iraq's neighbors: In 2006, a conference was organized in Saudi Arabia on religious dialogue. The next year, Syria (rather ironically) hosted a meeting on securing Iraq's borders. 2008 has seen meetings in Kuwait and Turkey. The EU has supported Iraq's outreach to its neighbors from the outset, with the European Commission active at all ministerial meetings and in three working-level forums addressing regional issues. Benita Ferrero-Walder has lobbied the Gulf states to open embassies in Baghdad and forgive Iraq's pre-war debt. European foreign ministers regularly note the need for better neighborly relations.²²

But the impact of all these conferences and dialogues has not been great. As a recent report to Congress euphemistically puts it: "[S]tatements agreed to and commitments made by Iraqis and their neighbors in regional conferences held since 2003 generally have not been implemented."²³ This is because, fascinating as the ministerial discussions doubtless are, they do not address the core issue in the region: radical shifts in the balance of power unleashed by the US-led invasion of Iraq. The Gulf region and broader Middle East are consumed by a struggle between rising Iran – whose investments in Hamas, Hizbullah, and Syria paid off, while the high oil price has filled its coffers – and an alliance led by Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, who fear Iran's regional dominance and influence over Shiite communities within their borders.

This struggle is replicated inside Iraq, with Iran and Saudi Arabia backing the Shiite and Sunni factions respectively. This is only likely to increase as (in the words of last year's US National Intelligence Estimate) Iraq's neighbors "focus on improving their leverage in Iraq in anticipation of a Coalition drawdown."

²¹ See Richard Gowan, "From Beirut to Baghdad?" *E!Sharp* (Sep-Oct 2007).

²² Correspondence with EU diplomat, Sep. 20, 2008; see also "Messages-cadres sur l'Iraq," General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, June 25, 2008.

²³ Christopher M. Blanchard, ed., *Iraq: Regional Perspectives and US Policy*, Report for Congress (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, Apr. 4, 2008).

The Turkish incursion into northern Iraq in 2007 and early 2008 showed the difficulties that direct intervention can create, so Iraq's neighbors will likely avoid a direct conflict but confront each other via their proxies. Even if violence has decreased dramatically, in part because Iran appears to have paused or at least decreased the arming of Shiite militias, future flashpoints – such as the process of integrating the “Sons of Iraq” into the Iraqi security forces or next year's elections – could see Iraq's neighbors revert to promoting violence there.

The steps toward a more effective EU strategy inside Iraq outlined above are meant to reduce the danger of these flashpoints. It must be admitted that, both inside Iraq and regionally, European policy will have only a marginal impact on the risks involved relative to shifts in the US military's posture. Nonetheless, the EU has unexploited opportunities to contribute to regional stability on the basis of its economic diplomacy in the area. Specifically, the cooperation between the EU and the Gulf has been growing – independently of Iraq. Trade between the EU and the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has risen steadily. Annual ministerial meetings have taken place since 1988 and cooperation now also includes non-proliferation. The EU had a \$22.4-billion trade deficit with the GCC in 2006.

Unfortunately, links between the EU and the Gulf remain largely technical and trade-oriented. European foreign policy toward the countries of the GCC has been lacking in the kind of comprehensive range of policy instruments seen in the EU's relations with its eastern neighbors. As Richard Youngs and Ana Echagüe point out, this is true both at the EU- and Member State levels, with only the United Kingdom and France maintaining a significant political engagement.²⁴

Breakthroughs have floundered on the technical nature of the EU's approach, the reluctance by Gulf states to negotiate as a group – and unify positions on issues like tariff structures – as well as uncertainty about the EU's seriousness. A preference for bilateralism by key EU states has also played a role.

Progress toward an EU-GCC Free Trade Agreement has failed to reach a result despite supposedly high hopes on all sides. The EU-GCC Joint Council and Ministerial Meeting takes place only once a year to no discernable effect.²⁵ Talk of a “Helsinki-type” regional security framework that encompasses Iran and the GCC countries has also been stymied by suspicions that such an arrangement would prove an instrument for regime-change across the Middle East. The Helsinki Final Act, after all, precipitated the collapse of the Soviet Union.

To overcome this impasse, the EU should build on the precedent set by the launch of the Mediterranean Union in Paris and invite the GCC heads of state, *along with Iraqis*, to an EU Summit at the earliest possible opportunity. Such a meeting – the first of its kind – could issue a political declaration on strengthening ties. Another EUSR could be appointed to follow up on this.

A bold way for the EU to follow through would be to offer the Gulf states a model of regional cooperation based on an earlier success in the Balkans: the Stability Pact.

24 Richard Youngs and Ana Echagüe, “Europe and The Gulf: Strategic Neglect”, *Studia Diplomatica* LX:1 (2007).

25 Leonie Holthaus, “EU and Arab Gulf States: Untapped Cooperation Opportunities,” *Atlantic Community*, Sep. 19, 2008.

This conflict-prevention mechanism was launched in 1999, bringing together the countries of the region with the members of the EU and other interested states and organizations to discuss issues ranging from the reconstruction of war-damaged areas to human capital. It proved a remarkably successful forum for states that had recently been at war to address common problems together.

One reason was that it offered a “European perspective” to the Balkan states. No such inducement is on offer to GCC members. Nonetheless, EU-GCC engagement could be moved beyond the purely technical/economic level through a Stability Pact-style process covering a range of issues: energy, development, education, environment, health, monetary affairs ... and Iraq’s security. The goal of these processes would be to embed talks on Iraqi stability in concrete discussions of other regional concerns, rather than the insubstantial talks of recent years.

There are two areas of security cooperation that both apply to Iraq and extend beyond it to concern GCC members more generally. The first of these is border management, which has been a priority within the organization since its inception in 1981. In 2007, the research group Oxford Analytica noted that Saudi Arabia and Kuwait were working to secure their borders with Iraq. “For the GCC,” it concluded, “‘fencing off’ Iraq is one of the best and least risky ways of appearing to support the security effort in Iraq, and fits with broader GCC policy of strengthening the alliance’s external borders.”²⁶ If, as we propose, the EU engaged directly in Iraqi border security through an ESDP mission, it could link this to cooperation with the GCC on general border questions.

This might involve EU support for border management across the Gulf region – a shift away from a variety of penny-packet, bilateral assistance programs in existence today. The launch of such a region-wide program could be prepared by an EU/GCC Border Management Conference, held at either the expert or political level, organized in the Gulf. This could, in turn, lead to the agreement of a border management concept – and guide the work of a Border Management Team modeled on an existing European equivalent at the OSCE’s Conflict Prevention Centre in Vienna.²⁷ If an EU-backed version of this team were to be set up in the GCC region, it would be one step toward wider regional security cooperation.

The second major potential security topic for GCC-EU discussions – and perhaps another priority for a “Gulf Conflict Prevention Centre” with EU backing – is maritime security. Piracy, especially off the coast of Somalia, is a matter of joint concern. More serious still is the risk of an accidental maritime confrontation, most obviously between the United States and Iranian navies. The downing of Iran Air Flight 655 by the US Navy in 1988 over the Straits of Hormuz is exactly the kind of incident that could trigger a larger conflagration in the Gulf. To minimize the likelihood of accidental clashes, EU-GCC discussions could start to explore the scope for regional maritime confidence-building measures.

As our references to a Gulf Conflict Prevention Centre suggest, GCC-EU relations would require some degree of institutionalization. The European Commission already has an office in Saudi Arabia, and it may be useful to anchor a Stability Pact-type arrangement there, creating a joint secretariat headed by a GCC representative

²⁶ See “Gulf States: Border Moves Yield Slow Progress,” *Oxford Analytica*, Feb. 19, 2007.

²⁷ For an overview, see <http://www.osce.org/cpc/13276.html>.

and the new EU envoy to the organization. This would not be on the scale of the new secretariat for the Mediterranean Union being readied in Barcelona, but again the Mediterranean precedent is useful. The EU could set up satellite offices in other Arab Gulf states while converting the Riyadh office into an EU “hub,” which can host more functional expertise. As the European Council noted in May 2007, all the Gulf needs to do to obtain more support from the EU is ask.²⁸

The EU’s new hub could connect to a range of like-minded initiatives. The non-governmental Gulf Dialogue, organized by the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) and hosted by the Bahraini government has tapped into regional interests in closer security cooperation: The meetings are now regularly attended by ministers from Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Yemen, Iran, Iraq, and British, French, American, and Australian officials. The insertion of an EU presence would be a mutually reinforcing move. The EU could back up its regional initiative by funding European studies centers in the new generation of universities that Gulf governments are now encouraging.

Would these gradualist reforms make any difference? There is good reason to be skeptical that regional initiatives are likely, in the short-term at least, to compel Iraq’s neighbors to abandon the pursuit of their national interests in favor of a collective settlement. Iraq’s constituent political and ethnic groups are also unlikely to give up their pursuit of parochial interests in favor of national unity. But with US policy in flux, at least until the new US President is firmly in office and his foreign policy team confirmed by the US Senate – which will not be before spring 2009 – the EU has an opportunity to prepare a new regional agenda for the benefit of Iraq’s stability and as a basis for extending stability from Europe to the Mediterranean and down to the Arab Gulf.

Conclusion

Iraq faces daunting challenges. The drawdown of US forces will have both positive and negative impacts on developments inside Iraq and the role played by its neighbors. One risk is that a withdrawal will encourage Iraqi factions anticipating a power vacuum to seek local solutions – and external aid – which could intensify sectarian violence and even intra-sectarian competition. Even with violence at a historical low, the humanitarian situation inside and outside Iraq has become appalling.

Renewed instability in Iraq would hurt the EU in a number of ways and the risk should stimulate greater EU engagement there. Europe cannot replace the United States in the Gulf; but through diplomatic legerdemain, it can help avoid the creation of a dangerous vacuum.

Our recommendations on how the EU can help avert this could be described as a “tale of two envoys” – one leading an enhanced ESDP presence in Iraq, the other working with the GCC to foster regional stability. We summarize the processes we believe these envoys should lead as follows:

²⁸ See Council Conclusions on Iraq, General Affairs and External Relations Council, EU, May 27, 2008.

In Iraq:

- Strengthen the existing EU Rule of Law Mission in Iraq, with a particular emphasis on police governance and strategic planning for Iraqi police.
- Europeanize the existing NATO military/gendarmerie mission in Iraq.
- Combine these two missions into one ESDP mission, and add a third pillar dealing with border security.
- Place this mission under the authority of an EUSR, who should also be double-hatted as head of the expanded Commission office in Baghdad.
- Support the United Nation's electoral activities through financing and monitoring, and promote the new EUSR as champion of free and fair polls through 2009.

In the region:

- Hold a conference of EU and GCC heads of state, also inviting Iraq.
- Appoint a second EUSR to pursue regional diplomacy with the GCC.
- Offer the GCC – and Iraq – a regional security process based on the Security Pact model in the Balkans.
- Focus attention on border security and maritime security in this process, aiming to develop regional security concepts on both – potentially as the basis for a new “Gulf Conflict Prevention Centre.”
- Institutionalize an EU-GCC secretariat as a hub in Riyadh, with satellite offices around the region.
- Link these efforts to like-minded diplomatic processes, including the IISS “Gulf Dialogue.”

This combination of in-country and regional initiatives will only work as part of a wider, multi-institutional, international approach to Iraq. It will not necessarily even be a central element. But on Iraq, as on many issues of concern to the next US administration, the EU has to demonstrate that it is even marginally relevant. If it does not, its own concerns will go unmet – perhaps fairly.

What can Europe do in Iraq?

Recommendations

We are very grateful for the deep insight and valuable recommendations of the contributors to this publication. They assess, like other political analysts, the current situation in Iraq as far from being stable. The political, security, economic, and social developments will remain extremely fragile and volatile for the near future. The main factors for continued violence and ongoing instability are the deep-rooted conflicts among the main political forces as well as the ethnic and sectarian cleavages. Iraq is also being impacted by some of its neighbors in the region who are fighting out their own specific national interests on its turf.

This very short analysis leads to the assumption that the development in Iraq can only be consolidated by broad-based internal reconciliation, supported by an extraordinary, lasting international effort and regional assistance. Only through such a concerted effort will Iraq have the chance to move in the direction of a democratic nation-state following the rule of law and respecting human and minority rights. Vice versa: without rule of law and respect to minority rights there will be no stable Iraq.

As we approach the sixth anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, it almost comes as a surprise that the European Union still has not taken a comprehensive and strong initiative to consolidate a close joint relationship with Iraq. Although the reduction of violence has been quite significant and a democratically elected government under Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is in power, a major decision of the EU to beef up political support and economic cooperation is only slowly evolving. In Iraq, the perception prevails that the EU up until now has been shying away from a meaningful role in the reconstruction of Iraq.

The Heinrich Böll Foundation is convinced that it is very much in the European Union's own political and economic interests to make every effort to stabilize Iraq. We feel encouraged by the findings of our authors to call on the European Union and its Member States to lift the future of Iraq to the top of its foreign policy agenda.

The contributions to this report reinforce that transatlantic cooperation and joint initiatives are greatly needed in the coming months. From statements prior and since his election, we conclude that President Barack Obama will welcome a stronger (civic) engagement from Europe and will be looking for joint initiatives to rebuild the Iraqi economy as well as its governmental structures.

Out of the many valuable and far-reaching recommendations made by Layla Al Zubaidi, Bülent Aras, Megan Chabalowski, Richard Gowan, Faleh Jabar, Daniel Korski, Sami Moubayed, Daniel Serwer, and Heiko Wimmen, the Heinrich Böll Foundation wishes to highlight a number of key options for the European Union. These recommendations should be seriously considered to engage the EU in Iraq and to seek

enhanced cooperation with Iraqi authorities, regional neighbors, and the United States.

The European Union should:

- reinforce **transatlantic cooperation** to consolidate peace and pursue political, economic, and social development in partnership with the Iraqi government. We consider Iraqi ownership as crucial in this process. The new US administration provides a broad window of opportunity for close collaboration. It is also very important to show regional players, such as Iran and Syria, that former divisions concerning Middle East politics have been overcome;
- nominate a **Special European Envoy** to coordinate its efforts and to deal with all issues concerning EU–Iraq relations on the political level. The mandate should be to concentrate on building closer and better relations between the EU, Iraq, and beyond to tune with international and regional players in order of the outstanding challenge in the reconstruction of Iraq;
- develop a **comprehensive package of EU initiatives** to improve stability and security of Iraq as Serwer and Chabalowski propose, including training of police and armed forces and support for the development of the legal system. It should be presented to and negotiated with the new US administration in order to develop a common strategy and a coordinated approach. Stability and security are preconditions for socio-economic development and foreign investment in Iraq. Both Serwer and Korski/Gowan rightly suggest strengthening the EU Mission as well as increasing its support for the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq;
- make use of its rich experience of **state-building and managing transition and peace-building processes** to support the Iraqi government and state infra-structure by educating, training, and mentoring personnel of key ministries, such as the ministries of the Interior and Justice. Both Korski/Gowan as well as Serwer/Chabalowski call for human resources of about 200 to 500 European officials as part of a broad initiative with consent and in coordination with the Iraqi government to empower state institutions and to train officials and qualified staff, as well as support and enhance the UN in resolving institutional issues and electoral issues;
- establish permanent and intense relations to **Iraqi decision makers** on different sides of the political spectrum: Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish. This should particularly include a younger generation of future potential leaders. Following Moubayed, contentious leaders such as Muqtada al Sadr should also be included. The European Union should keep distance from internal political bickering while paying attention to the sensitivities of ethnic and sectarian differences. It must avoid stepping into the trap of ethnic and religious rivalry and, rather, help bridging these gaps;
- invest in and promote the **development and exchange of the younger generation** of Iraq by setting up EU-funded exchange programs between European countries and Iraq, leadership training, scholarships, and dialogue forums as Moubayed suggests;
- **encourage European businesses** to engage and invest in Iraq by offering them security advice and guaranties;

- engage **regional and international organizations** such as the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), the Conference of Iraq's Neighbors, and the United Nations. As Aras, Al Zubaidi, and Wimmen suggest, the EU should help in finding a regional approach that strengthens the Middle East environment and that is also appropriate to counter the threat of terrorism in the region and in Europe;
- take advantage of **Turkey's evolving role as a regional player** and invest in its capability as an accepted political negotiator. As Turkey prepares for EU membership, the Union should try to fence Turkey's military interventions on the Iraqi-Kurdistan border;
- put a special effort into **resolving the Iraqi refugee crisis** by offering assistance to the Iraqi government in order to develop an applicable strategy for the return of refugees. The EU should build the capacity of the Iraqi security services to protect minorities and facilitate their return to a safe and just environment. It needs to beef up the support of the UNHCR, especially in Jordan and Syria, for improving the situation for the refugees and the host countries. The EU should significantly step up its contribution and open its own borders more to accept Iraqi refugees, especially those who are most vulnerable and unable to return to Iraq.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CRRPD	Commission for Resolution of Real Property Disputes
DFID	Department for International Development
ESDP	European Security and Defence Policy
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IISS	International Institute for Strategic Studies
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRFFI	International Reconstruction Fund for Iraq
ISCI	Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq
NTM-1	NATO Training Mission in Iraq
OIC	Organization of Islamic Conference
PJAK	Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan
PKK	Kurdistan Worker's Party
PRTs	Provincial Reconstruction Teams
SIIC	Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council
SOFA	Status of Forces Agreement
UIA	United Iraqi Alliance
UNAMI	UN Assistance Mission for Iraq
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution

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Almost six years after the invasion of Iraq by US-led coalition forces it is high time for a fundamental political debate in the European Union and in Germany about the conflict, its consequences, and Europe's own interests. It should lead to a consistent Iraq policy for the years to come. The process of stabilization and democratization of Iraq is of key importance to the region, to global security, and to the transatlantic alliance. But

a new transatlantic chapter could only be opened when Europe itself started co-writing the story, telling where and how to meet the United States halfway. This publication describes a new start of cooperation between Europe, the United States, and regional partners in the Middle East to tackle the challenges in Iraq and to help bring peace, stability, and sustainable development to the wider region.

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