



With Neighbors Like These

Iraq and the Arab States on Its Borders

David Pollock, Editor

Policy Focus #70 | June 2007

All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

© 2007 by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Published in 2007 in the United States of America by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1828 L Street NW, Suite 1050, Washington, DC 20036.

Design by Daniel Kohan, Sensical Design and Communication

Front cover: Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki, onscreen, delivers a speech during the opening session of an international conference on Iraq, Sharm al-Sheikh, Egypt, May 3, 2007. Delegations from various countries, including Iraq's Arab neighbors, can be seen below the screen. Copyright AP Wide World Photos/Nasser Nasser.

About the Authors

David Pollock, a visiting fellow at The Washington Institute, is former senior advisor for the Broader Middle East at the State Department, a post he assumed in 2002. In that capacity, he provided policy advice on issues of democracy and reform in the region. Previously, he served in several other State Department policy advisory positions covering South Asia and the Middle East, including four years as regional expert on the Policy Planning Staff.

Dr. Pollock received his Ph.D. from Harvard University and has served as a visiting lecturer there, and as an assistant professor at George Washington University. His past publications include the widely read Washington Institute Policy Paper *The 'Arab Street'? Public Opinion in the Arab World* (1993).

Simon Henderson is the Baker fellow and director of the Gulf and Energy Policy Program at The Washington Institute. A former journalist with the *Financial Times*, he has worked as a consultant advising corporations and governments on the Persian Gulf and as a correspondent for the British Broadcasting Corporation. His past publications include *Instant Empire: Saddam Hussein's Ambition for Iraq* (Mercury House, 1991) and the Institute Policy Paper *The New Pillar: Conservative Arab Gulf States and U.S. Strategy* (2003).

Barry Rubin is a visiting fellow at The Washington Institute and a prolific writer on the contemporary Middle East, having authored twenty-three books in the past thirty years and edited many others. He also serves as director of the Global Research in International Affairs (GLORIA) Center and editor of the *Middle East Review of International Affairs* (MERIA). His latest book is *The Truth about Syria* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2007).

David Schenker is a senior fellow in Arab politics at The Washington Institute. Previously, he served in the Office of the Secretary of Defense as Levant country director, responsible for advising the senior Pentagon leadership on the military and political affairs of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and the Palestinian territories. His past publications include *Dancing with Saddam: The Strategic Tango of Jordanian-Iraqi Relations* (The Washington Institute/Lexington Books, 2003).



The opinions expressed in this Policy Focus are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, its Board of Trustees, or its Board of Advisors.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
<i>David Pollock</i>	
Syria and Iraq: The Inconvenient Truth	5
<i>Barry Rubin</i>	
Kuwait: Between Iraq and Iran	14
<i>David Pollock</i>	
Jordan: Keeping All Quiet on the Western Front	24
<i>David Schenker</i>	
Saudi Arabia: The Nightmare of Iraq.	33
<i>Simon Henderson</i>	
Conclusion: Are Iraq's Arab Neighbors the Answer?	41
<i>David Pollock</i>	

Illustration

Iraq and Its Neighbors.	iv
---------------------------------	----



Introduction

AN OLD ARAB RHYME, once used in children's readers, teaches us "*is'al 'an al-jaar qabla al-daar*": "Ask about the neighbor, even before you ask about the house." This lesson is very timely today, when speculation about the role that Iraq's neighbors are now playing in that country's travails, and about the different roles they could possibly play in the future, has become something of a cottage industry in Washington. Interest in this important subject, as in so many others, was first sparked by the local think-tank community.¹ It was crystallized in the Iraq Study Group (a.k.a. "Baker-Hamilton") report issued in December 2006 by an unofficial but influential bipartisan panel, which recommended greater U.S. diplomatic engagement with Iraq's neighbors as one key way of working to solve the whole region's critical problems.

This suggestion added an important dimension to the growing debate about U.S. policy toward Iraq and toward the region as a whole. The role of Iraq's neighbors had long been a minor topic of discussion, mostly focused on their possible support (or at least tolerance) of insurgents and terrorists crossing their borders to and from Iraq. By mid-2007, serious concern existed about a "spillover" problem in the opposite direction: the flow of Iraqi refugees into neighboring Arab countries.

The number of these Iraqi refugees was estimated at about 2 million by that time, and growing by tens of thousands each month. About 1 million Iraqis, mostly Sunni Arabs, were seeking refuge in Jordan alone; another million or so, reportedly mostly Shiite or Christian Arabs, sought refuge in Syria. On top of the painful humanitarian tragedy and accumulating economic expenses, some observers voiced alarm about the potential for accompanying cross-border flows,

in both directions, of violence, sectarian conflict, and political instability.² By mid-May 2007, a leading Jordanian journalist estimated the cost of caring for these refugees at roughly \$1 billion so far, adding that while "the extensive Iraqi presence has so far not posed a threat to the security of the country, there are no guarantees in this regard."³

At the same time, new interest arose in a potentially positive contribution by those same neighbors: perhaps a contact group or an international conference of some kind that could help devise a regional solution for Iraq's problems, along the lines of Bosnia in 1995, Kosovo in 1998, or Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks on the United States.⁴ Others pointedly retorted, however, that in Iraq neither the overriding American capability nor an overarching common interest with neighboring nations existed to make this regional approach successful.

Alongside this debate, a corollary and equally significant one continued to simmer: whether progress in Iraq, and particularly neighbor support for such progress, is somehow "linked" with progress on Arab-Israeli issues on the other side of the region. Some observers, including the Baker-Hamilton group, claimed that this question should be answered in the affirmative. Others argued back—for various reasons, including the very intractability of Arab-Israeli issues just now—that any progress inside Iraq and with at least some of its neighbors might more readily be registered by finding common cause against a rising threat from another such neighbor: Iran.

In fact, much of the attention garnered by these twin controversies, and by all the subsequent diplomatic and political maneuvering in the White House,

1. The U.S. Institute of Peace has produced several papers about individual neighbor's interaction with Iraq, starting with Turkey in mid-2006. Later that year, the Brookings Institution and the RAND Corporation conducted comparative studies of regional involvement in civil wars, and the Congressional Research Service compiled a schematic overview of the policies of Iraq's neighbors.
2. For additional details, see the chapters on Syria and Jordan below. Also cf. Nir Rosen, "The Exodus," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, May 13, 2007.
3. Fahd al-Fanek, "The Cost of Housing Iraqis in Jordan," *al-Rai* (Amman), May 12, 2007, translated in *Middle East Wire*, May 16, 2007.
4. See, e.g., the recent op-ed by Rend al-Rahim, former senior representative of Iraq to the United States in 2003–2004: "Time for a Dayton Process for Iraq," *Washington Post*, May 10, 2007.

the Departments of State and Defense, and the Congress, centered on just this one of Iraq's six neighbors, and a non-Arab one at that. This focus is partly because Iran is widely considered to have more influence inside Iraq than any other foreign country, especially among Iran's fellow Shiite Muslims, who predominate in both Iraq's new government and in its overall population. In addition, the extraordinary level of official hostility between Washington and Tehran has made the suggestion of greater engagement between the two particularly noteworthy, if not necessarily wise.

Initially, the White House appeared to resist this (and other) Baker-Hamilton proposals, opting instead for a military "surge" in Iraq combined with continued rhetorical and financial pressure on Iran. This policy was matched by continued refusal to engage in dialogue with Tehran except on the nuclear issue, and then only with the condition—unacceptable to Iran—that it first suspend uranium enrichment. But in late February 2007, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced that the United States would attend a formal (if relatively low-level) meeting in Baghdad with all of Iraq's neighbors.

This meeting was indeed held on March 10, 2007, but the parties did little besides agree to hold another such meeting, at a higher, ministerial level. Even that much agreement became uncertain a month later because of continued acute friction between Washington and Tehran over Iraq and many other issues.

In the end, a ministerial-level meeting of Iraq's neighbors and other interested parties was in fact held on May 3–4, 2007, in Sharm al-Sheikh, Egypt. Iran's foreign minister Manoucher Motaki showed up after all but refused to meet (or even sit at the same dinner table) with Rice. She was able to hold a half-hour meeting with Syrian foreign minister Walid Mouallem, the highest-level such bilateral session in over two years. It came amid press reports of fewer insurgents crossing from Syria into Iraq,

but no concrete outcome from that meeting was announced.

Similarly, the multilateral sessions at Sharm al-Sheikh were long on rhetoric but short on real results. The "International Compact for Iraq" was signed, in which seventy-four delegations from diverse countries and international organizations pledged political and economic support for that country—but only in return for renewed Iraqi government pledges of political and economic reform. Some \$30 billion of new economic support was also pledged for Iraq—but almost all of it came in the form of forgiveness of old bad debts from Saddam's time and at a time when a shortage of cash was clearly very far from posing Iraq's most serious problem. And Iraq's neighbors again promised to support its government, secure its borders, and refrain from meddling in its affairs.

Still, as Secretary Rice herself put it about Syria's signature on this undertaking, "we will certainly see whether we can observe words being followed by deeds." That slim hope was probably further clouded by the passage, on May 31, 2007, of a new UN Security Council resolution mandating a tribunal to deal with the 2005 assassination (almost certainly by Syrian agents) of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri. Predictably, militia violence in Lebanon started to spike once more as soon as that resolution passed.

As for Iran, Secretary Rice's judgment was similarly skeptical: "I sincerely hope that Iran will act in what it says is its self-interest to stop the flow of arms to extremists I hope that Iranian support for terrorism will cease."⁵ Another, similarly inconclusive bilateral meeting of U.S. and Iranian diplomats at the ambassadorial level was subsequently held in Baghdad on May 28, 2007.⁶ At a news conference that week, President Bush remarked that the U.S. "Plan B" for Iraq was actually "Plan B-H," for Baker-Hamilton, further fueling speculation about such attempts to engage Iraq's neighbors. On the ground, however, both Syria

5. Karen DeYoung, "At Meeting on Iraq, Doubt and Détente; Nations Manage to Find a Way Forward as U.S. Meets Briefly with Iran, Syria," *Washington Post*, May 5, 2007; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Iraq Conference Declared a Success" (available online at www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2007/05/07).

6. For details and analysis, see David Pollock, "Building on a Vacuum: Ways Forward After the U.S.-Iranian Meeting," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Watch Number 1237, May 30, 2007.

and Iran maintained or even increased the pace of their military aid to Iraqi insurgents, according to U.S. commanders and officials monitoring this issue.⁷

By that time, some of the diplomatic talk, both in Washington and in the Middle East itself, had shifted toward Turkey, Iraq's other non-Arab neighbor. This shift was partly because of the rising tensions associated with the Turkish presidential election, due by mid-May. This election by the parliament, which the ruling Islamic-oriented Justice and Development Party (AKP) was poised to win, was postponed after a military warning about secularism, mass demonstrations in favor of that principle, and a judicial intervention—but the result was a decision to hold early parliamentary elections toward the end of July. Equally alarming was the rising chorus of threats and counterthreats of intervention traded by very senior officials in Turkey and in the Kurdish Regional Government in northern Iraq, mainly about the presence there of Kurdish anti-Turkish terrorists from the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

In addition, looming just a bit further ahead on the political calendar is the even more contentious issue of Kirkuk. This major, oil-rich, ethnically mixed city sits right outside the Green Line that marks the boundary of Iraq's officially recognized Kurdish region. At the end of 2006, Iraq's Kurds won the constitutional right to a municipal referendum on annexing the city, to be held by the end of 2007. Yet Turkey strenuously objects to the prospect of Kirkuk's becoming part of Iraqi Kurdistan, claiming that this outcome would jeopardize both the rights of its own ethnic Turkmen cousins living there and the odds of stability in a unified Iraqi state. The possible spillover effect on Turkey's own, largely contiguous population of some 20 million Kurds is still another major concern. It is no wonder that issues of Turkish-Iraqi relations were suddenly assuming a higher international profile.

By comparison, the interests and options of Iraq's four other neighbors—the Arab states of Jordan,

Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Syria—have received less than their fair share of serious attention. That policy vacuum is precisely what this analysis seeks to fill. The timing, at least, is auspicious: senior U.S. officials are beginning to look at this neglected but important set of issues in a new light. In mid-April 2007, to cite just one telling example, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates made Jordan the first stop on a Mideast trip. An anonymous senior official traveling with him told reporters that the secretary

will encourage continued support for the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki. Gates hopes that backing by predominantly Sunni countries such as Jordan and Egypt will shore up the legitimacy of Iraq's majority Shiite government and help tamp down sectarian violence in the country.... [R]egional support for Iraq is the most important way right now to mitigate Iranian pressure.⁸

Vice President Richard Cheney followed with a parallel itinerary less than a month later, with stops in Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt in early May 2007. On the Democratic side of the aisle, a visit to Damascus in April, led by Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Rep. Tom Lantos, generated fresh debate about the wisdom of such high-profile dialogue with Syria—primarily about Iraq, but also about other targets of Syrian activity, particularly in Lebanon and in the Arab-Israeli arena.

Now, in the wake of the Baghdad and Sharm al-Sheikh conferences with Iraq's neighbors and as the debate about those neighbors continues to crest, the time is right to take stock of what roles they actually play in this arena—and what might lie ahead in this regard. The chapters that follow bring together, for the first time, a systematic analysis of the role of the Arab neighbors of Iraq.

Each chapter offers a realistic, concise account, with little attempt to impose a foolish consistency of

7. Robin Wright, "Iran Flow of Weapons Increasing, Officials Say: Arms Shipments Tracked to Iraqi, Afghan Groups," *Washington Post*, June 3, 2007. See also remarks by U.S. Gen. Raymond Odierno that the Syrians, "while they had done some things inside their own country," were keeping up the flow of arms to insurgents in Iraq, as reported by Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), May 31, 2007.

8. Ann Scott Tyson, "In Mideast, Gates Pushes Support for Iraq," *Washington Post*, April 17, 2007.

style, centered on just two twin questions: What is that neighbor's actual effect on events in Iraq? And conversely, how do events in Iraq actually affect that neighbor? Each chapter also examines these neighbors' real options for dealing with Iraq, bilaterally or in some plausible multilateral framework. Although each author's judgments are his own, a concluding chapter

briefly synthesizes the findings into a set of recommendations for U.S. policy on this key emerging subject. Throughout, the discussion attempts to look behind diplomatic circumlocutions and outright deceptions and to concentrate instead on the hard realities of the very volatile and complex kaleidoscope of regional interests and ambitions.

David Pollock

June 2007

Syria and Iraq: The Inconvenient Truth

Barry Rubin

SYRIA HAS BEEN a major exporter of instability to Iraq; thus, the Damascus regime clearly does not fear instability in Iraq or see that as a threat to Syria itself. Some Western observers, including the Baker-Hamilton-led Iraq Study Group, have suggested that Syrian interests in Iraq are (or could be made) parallel to those of their own countries. If this hypothesis is at all true, it is only because parallel lines never meet.

American and Iraqi officials have consistently made this point in no uncertain words and in increasingly specific terms. In November 2005, Iraqi prime minister Ibrahim Jaafari explained: “We demand that [Syria] control [its] borders, prevent infiltration and terrorism. We want good relations with Syria, but this cannot be achieved when such violations exist.”¹

In September 2006, Iraqi deputy prime minister Barham Salih said that Iraq wanted to “get our Syrian neighbors to behave more responsibly . . . and to clamp down on the presence and activity of some of the former regime leaders” there “as well as some of the terrorists that are going across the borders.”² The deputy governor of Mosul, Khasro Goran, added a couple of months later that Syria could easily control terrorism from its territory, as evidenced by the fact that it had thrown out Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) leaders in 1998, responding to a threat from Turkey.³ The U.S. military spokesman in Iraq, Maj. Gen. William Caldwell, estimated that between 70 and 100 foreign fighters, one-fifth Syrian, were caught crossing the Syrian border into Iraq every month throughout 2005 and 2006.⁴ This

number reportedly decreased substantially in early May 2007, just when U.S. secretary of state Condoleezza Rice met with Syrian foreign minister Walid Mouallem at the Iraq neighbors’ conference in Sharm al-Sheikh, Egypt—but Rice continued to voice considerable suspicion that Syria was pursuing a strategy of different “words and deeds” in this regard.⁵

In late 2006, Syria added to its strategy by restoring diplomatic relations with Iraq, a relationship broken more than two decades earlier—even though, in the years before Saddam Hussein’s overthrow, the two countries had actually worked together closely. Syria’s foreign minister visited Baghdad, and Iraqi president Jalal Talabani made a weeklong return visit in January 2007 to Damascus, where he had lived in exile during the Saddam era. Syria and Iraq signed several accords and made public statements pledging to work together on all sorts of security, political, and economic matters of mutual interest.

The problem, however, was that Syria did not fulfill those pledges, particularly on the all-important security issue. In February 2007, Iraqi government spokesman Ali Dabbagh could still assert that “50 percent of murders and bombings are by extremists coming from Syria . . . and we have evidence to prove it.”⁶ Equally striking was the March 2007 statement by State Department Iraq coordinator Ambassador David Satterfield that at least 80 percent of suicide bombers in Iraq had transited through Syria.⁷

To some extent, both Iraq and the U.S. government might be exaggerating the high proportion of the

1. Bassem Mroue, “Iraqi PM Urges Syria to Tighten Border,” Associated Press Online, November 11, 2005.

2. Pauline Jelinek, “Iraq Needs Help from Syria to Calm Insurgency in West, Saleh Says,” Associated Press, September 14, 2006.

3. Jonathan Steele, “International: Ahmadinejad Invites Iraq and Syria to Summit on Insurgency: Move Designed to Boost Iranian Leader’s Standing: Talks Could Be Forerunner to Meeting Involving US,” *The Guardian* (London), November 21, 2006.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Joshua Partlow, “An Uphill Battle to Stop Fighters at the Border; without Syria’s Help, Iraqi General Says, Frontier ‘Can’t Be Controlled 100 Percent,’” *Washington Post*, May 5, 2007; Karen DeYoung, “At Meeting on Iraq, Doubt and Détente; Nations Manage to Find a Way Forward as U.S. Meets Briefly with Iran, Syria,” *Washington Post*, May 5, 2007.

6. Assad Abboud, “Iraq-Syria Relations Strained Anew,” Middle East Online, February 4, 2007. Available online (www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=19430).

7. Sue Fleming, “US Tells Syria to Stop Bombers Crossing into Iraq,” Reuters, March 27, 2007.

terrorism coming from Syria. Nevertheless, this factor is clearly both important and continuing, showing Syria's effort to maintain a high state of instability in Iraq and drive out U.S. forces. Playing this role suggests that Syria does not fear all-out civil war in Iraq; it merely wants its side to win. Similarly, the Syrian regime does not seem to take seriously the possibility of partition or large-scale Turkish intervention. And it certainly does not worry about large Iranian influence, since that country is its close ally.

Syrian Interests in Iraq

In fact, the preceding strategy closely follows Syrian interests, which are quite different from those of the United States and run along the following lines:

The regime of President Bashar al-Asad would prefer an Iraq that was under Syrian control, or one under Iranian influence, as long as Tehran did not forget about the needs of its Syrian ally. This preference translates to an Arab nationalist, anti-American Iraq, ready to actively pursue the conflict against Israel, and a sponsor of international terrorism (especially if that meant backing Syrian clients such as Hizballah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad). In the words of Syrian vice president Faruq al-Shara on March 7, 2007: Syria "supports any solution that leads to . . . the establishment of a new Iraq that is Arab in affiliation and that . . . is a brother of Syria . . ."⁸

Although seemingly paradoxical on the surface, Syria's lack of a strong preference concerning Sunni or Shiite rule in Iraq makes perfect sense; what Syria cares about is fulfilling Syria's agenda. Naturally, Syria would prefer that the type of Sunni insurgents, opposition elements, or Islamists who have been its direct clients come into power, but it would certainly be happy with Iranian-influenced Shiites who followed the kind of policies it seeks. In this context, it should be noted that Syria has excellent relations with radical Shiite leader Muqtada al-Sadr as well as a wide variety of Sunni insurgents, such as ex-Saddam backers, al-Qaeda

supporters, and Sunni sectarian militants or other opposition factions. As Asad himself stated in a little-noticed interview with French television on March 21, 2007, as reported by the Syrian Arab News Agency, "What we are doing is to start dialogue with all parties, whether they are supporting the political process or opposing it" in Iraq.⁹

In the absence of this preferred outcome, Syria will pursue its interests in Iraq through its present policies, which means ensuring that Iraq remains unstable and that U.S. influence is under attack there. A U.S. withdrawal would please Damascus as a sign of a retreating American role on its border. In the meantime, violence and disorder within Iraq should clearly be seen as in Syria's interest, not something that frightens Damascus with the threat of chaos on its frontier. What Syria does fear is a stable Iraq under a U.S.-allied regime that defeats the insurgency. Whether or not Sunnis are offered more of a share in the new Iraq or are reconciled with the existing Iraqi government is not of interest to Syria per se, because Damascus cares nothing about Sunni rights within Iraq.

The real issue for Damascus is to avoid any stable, moderate outcome in Iraq for five reasons:

1. A stable U.S. client-state on its border is in itself a strategic danger to Syria, given the clashes between the two countries' goals and interests. The battle over Iraq is whether that country will be part of the Iran-Syria axis or part of the more U.S.-oriented Saudi-Egyptian-Jordanian bloc.
2. Any democratic success in Iraq sends a dangerous message to Syria's own citizens, who might view this system as preferable to their existing dictatorship.
3. A victory for U.S. policy in Iraq is also an obstacle to the Iran-Syria alliance "resistance" strategy Asad advocates in the region.

8. "Iraqi Vice-President Says 'Common Vision' Emerged at Syria Talks," BBC Monitoring Middle East, March 8, 2007.

9. "President al-Assad Interview with France TV," Syrian Arab News Agency, March 21, 2007. Available online (www.sana.org/eng/21/2007/03/21/109106.htm).

4. An end to the insurgency would free U.S. assets to be used against Syria itself and its ally Iran. As long as the United States is tied down in Iraq, America has little power to spare to use against Syria directly. (A U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, however, could have, to some degree, the same effect.)

5. An end to ethnic strife in Iraq would remove a Syrian argument against internal reform that any change could lead to anarchy and civil war.

All these points must be understood before any “spillover” or effect of Iraq on Syria can be evaluated. Most essential to comprehend is that factors that seem negative to the United States, Egypt, Europe, Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the smaller Gulf Arab states are in fact positive from the Syrian perspective. In general, Syrian interests (along with those of Iran) are exactly opposite those of all these other countries.

The Insurgency

An intensive, bloody insurgency has wracked Iraq for the past three years. This instability could spread to other Arab countries in several ways. The terrorists using Iraq as a base or a battlefield could attack elsewhere, buoyed by their success. Or they could take the fight elsewhere after leaving Iraq, in victory or defeat, just as their ideological “ancestors” spread out from Afghanistan after the anti-Soviet jihad ended successfully there. Or the same forces supporting Iraq’s insurgency could sponsor or inspire similar efforts in other countries. But these issues do not scare Syria much at all. After all, it is the main outside sponsor of the Sunni insurgency.

This problem was the central focus, to no apparent avail, of the highest-level U.S.-Syrian meeting in Damascus during the seven years since Bashar al-Asad inherited power there: the January 2005 visit by lame-duck U.S. deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage.

This meeting was followed in the summer of 2005 by a very public spat between U.S., Iraqi, and Syrian officials about the role of Syria in Iraq’s insurgency. Syrian officials variously claimed to have posted 4,500, 6,000, or even 10,000 soldiers to patrol that border, demanding that others “should appreciate” the Syrian effort.

By early 2007, Syrian deputy prime minister Abdullah al-Dardari raised that claim to 12,000 troops. U.S. and Iraqi officials retorted that far too many insurgents were still coming across into Iraq.¹⁰ In January 2007, President Bush again accused Syria of supporting cross-border “networks” of those killing American soldiers and Iraqi civilians inside Iraq. A Syrian spokesman made a transparently false response, claiming that: “There is not a single Iraqi or American soldier there to secure the border. We have asked the Americans and the Iraqis to work together with us to secure the border, but they turned down our request. Maybe they want a scapegoat to explain their failure in Iraq.”¹¹

In February 2007, President Asad offered Diane Sawyer an equally poor excuse, saying, “You cannot control your border with Mexico, can you? You’re the greatest power in the world, you cannot control it with Mexico, so how do you want Syria to control its border with Iraq?”¹²

As disingenuous as this riposte may be, it does reflect Asad’s genuine lack of concern about any potential spillover back into Syria from insurgents in Iraq. The terrorists are not going to target their Syrian paymaster and safe haven; rather, they will attack Syria’s enemies or rivals. Who is going to imitate the insurgents within Syria itself?

The answer to that question, in theory, is that Sunni Muslim Islamists inside Syria might copy their co-communalists by rising up against a regime dominated by someone else: in this case, Alawites, a purportedly Shi-ite (but actually, according to many Muslim authorities, heretical or even non-Muslim) minority of only 12 percent ruling a 60 percent Sunni majority. Yet Syria’s

10. Arabicnews.com, July 22 and 28, August 6 and 20, 2005.

11. Ulrike Putz, “You Can’t Bring Peace to Iraq without Working with Syria” (interview with Syrian deputy prime minister Abdullah al-Dardari), Spiegel Online International, February 21, 2007. Available online (www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,467754,00.html).

12. “Syrian President Says He Can Help Broker Peace,” ABC News, *Good Morning America*, February 5, 2007. Available online (<http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/story?id=2849435&page=3>).

support for the Iraqi insurgency has consolidated its reputation—among its own Sunni majority as well as abroad—as a fighter for Sunni and Islamist causes. By supporting the insurgency across its border in Iraq, Syria has made itself less vulnerable to such an insurgency of its own.

Jihadist Terrorism and “Blowback”

According to the U.S. and Iraqi governments, as well as others, Syria has played a major role in supporting and inspiring not only “communal nationalist” Sunni insurgents, who merely want to return to the historic situation of their own supremacy, but also jihadist insurgents, who want a radical Islamist state in Iraq. This help includes housing headquarters, supporting leaders, and providing large amounts of funds as well as allowing Islamist volunteers for the insurgency to enter, transit, receive arms, and train in Syria. These people are mainly radical Islamists who would like to overthrow all existing Arab governments and install Islamist states.

Again, in theory Syria itself could fear similar treatment. In reality, however, Syria has reinvented itself as the main Arab sponsor of radical Islamist movements. True, the Baath regime was long secular in orientation, but for a number of years, certainly since Bashar al-Asad became president in 2000, mosques have been built and secular restrictions loosened (for example, on women wearing veils and on soldiers praying on bases). Government propaganda often sounds like variations or clones of radical Islamist arguments. The Syrian government is by no means a true Islamist regime, but it often talks and acts as if it were.

Ties with Iran and Saudi Arabia. A very intriguing and ironic outcome of Syria’s support for Sunni insurgents and jihadists in Iraq is the apparent—but not real—contradiction with another key aspect of Syria’s foreign policy: its alliance with Iran, which not only is the major Shiite power in the world today but also

actively supports Shiite government officials and sectarian militias inside Iraq.

On the surface, Iran backs the current Iraqi government, which Syria is so energetically subverting. In fact, however, Iran’s main priorities are to push out U.S. forces and establish a pro-Iranian regime in Iraq that would be part of the existing Iran-Syria-Hizballah-Hamas alliance. Both Iran and Syria also support al-Sadr, who represents one of the main forces that might produce such an outcome. Of course, Iran’s influence with Shiite factions within the government coalition is far more extensive than anything Syria possesses; yet that in itself is not a problem for Syria. Thus, the seemingly contradictory point that the two allies, Syria and Iran, are backing the opposite sides in a civil war, two groups that are murdering each other, is reconciled in strategic terms.

Another factor here is that Syria continues to maintain it is the best of all Arab nationalists at the same time as it has abandoned the camp of Arab states for an alliance with Iran. Asad’s insulting rhetoric toward Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia has not been defused by talks with leaders of those countries.¹³ These regimes oppose Syria’s posture, but they, too, are sympathetic toward the insurgency and want to maintain Sunni rule in Iraq. At any rate, they are not taking substantive anti-Syrian action, so the cost to Damascus is minimal.

Sectarian conflict. In addition to foreign policy and the profitable alliance with Iran, ample domestic reasons exist for Syria’s behavior. By supporting Sunni Islam through the Iraqi insurgency and Hamas—and even by its backing for Shiite (but Islamist) Hizballah in Lebanon—the regime has increased its support among Syria’s Sunni Muslim majority as the champion and defender of their community, Sunnis abroad, and Islamism. At a time when the Syrian economy is in terrible shape, freedoms are limited, and the minority (and non-Muslim, or at least pseudo-Shiite, Alawi sectarian) nature of the regime might be otherwise

13. Asad was welcomed by Saudi king Abdullah at the Arab Summit in Riyadh at the end of March 2007 and had several other bilateral meetings there, but no specific steps toward “reconciliation” were announced. For additional discussion, see this paper’s chapter on Saudi Arabia.

controversial, Asad is at the peak of his popularity. Anti-American and anti-Israeli policies and rhetoric intensify this populist, demagogic success.

Particularly notable is that the main and potentially most effective opposition group, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, has been undercut. For instance, at a meeting of Muslim Brotherhood cadres in Amman, Jordan, Jordanian Muslim Brothers criticized their Syrian counterparts, saying they could not fight the Syrian regime because it was doing such a good job promoting Islamism.

Yet at precisely the same time, the regime effectively uses the Islamist—which in Syria also means Sunni sectarian—threat at home to solidify support among those who fear such a danger. Those who might otherwise become liberal critics of the regime are afraid to speak, or they may even back Asad, because they fear that the alternative is a Sunni Islamist regime. This reaction occurs not only among Alawites but also among intellectuals and the educated as well as urban women (who might themselves be Sunni), and among the sizable Christian population. It might be a factor among the Druze minority, too.

Thus, rather than threaten to spill over, sectarian strife in Iraq contributes to Syrian regime maintenance. Those Syrians who support the insurgency count it to Syria's credit; those who are horrified at the bloodshed in Baghdad support the regime in Damascus to prevent this violence from spilling back over the border and to ensure that Syria does not face the perils of democracy.

Minor exception number one: Kurdish ethnic spillover. In March 2004, during a soccer game in Qamishli, Syria, Kurds in the crowd shouted slogans about Iraq's new constitution, which gave their counterparts there autonomy. Syrian Arabs, including police, responded with chants backing Shiite hardliners in the neighboring country. The security forces fired at the Kurds, killing several people. Police again opened fire during the funeral, setting off two days of riots. Many Kurds were arrested, beaten, and tortured.

Kurdish groups have aligned themselves with the pro-democratic opposition.

Clearly, Kurdish autonomy in Iraq inspires Syrian Kurds to demand more rights for themselves. Still, the Syrian authorities seem largely in control of the situation. Moreover, some Iraqi Kurdish leaders, including President Jalal Talabani, are sympathetic to Syria for hosting them in exile, whereas foreign Kurdish militants in Iraq are focused on Turkey or Iran rather than Syria. Finally, Syrian Kurds are only about 10 percent of the country's population, proportionately much less than their counterparts in Iraq or Turkey.

Minor exception number two: Refugees. The only actual cost Syria incurs because of the instability in Iraq is the inflow of many refugees. These refugees have had a real financial cost to the regime. At the same time, however, even this problem creates advantages by giving Syria an opportunity to showcase its humanitarian credentials—while serving as a vivid warning to its own citizens about the cost of putting their faith in America, trying out democracy, and overthrowing a dictatorial regime.

As of early 2007, according to one Syrian official, Syria was hosting well over 1 million Iraqi "visitors," at a high financial cost:

No economy can simply absorb so many. In Damascus alone 25,000 children are attending our elementary schools—free of charge, it goes without saying. For us that means that we have to build dozens of new schools. One must emphasize that the U.S. in particular has a moral obligation in this matter.¹⁴

In March 2007, in the highest level of direct contact since the February 2005 Rafiq Hariri assassination, U.S. assistant secretary of state for population, migration and refugees Ellen Sauerbrey journeyed to Damascus for a "useful exchange" focused "exclusively on Iraq refugee issues" with Syrian deputy foreign minister Faisal Maqdad. The United States apparently agreed to keep funding United Nations High Commission on

14. Putz, "You Can't Bring Peace to Iraq without Working with Syria."

Refugees (UNHCR) aid to Iraqi refugees, while the Syrians expressed their willingness to continue hosting displaced Iraqis, although “noting the burden that this does place on them and on their system.”¹⁵

Syrian Options

For Syria, then, instability in Iraq—or more precisely, its own ability either to advance or curtail that instability—is not a threatening crisis but a major asset to achieve leverage on other issues. The very deniability built into sponsoring terrorism allows Syria to continue backing the insurgency while claiming innocence, and even protesting that it deserves credit for countering the violence.

Indeed, many media outlets, experts, and politicians in the West are quite ready to credit Syria’s statements about its alleged efforts toward peace in Iraq, and to urge rewarding Damascus for what it claims to have already done or what it might yet do. Syria hopes for a long list of benefits by promising or pretending to help Iraq, as outlined in the following sections.

“Engagement.” Syria hopes that its self-professed ability to help resolve the Iraq issue will lead the West in general, and the United States in particular, to engage in a diplomatic process with Damascus. The purpose of this process is not so much to reach an agreement but to gain three other objectives.

First, if Western states are in negotiations with Syria, they are more likely not to attack it, to attempt “regime change” in Damascus, or to inflict other costs on it. Thus, a long-term process in effect gives Syria a freer hand to operate on such questions as supporting terrorist operations; backing its political clients, such as Hamas, Hizballah, and Islamic Jihad; subverting Lebanon; sabotaging any Arab-Israeli peace efforts, and so on. Second, Western states are more likely to make concessions to Syria to get it to engage, keep it engaged, and try to persuade it to reach some kind of agreement. This kind of argument is constantly being voiced in the media, both Syrian and Western. Third, this kind of engagement sends a message to Syria’s own

people that their government is strong and successful, giving them the impression that it will make big gains in the future so they should ignore today’s lack of rights and low living standards.

The model for this strategy is the experience with the United States in the 1990s. Then, Syria nominally supported the coalition against Iraq during the 1991 Gulf War and subsequently engaged in talks with Israel. As a result, Syria received huge amounts of aid from Saudi Arabia and a free pass on Lebanon and other issues. In the end, Syria gave nothing and reaped great benefits.

Lebanon. The number-one goal of Syrian policy is to revive its long domination over Lebanon. This occupation brought not only strategic advantages but also tremendous material ones. For wealthier Syrians and regime supporters—including many army officers—looting, smuggling, investing, real estate, counterfeiting, and drug production were profitable areas. For poorer Syrians, Lebanon offered hundreds of thousands of jobs that paid far better than their equivalents in Syria (and certainly much better than the unemployment they would have suffered there), plus low-level participation in smuggling and other such enterprises.

Syria has tried to get back into control of Lebanon through terrorism (including assassinations) aimed at convincing the Lebanese that without a Syrian presence they can know no security. Syria’s assets include traditional pro-Syrian politicians, the Christian faction of Michel Aoun, some small Sunni Islamist groups, and, first and foremost, Hizballah. Using these assets, Damascus has a wide variety of schemes to regain a pro-Syrian government in Beirut.

If, the regime argues, the West were to give Lebanon back to Damascus, it would kill two insurgencies with one stone. Syria would presumably rein in both the Iraqi insurgency and Hizballah from attacking Israel. Not only is this argument the crudest form of blackmail, but Syria would probably not deliver on its promises even as it swallowed its prizes—as demonstrated by its consistent prevarication about Iraq.

15. State Department Regular Briefing, Tom Casey, department deputy spokesman, Federal News Service, March 12, 2007.

The Hariri investigation. If Lebanon is the regime's greatest desire, the Hariri investigation is its biggest fear. The involvement of the highest levels of the Syrian regime in ordering the murder of former Lebanese prime minister Hariri in February 2005 has become increasingly clear. The United Nations (UN) investigation has been moving toward this conclusion. Quite conceivably, if it continues as an honest and independent investigation, the process will end with the indictment of the Syrian regime. In that case, a joint international tribunal of Lebanese and foreign judges would be set up to try Syrian officials. If some of them start testifying about what they know to save themselves, higher-ups will be implicated.

The Syrian regime has been desperate to kill this tribunal. One way has been to take over Lebanon or to intimidate the Lebanese government into watering down or dispensing with the investigation. The other way is to get the West to drop it. The Iraq issue is seen as a way of saving the regime through a tradeoff.

The Golan Heights. From the standpoint of real Syrian interests, this issue is far more ambiguous than it might appear. In terms of peace with Israel or other concessions, Syria does not want to pay anything for getting back the Golan Heights, because such a deal—as the following discussion demonstrates—has far more negatives than positives for the Syrian regime. Although these factors apply both to Hafiz al-Asad—who, after all, turned down such a deal in 2000—and to his son Bashar, the latter is simultaneously more insecure and more committed to a consistently radical strategy. In contrast to actually reaching a deal, however, being engaged in a protracted negotiating process would be advantageous.

First and foremost, the Golan Heights is a poisoned prize for Syria. If the regime loses the excuse of the conflict with Israel, it has precious little else to use to legitimize its continued rule. Moreover, a rational analysis of regime interests shows many more reasons for Syria to avoid or even prevent peace than to make peace with Israel. Syria does not want to see an increase in regional stability, a greater U.S. role, or the normalization of Israel's position in the area. While dissatisfied with the

status quo, Syria's rulers see the Arab world's return to past militancy as a way of escaping isolation and seizing leadership. Otherwise, their hope of gaining, or keeping, influence over neighbors and becoming the area's dominant power would be lost forever. The existence of a Western-oriented Palestinian state that did not side with Syria's ambitions, but whose existence might even reduce tensions or end the Arab-Israeli conflict, would do nothing for Syrian leaders either.

An Israeli-Syrian peace treaty would be equally bad for the regime. Such a diplomatic achievement would open the door for most other Arab states to have relations with Israel and to work with it on matters of common interest. But Israel would remain determined—and be far more able—to oppose Syria's ambitions for sway over Jordan, Lebanon, and the Palestinians. The United States would also use its stronger influence to block Syrian goals. An Israeli-Lebanese agreement would follow any Israeli-Syrian accord, reducing Damascus's leverage in Lebanon and bringing international pressure for a Syrian withdrawal.

These strategic costs would not be matched by many economic or political gains for Syria, certainly not on the all-important domestic front. A Syrian agreement with Israel would not bring much Western aid or investment. More open access for foreigners to invest or do business directly in Syria and more open commercial opportunities for Syrian businesspeople would actually weaken the dictatorship's hold over its own subjects. Freer communications would give Syrians more access to news and information, including ideas and facts the regime did not want them to know.

As a result of such changes, Syria would lose prestige, aid, and deference to its interests—all advantages that being a militant confrontation state have long given it. Today, these same factors make the Syrian regime powerful in terms of the demagogic appeal used to keep its people in line, marching behind the regime.

In short, maintaining the Arab-Israeli conflict has been, and continues to be, good for Syria's regime. Having the issue disappear would be worse than being defeated in a dozen battles against Israel. Syria would be relegated to permanent status as a secondary power in the Middle East. At home, the result could conceivably be the

regime's overthrow and a devastating civil war or revolution. A peace agreement would promote U.S. influence in the region, which would run counter to Syrian interests as well. It would promote moderation, undercut radicalism, introduce Israel as a normal political (and economic) factor, and foster regional stability that would strengthen the status quo. In every aspect of its effect, a successful peace process runs counter to Syrian interests.

Consequently, the Syrians are not interested in "trading" Iraq for the Golan Heights. But they are interested in trading the pretense of being helpful for a long-term inconclusive "peace process," control of Lebanon, and an end to the Hariri investigation.

Material benefits. Given the bad shape of its economy and the regime's refusal to make meaningful economic reforms, Syria is also interested in using Iraq to gain material benefits. In 2005, officially reported Syrian exports to Iraq totaled approximately \$800 million, not far behind Iran's roughly \$1 billion figure. Since diplomatic relations were restored in late 2006, Syrian officials have voiced greater interest in expanding formal economic ties with Iraq. In March 2007, to cite one recent example, the two countries' ministers of electricity signed an agreement to plan links between the two national grids so that Syria could sell electricity to Iraq.¹⁶ If, however, obtaining such advantages would require concessions or compromises on Syria's part, the regime would rather give up the gains than pay for them, as the government's meager record in this regard clearly shows.

At the same time, Syria might well offer cosmetic overtures to Iraq and pay lip service to good neighborly relations. For instance, in March 2007, Syrian deputy prime minister for economic affairs Abdallah al-Dardari made the following declaration: "Stability, development, prosperity and unity in Iraq will be beneficial for Syria more than any other country. Our economic outlook depends on economic growth and development in Iraq."¹⁷ After all, if Syria can have nor-

mal relations with the Iraqi government while still subverting it—a goal that is quite obtainable—that would be the best of all possible situations for the Damascus regime. In this context, the economic benefits are also an incentive for Iraq to ignore some of Syria's unfriendly, but covert, activities.

Always in the regime's thinking are its objectives beyond Iraq. Its aims include eliminating or rendering impotent the Hariri investigation, getting off the U.S. terrorist list, reopening the Iraqi oil pipeline through Syria (which the same regime used to violate the sanctions before Saddam Hussein was overthrown), completing a trade agreement with the European Union, and getting security equipment (in some cases, items it has previously given Hizballah and the Iraqi insurgency, such as night-vision goggles) to "patrol" the Syrian-Iraqi border.

Prestige. One more extremely important aspect of Syria's posture remains to be discussed. In February 2007, President Asad asserted in *Newsweek* magazine that Syria is "the main player" in Iraq; his deputy prime minister echoed that line, telling *Der Spiegel* that "everyone who wants to bring peace to Iraq has to work closely with Syria."¹⁸ This concept is an important element in the Syrian policy conception. Asad seeks to portray himself as the key player in the region who can impose far-reaching demands in exchange for his cooperation. If Syria is so valuable an interlocutor, it can even expect to receive unilateral concessions.

Certainly, Asad seems to genuinely believe that he is operating from a position of strength. Every hint of the West's uncertainty or weakness—such as the April 2007 visit of Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and others—is portrayed in Syria as a major victory and proof that its strategy is working.

Conclusion

The problem in analyzing Syria is misunderstanding the government's interests. At the top of the list is

16. "Iraq-Syria/Power Grid," United Press International, March 20, 2007.

17. "Stability in Iraq Beneficial for Syria," Arabicnews.com, March 20, 2007. Available online (<http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/070320/2007032010.html>)

18. Putz, "You Can't Bring Peace to Iraq without Working with Syria."

regime maintenance. In this context, peace with Israel in exchange for the Golan Heights would weaken the regime, and the same is true for democratization or economic reform—changes that superficially are thought to benefit the country.

Next on the regime's list is killing the Hariri investigation and reestablishing its domination of Lebanon. In this connection, continued backing for Hizballah and strengthening it are absolutely necessary because Hizballah is Syria's main asset in Lebanon. Similarly, in any realistic context, the West can offer Damascus nothing that would convince it to split from Tehran, which gives it so much geopolitical leverage, Islamist legitimacy, and material benefits.

The bottom line is that Syria likes the instability and insurgency in neighboring Iraq, preferring instability in

its neighbor unless it can dominate that country itself or in tandem with its ally Iran. Syria's interests are, in fact, diametrically opposed to the United States on this issue. The Syrians would welcome a U.S. withdrawal, although they might worry it would free U.S. assets to be used against Syria. Although it would not like to see Iran with a monopoly of influence in Iraq, having an Iraq that is in Iran's orbit does not scare Syria. After all, Iran is a member of what would be the Iran-Syria-Iraq alignment.

To be sure, the regime in Damascus would like to use its ability to disrupt Iraq as a bargaining chip to make gains elsewhere. Yet even if in receipt of these gains, as the preceding analysis demonstrates, Syria would not be inclined to favor a moderate, pro-Western, stable, democratic Iraq.

Kuwait: Between Iraq and Iran

David Pollock

FOR KUWAIT, the first question is not whether it can manage Iraq's spillover effects but how it has managed to stay so untouched and unruffled by such dramatic upheavals so close to home. The answer begins with Kuwait's unique experience with Iraq, especially when that country was under the rule of Saddam Hussein. However uncertain Iraq's situation has become today, it is less of a threat to Kuwait than it was when Saddam was still in power. As Kuwait's National Council chief, Sheikh Ahmed al-Fahd al-Sabah, told a leading pan-Arab paper in February 2007: "Today we witness the greatest Kuwaiti-Iraqi rapprochement in the modern history of relations between the two countries." Ever since Saddam's downfall, ironically, not the overweening strength but the unaccustomed weakness of Iraq causes Kuwait concern. As Sheikh Ahmed put it: "We fear three things in Iraq. First, we fear the partitioning of Iraq, because Kuwait wants the unity of Iraq. Second, we fear that Iraq might slide into a civil war in any shape or form. Third, we fear a sectarian war."¹

Underlying Kuwait's fear of Iraq's partition is not any sentimental attachment to its old enemy's territorial integrity but a rational calculation of Kuwait's interests. The partition of Iraq would raise the specter of a war spilling over its borders, intervention by other neighbors, pressure on Kuwait to take sides, and a Shiite or other rump state carved out of Iraq with renewed irredentist designs on Kuwait. Full-fledged civil war in Iraq, a possible step toward partition, would raise similar problems. Unrestrained Iraqi sectarian warfare, in particular, could threaten Kuwait's studiedly neutral, consensus-driven regional posture; its internal order; and its relatively cordial relations with Saudi Arabia and especially with Iran—which would each be

tempted to intervene in Iraq, directly or by proxy, and to press Kuwait for at least passive support. But even without any further movement toward civil war or partition, the drastic decline in Iraqi power raises fresh questions about a potential rise in the hostile intentions and capabilities against nearby Kuwait of Iraq's regional archrival, namely Iran.

National Defense

So a key "spillover" question for Kuwait is this: Does the weakening of Iraq mean that Kuwait is now exposed to a new direct military threat from Iran? The answer is probably not, for three reasons. First, Iran has shown no intention of attacking or threatening Kuwait militarily for almost twenty years, since the end of the Iran-Iraq War of 1980–1988. Second, Kuwait's own armed forces could conceivably offer some level of deterrent or reaction against Iranian military adventurism. As Gulf expert Michael Knights has pointed out, Kuwait's military, while minuscule compared with Iran's, is reasonably effective for its size.² Moreover, in his judgment, Iran's lack of land access to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, and the likelihood of advance warning of any major assault, could render Iranian military threats more manageable. This judgment is by nature subjective; other analysts point out that although some of the new military equipment at the disposal of Kuwait and its GCC partners is both top of the line and relatively well matched to an Iranian naval threat, no guarantee exists that it would be used effectively (or even at all) in any real confrontation with Iran.

But there is a third reason why Kuwait can counter Iran: continuing U.S. protection against any overt military threat. In addition to the strategic interest

*The author would like to thank Rana Shabb for her excellent research assistance with this chapter.

1. Interview in *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London), February 13, 2007, translated in BBC Monitoring Middle East–Political, February 14, 2007x.
2. Michael Knights, *Troubled Waters: Future U.S. Security Assistance in the Persian Gulf* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2006).

and the historical commitment, tens of thousands of U.S. troops are either stationed in or rotating through Kuwait at any moment. Moreover, Kuwait houses a vast network of U.S. facilities and prepositioned equipment. As of mid-2005, according to the Congressional Research Service, an astonishing level of “about 90,000 U.S. military personnel are in Kuwait at any given time, mostly preparing to rotate into Iraq.... However, only about 20,000 are based in Kuwait more permanently.”³ The salience of this relationship was symbolized recently by Kuwait’s hosting Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in January 2007 for a meeting of the GCC + 2 group (adding Egypt and Jordan to the Gulf Arab monarchies), which issued a general endorsement of U.S. policy toward Iraq and an implicit warning against hostile Iranian designs on the region.

Internal Security

What are the odds of jihadist terrorism overflowing from Iraq into Kuwait? A number of individuals previously from Kuwait have surfaced in the al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan and Pakistan, including the notorious terrorist ringleader Khaled Sheikh Muhammad and at least one other senior operative. In Kuwait itself, isolated terrorist incidents against U.S. forces in 2002–2003 foreshadowed a flurry of more serious shootouts with terrorist cells in early 2005, revealing a modest Iraqi-oriented, al-Qaeda-modeled group called the Kuwaiti Mujahedin, along with an inward, Kuwaiti-focused group styled the Peninsula Lions. These incidents were a more serious wake-up call, because those arrested were well-trained, comfortably employed Kuwaiti nationals.

Since then, however, the internal landscape has been remarkably quiet. This calm is especially striking in view of the continuing large-scale, if generally low-profile, U.S. military presence in the country—and of the continuing maelstrom in Iraq, beginning in Basra right across the border and a mere fifty miles from downtown Kuwait City.

In part, this success must be credited to the stepped-up vigilance of both local and U.S. security and intelligence forces. But in part this success can also be credited to another factor particular to Kuwait: the residue of popular goodwill—or at least the absence of anti-American fervor—that the United States continues to enjoy there. While many ordinary Kuwaitis are no doubt troubled by daily media reports or dinnertime discussions of violence in the Palestinian territories, Lebanon, or Iraq, they generally do not outwardly direct their anger against the United States. Even the Islamists in Kuwait, by most accounts, do not overtly question the utility of U.S. protection.

A potentially risky factor closer to home, but one that has also proved eminently manageable, is the continuing presence in Kuwait of over 2 million foreign workers, precisely twice the total native population, by the most recent reliable account.⁴ These individuals come mostly from South or Southeast Asia as well as the Middle East. Probably about half are Muslims. Yet reported incidents of political protest or violence are extremely rare, and the record also suggests that Kuwait is quite adept at policing, and if necessary isolating or deporting, potential troublemakers among this very large guest-worker population. The last known incident of significant expatriate public protest of any kind, mainly involving Egyptian workers angry about a wage dispute, was in 1999.

The greatest terrorist risk Kuwait may face is of a different kind: state-sponsored terrorism directed by Iran, as happened sporadically from 1983 through 1987 during the Iran-Iraq War, in which Kuwait supported Iraq financially. A few well-placed and well-timed bombs would seriously spook the Western official and expatriate worker community, which would have real, adverse implications for Kuwait’s economy and sense of security—and raise significant force-protection problems for the major U.S. military presence in the country.

For the time being, no visible evidence indicates that Iran is preparing to activate this unspoken threat,

3. Kenneth Katzman, “Kuwait: Post-Saddam Issues and U.S. Policy,” Congressional Research Service Report RS 21513, updated May 18, 2005, p. 3.

4. “Kuwait’s Population up by 6.4 Percent in 2006—Report,” Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), May 29, 2007. Available online (www.kuna.net.kw/NewsAgenciesPublicSite/ArticleDetails.aspx?id=1749418&Lang).

but it is increasingly mentioned in private Kuwaiti conversations. It would be high on Iran's repertoire of responses to an assault against its nuclear installations. This terrorist angle is but one aspect of Iran's overall increased leverage on Kuwait, which is examined later in this chapter.

Border Security

Kuwait's 222-kilometer border with Iraq is currently the only one of Iraq's large and largely desolate frontiers that is effectively policed. It has a combination of fencing and electronic sensors and is subject to working agreements and active inspections by security forces from both sides. A possible security problem, however, could arise as a result of the upcoming, partial British military withdrawal from the Basra area, which will leave the Iraqi side of the frontier approaching Kuwait more vulnerable to smugglers, terrorists, and migrants.

In the meantime, however, the Kuwaiti-Iraqi border is secure, busy with military and related traffic, but essentially closed to other travelers. The virtual absence of Iraqi refugees in Kuwait is no accident. This major spillover problem for two of Iraq's other neighbors (Jordan and Syria), each with as many as 1 million refugees already, is nowhere on Kuwait's horizon. Even individual Iraqi officials have a hard time obtaining visas for or entry into Kuwait; and group visits by Iraqis, even official ones supported by the United States, are a rarity. When the United States needs to train Iraqis outside their country because of security concerns, it flies them to Amman, Beirut, Istanbul, or even farther afield rather than send them to nearby Kuwait City.

Spillover of Sectarian Strife

Although Kuwait has not faced, and is not likely to face, major problems from cross-border movements to or from Iraq, the possibility exists that Iraq's crisis could ignite trouble inside Kuwait's own population, which might seem to contain a combustible mix. In a February 2007 interview, Kuwait's National Security Council chief, Sheikh Ahmed al-Fahd al-Sabah, mused

with atypical bluntness about possible spillover effects on his country from Iraqi sectarian strife: "We do not want these dossiers to have an impact on us domestically. The Kuwaiti society is a mixture of various sects, and hence these dossiers should be prevented from having an impact on us."⁵ Have four years of bloodletting in Iraq, coupled with the increasingly assertive Shiite revival exported by Iran, started to spill across the border into Kuwait?

The short answer is no. Among the 70 percent Sunni majority in Kuwait, there is less sense of cross-border "Sunni solidarity" with Iraqis than exists in Saudi Arabia or Jordan. This lack of solidarity probably arises from the relatively mild nature of Kuwaiti Islamic identification, the comparative dearth of tribal ties with Iraq, and the general Kuwaiti sense of aloofness from (if not superiority over) all Iraqis. Among the substantial 30 percent Shiite minority of Kuwaitis, a few violent troublemakers have surfaced in the past, but there are none to speak of at present. In the mid-1980s, several dozen Shiite extremists, including some expatriate Arabs or Iranians but also a number of Kuwaitis, were arrested for a series of terrorist incidents almost certainly conducted on orders from Tehran. The vast majority of Kuwaiti Shiites remained peaceful citizens, and the ordeal of occupation by Iraq a few years later is widely credited with forging a stronger sense of national unity among all Kuwaitis. To the extent that sectarian tensions exist, they tend to play out in the realm of parliamentary politics or parallel civil societies. In short, Kuwait exemplifies the triumph of social intercourse over sects, of democracy over demography.

In Kuwait, unlike most other places, the two Muslim sects live intermingled in the same neighborhoods, and the Shiites predominantly share in Kuwait's prosperity, rather than disproportionately forming an economic underclass as in Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, or Bahrain. Moreover, in the past four years, the Kuwaiti government has approved long-standing requests for a Shiite *waqf* (Islamic endowment), a Shiite supreme court for *sharia* cases of family and personal status law,

5. Interview in *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London), February 13, 2007.

construction of several new Shiite mosques, and public observance of the major Shiite holiday of Ashura, commemorating the martyrdom of Ali's son Hussein at the hands of his (Sunni) Muslim opponents.

Nevertheless, some minor trouble spots exist even in Kuwait, which could conceivably raise questions about possible contagion by sectarian tensions from Iraq or elsewhere in the region. Some de facto religious discrimination against the Shiites occurs. Sunnis joke privately about certain well-known Shiite religious customs, such as the practice of temporary or "pleasure" marriage. More troubling is the pattern of de facto political discrimination. The Shiites are "underrepresented in upper levels of government." In successive new cabinets with about a score of ministers appointed by the emir in 2006, the number of Shiites doubled compared with previous years—to just two.

In the National Assembly, with fifty elected members, the number of Shiite representatives has actually been decreasing in each of the past three parliamentary sessions: from six, to five, to just four today. Similar problems of underrepresentation are reported at lower levels of government. Most striking of all is the finding that "there are no known Shi'a in the Kuwait State Security (KSS) forces" and relatively few in the National Guard, although at least one senior officer in the regular army is Shiite.⁶

As individuals, some Kuwaiti Sunnis may see their own Shiite compatriots as having too close an affinity for the Shiite theocratic regime in Iran, which as noted is perceived as more threatening to Kuwait now that Saddam is gone. Some Kuwaiti Shiites, in turn, suspect their Sunni fellow citizens of secretly funding the Sunni insurgents and extremists in Iraq—not without reason in several cases, according to a number of outside observers. Social interaction between members of the two communities has declined fairly steeply in the past couple of years, according to local informants.⁷

Yet on the whole, what is remarkable is how calm the sectarian situation seems in Kuwait, in such sharp contrast to Iraq (or Lebanon). Kuwaiti citizens, whether Sunni or Shiite, are generally secure in their homes and relatively content with their lot. Moreover, the Kuwaiti authorities, unlike their Iraqi counterparts, are widely considered quite capable of preserving public order in the unlikely event they might be called upon to do so. There is little reason to expect change any time soon.

The Rise of Iranian Influence

Of all Iraq's neighbors, Kuwait stands out as the one likely to be most discomfited by a key consequence of the situation in Iraq, indirect and unintended as it may be: the rise in regional influence and ambition of Iran. Kuwait's unease is partly owed to fears of renewed sectarian incitement but more to familiar reasons of power politics, beginning with pressure on disputed oil fields, shipping lanes, energy or other policies, other neighbors, and Iran's overall drive for regional hegemony.

Kuwait's uneasy relations with both Iran and Iraq give the lie to the old Arab adage that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." In 1979, the year of Iran's Islamic Revolution, significant protest demonstrations in Kuwait showed that antigovernment Islamic fervor could cross the narrow gulf between the two countries, if only sporadically. The following year, when Saddam's Iraq invaded Iran, Kuwait's massive financial support for the Arab Iraqis naturally aroused Iranian ire. Iran apparently sponsored a couple of terrorist bombings in Kuwait in 1983, an attempted assassination of the emir in 1985, and a renewed series of terrorist bombings in 1986–1987. Iran's gradually escalating attacks on Kuwait's vital oil shipping and installations eventually led to the "reflagging" episode of 1987–1988, in which U.S. warships protected Kuwaiti tankers, suddenly flying American flags of convenience, against Iranian assault.⁸

6. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, "Kuwait," *2006 International Religious Freedom Report*. Available online (<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2006/71425.htm>).

7. Private discussions by the author with Kuwaitis in Kuwait, October 2006 and January 2007; comments by Prof. Nathan Brown of George Washington University, Washington, D.C., based on recent visits to Kuwait, March 2007.

8. For detailed background on this and other issues, see Anthony Cordesman, *Kuwait: Recovery and Security after the Gulf War* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 8–9 and following.

Since liberation from Saddam's occupation in 1991, Kuwait's ties to Iran have been generally correct but still somewhat distant. The two countries' leaders—including current Iranian president Ahmadinezhad and Kuwaiti emir Sabah al-Ahmed al-Sabah—have met about once a year, issuing vague statements about friendship and regional cooperation. Economic or other interaction between Kuwait and Iran has been only modest. Two-way trade climbed to just over \$400 million in 2005, up only moderately from about \$100 million annually a decade earlier. Joint oil or gas projects have been stymied during this period by friction over the contested Dorra offshore gas fields.

The overthrow of Saddam in 2003 and consequent severe weakening of Iraq, and the increase in Iranian influence there, have given Kuwait some serious grounds for rethinking this complacent attitude. Kuwaitis today express differing views about Iran's increasing role in their neighborhood. A benign (and most likely minority) view is that voiced by the usually liberal commentator Shafiq Ghabra in March 2007: Now, he writes in the leading Kuwaiti paper, is the time to “upgrade” Kuwait's relations with Iran, because “Iran and Kuwait have Iraq in common.” Others lean toward the more ominous view of a different Gulf-based commentator, Abdul Rahman al-Rashed, who writes that “the conflict with Iran, although it is calm for now, could erupt at any moment . . . even without the nuclear escalation, there is a real fear of Iranian expansion in southern Iraq, which is adjacent to the Saudi-Kuwaiti borders.”⁹

Interestingly, the current prime minister of Kuwait, Sheikh Nasser al-Muhammad al-Ahmed al-Sabah, who has led all three cabinets formed since the accession of the current emir in early 2006, previously served as Kuwait's ambassador to Tehran for the entire last decade of the reign of the last shah of Iran (1968–1979). He is still officially listed today as able to speak Persian,

in addition to English, French, and of course his native Arabic.¹⁰ One can only guess the effect his experience in Tehran has on his thinking today. Common sense, however, suggests that the Islamic revolution in Iran, which coincided with his departure from Tehran, did not leave a favorable impression on this conservative member of another royal family in the region.

Either way, some indeterminate but probably substantial number of Kuwaitis must wonder if the rise of Shiite parties in Iraq (and of Hizballah in Lebanon) indicates that Kuwait's American protectors have somehow decided to throw their lot in with a Shiite revival—even if it is also supported by Iran. And few Kuwaitis are likely to accept the Western view that Iran itself may end up at the mercy of local feuds in Iraq and elsewhere, over which it has little control. The result of these conflicting assessments is a policy suffused with ambiguity: counting on U.S. protection, yet not trusting totally in it; hoping Iraq will somehow stabilize, yet not doing very much to support its new Shiite-led government; suspecting Iran's intentions, yet trying to put the best face on them.

A perfect example from early 2007 is the commentary offered by the head of Kuwait's navy, Commander Ahmed Yusuf al-Mullah, on recent exercises in the Gulf. Iran's maneuvers, he opined, were “routine, and had nothing to do with the nuclear program”; the U.S.-led maneuvers, in which Kuwait participated only as an observer, “did not target Iran, because Kuwait considers Iran a friendly neighbor.”¹¹ Any public statement by a Kuwaiti official that explicitly singles out Iran for unequivocal criticism would be hard to find. Still, Kuwait has signed up to several recent joint statements—including one issued after the GCC + 2 meeting with Secretary Rice in January 2007—that allude more vaguely to rejecting hostile external pressures, a formulation widely regarded as a reference to Iran. The overall approach was well summed up by a British

9. Shafiq Ghabra, comments to *al-Ray al-Amm* (Kuwait), March 5, 2007; Abdul Rahman al-Rashed, “Why We Fear Iran,” *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (English edition), April 22, 2006 (available online at <http://aawsat.com/English/news.asp?section=2&cid=4650>).

10. “Profiles of New Kuwaiti Cabinet Members,” Kuwait News Agency (KUNA), March 27, 2007. Available online (www.kuna.net.kw/home/story.aspx?Language=en&DSNO=965273).

11. “Kuwaiti Defense Minister (sic) Terms ‘Routine’ Iranian Military Exercises in Persian Gulf,” Islamic Republic News Agency, March 13, 2007. Available online (www.irna.com/en/news/view/line-22/0611199510163902.htm).

observer: “Washington’s Arab allies want Iran deterred, not provoked.”¹²

Iran’s nuclear program poses a severe test for this temporizing stance. Here Kuwait has so far mainly taken refuge in the language of “international legitimacy,” that is, the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, International Atomic Energy Agency reports and regulations, and UN Security Council statements and resolutions. Kuwaiti spokesmen pointedly note that Iran has the right to a peaceful nuclear program, while also proclaiming their adherence to the still very limited UN sanctions targeting Iran’s clandestine nuclear activities. In February 2007, in his most extensive public remarks on this issue, Emir al-Sabah offered this remonstration:

The president of Iran visited me We told him that if nuclear energy will be used for peaceful purposes we will be the first to welcome it. But if it is the intention of his leadership to use this energy for military purposes, then we will be very unhappy. I hope they use their heads I hope that the [military] confrontation will not happen, but everything is possible.¹³

As a long-term precaution, Kuwait joined in the announcement at the end of 2006 that the GCC would examine the option of acquiring a civilian nuclear capability. Privately, Gulf officials say this plan had already been under active consideration for the past couple of years or so. Although it is too soon to tell how seriously to take these claims, their mere assertion should be seen as at least a rhetorical shot across Iran’s bow.

Altogether, the specter of Iran, emboldened by the situation in Iraq, looms as Kuwait’s most significant danger from any direction. Internal issues, including Kuwait’s own sectarian balance, could be aggravated more by Iranian meddling or inspiration than by any direct spillover from Iraq. Kuwait’s first line of defense against that possibility is to keep its reasonably open political, social, and economic systems functioning normally, even in the face of great uncertainty and

instability on its borders. That is a proven method, at least for most of Kuwait’s modern history, for ensuring domestic tranquility.

Kuwait’s Options

Beyond this domestic first line of defense, Kuwait’s other options include the following.

Staying under the American umbrella. Although no match for a determined external aggressor, Kuwait’s own small forces are arguably no longer totally trivial. Theoretically, in combination with some effective regional security structure, they could conceivably be a larger factor than before in coping with some of the security implications of the unsettled situation in and around Iraq. Yet even such seemingly natural cooperation confronts a major obstacle: the ingrained distrust and resentment that divide one Gulf society from another, even (or especially) when they are the closest neighbors. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia’s military modernization program is generally seen as disappointing over the past decade, especially by comparison with Iran’s. In the short term, then, no effective regional Arab security structure is on the horizon, nor can one be anticipated to arise even in the medium term.

As a result, Kuwait will surely continue to take great care of its special security relationship with the United States, which has long been its primary protection against any external threat. It will keep hosting substantial U.S. forces and an equally wide array of privatized security and logistics operations oriented toward Iraq. Fortunately, Kuwait is mostly empty space, and the U.S. military is now staying away from any densely populated areas. Except at the airport (and even then out of uniform), the U.S. military is hardly visible at all to the casual observer anywhere within metropolitan Kuwait City, which is where almost everybody in the country resides. Even shopping trips to the ubiquitous local malls are now essentially off-limits to U.S. military personnel, for whom self-contained PX emporia of all

12. Edmund O’Sullivan, “Hardline Approach from the U.S. Puts Tehran on the Spot,” *Middle East Economic Digest* 51, no. 4 (January 26–February 1, 2007), p. 56.

13. “Emir of Kuwait Implores Iran to Be Reasonable over Nuclear Programme,” Agence France-Presse (dateline London), February 6, 2007.

kinds have been built in the past few years on the bases scattered around the far outskirts of the city.

If the United States decides to redeploy some troops from Iraq to create a larger contingency force on the Kuwaiti side of the border, Kuwait can be expected to comply readily with this request. In the words of a senior Kuwaiti security official, “Kuwait has special relations with the United States, the United Kingdom, and the rest of the coalition countries, which means that we can play a role in stabilizing the situation in the region.”¹⁴

Like the other Arab Gulf states, Kuwait will discreetly advocate sustaining a very robust U.S. military presence in its vicinity, including a continued commitment to Iraq sufficient to keep it from disintegrating or falling into the hands of Iran. Kuwait will watch closely to see which way the winds are blowing in Washington. If U.S. strategy generally appears to be holding, Kuwait will stay supportive but in the background. But if U.S. policy seems to be lurching toward some drastic departure—either toward a military confrontation with Iran or toward a greatly reduced role in the region—then Kuwait will have to scramble for some new sources of protection.

A new source of protection could take the form (in descending order of likelihood) of requests for a more overt American defense umbrella, for a stronger regional self-defense mechanism, or for accelerated rapprochement with Iran. Most likely of all, because of the regional penchant for ambiguity, hedging one’s bets, and muddling through, Kuwait will paradoxically try to pursue all three of those avenues simultaneously for as long as it can. For a small, rich, and weak country like Kuwait, one with powerful friends and enemies, that strategy for success is not elegant but is probably effective.

Providing economic initiatives to help stabilize Iraq. In absolute dollar figures, Kuwait’s economic contribution to certain programs in Iraq is substantial.

U.S. embassy sources estimate the in-kind donations of fuel, infrastructure building and maintenance, and related expenses of the (mostly U.S. military and security) air and “land bridge” transport links from Kuwait to Iraq since 2003 at several hundred million dollars. Kuwait has also spent tens or perhaps as much as hundreds of millions of dollars on humanitarian, primarily medical, assistance to Iraq.¹⁵ What is conspicuous by its absence, however, is any significant Kuwaiti direct commercial input to the struggling Iraqi economy.

To be sure, given Iraq’s chaotic security, financial, legal, and infrastructure situation, Kuwait’s careful managers would not easily uncover many prudent investment vehicles there. Even profitable trading ventures will likely be strictly limited, beyond military and other official requisitions. A prime example is the fate of an agreement for Kuwait to import natural gas from Iraq through an existing pipeline. In February 2007, a Kuwaiti official publicly abandoned this project, noting: “We are not refurbishing the pipeline for the Iraqi gas now. Why should we, when the infrastructure on the Iraqi side has not been repaired? ... We have to look elsewhere for supply, either from Iran or Qatar.”¹⁶

On top of such cold calculation is the continued personal and political resentment and contempt among many Kuwaitis concerning all things Iraqi. In addition, Kuwaitis can claim, with surprising justice, that Iraq does not really need their money. Iraq has its own plentiful cash reserves; security and manpower are the real impediments to economic development.

Another donor conference took place in mid-April 2007, but so far Kuwait has given no outward sign that it will fall in line. On the contrary, judging from remarks by Kuwait’s then foreign minister in late 2006: While Iraq has “friends and brothers” who can assist it in various ways, it “is a very rich country that does not need donations.” Kuwait has pledged just \$5 million to the UN/World Bank International Reconstruction

14. Interview in *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London), February 13, 2007.

15. U.S. Embassy in Kuwait, Background Notes, November 2006, gives a high figure of \$425 million in Kuwaiti funding for a “Humanitarian Resource Center” in Iraq.

16. “Windfall Report Card—Kuwait: Missed Opportunity,” *Middle East Economic Digest*, March 23–29, 2007, pp. 10ff; “Special Report: Kuwait,” *Middle East Economic Digest*, November 17–23, 2006, pp. 55–83.

Fund for Iraq, to which twenty-four other nations have contributed a total of nearly \$1.5 billion.

Then, the much larger question of Iraq's outstanding international debt arises. Kuwait has yet to move beyond its declared willingness in principle to forgive a "substantial portion" of the Iraqi debt it holds, estimated at \$27 billion, even as Iraq's Paris Club (and some other) sovereign creditors have agreed to cancel 80 percent of those obligations. Even when Saudi Arabia moved to match that level, at the Sharm al-Sheikh International Compact for Iraq meeting on May 3, 2007, Kuwait failed to follow suit.

At the same time, Kuwait continues to receive from Iraq the annual 5 percent of Iraq's oil revenue—approximately a billion dollars per year—due under UN mandate as compensation for losses incurred during Saddam's occupation of Kuwait more than 15 years ago.¹⁷ Given this mindset, the product both of Kuwait's painful history with Iraq and of the parlous present condition of that country, Kuwait is highly unlikely to take the initiative with any sort of economic package for its northern neighbor.

Some observers are inclined to attribute this parsimony mainly to Kuwait's displeasure with the Shiite and therefore "pro-Iranian" cast of the new Iraqi government, but that can hardly be the whole story. Even if the entire Iraqi government were Sunni and somehow ethnically connected to Kuwaitis, Kuwait's largesse would rise by no more than a modest measure. It derives from Kuwait's universally conservative foreign economic policy, which goes beyond any sectarian or other sociopolitical criteria.

Given this history, significant improvements in Kuwait's economic ties to Iraq would require some form of outside encouragement. Kuwait's reluctance to relinquish reparations for Saddam's 1990–1991 occupation or to write off Saddam's debt from his earlier war against Iran is understandable. Nevertheless, Kuwait could be encouraged to offset these demands on Iraq's limited resources with an aid, trade, and investment package of some kind. Such adjustments would make

at least a symbolic and possibly also a real contribution to the stabilization of Iraq, which on balance is in Kuwait's own enlightened self-interest. While this kind of gesture is hardly the top priority by comparison with Kuwait's vital land link to Iraq, it may be worth pressing in the context of the UN-sponsored International Compact for Iraq.

Promoting regional dialogue and reconciliation.

Kuwait can be counted on as a staunch advocate of regional and international dialogue (with the glaring exception of any direct dialogue with Israel). Ideally, these sorts of "conference-building measures" might ultimately create a less dangerous regional environment for Kuwait and the other temptingly weak and wealthy states of the Gulf. But even well short of that, support for regional dialogue is intended to mitigate the kind of acute polarization or outright conflict that might force the Kuwaitis to take sides.

A noteworthy instance of this posture came in mid-January 2007, in an uncharacteristically forward-leaning comment by Kuwait's new foreign minister, Sheikh Muhammad al-Sabah al-Salim al-Sabah. He went out of his way to tell the media that the emir had asked Secretary Rice, during her visit for a GCC +2 meeting on regional issues, to initiate "dialogue" with both Syria and Iran "to safeguard Gulf security."¹⁸ Because the United States in fact agreed to do this in some fashion only a month later, one can probably safely assume that Sheikh Muhammad knew he was pushing on an open door and that both the United States and Saudi Arabia had already signaled their comfort with this public plea.

In line with this approach, a Kuwaiti ambassador was a willing if quiet participant in the unprecedented ambassadorial-level conference of Iraq's neighbors (plus the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and a few additional Arab or Islamic representatives) that convened in Baghdad for one day on March 10, 2007. The conferees agreed on a bland communiqué supporting Iraqi security and reconstruction and agreed

17. "Baaqi 29.5 Milyar Dular" (29.5 billion dollars remain), *al-Anba* (Kuwait), March 27, 2007.

18. "Kuwait Urges U.S. to Talk with Iran, Syria," Agence France-Presse (dateline Kuwait City), January 17, 2007.

as well to meet again somewhere in the region before too long, reportedly at a higher, ministerial level.

Kuwait attended the follow-up ministerial meeting of Iraq's neighbors, held at Sharm al-Sheikh, Egypt, May 3–4, 2007. It duly subscribed to the same vague verbal consensus supporting Iraq, but as noted, made no specific commitments on debt relief, forgiveness of reparations, refugees, or any other matter. Even in this multilateral framework, Kuwaiti consent to any such pledges of economic or other assistance to the hard-pressed Iraqi government will obviously take some additional prodding.

Conclusion

Kuwait, often overlooked in discussions of Iraq's neighbors, in reality plays an indispensable part as a southern land bridge for U.S. and other military and civilian transport to that beleaguered country. Moreover, Kuwait has about as much oil (and probably also natural gas) buried in its own tiny territory—at least another hundred years' worth even at current high production rates—as exists in all of Iraq. For Kuwaitis, Americans, and the entire global economy, protection of these assets is essential. Indeed, to the extent that Kuwait has been overlooked in most regional analyses of the implications of Iraq's crisis, this omission is largely because Kuwait has proved so surprisingly successful at averting the threats of direct spillover from the turmoil consuming its neighbor to the north.

Given its great national wealth, Kuwait could be encouraged to make greater economic and humanitarian contributions to Iraq. Although this activity may be a secondary dimension of its overall role, it would be in Kuwait's own interest—not only for the marginal help it might provide in trying to stabilize Iraq but also to balance Iran's influence in that country.

The preceding point leads directly to the central issue arising from Iraq, for Kuwait and for its American and other friends: how to contain potential threats from the rising power of Iran. Clearly, Kuwait cannot cope with this major issue on its own. Precisely for that reason, some creative new quiet diplomacy is called for. The United States and Kuwait can consult more closely about Iran, share more information about it, and plan

more actively together to address the common security concerns created by Tehran's regional ambitions. They should be able to shift more of the intelligence and internal security focus, in cooperation with close allies, toward potential terrorist and other threats from Iran. Similarly, planning military acquisitions and strategy with even greater emphasis on potentially hostile Iranian intentions and capabilities would make sense, preferably in close coordination with other GCC states—but without loud public alarms or provocative declarations.

On the economic front as well, there is room for improvement in containing the Iranian challenge. If, for example, Kuwait's parliament could be convinced to open up new avenues for much-needed foreign investment and technical help in developing additional energy exports, this might well add to the economic pressures on Tehran to moderate some of its belligerent positions. Despite its small size and negligible “hard power,” Kuwait has the potential to become much more of an economic powerhouse, with potentially more significant strategic consequences. Even as today's focus is inevitably on short-term crisis management in Iraq, such longer-term possibilities also deserve more thoughtful attention.

At the same time, Kuwait could adopt a more activist pursuit of regional dialogue and reconciliation, including Iran. The only proviso should be to make material progress explicitly conditional on resolution of the nuclear impasse with Tehran.

Overall, Kuwait remains surprisingly insulated from direct negative repercussions of the situation in Iraq. Little immediate prospect looms that this happy anomaly will take a sharp turn for the worse, almost no matter what happens inside Iraq. Refugees, terrorists, armies, or sectarian strife have not and probably will not make it across this border again in appreciable numbers or impact, in either direction.

Yet Kuwait could become vulnerable to the indirect implications of Iraq's troubles—particularly the expanding regional reach of Iran. In the short term, the best hedge against this problem is Kuwait's own success story of preserving its parliamentary system, its energy and economic lifeline, and its enviable record of communal coexistence.

Given its small size and conservative political and economic instincts, Kuwait is highly unlikely to adopt any major initiatives on its own to tamper with this essentially tolerable status quo, or with its current

means of maintaining it. Nor should it be pushed or prodded to do so. Unlike most other places in the region these days, the folk wisdom of “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” is very much in order here.

Jordan: Keeping All Quiet on the Western Front

David Schenker

OF ALL IRAQ'S NEIGHBORS, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan may well feel it has the most riding on what happens next door. For decades prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Jordan's fortunes were in large part tied to those of Baath Iraq. Saddam's economic largesse and capricious political dealings constituted a double-edged sword for Jordan. Today, events in Iraq continue to affect the kingdom. The instability and violence across the border, in particular, increasingly has political, economic, and social implications for Jordan.

The contrast between the pre- and post-2003 dynamic between Jordan and Iraq is striking. Under Saddam, Iraq was Jordan's leading trade partner; today it is number five.¹ Before 2003, Iraq was the sole-source provider of oil to Jordan—at vastly reduced prices; today, Iraq sells Jordan a mere fraction of its energy needs. And today, because of the violence in Iraq, up to 1 million Iraqis have fled their country to take up residence in Jordan.

What happens in Iraq directly affects Jordan. In 2004, Jordan's King Abdullah voiced concern about the implications of Iranian inroads into Iraq. "If Iraq goes Islamic republic," he said, "we've opened ourselves to a whole set of new problems that will not be limited to the borders of Iraq."² The danger, he noted, was the creation of an Iranian-backed "Shiite crescent," stretching from Iran to Lebanon, threatening moderate, predominantly Sunni Arab states.

Four years after the U.S. invasion, Iraq is not the only front on which Jordan's strategic horizon has deteriorated. To Jordan's west the peace treaty with Israel remains solid, but developments in Palestinian politics—the landslide election of Hamas to parlia-

ment and the subsequent power-sharing arrangement between Hamas and Fatah—do not bode well for Jordan, where an estimated 60 percent of the population is Palestinian. Hamas's expanded role in the Palestinian Authority has heightened intra-Palestinian tensions and increased the likelihood of an eventual conflagration with Israel. For Jordan, the result is a second troubled border.

At the same time, to the north, Iran-backed Syria remains a nominally hostile border for Jordan. Moderate Jordan, an ally of Washington and a recipient of significant U.S. foreign assistance, has a tense border with Syria—not only because Damascus has pursued a policy of destabilizing Iraq, but also because of apparent Syrian complicity in promoting terrorism in Jordan. Indeed, on several occasions in recent years—most notably in the case of the thwarted 2004 Jayoussi-cell chemical weapon attack in Jordan—terrorists entered the kingdom through Syria.

Surrounded by uncertainty, Jordan is feeling the pressure. With Hamas on one border, an increasingly antagonistic Syria on another, and the possibility that Iran will wield considerable influence in a postwar Iraq, Jordan no doubt is feeling vulnerable. These pressures likely contributed to Jordan's latest efforts to promote a return to U.S.-brokered Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, despite the seemingly insurmountable obstacle of Hamas's participation in the Palestinian national unity government.³ Understood in this context, King Abdullah's address to a joint session of the U.S. Congress on March 7, 2007, was more about Jordanian security than about linking Israeli-Palestinian peace to solving the Iraq crisis.

Jordan today is neither weak nor in imminent jeopardy. Should Iraq take a turn for the worse, however,

* The author would like to thank Rana Shabb for her excellent research assistance in preparing this chapter.

1. "Jordan's Trade Balance with Main Partner," International Monetary Fund data appearing in *DG Trade*, September 2006.

2. Robin Wright and Peter Baker, "Iraq, Jordan See Threat to Election from Iran," *Washington Post*, December 8, 2004.

3. See the address by King Abdullah II to the Joint Meeting of Congress, March 7, 2007 (available online at www.jordanembassyus.org/hmka03072007.htm).

the kingdom would be placed in a precarious position. As King Abdullah said in January 2007: “Civil war is always looming around the corner in Iraq . . . If it takes to the next stage where it is a full-blown civil war . . . then countries in the region, whether we like it or not, will be dragged in.”⁴

The kingdom faces a number of challenges related to spillover from Iraq. To insulate Jordan from these Iraq-related threats, King Abdullah is pursuing a number of initiatives both with the West and among his Arab neighbors.

Political Support

Jordan has been an advocate on behalf of the Iraqi government since the first interim government was established and has since continued to back stability in Iraq based on a “legitimate and inclusive political system.”⁵ The clearest demonstration of Amman’s support was that Jordan was the first Arab state to establish an embassy and to post an ambassador to post-Saddam Iraq. This presence in Baghdad—and Amman’s support for the coalition—has placed Jordanian personnel in harm’s way.

On August 7, 2003, the Jordanian embassy was the target of a car-bomb attack, which killed nearly a dozen persons and wounded forty others, including the Jordanian consul. Nevertheless, the embassy was reopened and the ambassador reposted in April 2003. Still, Jordanian personnel in Iraq (and Iraqi host-country nationals employed at the embassy) continue to be targeted to this day; kidnappings and killings are an almost routine occurrence. Despite the security threat, Amman is committed to maintaining its presence in Baghdad.

By and large, however, Jordanian political support for stability and for the elected government of Iraq has been confined to the realm of rhetoric because the kingdom’s ability to influence the direction of events

in Iraq is limited.⁶ A Jordanian delegation led by Foreign Ministry secretary general Khaldun al-Talhouni attended the March 7, 2007, conference of Iraq’s neighbors. Jordan articulated support as well at meetings of the International Compact for Iraq, including the ministerial meeting at Sharm al-Sheikh, Egypt, held May 3–4, 2007. Other than lending such political support, however, what Jordan could do in this area is unclear.

Unlike Iran and Syria, Amman has done a relatively good job of controlling its borders and preventing jihadists from using Jordanian territory to transit to Iraq. Still, some say that the kingdom is not doing enough to prevent personnel and material support from reaching the insurgency through Jordan. In 2005, for example, then Iraqi government spokesman Laith Kubba said that relatives of Saddam who “have huge sums of money . . . are supporting political and media activities and other efforts to revive the Baath Party” from Jordan.⁷ Despite these accusations, however, most believe that the support emanating from Jordan for the insurgency is minimal.

Jordanian officials often speak about the danger of “external actors” interfering in Iraq—a reference to Iranian and Syrian meddling. Related to this Iranian meddling, Jordan has been especially concerned about the disposition of Iraqi Sunnis vis-à-vis the majority Shiite population. King Abdullah has repeatedly warned the coalition not to marginalize the Sunni community. “Any political process that doesn’t ensure the participation of all segments of Iraqi society” he said, “will fail and lead to more violence.”⁸

In the aftermath of the U.S. invasion, Jordan presented itself as a potential mediator of sorts between the coalition and angry, dispossessed Sunnis, with whom the Jordanians had long-standing tribal ties. As part of this effort, in November 2004, King Abdullah issued the “Amman Message,” a speech and initiative geared toward promoting religious tolerance in the

4. “Jordan’s King Gives U.S. Iraq Plan Six Months to Work,” Agence France-Presse, January 26, 2007.

5. King Abdullah, interview with NBC’s *The Today Show*, September 16, 2005.

6. Initially the king did not support democracy in Iraq but rather believed that Iraq would be better served by “someone who has experience of being a tough guy.” See Alan Cowell, “Old Iraq Army Could Provide a Leader, Jordan’s King Says,” *New York Times*, May 18, 2004.

7. Richard Opal, “Iraq Accuses Jordan of Allowing Financing of Insurgency,” *New York Times*, August 22, 2005.

8. “Rice to Attend Mideast Summit,” *CBS News*, January 15, 2007.

region.⁹ A key element of the message was the inadmissibility of *takfir*—defining someone as an infidel—in an effort to calm Sunni-Shiite tensions. Regrettably, this Jordanian Sunni outreach appears to have had little effect in either reassuring Iraqi Sunnis or reducing the level of the insurgency.

Concern for Iraqi Sunnis in particular is not confined to the regime but is widespread among the Jordanian population. In part this appears to be driven by mistrust of Iran and of Shiites in general. Although Jordan's Shiite population is negligible—according to the *CIA Factbook*, Shiites and Druze constitute less than 2 percent of the Jordanian population—the kingdom is concerned about Iran's proactive militant and predatory regional policies, which threaten the regimes of several moderate Sunni Arab states. Jordan is concerned about the increasing influence of Tehran in Iraq and the prospect that Iran will soon become a nuclear state.

Interestingly, Jordan's pro-Sunni sentiments were most pronounced following the execution of Saddam Hussein in January 2007. Immediately following Saddam's death, the Jordanian opposition—dominated by Islamists led by the Islamic Action Front (IAF)—launched a series of demonstrations raising pictures of Saddam and calling for Hamas and Hizballah to “sever their relations” with the (Shiite) governments of Iran and Iraq.¹⁰ The opposition also demanded that the Jordanian government sever ties with Iraq and close the Iranian embassy in Amman. IAF officials also demonstrated their support for Sunni jihadist leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi by attending his martyr's funeral in August 2006.

In its effort to cultivate goodwill within the Iraqi Sunni community, in 2003, Jordan established a 100-bed field hospital in Falluja. In its nearly four years of operation, the facility has provided both emergency

and basic preventive care to the local population and has been well received—as evidenced by the fact that, to date, it has not come under attack by insurgents.¹¹ As of April 2007, the Jordanian field hospital had treated some 747,291 Iraqis, including 4,500 surgeries.¹² Despite the modest success of the hospital, however, the goodwill on the ground has failed to translate into a decrease in violence.

Military Support

In April 2006, King Abdullah described his country's military assistance to Iraq as follows:

Jordan's training of Iraqi police and security forces stems from our concern for the security and unity of Iraq. We are thoroughly convinced that as long as we secure the establishment of a strong Iraqi army and a qualified and trained police force, Iraq's reconstruction can be assured along with an end to foreign presence there.¹³

Indeed, Jordan, with U.S. and coalition assistance, has taken a leading role in helping train the Iraqi police and military special-forces units. The military support from Amman to post-Saddam Iraq is not surprising, given the assistance it provided to U.S. forces in toppling Saddam. Indeed, according to the *Washington Post*, Jordan provided “secret” basing to U.S. military and intelligence personnel during U.S. operations in Iraq, which included bases for the Rhode Island Air National Guard as well as for army aerial surveillance assets.¹⁴ But Jordan has been active in preparing Iraqi forces to help contain the insurgency as well.

In October 2003, after completion of months of U.S.-funded construction, the Jordan International Police Training Center (JIPTC), located at Camp Muwaqqar near Amman, was inaugurated. An international training effort staffed by twelve countries

9. Text available in English online (www.jordanembassyus.org/new/pr/pr11092004.shtml).

10. “Mutathahirun fil Urdun yatlubun Hamas wa Hizbullah biqata ‘ilaqathuma maa Iran” (Demonstrators in Jordan demand that Hamas and Hizballah break their relations with Iran), *al-Hayat* (London), January 6, 2007.

11. Interestingly, this facility was supported by Department of Defense Coalition Support Fund (CSF) reimbursements.

12. Statistics provided by the Jordanian embassy in Washington.

13. King Abdullah interview, *al-Sabah al-Jadid* (Baghdad), April 23, 2006.

14. William Arkin, “Keeping Secrets in Jordan,” *Washington Post*, November 16, 2005.

and 2,000 personnel, the JIPTC was a state-of-the-art police training facility. The mandate of JIPTC was to train some 32,000 Iraqi police officers by January 2004,¹⁵ and when the facility was fully operational, it graduated about 1,700 police per month. The eight-week classes included classroom instruction—with an emphasis on “democratic policing principles”—as well as firearms training. When the program finally ended in February 2007, the United States had invested some \$500 million in construction and facility operations. During the thirty-seven classes conducted, more than 50,000 Iraqi police were matriculated.

Assessments of the JIPTC vary widely.¹⁶ Coalition officials publicly point to the numbers of those trained currently serving in Iraq. Fewer than 4 percent of the Iraqi trainees were said to have “washed out” and not completed the course. Detractors, however, are legion. One unnamed American expert quoted in a 2005 study by the Center for Strategic and International Studies gave a devastating summary of the problems:

I started to recommend back in February 2004 that JIPTC modify its curriculum to place more emphasis on paramilitary training as opposed to women’s rights, human rights, etc. That type of training is not unimportant for democratic policing, but it is useless if the policeman is dead. Unfortunately, the police trainers—particularly from Western Europe—were adamant about the need to train Iraqis in community and democratic policing... When I departed in March 2005, JIPTC still did not provide firearms training to IPS recruits on anything but 9 mm pistols—not terribly effective against AKs, RPKs and RPGs.¹⁷

Still other critics focus on the quality of the Iraqi recruits. The bottom line is that the effect of this training on the

overall stability of Iraq remains to be seen. What we do know is that the morbidity rate for these JIPTC graduates appears to be no less than that of the overall police population. By winter 2007, an estimated 2,000 of the trainees had been killed.¹⁸ Of course, Jordan is neither to blame nor to congratulate for the failure or success of the JIPTC. The kingdom was merely host to the center and one of the several countries participating in the training effort coordinated by the United States—specifically, by the Department of State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs.

Concurrent with the police instruction, Jordan was also training Iraqi special-forces personnel at the headquarters of the Jordanian Armed Forces 71st Counterterrorism Battalion in Yajouz. Through April 2006, Yajouz, which is now known as the King Abdullah Special Forces Training Center, had trained some 7,000 Iraqi special operations forces, most of whom returned to Iraq and are said to be performing quite well in joint counterinsurgency operations with U.S. forces.¹⁹

Jordanian-Iraqi security cooperation may be moving beyond training. In December 2006, the two states signed a security protocol in Amman in which three committees were established to facilitate bilateral cooperation, including counterterrorism, extradition requests and prisoner exchange, and border crossings.²⁰ Whether this latest cooperation is of yet productive is unclear.

Economic Cooperation

For Jordan, Iraq remains an important economic partner, despite the fact that the violence in recent years has led to a significant decrease in bilateral trade. In 2006, the volume of trade between Iraq and Jordan totaled some \$600 million, of which \$570 million were Jorda-

15. See www.jiptc.org/index.html.

16. *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq: Report to Congress in Accordance with DOD Appropriations Act 2006*, May 2006. Available online (www.defenselink.mil/news/may2006/d20060530SecurityandStabilityRptFinalv2.pdf).

17. Anthony Cordesman, “Iraqi Force Development: Can Iraqi Forces Do the Job?” Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., November 29, 2005.

18. Cindy Carroll, “To Protect and Serve,” *Tennessee Alumnus Magazine*, Spring 2007. The article is an interview with Jim Hammond, chief of training for U.S. Department of Justice at JIPTC.

19. In 2004, nearly fifty of these trainees were killed when they ill-advisedly returned home to visit Iraq for Ramadan. They traveled by bus and were not carrying weapons at the time.

20. “Al Urdun wal Iraq yuwaqqa’an brutukul ta’awun amni bayna al-baladain” (Jordan and Iraq sign a protocol on security cooperation between the two countries), Agence France-Presse, December 13, 2006.

21. “Jordanian Minister, Iraqi Speaker Discuss Boosting Trade, Investments,” BBC Monitoring Middle East (Petra website), August 16, 2006.

nian exports.²¹ Jordanian exports to Iraq have in fact increased in recent years. In 2002, the year before Saddam was deposed, Jordan exported roughly \$441 million worth of goods to Iraq; in 2006, \$465 million. But the difference really comes in terms of Iraqi exports to Jordan, where in the same timeframe, Iraqi exports dropped from \$751 million to \$7 million.²² This dramatic change is largely related to oil.

Under Saddam, Jordan had received 98,000 barrels per day of oil—almost the entirety of Jordan's domestic requirements—from Iraq at vastly reduced prices. Oil, trucked by road, was Iraq's primary export to Jordan. With the onset of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Iraqi oil exports to Jordan were suspended, which created a real problem for Jordan. Not only would the kingdom have to pay market prices for its petrol, but also it would have to find alternate suppliers.

As a result of the end of the Iraqi subsidy, Amman was forced to pass the cost onto the Jordanian consumer. According to Jordanian officials, a \$1 increase in the cost per barrel of oil over \$60 equates to a \$30 million increase in Jordan's budget deficit. In April 2006, the government of Jordan increased price of petrol, gas, and home heating oil between 12 percent and 43 percent to reduce the budget deficit.²³

Since 2003, Jordan has not received oil from Iraq. In October 2006, however, Iraq and Jordan reached a deal for between 30,000 and 60,000 barrels per day at \$10 per barrel, well under the then market price of about \$50 per barrel.²⁴ Exports were slated to start at 10,000 barrels per day. Because of the security situation in Iraq and the inability to protect the roads to Jordan, however, the agreement was never implemented. Earlier this year, Jordan and Iraq met again to discuss how to move forward on the oil deal.

In March 2007, Iraqi security affairs minister Shrawan Waeli, who was visiting Amman, revealed that Iraq had prepared a security plan for protecting oil installations and export routes that would allow the transport of oil to Jordan to start. The plan, according to Waeli, involved using sixteen Iraqi helicopters to monitor and protect the roads.²⁵ The potential efficacy of this plan remains a question mark.

Although Jordanian exports to Iraq are up, the overall economic situation for Jordan is difficult without subsidized oil. In 2003, the Bush administration took steps to aid the kingdom in what it believed would be a short disruption in the Iraqi oil supply. That year, the United States provided Jordan with \$700 million in emergency supplemental economic support funds (in addition to \$400 million in foreign military financing). U.S. foreign assistance to Jordan—without supplementals—now tips in at about \$500 million per year, relatively unchanged from 2002. Although the Jordanians are lobbying hard, whether Jordan will receive supplemental funds in 2007 is unclear.

Refugees

Even as Jordan is taking steps to help the Iraqi government contain the insurgency, the kingdom is facing increasing pressure at home. The most serious of these pressures, of course, is the refugee crisis.²⁶ Although estimates vary greatly, as of early 2007, some 700,000 to 1 million Iraqis were believed to be residing in Jordan. According to the Jordanian Ministry of the Interior, as of March 2007, 500 asylum seekers arrived in Jordan per day.²⁷

Several studies have discussed the effect of these refugees on Jordan's state and society, from increases in the price of real estate to inflation to stress on resources,

22. Jordan's Trade and Investment Information System website, *Merchandise Trade* (<http://193.188.90.76:7001/JoTIIS/TrdJordan.jsp>). Saudi Arabia has supplanted Iraq as Jordan's leading supplier of oil.

23. "Jordan Expected to Sign Free Trade Agreement with Iraq," *Jordan Times*, September 17, 2006.

24. "Iraq Oil to Jordan Stalled by Violence," *UPI Energy*, March 6, 2007.

25. "Iraq to Supply Jordan with Oil at Preferential Prices: Minister," Deutsche Presse-Agentur, March 27, 2007.

26. For additional details, see Nathan Hodson, "Iraqi Refugees in Jordan: Cause for Concern in a Pivotal State," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Research Notes, Number 13, April 2007.

27. "Iraq-Jordan: Authorities Consider Imposing Visas on Iraqis," Reuters, March 15, 2007.

28. See, for example, Scott Lasensky's "Jordan and Iraq: Between Cooperation and Crisis," United States Institute of Peace Special Report no. 178 (December 2006), Washington, D.C.

particularly water.²⁸ It's easy to see why: before the arrival of these Iraqis, the kingdom's population was just about 6 million. The Iraqi influx represents a 15 percent increase in Jordan's population. Given the sheer numbers, it's no wonder that, in January 2007, Jordanian spokesman Naser Judeh characterized the Iraqis as a "burden."

According to Salamah Dirawi, an economic reporter for the Jordanian daily *al-Arab al-Yawm*, more than 80 percent of Iraqis currently in Jordan are residing—illegally—without official residence permits.²⁹ Adding to the stresses on Jordan's infrastructure, he writes, some 34,000 Iraqi children currently attend Jordanian schools. Jordanians entering the kingdom are usually professionals, in part because living in Jordan is more expensive than in Syria, the other leading destination for fleeing Iraqis.³⁰ Despite the economic and social costs, Jordan continues to admit Iraqis. As King Abdullah explained in January 2007, Jordan is bound by its tradition:

Jordan has always been the refuge of those escaping conflict in our region. It is the world's largest per capita host of refugees and all those escaping the hell of war. We receive those escaping dire circumstances for humanitarian reasons... we will not abandon our humanitarian role, and we will continue to support them until circumstances are such that they can return to their countries.³¹

Given the hospitable environment, it comes as little surprise that the Palestinian Authority too has petitioned the UN to intervene on behalf of Palestinians in Iraq—who are having trouble finding third-country destinations—to enter Jordan.³² Palestinians apparently are having an especially difficult time in Iraq,

where they are perceived as having been closely affiliated with the Saddam regime.

Signs are growing, however, that Jordan may be reaching its limit. In March 2007, Jordanian government spokesman Naser Judeh hinted that Jordan was considering steps to limit the influx of Iraqis. Judeh said that Jordan was considering implementing "procedures... to organize Iraqis' entry into the Kingdom."³³ These procedures are necessary, not primarily because of economic or social pressures in Jordan, but rather because of growing security concerns about the Iraqi population.

As a first step, the Jordanian government partially limited the entry of military-age Iraqi males. To this end, Jordan has mandated that only those Iraqis carrying new "G" series Iraqi passports—and not the older "S" series passports—may enter the kingdom. Jordanian sources indicate that hundreds of forged "S" passports are being interdicted by Jordanian customs agents at Iraqi border posts.

To curb inflation, the government of Jordan is imposing restrictions on the purchase of property by Iraqis. According to Jordanian sources, Iraqis possessing a one-year residency permit can buy an apartment and a Jordanian automobile, but restrictions on the ownership of apartments and real estate will apply to those who have temporary residency only.³⁴ Some reports suggest that even those Iraqis allowed to own cars will need a "special [license plate] number to make it possible to identify and facilitate monitoring of Iraqis."³⁵

Still other sources suggest that Jordan is implementing more-stringent measures on Iraqis to better track, harass, or even deport current Iraqi residents of the kingdom. For example, one report in the Arabic inter-

29. Salameh Dirawi, "Al Iraqiyun fi Amman" (The Iraqis in Amman), *al-Arab al-Yawm* (Amman), March 8, 2007.

30. Jordanians say that Syria is increasingly expensive for Iraqis; in terms of housing costs, some say that Syria is more costly.

31. King Abdullah, interview with *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London), January 23, 2007. Available online (www.jordanembassyus.org/hmka01232007.htm).

32. Osama Mehdi, "Da'wa linaqal Falastinii al Iraq ila al Urdun wa Suriya" (A call to transport the Palestinians of Iraq to Jordan and Syria), *Elaph.com*, December 24, 2006.

33. "Iraq-Jordan: Authorities Consider Imposing Visas on Iraqis," Reuters, March 15, 2007.

34. Muhammed al Daama, "Amman: Ijra'at dakhil kibar al-sinn wal marda al Iraqiyin" (Amman: Activities among the elderly and ill Iraqis), *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London), March 28, 2007.

35. Osama Mahdi, "Al Urdun awqafa al-'Iraqiyin wa sayamna' tamlikhum lilaqarat" (Jordan has stopped Iraqis and will prevent them from owning property), *Elaph.com*, March 21, 2007.

net daily news service Elaph suggests that because these Iraqis are technically illegal, Jordanian authorities are causing difficulties for Iraqis in working, registering their children for schools, and using public health facilities.³⁶

The international community reacted sharply to the perception of a change in Jordanian policy. Robert Breen, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) representative in Amman, stated: “We recognize that governments have a right and responsibility to ensure the security of their own borders. At the same time, in any situation where there are people fleeing violence and persecution, we ask that neighboring states keep their borders open to those in need of protection.”³⁷ Even before the latest restrictions, however, Human Rights Watch condemned Jordan for preventing entry of military-age Iraqi males into the kingdom as a “violation of the most fundamental principle of refugee protection—nonrefoulement, which prohibits the return of refugees to persecution or serious harm.”³⁸

The presence of so many Iraqis presents Jordan with a political dilemma. If the violence does not subside in Iraq, how will the kingdom eventually reduce its Iraqi population? Refoulement of refugees contravenes the international norms, and to date no third-party states have stepped forward volunteering to absorb hundreds of thousands of exiled Iraqis.

To keep all of its options open, to date the kingdom has refused to define Iraqis in Jordan as “refugees,” instead preferring to call them “visitors.” For Amman, “refugee” is a legal term that implies onerous obligations on the host country, not the least of which is that refoulement or repatriation is forbidden. In this context, Jordanian officials note with some frequency that only about 20,000 Iraqis in Jordan had officially registered with the UN as “refugees.”

For the time being, the UN appears to have no objection to Jordan’s policy. According to Radhouane

Nouicer, the UNHCR director for the Middle East and North Africa, “some governments prefer to keep people as guests, or brothers, or visitors, so as to avoid the firm and solid obligations stemming from the refugee status”; this is not a problem so long as the Iraqis are well treated and not deported.³⁹

Meanwhile, in February 2007, the government of Jordan commissioned a survey by the Norwegian institute FAFO to determine the number of Iraqis actually in Jordan. Initially, the Jordanians had considered performing the census themselves, but eventually they decided to bring in an external institute so the data would be “uncontestable.”⁴⁰ In announcing this decision, government spokesman Naser Judeh said, “before we have a conception of who is a refugee and who is a resident and who is a visitor, you need to know about numbers and factions.”⁴¹

Justifiably, the Jordanians are interested in how many Iraqis are on their soil. Perhaps more important, however—and not mentioned by Judeh—for security reasons, Amman is interested in the demographic composition of its Iraqi guests. In recent years, Jordan has been the locale of several terrorist attacks, most of which were perpetrated by Sunni Muslim extremists associated with (the now deceased) Jordanian national Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the former al-Qaeda leader in Iraq. Even so, the kingdom is likely more concerned about the influx of Iraqi Shiites.

The Increasing Threat of Terrorism

For years and well before the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Jordan has had a terrorism problem. Over the past decade, Jordan has interdicted several terrorist operations in the kingdom, the most notable of which was the 1999 al-Qaeda plot to attack American and Israeli tourists during the millennium celebrations.

More recently, the threat to Jordan has an increasing connection to extremists in Iraq. In October 2002,

36. Ibid. Some Jordanian officials claim that Elaph.com’s reportage on Jordan is biased and unreliable.

37. “Iraq-Jordan: Authorities Consider Imposing Visas on Iraqis,” Reuters, March 15, 2007.

38. Human Rights Watch website (<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/01/16/usint15064.htm>).

39. “UNHCR: Syria, Jordan Urging U.N. to Hold Iraqi Refugees in Camps,” *International Herald Tribune*, March 26, 2007.

40. Jordanian ambassador to Washington, Prince Zeid, interview by author, April 3, 2007.

41. Saad Abbas, “Al-Urdun yukallif hay’ah Norwigiyyah ihsaa’i al-‘Iraqiyyin ‘ala ardihi” (Jordan appoints a Norwegian organization for statistics about the Iraqis on its soil), *al-Zaman* (London), February 20, 2007.

Zarqawi assisted in the assassination of U.S. diplomat Laurence Foley in Amman; in April 2004, Jordan interdicted a chemical weapons attack orchestrated and funded by Zarqawi that, if successful, could have killed up to an estimated 80,000 people; in April 2005, U.S. Marine amphibious ships were fired upon by an al-Qaeda group, and the perpetrators fled to Iraq; more recently, three Amman hotels were attacked, killing sixty, including three Americans, and al-Qaeda claimed responsibility from Iraq.

The combination of chaos in Iraq and Jordan's pro-West orientation puts the kingdom at risk, particularly now that nearly a million Iraqis are residing in Jordan. No doubt, among the vast majority of innocent Iraqis in Jordan today, some Sunnis are either insurgents or are planning to attack the kingdom. The Jordanian Ministry of the Interior may be confident that it can interdict these Sunni terrorists, but policing or infiltrating Iranian-backed Shiites from Iraq with nefarious plans may prove more difficult. On the record, Jordanian officials say that the kingdom is interested only in numbers of Iraqis. Off the record, however, Jordanian officials express concern about the number of Shiites in Jordan, who may comprise up to 44 percent of Iraqis currently in the kingdom.

Although King Abdullah has to date not impugned his Iraqi guests or even remotely suggested that Iraqis in Jordan might somehow constitute a threat, the king does acknowledge that "perpetrators of most terrorist operations that have harmed Jordan came from outside."⁴² Given the king's recognition of the threat and the undisputed history of terrorism in Jordan tied to Iraq, Jordan has reason to be concerned about its new Iraqi population.

Conclusion

Since 2003, Jordan has been taking steps to minimize the detrimental effect of the deteriorating situation in Iraq on the kingdom. On the political side, Jordan has lent consistent support to the democratically elected Iraqi government in international and Arab forums

and has helped train security forces. At the same time, on the economic front the kingdom has looked to reestablish preferential oil deals with Iraq—deals enabling Iraq to pay down its longstanding debt to the kingdom that allow the kingdom to subsidize oil to Jordanian citizens without increasing budget deficits. These steps have not yet produced significant dividends for Jordan, and whether these policies toward Iraq will ultimately pay off is unclear.

In the absence of tangible dividends and given the pressures from the West and the East, until now Jordan appears to have actually navigated the storm rather well. Despite large increases in the cost of fuel in the kingdom, for example, large-scale disturbances, such as the bread riots of 1989 and 1996, have not occurred. Likewise, no evidence exists to date of terrorism in the kingdom tied to the million or so resident Iraqis. But internal pressures are growing because of inflation and the relative deprivation of Jordanian nationals. As more Iraqis continue to arrive—which is almost a certainty—these social pressures will mount.

Many Iraqis entering Jordan now are wealthy—in part, because they have sold all their possessions in Iraq in preparation for departure. Like 1991—when hundreds of thousands of Iraqis moved to Jordan during the war—these Iraqis will also eventually run out of money, becoming more of a burden on the Jordanian infrastructure.

The combination of the social dislocation of Jordanians and Iraqis and the potential security threat does not bode well for the kingdom in the long term. And this dynamic will not improve over time, particularly given that other countries—because of the same security concerns held by Jordan—will also be hesitant to provide sanctuary to these Iraqis. Jordan traditionally has prided itself on its record of humanitarian assistance, but the risks accompanying this policy are mounting and suggest a change in tack.

Jordan appears to be moving toward a more restrictive policy toward Iraqis trying to enter the kingdom. The immediate result, according to some Jordanians,

42. King Abdullah, interview with *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London, English edition), January 24, 2007.

is that border entry for Iraqis has become a somewhat capricious event. For example, Iraqi professors attending conferences in Amman are turned around at the border. So are fleeing Iraqis. The problem, of course, is that the journey to the border is both dangerous and expensive.

Jordan has never really closed its borders before. During Operation Desert Fox in 1998, Jordan briefly hinted that it would prevent Iraqis from entering. In an effort to stem another refugee flow like that of 1991, then minister of the interior Nayif al-Qadi announced that Jordan would “not open its borders for refugees.” At the same time, he said the kingdom would “be willing to offer any possible assistance and help, if needed, on the Iraqi side” of the border.⁴³

Jordan’s latest, more restrictive policies may be a prelude to closure to all those except visa holders. Ample justification exists for this policy, but to prevent further hardship on the Iraqi side, the Jordanians need to clearly announce this policy. A Jordanian announcement—and the crisis it would spark—might also have the benefit of encouraging the UN and the international community to start seriously considering alternative temporary homes for the Iraqis.

Should developments take a turn for the worse in Iraq, Jordan would be the big loser. The outflow of refugees would increase and al-Qaeda would be emboldened, perhaps intensifying its efforts to target Jordan.

In the event of this worst-case scenario, the kingdom would be compelled to deploy additional troops to the east to secure the border. Moreover, Jordan might be inclined to establish refugee facilities on Iraqi territory. To ensure domestic security, the kingdom likewise might move to increase monitoring of its guests. At the very least, Washington could expect a slowdown, if not a rollback, of political and economic reform initiatives in Jordan.

As is the case for Jordan, the stakes are high for the United States. Amman is Washington’s most reliable Arab partner and, as such, stands to lose a great deal in the event that developments in Iraq spill over and destabilize the kingdom. To help Jordan, Washington would be well served to press now for third-country absorption of Iraqis. The risk is that the longer these Iraqis remain in Jordan, the more restive the local population will become. Washington should also consider alleviating the financial burden caused by these Iraqis by providing Jordan with additional near-term economic assistance.

In the coming years, developments in Iraq will profoundly affect Jordan. Regrettably, Jordan, like the West and Iraq’s other neighbors, is not particularly well placed to affect the course of events next door. Without this type of influence, for the time being, Jordan will have to play good defense.

43. “Jordan Closes Border with Iraq,” *Jordan Times*, December 17, 1998.

Saudi Arabia: The Nightmare of Iraq

Simon Henderson

IRAQ UNDER SADDAM HUSSEIN was a nightmare for Saudi Arabia. Iraq without Saddam is also a nightmare.¹ While he was in power, Riyadh saw Saddam as a bully, a regional troublemaker, and a constant destabilizing force. But Iraq without Saddam has become a power vacuum, almost equally destabilizing. For the Saudis, Saddam's merit was that he was a Sunni who viewed his own Shiite population with distrust and neighboring Iran with visceral hatred.² As such, he was a bulwark against Shiite and Iranian influence trying to penetrate the kingdom and perhaps contest the House of Saud's self-declared custodianship of the two holy places of Islam, Mecca and Medina. Without Saddam, Iraqi Shiites are empowered and on the Saudi border, while Iranian influence is threatening Iraq as well as Shiite-majority Bahrain and reaching out to the Saudi Shiites who live in the oil-rich Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, where they constitute a local majority.³

With the exception of its self-view as the leader of the Islamic world and the concomitant belief that the Islamic message should be spread,⁴ Saudi Arabia usually

behaves as a traditional status quo power. Riyadh has a natural preference for things as they are; but, if they cannot be kept as they are, trouble should at least be kept at a distance. The kingdom was threatened by secular Arab republicanism in the 1950s and 1960s. It protected itself by offering sanctuary to Islamists. It was again threatened in 1979 by Iran's Islamic Revolution, but the revolution consumed its own children, as well as being distracted by the yearning for more autonomy by Iran's ethnic minorities. To stop any export of Iran's revolution, Saddam, with Saudi and other Gulf Arab financial backing, proved a willing foil. And Saddam's fixation on Iran blunted his ambitions to meddle in Arab politics.

The United States has been understanding—perhaps too understanding—of Saudi perceptions of regional policy challenges within the Arabian peninsula and Persian Gulf areas. In Washington's mind, the key aspect of the relationship with Riyadh has focused on the kingdom's status as a major oil exporter and the need to maintain the unrestricted flow of reasonably priced oil to the world economy.

1. The "nightmare" metaphor is common in descriptions of Saudi policy choices. In May 2006, Saudi foreign minister Prince Saud al-Faisal reportedly told President George W. Bush: "We have two nightmares about our relationship with Iran. One is that Iran will develop a nuclear bomb, and the other is that America will take military action to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear bomb." Christopher Dickey, "Who Leads the Middle East?" *Newsweek International*, April 9, 2007.
2. Saddam's uncle and former guardian was Khairallah Talfah, a one-time mayor of Baghdad in the early days of Baath Party rule, who in 1981 published the booklet "Three Whom God Should Not Have Created: Persians, Jews and Flies." Talfah described Persians as "animals God created in the shape of humans." (Jews were a "mixture of dirt and leftovers from diverse peoples.")
3. Saudi Arabian public opinion is often critical of Shiites, who form an estimated 10 to 15 percent of the kingdom's population and are traditionally discriminated against. Famously, several *fatwas* (religious edicts) by the late top Saudi cleric Abdul-Aziz bin Baz denounced Shiites as apostates, and senior cleric Abdul-Rahman al-Jibrin in 1994 even sanctioned the killing of Shiites. In early 2007, King Abdullah, reacting to reports of Sunnis being converted to Shiism, spoke of being "aware of the dimensions of spreading Shiism and where it has reached," adding that "the majority of Sunni Muslims will never change their faith." "Saudi King: Spreading Shiism Won't Work," Associated Press, January 27, 2007. Contemporary Saudi religious conservatives are also sharp in their criticism: Abdul-Rahman al-Jibrin, now retired but still a key member of the clerical establishment, wrote in early 2007, "[Shiites] are the most vicious enemy of Muslims, who should be wary of their plots." And Abdul Rahman al-Barak, another top cleric, wrote, "Shiites should be considered worse than Jews or Christians." "A Top Saudi Cleric Declares Shiites to Be Infidels, Calls on Sunnis to Drive Them Out," Associated Press, January 22, 2007.
4. The Saudi education system has for years produced, through its Islamic universities, thousands of religiously indoctrinated young men, motivated to spread the Wahhabi hardline version of Islam. The Saudi government found exporting many of these radicals convenient, either as workers for Islamic charities, spreading the word, or as militants. (After the September 11, 2001, attacks, the public realized that some of these types formed the global support network for Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda terrorist organization.) Fighting against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s was attractive, as was Chechnya and then Bosnia. Post-Saddam Iraq can be seen as just the latest destination of choice for those wanting to fight for the cause of Islam. Those who returned, that is, those who were not martyred in the cause, were encouraged to settle down—and quiet down. Those who were still Islamic radicals were found jobs in the *mutawa* (the religious police).

Traditionally, Washington has stood apart from Saudi concerns about its leadership role in the Islamic and Arab worlds. This stance was severely damaged by the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, when fifteen of the nineteen hijackers were Saudi nationals. The kingdom's compromise with Islamist extremists to protect the regime became clear, and it had the effect of directing onto U.S. targets the challenge represented by militant Islam.⁵ But Saudi Arabia's compromise with its own extremists broke down after terrorist attacks began inside the kingdom in 2003.

Since then Riyadh has been able to rebuild its relationship with Washington, overcoming adverse U.S. public opinion and an apparent lack of trust within at least parts of the Bush administration. Indications of Saudi caution toward the United States appear to be ignored, or excused as some sort of Saudi balancing act, worthy of being tolerated.⁶ A principal reason for Vice President Richard Cheney's Thanksgiving weekend trip to Riyadh in November 2006 was reportedly to hear King Abdullah's warning that, despite the apparent will of the new Congress, U.S. forces should not withdraw from Iraq.⁷ Yet at the March 2007 Riyadh Arab summit, King Abdullah unhelpfully condemned the "illegal, foreign occupation" of Iraq, a phrasing which, to Arab and Muslim ears, legitimized attacks on U.S. and other coalition forces. This glaring public disconnect was sure to have been addressed behind closed doors during Cheney's May 2007 visit to Riyadh, along with the looming issue of Iran's nuclear program that both countries also see as a threat—although again the Saudis are reluctant to say so.⁸

Saudi Official Thinking

Riyadh saw the overthrow of Saddam as inevitable and not regrettable—he had run a hostile and unpredictable

regime. Given the post-September 11 shadow over U.S.-Saudi relations at the time of the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, cooperation at the time was limited, especially in comparison with Saudi assistance at the time of liberation of Kuwait in 1991. Riyadh prevented U.S. airstrikes from being flown out of the Prince Sultan Air Base but did allow U.S. and other coalition special forces to use Saudi airstrips along the Saudi-Iraqi border.

Although contradictory, the Saudi position is comprehensible in terms of its three foreign policy priorities: being leader of the Islamic world, remaining among the leaders of the Arab world, and retaining its position as the leading oil exporter in the world. The kingdom was restricted from tackling Saddam Hussein's obduracy on weapons inspections due to Muslim and Arab opinion against the use of military action; yet, to safeguard its status as an oil exporter, a measure of cooperation with the United States was vital.

The inevitability of a Shiite-dominated government emerging in Iraq did not appear to be fully realized. "The kingdom will wait for the Iraqi people to set up their government and then we will deal with it," Saudi foreign minister Prince Saud al-Faisal was quoted as saying. He added: "Does the idea of participation in governing their affairs seem a threat to the people of the Middle East? The question seems to us in the region to be ridiculous."⁹

Officially, the Saudi policy has been to work for "Iraq's security, unity and stability with all of its sectarian groups."¹⁰ But when signs of anxiety over Iranian interference emerged, gut sentiments surfaced as well. In September 2005, Saudi foreign minister Prince Saud al-Faisal expressed concern in a briefing to U.S. journalists about "the entry of people, money and weapons [from Iran] as well as meddling in political life."

5. Senior Saudi princes paid off Osama bin Laden in the years after the 1995 attack on a Saudi National Guard facility in Riyadh to stop attacks in the kingdom. See Simon Henderson, "The Saudi Way," *Wall Street Journal*, August 12, 2002. After the September 11 attacks, diplomatic pressure by the United States and other countries stopped the money transfers, a consequence of which was probably the recommencement, after a gap of more than seven years, of al-Qaeda attacks against U.S. and other foreign targets in the kingdom in May 2003, when three housing compounds for expatriates in Riyadh were attacked.
6. Karen Elliot House, "Saudi Balancing Act," *Wall Street Journal*, April 4, 2007.
7. Helene Cooper, "U.S. Feels Sting of Winning Saudi Help with Other Arabs," News Analysis, *New York Times*, March 30, 2007.
8. Simon Henderson, "Cheney in the Middle East: Defining Key Issues and Mutual Interests," *Policy Watch* no. 1229 (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 8, 2007).
9. "Kingdom Wants Iraqis to Set Up Their Own Government," *Arab News* (Jedda), April 10, 2003.
10. Saudi Press Agency, as reported in *Arab News* (Jedda), December 3, 2006.

He also told the Council on Foreign Relations that U.S. policy was “handing over the country [of Iraq] to Iran, for no reason.” A few days later, and after the Iranian Foreign Ministry had described the remarks as “surprising and irrational,” the then Iraqi interior minister responded by saying Iraq would not be lectured by “some Bedouin riding a camel.” He broadened his remarks to say of Saudi Arabia: “There are regimes that are dictatorships; they have one god, he is the king, he is god of heaven and earth, and he rules as he likes. A whole country is named after a family.”

Such sentiments cast doubt on the sincerity and optimism of the stated Saudi policy, although the Saudis persevered for a while. For example, in October 2006, the kingdom invited senior Shiite and Sunni scholars from Iraq to Mecca to agree on a declaration of reconciliation. The meeting was actually held under the auspices of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), but the delegates were received by King Abdullah, who told them: “I welcome you in your second country and wish you every success in your efforts as you are brothers in Islam and we don’t want anybody to interfere in the affairs of the Islamic nation.”¹¹

At the end of the Mecca meeting, on October 22, the Iraqi Shiite and Sunni scholars approved the “Mecca Document,” which they labeled a *fatwa* (religious ruling) against Muslims killing Muslims.¹² The document was signed on the fifteenth floor of the al-Safa palace in Mecca, in a room overlooking the Grand Mosque. The scholars had just had an audience with King Abdullah, but he was not at the signing ceremony, which instead was chaired by Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, the Turkish secretary-general of the OIC. A total of fourteen scholars from each sect signed the document, one Shiite and one Sunni going forward together to the table. The *Arab News* reported that “[n]early every paragraph of the declaration cited a verse from the Koran as the basis for required action.” The writer commented, “[t]here is pessimism that the Mecca Declaration is nothing but a piece of paper.” Within days, when it had no effect on

the violence, this prediction proved to be the case, and the declaration is now largely forgotten—especially in comparison with the longer-lived January 2007 Mecca Agreement between the Palestinian Fatah and Hamas factions—in which King Abdullah appears to have invested more personal and political prestige.

Saudi Support for Sunnis in Iraq

Behind this veneer of sectarian neutrality, Saudi Arabia has found itself facing at least two pressures. The Sunni elite of Saddam’s former regime found themselves excluded from political power, and the Arab Sunni community as a whole found themselves in a minority compared to both Shiite groups and the (non-Arab, but mainly Sunni) Kurds. Also, militants linked to al-Qaeda saw Iraq as a battleground on which to confront the United States. The Iraqi Sunnis had tribal links with Saudis living in the kingdom. The jihadists linked to al-Qaeda were able to appeal to Saudi Islamists for financial and logistical aid based on their confrontation in Muslim lands with the infidel (the United States and other coalition members). Despite a crackdown on al-Qaeda within the kingdom, the temptation seemed to exist for Saudi Arabia to exploit the willingness of jihadist fighters to fight in Iraq, including a sizable contingent of Saudi young men.

As the Shiite dominance of politics in Baghdad increased, partly as a consequence of elections (initially boycotted by Sunnis) that showed voting on strict ethnic and religious lines, Saudi Arabia became more concerned. Always suspicious of Iranian motives, Saudis’ anxieties were only raised by reports of Iranian activities in Iraq, especially after the election of Mahmoud Ahmehdinezhad as president of Iran in June 2005. As the Sunni insurgency developed, jihadist and Baath attacks on Shiite targets served only to increase Shiite militancy in response, confusing cause and effect in what was clearly a vicious cycle of violence. The February 2006 attack, which destroyed the dome of the Golden Mosque in Samarra, a major Shiite shrine, was considered especially

11. Saudi Press Agency, as reported in *Arab News* (Jedda), October 21, 2006.

12. *Arab News* (Jedda), October 21, 2006. The newspaper quoted Iraqi journalists as saying that Shiites and Sunnis were “living peacefully in Iraq until the Americans occupied the country.”

significant in hardening Shiite attitudes.¹³ Both Saudi Arabia and Iran began to see Iraq as an important part of their own sphere of influence, which each was not prepared to concede to the other.

A further blow against the façade of Saudi neutrality was an op-ed article published in the *Washington Post* in November 2006¹⁴ by Nawaf Obaid, who described himself as an advisor to the Saudi government, although he also noted that the opinions in the article were his own and did not reflect official Saudi policy. Obaid warned that if U.S. forces were to leave Iraq abruptly, “massive Saudi intervention to stop Iranian-backed Shiite militias from butchering Iraqi Sunnis” would take place. Saudi Arabia quickly denied the article’s content: “This article is utterly baseless,” an official told the Saudi Press Agency.¹⁵ Obaid, who had worked as a consultant for Ambassador to the United States Prince Turki al-Faisal, found himself unceremoniously fired.

But it is clear, at least in retrospect, that Obaid’s article conveyed significant aspects of some Saudi official thinking, even if it appeared to undermine King Abdullah’s efforts, in Obaid’s words, “to minimize sectarian tensions in Iraq and reconcile Sunni and Shiite communities.” The article said that the kingdom was considering options including “providing Sunni military leaders . . . with . . . funding, arms and logistical support . . .” and “Another possibility includes the establishment of new Sunni brigades to combat Iranian-backed militias.”

At the very least, a sharp policy debate occurred within Saudi official circles about the dilemmas posed by Iraq. This was confirmed to some degree by the otherwise inexplicably abrupt December 2006 resignation of Prince Turki as his country’s envoy to Washington after only fifteen months in the role. The most frequently suggested cause was a personality clash

between Turki and his predecessor, Prince Bandar bin Sultan. Bandar had returned to Riyadh and become the secretary-general of a new National Security Council, a role that allowed him to become a global trouble-shooter, including making visits to the White House in Washington without the knowledge of Prince Turki.¹⁶

The Saudi Two-Track Strategy toward Iraq

As of mid-2007, Saudi Arabia appeared to be maintaining a two-track policy toward Iraq, both reaching out to the Iraqi government and trying to blunt the challenge of Iran more directly. Riyadh’s most notable steps in helping Baghdad have been the following:

- **Continuing to press for reconciliation between Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq.** In an April 2007 Friday sermon at the Grand Mosque in Mecca, the imam, Sheikh Abdulrahman al-Sudais, said, “Muslim intellectuals and politicians must work to stop bloodshed in the community and the killing of Muslims by Muslims.” He warned of a “huge human catastrophe” if the killings in Iraq continued, calling for unity: “Many Muslims have forgotten an important principle of Islam, the principle of unity. The Holy Koran has said: ‘Hold fast, all together, the rope of Allah and be not divided among yourselves.’”
- **Speaking out against the idea of the partition of Iraq.** In January 2007, Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal stated: “For Saudi Arabia, a partition of Iraq is inconceivable. It is essential to avoid it. This break-up would first of all hurt Iraqis, who have suffered decades of conflict.”¹⁷
- **Writing off much of Iraq’s debt.** Both Iraqi and Saudi officials said in April 2007 that the kingdom

13. Other significant incidents included the March 2004 attacks on Shiites in Karbala and Baghdad in which 140 died, the February 2005 attack in the Shiite town of Hillah in which 114 died, a series of attacks in September 2005 in which 182 Iraqis died in a mainly Shiite district of Baghdad, and the November 2006 series of car bombings in the Shiite Sadr City area of Baghdad in which 200 died.

14. “Stepping into Iraq: Saudi Arabia Will Protect Sunnis if the U.S. Leaves,” *Washington Post*, November 29, 2006. (Obaid is a former visiting fellow of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.)

15. Reported in *Arab News* (Jedda), December 3, 2007.

16. Simon Henderson, “Talking Turki,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 16, 2006.

17. Interview with the French daily *Le Figaro*, quoted in the *Jerusalem Post*, January 25, 2007.

had agreed to forgive 80 percent of the more than \$15 billion that Iraq owes the kingdom. Iraq had pressed for total forgiveness, but the Saudi side stuck to 80 percent, reportedly in line with Paris Club creditors, the group that negotiates international sovereign debt.

- **Attending the March 10, 2007, meeting of Iraq's neighbors** (plus the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and other Arab and Islamic representatives) that convened for one day in Baghdad.¹⁸ Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal also attended the May 3–4 ministerial meeting of the “International Compact for Iraq” and neighbors’ follow-up meeting at Sharm al-Sheikh, Egypt. In that context, Saudi Arabia signed on (with sixty-odd other delegations) to the conditional rhetorical pledges of political and economic support for the Iraqi government issued there, under nominal UN auspices.

- **Endorsing a protocol for security cooperation** between governments of countries neighboring Iraq to combat terror, intrusion, and organized crime, at the April 17, 2007, weekly meeting of the Saudi council of ministers. Under the accord, Iraq’s neighbors will not allow their territories to be used for planning, organizing, and executing terrorist operations or for instigating or promoting such crimes.¹⁹ According to Nawaf Obaid, in his last Washington presentation (at the Wilson Center) in November 2006, the Saudis genuinely preferred to prevent jihadists from crossing their border into Iraq, on the theory that they could be better monitored and detained while still inside the kingdom. Statements by U.S. and Iraqi officials, who regularly claimed through April 2007 that the vast majority of foreign fighters were entering Iraq from the Syrian side, lend

some credence to this assertion. The kingdom had previously announced the construction of a 560-mile-long security fence (reportedly equipped with electronic sensors) along the entire length of the Saudi-Iraq border.²⁰

The significance of such moves is mixed. The backing of al-Sudais for King Abdullah’s call for reconciliation is notable because the cleric is seen as being a hardline member of the clerical establishment, who might otherwise be backing a tougher line against Shiites.²¹

On the debt issue, Riyadh is probably responding to pressure from the United States, which is anxious to free Iraq from debt obligations incurred during the time of Saddam Hussein. Given current oil prices and Saudi production of 11 million barrels a day while Iraqi exports are restricted, the 80 percent forgiveness is not generous. The debts relate to Saudi loans or oil sales on behalf of Iraq during the 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq War, when Saddam was seen as blocking the advance of Iran’s (Shiite) Islamic Revolution into (Sunni) Arabia. At the time, and until his overthrow in 2003, the Iraqi leader saw such loans as gifts, a point never conceded by Saudi Arabia or Kuwait, the other principal financial supporter of Saddam against Iran.

Yet the Saudis clearly have also not given up on the prospect of needing to confront Iran more directly. In February 2007, Iran’s national security advisor Ali Larijani visited Riyadh and “left feeling quite unsatisfied,” according to a knowledgeable Saudi analyst.²² The March 2007 Riyadh summit between King Abdullah and President Ahmadinezhad of Iran is believed to have included some blunt talking on both Iraq and Iran’s nuclear program. The Saudi monarch is believed to have told the Iranian leader that Iran was vulnerable to domestic insurrection by its ethnic minorities, implying or even stating that Saudi Arabia

18. The kingdom, along with other states, sent only an official-level as opposed to a ministerial-level representative, assistant undersecretary for political affairs Prince Turki bin Muhammed bin Saud.

19. *Arab News* (Jedda), April 17, 2007.

20. “Work on Iraq Border Fence Starts in 2007,” *Arab News* (Jedda), November 15, 2006.

21. Al-Sudais is “a noted Wahhabi bigot.” Stephen Schwartz and Irfan al-Alawi, “Valentine’s Day in Saudi Arabia: Portents of Change from the Desert Kingdom,” *Weekly Standard*, March 5, 2007.

22. Adel al-Toraifi, quoted in Hassan M. Fattah and Nazil A. Fathi, “Iran Says Its Leader Will Join the Saudi King for Talks on the Region’s Conflicts,” *New York Times*, March 2, 2007.

was prepared to finance or otherwise instigate such activities.²³

The Saudis are also ready to apply pressure on the Baghdad government, either to encourage it to make concessions to Iraqi Sunnis or to distance itself from Iran. Symbolic evidence of this readiness was the reported refusal of King Abdullah to meet Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki in advance of the May 2007 Sharm el-Sheikh “International Compact for Iraq” ministerial meeting—and the refusal by the Saudi foreign minister to meet with Maliki when that ministerial gathering took place. Moreover, in his remarks to the press at that conference, Prince Saud was dismissive, both of the conference itself and of the Iraqi government’s own efforts. He told the *New York Times*: “Our American friends say there is improvement: improvement in violence, improvement in the level of understanding, improvement in disarming militias. But we don’t see it You have to have national consensus . . . you can’t do it from the outside.”²⁴

Nevertheless, in the same interview, he welcomed U.S. discussions with Iraq’s other neighbors, including Syria and Iran, while ridiculing the previous American boycott of such talks: “Sometimes it appears people in diplomacy use talk as a reward or punishment. That seems to me very childish.” In comments to *al-Hayat*, the Saudi foreign minister was even blunter about Iraq: “The situation in Iraq is getting worse and not improving. This leads to thinking about the end of the road and of the move towards the abyss. We are fearful of the deterioration of the situation turning into civil war.”²⁵

Asked point-blank whether Saudi Arabia supported or opposed the Maliki government in Baghdad, Saud said only, “This is not in our hands. We do not interfere in the internal affairs of Iraq or any other country. This matter concerns the Iraqis.” Four days later, U.S. Secre-

tary of State Condoleezza Rice offered a gentle verbal nudge from that studiously aloof Saudi posture: Iraq’s neighbors, she said, should not “just sit back and say, ‘they [the Iraqi Shiites and Sunnis] have to reconcile.’ Of course they have to reconcile. But those neighbors should support the Iraqi government.”²⁶

Spillover Effects

Saudi Arabia has two principal concerns about possible contagion of the troubles of Iraq:

1. Iranian subversion of the Saudi Shiite community. Despite improvements in recent years, the ethnic minority still faces discrimination and so could provide fertile ground for Iranian agents. Although a local majority in the Eastern Province, where most of the kingdom’s oil is produced, Saudi Shiites find gaining employment in the oil industry difficult, apparently because they are not trusted. Politically, Saudi Shiites are underrepresented and discriminated against. For example, in municipal elections held in the Eastern Province in 2005, a result was gerrymandered in the al-Hasa constituency to disqualify a Shiite and give victory to a Sunni so that, along with appointed Sunnis, the resulting council had a Sunni majority.

2. Reinvigoration of al-Qaeda in the kingdom. Determined and harsh efforts by Saudi security forces have effectively countered the emergence of al-Qaeda cells. Most jihadists with experience and training from Afghanistan have been imprisoned or killed in clashes. Young Saudi Islamists appear still to be attracted to the opportunities of fighting in Iraq or martyring themselves there.²⁷ Those able to return to the kingdom can inspire new recruits and provide training. Financial assistance from rich Saudi Islamists appears to be still forthcoming,

23. Western diplomat interviewed by the author in a Persian Gulf state, March 2007. The ethnic group mentioned in particular was the Arab population of Khuzestan, the oil-rich province in southwestern Iran.

24. “Rice and Her Syrian Counterpart Discuss Iraq Border,” *New York Times*, May 4, 2007.

25. *Al-Hayat* (London), May 5, 2007, translated in Middle East Wire. Available online (http://www.mideastwire.com/index.php?action=timesearch&news_day=7&news_month=5&news_year=2007&cx=28&cy=3#15438).

26. Interview on The Charlie Rose Show,” PBS, May 8, 2007 (as heard).

27. In the Schwarz and al-Alawi *Weekly Standard* article, “Valentine’s Day in Saudi Arabia,” op. cit., the Saudi newspaper *al-Watan* is quoted as stating that 2,000 Saudis have died in Iraq since 2003. In the same *Weekly Standard* article, the Wahhabi periodical *al-Sahat* is quoted in reference to the report of a Saudi subject, Hudhaiban al-Dosary, who crossed into Iraq to blow himself up “in a massacre of dozens of Iraqis during the solemn commemoration of Ashura,” which took place in January 2007. In a presentation to the annual policy council of the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations, October

much to the concern of the U.S. government. In his January 2007 interview, Foreign Minister Saud al-Faisal noted: “From Iraq, al-Qaeda threatens not only Saudi Arabia but also the entire region.”²⁸

Even just one of these possibilities could threaten the Saudi regime itself. Indeed, the House of Saud probably already feels directly threatened by both possibilities. Combating such threats will be an onerous task for Saudi security forces. Although numerous, the most competent parts of the forces are small. A further concern, at least in respect to al-Qaeda, is the uncertain loyalty of parts of the security services, which are sympathetic to radical Islamic views and perhaps are supportive of attacks on non-Muslim foreigners, precisely the ones whom they might be notionally protecting.

Saudi Arabia is especially apprehensive about the vulnerability of its oil installations. An al-Qaeda suicide attack on the crucial processing facility at Abqaiq in February 2006 was nearly devastatingly successful. Since then, Saudi officials have been increasingly concerned about Shiite attacks on oil facilities, which will have the consequence of increasing local discrimination against Shiites.

Saudi Options

Unless the U.S. military achieves greater success in dealing with the Sunni insurgency in Iraq and thwarting malevolent Iranian influence, the kingdom has few options with much likelihood of success. A stable, benign Shiite-dominated regime in Baghdad would be the best alternative for the kingdom, but this option seems currently unlikely. In its absence, a Shiite-dominated government focused internally on its own problems would be better. The temptation for Saudi Arabia is to encourage internal problems in Iraq by providing support for Sunni insurgents and jihadists.

Partition of Iraq probably has attractions for some segments of Saudi society, offering solace to their

Sunni coreligionists wanting to avoid Shiite tutelage. But much of the Saudi-Iraqi border area is adjacent to southeastern Iraq where Iraq's Shiites are dominant. So this option would be another nightmare rather than a solution.

Causing trouble for Iran inside Iran is possible but offers the countervulnerability of Iranian agents provoking unrest or sabotage in the kingdom. Such activities in Iran, especially if limited to Saudi financial support, which would be unidentifiable and therefore deniable, could have additional benefits, such as destabilizing the clerical regime in Tehran or distracting it from its presumed efforts to make nuclear weapons.

A further way of combating Iran, though less directly, is to work toward decreasing the price of oil. With high demand causing high prices—boosted by political uncertainty in the Persian Gulf, Nigerian, and Venezuelan production areas—a weakening of the price seems unlikely but might be achievable by careful manipulation of market sentiment. Iran's economy is considered very inefficient, and it reportedly needs prices over \$50 per barrel to meet budget requirements. Bringing prices below this figure could achieve benefits for Saudi—and U.S.—policy not only in Iraq but also in regard to the Iranian nuclear program.

Conclusion: Uncertainty in the Face of Certain Danger

The late, celebrated British economist John Maynard Keynes is famous for saying “in the long-run, we are all dead.” The challenge for Saudi policymakers is that even in the short run, King Abdullah will be dead. The eighty-four-year-old monarch will outlive the late King Fahd in 2007, the previous oldest Saudi king—who spent his last ten years increasingly incapacitated by a series of strokes. Abdullah's death could well end the Saudi policy of reconciliation between Sunnis and Shiites in Iraq. The next likely king, Crown Prince Sultan, eighty-three in 2007, is renowned for lacking

30–31, 2006, Nawaf Obaid said the cumulative total of Saudi fighters in Iraq up to October 2006 was 655, a figure exceeded by jihadists from Algeria (1,875), Syria (1,170), Yemen (1,050), Sudan (920), and Egypt (850), but “still a major concern for the [Saudi] government.” His presentation offered no sources for his figures.

28. Interview in *Le Figaro*, op. cit.

Abdullah's claimed liberal tendencies and is reportedly antipathetic towards Shiites.

But Sultan's own poor health—he reportedly had cancer in 2004—makes his succession questionable. The selection of the next king is unpredictable. An Allegiance Council was established in 2006 to confirm Sultan's eventual choice of crown prince and therefore next-in-line to be king, but who that might be can only be guessed. Even that forecast is dependent on the circumstances of the moment. For example, the death in rapid succession of an aging Abdullah and Sultan, or Sultan's predeceasing Abdullah, might cause the council to choose a younger and healthier candidate than it would otherwise do.

Within a probably similar timeframe, a change in leadership will also take place in the United States. Iraq looks to be the dominant issue of the 2008 U.S. presidential and congressional campaigns. If a substantial withdrawal of U.S. forces occurs on a timescale that Saudi Arabia regards as premature, greater military support for Iraqi Sunnis, as predicted in the Obaid op-ed, might be anticipated. Such intervention might offer the Sunnis some relief but is unlikely to be decisive. Saudi military units have a poor reputation for effectiveness.²⁹

Perversely, despite King Abdullah's March 2007 description of U.S. forces as an "illegal, foreign occupation," Saudi interests are probably best served by the United States' remaining in Iraq, providing it can boost the Baghdad government, contain Iranian influence, and protect the political interests of the Sunni Arab minority. But Washington can expect little public thanks for such a stance.

Little doubt exists that Saudi Arabia sees events in Iraq in apocalyptic terms, in large part because of the unintended benefits they confer upon the Saudi archrival, Iran. Ironically, a dimension of this vision would have occurred even if U.S.-led coalition forces had not invaded Iraq in 2003. The developing Iranian nuclear program was already beginning to threaten Saudi Arabia's status in the Persian Gulf region and its standing as the leading state of Islam.

The Sunni-Shiite aspect of the Saudi view of Iraq, and the additional threat from Iran, means that usual Saudi preferences for compromise will be harder, if not impossible, to achieve. Riyadh seems uncertain of its policy options, which are likely to be reconsidered anyway in the event of a new monarch and a change in political leadership in Washington.

29. At the time of the original Obaid op-ed, a retired British officer who had spent many years training the Saudi military commented on the notion of Saudi forces intervening: "They'd lose."

Conclusion: Are Iraq's Arab Neighbors the Answer?

David Pollock

THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS have provided a critical examination of two opposite but, as it turns out, equally flawed—yet equally widespread—misconceptions: first, the alarmist assumption that Iraq's Arab neighbors, along with Turkey and Iran, are acutely threatened by unmanageable spillover from its problems in the form of refugees, terrorists, sectarian conflict, or irresistible impulses to military intervention; and second, the utopian assumption that those neighbors could somehow combine to stabilize Iraq, if only the United States could bring them together and figure out what diplomatic or other incentives they need to cooperate on Iraq.

To a certain extent, these two assumptions stand or fall together, in the sense that a great enough common threat from instability in Iraq could conceivably produce concerted international action to address it. The fact is, however, that neither assumption stands up to serious scrutiny. Moreover, the two assumptions actually contradict each other, in the very real sense that the major common interest shared by three of Iraq's four Arab neighbors—Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait—turns out to be how to counter the aggressive expansionism of another, non-Arab neighbor of Iraq: Iran.

So, in place of these twin misconceptions, the chapters in this essay on each one of Iraq's Arab neighbors lead this author logically to the following ten realistic conclusions and policy recommendations, contrarian as they may at first appear to be. Together these ten conclusions constitute a recipe for what might be called open-eyed engagement with Iraq's neighbors. Engagement, because the United States truly needs all the help it can get with Iraq—or at least a way to induce its neighbors to do less harm there, and ultimately enable the United States to disengage from Iraq while avoiding the worst regional repercussions. Open-eyed, because the United States and each one of Iraq's neighbors necessarily have very different views of the costs and benefits at stake in Iraq—and no overarching

common interest or overriding force is sufficient to produce an effective joint approach.

The ten policy conclusions and recommendations are as follows:

1. Do not rely on Iraq's neighbors for much help in that country.

Iraq's Arab neighbors, in particular, do not hold the keys to its salvation. Given the tremendous difficulties and frustrations for U.S. policy in Iraq today, grasping at these straws for help is understandably tempting. A regional discussion might offer some slight hope of “containing” Iraq's troubles within its borders—the more so, ironically, as the prospect of U.S. retrenchment from that country, and consequent chaos there, helps concentrate its neighbors' minds. But the reality is that these countries are largely unable to offer much more effective help than they already are—or are unwilling, in the case of Syria (and also Iran), to stop the harm that it is currently inflicting on Iraq. In any case, Iraq's problems are (as the latest National Intelligence Estimate truthfully notes) primarily internal in nature. Certainly, every little bit of extra help for Iraq would be more than welcome. Yet it would be foolish to compound previous errors by trusting Iraq's neighbors to bail out the United States in Iraq—and even worse to offer any of those neighbors extravagant incentives in advance payment for false promises of support.

2. Avoid linkage to any other “Middle East peace process.”

Arab-Israeli issues should not be “linked” to Iraq. Paradoxically, this recommendation stems from the fact that each set of issues is so difficult and so important, both to the United States and to Arab governments and publics. Iraq alone is problematic enough; Arab-Israeli issues are almost equally fraught these days. Only an incorrigible optimist could hope for help by mixing these two problems together. On the Arab-Israeli front, the election of Hamas to power in the Palestinian Authority and political uncertainty

in Israel in the wake of the inconclusive war against Hizballah in mid-2006 have clearly compounded these problems, and the February 2007 Mecca Accord on a Hamas-Fatah “unity government” has if anything rendered them even worse. As a result, “tradeoffs” between those issues and anything connected with Iraq are practically impossible.

Moreover, although Arab leaders, Arab media, and Arab opinion polls routinely voice deep concern about the Palestinian issue, they seldom draw any linkage with Iraq. The notion of this linkage is a product more of Western than Arab imagination. In particular, no reason exists to think that Syria would provide real cooperation on Iraq, or otherwise part ways with Iran, in exchange for either the Golan Heights or Lebanon. As one career U.S. official closely involved in Iraq policy put it privately in March 2007: “While a ‘diplomatic surge’ on Arab-Israeli issues would create a better atmosphere to enlist more international support for Iraq, I don’t see how getting Syria back the Golan Heights is going to solve any problems in Anbar Province. And you could have a Palestinian state tomorrow, and Iraqi Sunnis and Shi’is would still be fully engaged in ethnic cleansing.”

3. Resist exaggerated fears of contagion. The spillover from Iraq to its Arab neighbors is likely to remain manageable. The burden of refugees, the specter of ethnic or sectarian strife, the new breeding ground for jihadist terrorism, and even the risks (for Jordan, Kuwait, and to a lesser extent Saudi Arabia) of association with the struggling and unpopular American project in Iraq are all very uncomfortable, but still tolerable. This situation is true even in those immediate Arab neighbors with significant minorities that might be affected by the turmoil in and around Iraq: the Shiites (in Kuwait or Saudi Arabia) or the Kurds (in Syria).

4. Adopt a realistic posture to manage the refugee problem. The biggest direct spillover problem by far is the inflow of Iraqi refugees. This humanitarian tragedy, on a terrible scale for all the people involved, truly warrants at minimum an immediate and generous humanitarian response. But for Iraq’s neighbors, this refugee

issue substantially affects only Jordan and Syria, and it is not an immediate economic or security threat to either country. If that flow continues, or if the prospect of eventual repatriation evaporates entirely, this problem could become more serious in the long term. And if Iraq implodes into full-scale civil war, the population pressure on its borders could become acute. Yet from the neighbors’ perspectives, this problem may be self-limiting, in the sense that they can tighten access controls as they approach saturation levels.

The neediest and most deserving neighbor is Jordan, which is resource poor, already home to hundred of thousands of refugees from the 1991 Gulf War and subsequent decade, and today hosts about 1 million new Iraqi refugees—three times, in proportion to total population, the level of the other major host, Syria. Additional host destinations (Arab, American, and other) would be useful, but the practical prospects for mass redirection of this flow are very slim. Therefore, UNHCR should be encouraged and supported in providing more assistance with this significant humanitarian challenge—particularly through contributions from Iraq’s oil-rich (and refugee-free) Arab neighbors.

5. Understand that, for Iraq’s Arab neighbors, the threat of military intervention is remote. More-dramatic spillover scenarios are not on the immediate policy horizon for Iraq’s Arab neighbors. The conventional worst-case scenario is a descent into full-scale civil war in Iraq, decisive moves toward partition of the country, and possible new foreign military interventions there. Given Arab military weakness, the only plausible interventions would be either Turkish or Iranian. But any major Turkish military intervention in Iraq, presumably against the Kurds, would probably prove very costly to both sides; for that very reason, both sides will most likely strive to avoid it. It is essential for the United States to help resolve this tension in a way that salvages at least the success of the Kurdish region in northern Iraq, the best result achieved in that country so far. But even in the worst case imaginable in that small sliver of Iraq, the interests of Iraq’s Arab neighbors would probably not suffer very much.

A major Iranian military intervention, in contrast, would be much more problematic from their standpoint—although they could not do much about it. Yet Iran, too, will probably feel constrained by the uncertainties and costs such a drastic step would entail. Meanwhile, Tehran will most likely remain content to press its advantages in Iraq by proxy.

6. Realize that the real threat to Iraq's Arab neighbors is the political and sectarian one from Iran.

This recommendation points to what actually is the most significant issue for Iraq's Arab neighbors: the indirect effect of Iraq's crisis in raising the fortunes of another historically distrusted neighbor, Iran. Even without any partition of Iraq or overt Iranian military intervention there, most Arab leaders correctly perceive a threatening, quantum leap in Tehran's influence over Baghdad—whether from a religious, political, economic, or strategic standpoint. Even putting sectarian and ethnic animosities aside, they view Iran's radical policies as a potential danger to their own internal security, political stability, economic interests, and protective alliances with the United States and other major powers. And all these concerns are naturally magnified, in Arab eyes, by Tehran's transparent search for a nuclear weapons capability.

7. Work with friendly Arab governments to contain that threat. This issue offers the most promising avenues for working in concert with at least some of Iraq's Arab neighbors—to help them deal with Iran, to help Iraq, and to help U.S. policy in the region as a whole. Of course, some tensions are inherent in this approach. These Arabs usually prefer to engage rather than confront Iran. Nevertheless, they are willing to work with the United States to contain Iran's reach, across the region generally and in Iraq specifically.

8. Try to counter both Sunni and Shiite extremism. Two key policy prescriptions emerge: First, work with Iraq's relatively friendly Arab neighbors

to provide greater political support to Iraq's government, despite its predominantly Shiite cast, so long as it keeps its distance from Iran. Second, work with those neighbors to turn the Sunni insurgents in Iraq against the al-Qaeda presence there and ultimately to reconcile with Iraq's government. A few fresh glimmers of hope—from the Riyadh Arab summit in late March, meetings with Iraqi leaders in Egypt in April and early May, and some tribal alliances against jihadists on the ground in al-Anbar and Diyala provinces emerging in May and June 2007—suggest that this twin approach could be productive.

9. Keep in mind that money is not the issue. By comparison, the economic dimension of Arab support for Iraq, which has received much more publicity and diplomatic ceremony, is actually much less important. Although Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other oil-rich Gulf Arabs have given the new Iraq almost nothing when they could all easily afford to do much more, the problem in Iraq, unfortunately, is not the absence of money. Iraq has literally more than it can spend. The true problem is the absence of security, which money alone apparently cannot buy.

10. Strive to block meddling by Syria—but also offer it an escape route. The odd man out in all this, as is so often the case, is Syria. Once again, both Iraq and the relatively friendly Arab states on its borders prefer to engage rather than confront this other, more troublesome neighbor; but once again, they do so with the clear understanding that their policies are essentially opposed. To quote one independent Arab analyst, Amal Saad-Ghorayeb of the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut: "It makes no sense for Syria to split from Iran."¹ The argument that Assad does not really want a "land for peace" deal with Israel is certainly debatable, not least inside Israel itself; yet it would be unwise to hope that even such a deal would put an end to Syrian intrigues in Iraq. The precedents are not terribly encouraging: while Syria has

1. Quoted in Nicholas Blanford, "Syria Seeks to Gain from Regional Tumult," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 7, 2007.

meticulously kept things quiet on its own front lines with Israel, it has actively aided terrorism and insurgency everywhere else in its neighborhood. Probably the best that can be hoped for, therefore, is a modest reduction in Syrian support for antigovernment gunmen in Iraq. For ironclad guarantees of better behavior in this regard, a Libya/Lockerbie-type deal with Asad's regime might be worth considering, one in which some prime suspects would be surrendered

to the UN tribunal on Rafiq Hariri's assassination in tacit exchange for immunity for their boss.

Clearly, and unfortunately, the recommendations above necessarily add up to less than a formula for the full success of the American adventure in Iraq. Yet taken together, these suggestions may help point the way to securing the best possible outcome for U.S. interests in the region, even in the face of what all by now agree is an exceedingly difficult challenge.

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Executive Committee

President

Howard P. Berkowitz

Chairman

Fred S. Lafer

Chairman Emeritus

Michael Stein

Founding President and Chairman Emerita

Barbi Weinberg

Senior Vice Presidents

Bernard Leventhal

James Schreiber

Vice Presidents

Charles Adler

Benjamin Breslauer

Walter P. Stern

Secretary

Richard S. Abramson

Treasurer

Martin J. Gross

Committee Members

Richard Borow

Maurice Deane, *emeritus*

Gerald Friedman

Robert Fromer

Roger Hertog

Peter Lowy

Daniel Mintz

Fred Schwartz

Dimitri Sogoloff

Merryl Tisch

Gary Wexler

Next Generation Leadership Council

Jeffrey Abrams

Anthony Beyer

David Eigen

Adam Herz

Daniel Mintz, *co-chairman*

Zach Schreiber

Dimitri Sogoloff, *co-chairman*

Jonathan Torop

Board of Advisors

Warren Christopher

Lawrence S. Eagleburger

Alexander Haig

Max M. Kampelman

Samuel W. Lewis

Edward Luttwak

Michael Mandelbaum

Robert C. McFarlane

Martin Peretz

Richard Perle

James Roche

George P. Shultz

Paul Wolfowitz*

R. James Woolsey

Mortimer Zuckerman

*Resigned upon entry to government service, 2001

