The Calm before the Storm:

The British Experience in Southern Iraq

by Michael Knights **(/experts/michael-knights)** , Ed Williams **(/experts/ed-williams)**

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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In May 2006, Iraqi prime minister Nouri al-Maliki declared a state of emergency in the country's southern Basra province. This status has been maintained ever since, amid spiraling violence and local political troubles. Why has southern Iraq seemingly deteriorated since 2003, when British coalition forces took on the task of bringing law, order, and, eventually, Iraqi self-rule to the area? And what can be done to change the situation on the ground?

In this Washington Institute Policy Focus, Michael Knights and Ed Williams diagnose the many problems afflicting southern Iraq, a key population center and the main source of revenue for the central government. Beginning with prewar realities and the immediate aftermath of the coalition invasion, they discuss the British military and civil plans for the region and how those plans have been challenged -- and often thwarted -- in the years since by rampant disorder, dangerous local political developments, well-organized Islamist movements, outside interference from countries like Iran, and the partisanship and weakness of government security forces. With promising new initiatives balanced against the sober reality of a British troop drawdown, the south's fortunes will have profound implications for the future of Iraq as a whole.

*Includes detailed map of southern Iraq.

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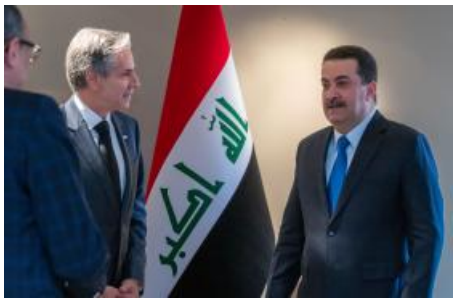

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