

Iraq's Future:

A Concept Paper

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Iraq is most likely to see a protracted internal war and economic difficulties for years to come. A mildly optimistic scenario is possible but so are some outcomes that would be destabilizing for the region, unpleasant for Iraq, and detrimental for U.S. interests.

Iraq's difficulties are disappointing to the Iraqi people, who so hoped that the American invasion would at least mean a return to peace after twenty-three years of war and near-war. The violent insurgency now raging is not likely to end any time soon; neither the government nor the insurgents are strong enough to win a decisive victory. Instead, the war is likely to continue for some years, and -- especially if the forces behind the current government prevail -- the fighting is likely to phase down rather than to end abruptly.

The interesting question to ask is what will be the situation five to ten years from now, for that is a time frame long enough that one or the other side could have become strong enough to prevail. It is possible that by then, modest democratic forces will have prevailed. Yet the most likely future is that Iraq will remain a weak and fragile society challenged by an insurgency. However, it is also possible that an Islamist state will emerge. Also, there is always the outside chance Iraq will split apart. . . .

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