

The Regional Implications of Pursuing 'Regime Change' in Iraq (Part IV)

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In-Depth Reports

Unfortunately, there is no Iraqi on this panel. I wish there were. But because Kuwait is closest, in many ways, to Iraq, we Kuwaitis probably share some of the Iraqi vision of the future of Iraq.

The atmosphere in Kuwait is one of anxiety and nervousness, with a strong sense of helplessness. At the end of the day, Kuwait is one country that will not be calling the shots when major decisions have to be made in the region. Yet, we do have some aspirations for the Iraqi people. Recently, I was one of 120 signatories of a message to the Iraqi people from Kuwaiti intellectuals, academics, businessmen, members of parliament, and ex-ministers. Although we refrained from mentioning potential military action, we did lay down our hopes of what Iraq would be like after the end of this nightmare, the Saddam era.

The message had three main points. First, we want to spare the Iraqi people further destruction and devastation because they have gone through a lot.

Second, we wish to safeguard the territorial integrity of Iraq. The status quo is that Iraq is divided, and the regime has always thrived on division and fear. When Saddam invaded Iran, he said to the world and to the Gulf countries, "Come and help me. Otherwise, Khomeini will take over the region." So, everyone came to his rescue. When he invaded Kuwait, he said, "I will settle this in the Arab house, because now I am facing imperialism." So, a lot of Arabs actually believed him. Now that Saddam is facing up to a completely different kind of threat, he is calling himself the savior of Iraq's territorial integrity. It is degrading to think of the great Iraqi nation as unified by just one person. Iraqis are united not because of Saddam, but because they are Iraqis. Maintaining the status quo, however, will lead to real divisions in Iraq. Kurdistan is already beyond the control of the central government. In the south, government control is exercised only in major cities, by Saddam's troops. The central region, Baghdad in particular, is no longer predominantly Sunni; it is now predominantly Shi'i, believe it or not.

Third, Kuwaitis have tried to communicate, as a message of solidarity to the Iraqi people, that we hope for a democratic Iraq. By the standards of the region, "democratic" is a tricky word. I come from a country that claims to be democratic. By regional standards, we are, but by idealistic standards of democracy, we are not. A democratic, stable, and prosperous Iraq would be the safest outcome for Kuwait and for the region as a whole. Although Kuwait has always had problems with central governments in Baghdad, we have never had problems with the Iraqi people.

There is also a pragmatic element to Kuwaiti hopes for Iraq. A prosperous Iraq is desirable not only from a humanitarian perspective, but also from an economic point of view. Kuwait is closest to, and most familiar with, the Iraqi markets. We know the language and the mentality, and most of us have relatives in Iraq.

Nevertheless, regime change is a difficult issue. In another context, I have argued that if the Kuwaiti regime invaded and occupied Iraq, attacked my hometown with chemical weapons, tortured those who spoke out against it, and caused the flight of one-sixth of the Kuwaiti population, then I would say to the world, "Please overthrow my government." I wrote this as an argument for addressing intervention and regime change through international law,

which is a scary business. When the relevant international laws were drafted, no one anticipated that someone like Saddam would cause such mayhem and destruction to his own people and yet still enjoy the protection of international legal norms.

In order to pave the way for reform in the Middle East, you must change the elements and points of tension. In regions that have sources of conflict such as the Iraqi regime or the Israeli-Palestinian issue, reform cannot proceed until these problems are resolved in a just manner.

I wish armed intervention were a clear solution. I am not a military man, but I know that war is an unpredictable device and that military action in Iraq would not be easy. There is no magic solution for Iraq, and the consequences of U.S. intervention are difficult to foresee. As Saddam himself once said, "Politics is to say you'll do something, while intending to do another, but you eventually do neither what you said nor what you intended."

Read remarks by the other participants on this panel: [Bernard Lewis, \(templateC07.php?CID=114\)](#) [Abdel Ilah Khatib, \(templateC07.php?CID=115\)](#) and [David Ignatius \(templateC07.php?CID=116\)](#) ❖

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