

# IRAQ POST-2010

## *Scenario One: National Unity Dictatorship* Stable Iraq & Stable Region

A nationalist leader emerges from the chaos of Iraq, a leader who is sufficiently independent of external players—the U.S., Iran, al Qaeda, Arab governments—to establish internal credibility as a unifying figure.

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## *Scenario Two: Contained Mess* Unstable Iraq & Stable Region

As Iraq disintegrates into all-out civil war, neighboring countries—understanding the potential for contagion, radicalization and the threat to their regimes—manage to act collectively to avoid the worst case even as they pursue proxy war on Iraqi territory.

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## *Scenario Three: Contagion* Unstable Iraq & Unstable Region

Iraq's civil war spreads to adjoining states through refugee flows, growing radicalization of Arab populations, escalating terrorism and the deliberate efforts of regional rivals to destabilize each others' governments.

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# CGA Scenarios: PROJECT OVERVIEW

This CGA Iraqi scenarios workshop, conducted on March 30, 2007, was the first of what we expect to be many such events designed to reduce surprise and expand U.S. foreign policy options. Too often, in both official and academic policy debates, the future is expected to parallel the recent past. Potential discontinuities are dismissed as implausible, information that conflicts with prevailing mindsets is unseen or viewed as anomalous, pressure for consensus drives out distinctive insights, and a fear of being ‘wrong’ discourages risk-taking and innovative analysis. Too much good thinking falls to the cutting room floor, while consensus coalesces around lowest common denominator extrapolations of recent data, or around the policy commitments of ‘clients.’ This built-in conservatism can artificially restrict policy options and reduce foreign policy choice.

The CGA Scenarios project aims to apply imagination to debates about global conditions that affect U.S. interests. The project will assemble the combination of knowledge, detachment and futures perspective essential to informing decisions taken in the presence of uncertainty. The project will comprise long term research on forces for change in the international system and workshops attended by experts and policy makers from diverse fields and viewpoints. The workshops will examine the results of current research, create alternative scenarios, identify potential surprises, and test current and alternative policies against these futures.

This CGA Scenarios publication is the first of a series of occasional papers intended to disseminate the results of the project’s workshops and research in the form of new insights into forces for change, potential surprises, alternative scenarios and policy impacts and options.

Michael Oppenheimer, the founder of the project, has organized over thirty conferences devoted to scenario development and foreign policy analysis for such organizations as the State Department, the Defense Department, the National Intelligence Council, the Central Intelligence Agency, The U.S. Institute of Peace, The Brookings Institution, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Hart Rudman Commission and the Presidents Science Advisor. He is a professor at the Center for Global Affairs at NYU.

# FOREWORD

When I received the invitation from Michael Oppenheimer to participate in a workshop focusing on alternate scenarios for Iraq and the Middle East after a U.S. withdrawal from that country, I was interested, but also a bit skeptical. Alternate scenarios? What alternate scenarios? Although the political tide had clearly turned against the notion of a long-term U.S. presence in Iraq, everything I knew about the Middle East and Iraq suggested that a significant drawdown of U.S. troops would result in further deterioration of security in Iraq—a slide from civil war to all out ethnic and sectarian conflict.

I have from time-to-time toyed with my own alternate scenarios including bringing down the Iraqi flag at the UN and putting up the new national flags of Kurdistan, the Islamic Republic of Basra, and the state of Anbar. In the abstract, it seemed to me that if the United States helped partition Iraq it would be bloody, but less so than if this division occurred naturally from the debilitating violence that plagues Iraq. Yet, the complexities and dangers associated with this scenario for Iraq, its neighbors, and the United States make it impractical to carry out.

So just what could the “accomplished group of international scholars” that NYU’s Center for Global Affairs invited to participate in the workshop “envision [as] plausible, significant and distinct pathways for the region after ‘the surge?’” Surpassing my initial expectation, the open-ended, free flowing process that Oppenheimer and his team devised proved to be extraordinarily useful in working through the complex and overlapping political, economic, social, and security challenges Iraq presents to the region.

As both a political scientist and a regional expert, I believe that the interaction with other specialists from a range of other disciplines and professional experiences proved invaluable to working through different scenarios. This aspect of the workshop provided for a rich discussion and, importantly, alternative views of some conventional wisdom about Iraq, the Middle East and potential future outcomes. The multi-disciplinary aspect of the workshop was particularly important when it came to making the “drivers” that underlie the scenarios we were addressing work. The complement of expertise on terrorism, regional politics, and insight into the way Washington works produced fascinating insights and, as you will see from the report, some surprising outcomes.

I believe I speak for all the participants of the workshop when I say that the session was an intellectually gratifying experience. I have participated in many meetings and discussions about Iraq since the run-up to Operation Iraqi Freedom and it is safe to say that the Center for Global Affairs’ alternate scenarios for Iraq and the Middle East was the most thought-provoking.

May 30, 2007

Steven A. Cook, Ph.D.

Douglas Dillon Fellow

Council on Foreign Relations

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The three scenarios narrated in this document were prepared by CGA, based upon extensive notes of this five-hour session.

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**SCHOOL OF CONTINUING AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES**

# Iraq Post-2010: INTRODUCTORY NOTES

The process was designed as a free-flowing discussion on plausible futures for the Middle East, post-U.S. occupation of Iraq. It was not a formal simulation with assigned roles and a scripted dialogue, but a facilitated conversation among Middle East and U.S. foreign policy experts trying to imagine the region without a large U.S. footprint in Iraq. In order to avoid a focus on the immediate issues of the surge and its short-term effects, the reversal of de-Baathification, oil revenue sharing, etc., we began with the period of greatly diminished American military presence, which we assumed to be 2010, and carried the scenarios through 2015. This allowed for some residual U.S. deployments in Iraq, and of course a significant presence in the region. By leaping over immediate controversies, we hoped to better imagine the region as it reacts to local forces and interests, while still absorbing the after effects of the American invasion.

The first hour involved a discussion of potential scenario concepts drafted by CGA and a selection of three for more detailed treatment. The six candidate scenarios were:

- An assertion of Iraqi nationalism in the wake of U.S. withdrawal, manifested in some structure for sharing of political power, securing of borders and protection of sovereignty;
- Unresolved conflict over distribution of wealth and power leading to monopolization of power by Shia government, escalating sectarian violence, but largely contained within Iraq's borders through the efforts of regional powers, residual U.S. forces, and multilateral organizations;
- Internal conflict reflecting both sectarian rivalries inside Iraq and intervention/manipulation by outside powers; in effect a proxy war still limited to Iraqi territory;
- A spreading regional conflict which cleaves largely along Sunni-Shia lines, is organized respectively around Saudi Arabia and Iran, produces violence between and within the major antagonists, and increases internal challenges to all governments;
- A bipolar balance of power between two rival coalitions, led by Saudi Arabia and Iran, with major conflict avoided through deterrence and diplomacy;
- A fluid, multipolar balance of power among regional actors, which succeeds in preserving autonomy of states and preventing war.

These concepts were discussed and reduced to three scenarios that met tests of plausibility (not likelihood) and significance for the region and for U.S. interests. The three scenarios as a whole encompass a wide range of conditions, including some that are of low probability but would be highly impactful and that challenge both our assumptions and our preferences. The goal here was not to predict, which in this highly volatile environment is (has been) hazardous, but to gain insight into what might happen as the distorting effects of U.S. occupation diminish.

The three scenario concepts chosen for detailed treatment were:

- *National Unity Dictatorship: Stable Iraq, Stable Region.* A nationalist leader emerges from the chaos of Iraq, a leader who is sufficiently independent of external players—the U.S., Iran, al Qaeda, Arab governments—to establish internal credibility as a unifying figure.
- *Contained Mess: Unstable Iraq, Stable Region.* As Iraq disintegrates into all-out civil war, the neighboring countries, understanding the potential for contagion, radicalization and the threat to their regimes, manage to act collectively to avoid the worst case, even as they pursue proxy war on Iraqi territory.
- *Contagion: Unstable Iraq, Unstable Region.* Iraq's civil war spreads to adjoining states through refugee flows, growing radicalization of Arab populations, escalating terrorism and the deliberate efforts of regional rivals to destabilize each others' governments.

The three scenarios were then the subject of detailed discussion over the next three hours. Here disbelief and preference were—to the extent possible—set aside and the group committed to building the most persuasive case possible for each scenario. To facilitate this, we addressed certain questions within all three scenarios: what factors precipitate and drive the scenario (which regional actors—including the U.S.—and relationships; what issues; what wild card events), what could get in the way, and how might these impediments be overcome? As each scenario took on a plausible shape, we asked about implications of the scenario for the domestic politics of major regional players, Arab-Israeli relations, terrorism and nuclear proliferation.

The fourth hour was devoted to what we learned about regional dynamics in a post-U.S. occupation Middle East, and any insights about U.S. policy that might facilitate the more desirable futures and avoid the most harmful. We then opened up the discussion to other faculty and NYU students to questions and comments.

NYU Center for Global Affairs  
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# Scenario One: NATIONAL UNITY DICTATORSHIP

## Summary

Confronted with the harsh realities of continuing sectarian rivalry and religious violence in Iraq, and with the American military presence dwindling, attention of local and regional players turns towards recreating an acceptable version of Hussein's rule. Minds concentrate on the imperative of keeping the country's nascent civil war from expanding into regional conflict and in finding, or facilitating the emergence of, strong and unifying central leadership. This goal is shared, more or less, by the United States, which has long given up on democracy building in Iraq.

A "National Unity Dictator" (NUD) is willing and able to suspend the constitution in order to address the lack of law and order that has led many Iraqis to flee the country or to throw their support behind insurgent groups and sectarian militias. Such a NUD would tap into dormant strains of Iraqi nationalism by resisting all elements compromising Iraqi sovereignty, including Sunni insurgents, al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), the American presence, Iranian supported militias and Kurdish separatists.

The NUD is not necessarily a secular leader and is likely to be situated between all of the ethnic and religious factions that currently divide Iraq. This leader is an Iraqi nationalist, not an Arab nationalist, and emerges after a substantial withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, sometime between 2010–2012. By that point the failure of the Islamists and successive weak administrations in Baghdad will have persuaded large numbers of Iraqis to trade the liberal freedoms they have enjoyed on paper since the fall of Saddam for freedom from fear.

The NUD represents the first leader in post-Saddam Iraq who combines the room to maneuver in forcefully dealing with violent insurgents with an ability to operate among Iraq's internecine ethnic and religious divisions. A leader who is properly situated between these groups, most likely a Shia with good relations across communities, could exploit tensions between tribal leaders and foreign jihadis and attempt to unite the country under the task of flushing out al Qaeda-like terrorists and restoring stability.

Any U.S. attempt to anoint a friendly leader with this role is likely to backfire. Indeed, his emergence will probably come as a surprise. In civil wars, it is often military—not political—leaders who are able to consolidate power due to their prowess in battle. That inherently unpredictable process as well as the necessity that the NUD not be seen as doing the bidding of the U.S. means that the United States may have to wait for him to emerge independently, then court his support.

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The NUD is valuable to the United States only to the extent that he is able to hold the nation together and keep the chaos currently reigning in Iraq from spilling out into a regional conflagration. A withdrawal of U.S. troops is necessary for the emergence of a NUD, but not sufficient. Another important component

of this scenario is the Iraqi army, which must be transformed into a force that is representative of the entire country and strong enough to engineer the most likely path for a NUD to assume power: a coup. Providing an environment in which a NUD can emerge will require the United States to maintain a delicate balance both within Iraq and among the other states in the region.

## **Players: Iraq**

Within Iraq, a natural equilibrium between communities will have to be found in order for the population to accept the idea of a NUD to fill the power vacuum that will inevitably follow a U.S. withdrawal. This equilibrium will be maintained by each faction assuming responsibility for patrolling its own community, with the Iraqi National Army similarly divided along sectarian lines, but under the ultimate command of the NUD.

It is very important in finding this equilibrium that the Kurds and the Shia not fear a substantial loss of the gains achieved since Saddam was removed from power. Aside from allowing the Kurds to maintain the autonomy they have enjoyed and securing the endorsements of prominent Shia religious figures, the central government must allow each region some discretion to run their own affairs.

By the time the emergence of a NUD becomes plausible, the inability of ethnic factions alone to provide safety and basic services will have laid the groundwork for a strong leader to galvanize support. Nonetheless, the equilibrium necessary for the NUD's ascendance faces many significant challenges. Much of the capable Sunni leadership has left the country and divisions between those who remain will make it harder for them to hold up their end of the bargain. Kurdish leaders will be hesitant to give up any power to a central government if it comes at the cost of their autonomy.

Perhaps the largest variable in terms of conditions within Iraq necessary for the emergence of a NUD is the very existence of remnants of the Iraqi nationalism he would rely on. After wars with neighbors and the United States, years of crippling sanctions, and the chaotic sectarian warfare that has emerged as the main source of violence in Iraq, it's open to question whether any leader would be able to unite the country again. But a NUD is the most likely route to a unitary Iraq.

While it's certainly too early to say that he will become a possible NUD, the rise of Lt. General Aboud Qanbar is important to consider in the context of this discussion. In January 2007, after the announcement of the surge by the United States, Qanbar was named commander of Iraqi forces by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Qanbar is from the Shia-dominated south but served as a commander in Saddam's Navy. He had not worked with American officials before his appointment and was actually taken prisoner by U.S. forces during the 1991 Gulf War. His appointment came over the objections of U.S. and Iraqi officials who complained that his loyalties were unknown and that more qualified candidates had been overlooked.

As part of the Iraqi component of the surge, a large amount of power over the Interior and Defense Ministries has been granted to Qanbar, who answers only to Maliki. Considering that Prime Minister Maliki's sectarian loyalties and relationship with anti-American leaders such as Moqtada al-Sadr have long been a concern of U.S. forces, the apprehension about the power being accumulated by General Qanbar may be a harbinger of the kind of relationship that might develop between the United States and a future NUD in Iraq.

Even if the emergence of a NUD comes long after the current surge has ended, General Qanbar's ability to hang onto power and play a prominent role in bringing some measure of stability to Iraq will determine his viability as a leader and serve partly as an indication as to the viability of the NUD scenario as a whole.

## **Players: Terrorists**

Terrorists are another group inside Iraq who will play an important role in the emergence of the NUD. About one-eighth of all attacks in Iraq are being carried out by AQI, which is virulently anti-Shia. Rooting out terrorist elements that have aimed to stoke sectarian tensions will be the central mission and a major source of legitimacy for the NUD amongst Iraqis.

One possible point of collaboration between the NUD and the United States might be the maintenance of a no-fly zone over AQI strongholds which would allow for periodic strikes against terrorist training camps there by Iraqi and U.S. forces. The radicalization of an entire generation of Iraqis and others may also

provide a source of cooperation between governments in the region who have incentive to collaborate against elements they see as a threat to their regimes' survival.

### Players: Iran

Iran would likely support a NUD for the sake of stability in Iraq if the leader was a Shia. The Iranians might also support the unlikely scenario of a Sunni NUD, but only if he had received the endorsement of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. Iranian tensions with Saddam Hussein's Iraq had more to do with Saddam's relationship with the United States than with his Sunni heritage, and one of their main concerns in Iraq today is ensuring a secure life for their co-religionists. Complicating Iranian acceptance would be any anti-Iranian rhetoric the NUD might deem necessary to cement his nationalist credentials. Additionally, escalating Iran-U.S. conflict over nuclear issues might provoke Iran to strike against the dwindling U.S. presence in Iraq.

### Players: Syria

Syria is home to a ballooning Iraqi diaspora and many foreign fighters use the country as a transit point into Iraq. The Assad regime recognizes the threat that these hardened fighters pose to its own survival and, while plenty of fighters are seen coming in from Syria, few are being allowed back in from Iraq.

Persuading Syria to control the inflow of jihadis across its border is vital to the NUD's main task of eliminating terrorist elements inside Iraq. While there is a possibility that the Hariri investigation will lead the Syrians to try and pressure the U.S. through Iraq, it appears more likely that a deal could be struck where

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tighter border control by the Syrians is rewarded with a relaxation of international isolation. Such an agreement could easily include Syrian support for a NUD in Iraq.

### Players: Saudi Arabia

Of all regional players, Saudi Arabia has the most to fear from the emergence of a NUD. While the Saudis would welcome the stability that a strong Shia NUD would bring to Iraq, the benefit that Iran would derive from the NUD's coming to power would be deeply worrying to Riyadh. Due to Saudi desires to play a bigger role throughout the region, it would most likely oppose a NUD who was seen as being too pro-Iran or even a secular figure who would further threaten the regime's legitimacy. Without many cards to play, the Saudis would have to rely on the continued backing of the Jordanians and Egyptians and continue to use oil windfalls to influence regional allies.

Perhaps even more than other regimes in the region, the Saudis are worried about the effect that jihadis returning from Iraq will have domestically. Saudi Arabia has long been a target of extremists, who see it as an apostate regime, with some sweeps netting more than 170 suspects accused of plotting attacks within the country. As the custodian of the holiest sites in Islam, it has an active interest in the growing tension between Sunni and Shia generally, but there is a natural limit as to how far the Saudis can use religion as a tool. Their main concern would be controlling the borders, and although the NUD may be a hard sell for the reasons mentioned above, the Saudis could be convinced to support a NUD on the basis of fighting terrorism.

As part of the effort to strengthen the NUD, the United States would have to lean on Saudi Arabia to put its fears aside and not interfere through the support of Sunni jihadists in Iraq, who, besides destabilizing that country, could also return home battle-hardened and ready to fight against the House of Saud.

## Players: United States

The main objective of the United States in not opposing a NUD in Iraq is to provide stability that will facilitate a continued withdrawal of troops and allow a reconstruction process to begin in earnest. That the NUD would draw much of his legitimacy from fighting terrorists within Iraq would mitigate the concern that a substantially diminished U.S. presence would compromise the war on terror.

It is important that the United States resist the urge to become too involved with the selection and rise of the NUD. Aside from having a poor track record in picking and grooming similar leaders in the past, it is important that the NUD emerge independently of the U.S. because the NUD's credentials as an Iraqi nationalist will be strengthened by the perception of distance between him and the United States. The United States must, in fact, be prepared to tolerate a certain amount of anti-U.S. rhetoric. This rhetoric will be necessary to draw supporters away from AQI and AQI's status as the only anti-American group inside Iraq with the ability to inflict real damage.

**The United States must in fact be prepared to tolerate a certain amount of anti-U.S. rhetoric.**

Because the United States will have to provide the NUD with military support and equipment in order to maintain a relationship with him and ensure he has means at his disposal to deal forcibly with terrorists on his own, the relationship with the reconstituted Iraqi army will be vitally important. The Iraqi army could be a source of residual U.S. influence in Iraq, with the NUD arising from its ranks.

Establishing expectations for the NUD will be another significant challenge for the United States. The supply of weapons would be the main pressure point that the United States would have as leverage over the NUD, but there is a limit to how effective this tactic would be as it is not in the best interest of the United States for the NUD to be lacking weapons and vulnerable to a coup. The support of the United States would be absolutely dependent upon his commitment to fighting AQI without compromise, but the U.S. would have to accept that the NUD is likely to be a leader it cannot control.

Supplying weapons to a leader who suspended the constitution in the name of law and order and draws some of his support from anti-American rhetoric is risky. The operation would require that congressional limitations on arms supplies either be relaxed or circumvented. While getting weapons to friendly leaders is a manageable challenge for the United States, the domestic ramifications of supporting a NUD in Iraq would have to be handled carefully.

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The U.S. will also have to organize its regional policies to build and maintain support for the NUD. Iran must be dissuaded from destabilizing Iraq, although a Shia NUD will go a long way toward satisfying Tehran.

Syria will require incentives to control its border with Iraq. Saudi Arabia must be persuaded to support a Shia leadership and therefore will need reassurance that Iran will be prevented from capitalizing regionally on its increased influence in Baghdad.

## Players: Israel

Another player whose concerns must be carefully managed as part of a policy of supporting the NUD is Israel. Israel has the capability to be a spoiler if it is not made to feel comfortable with the regime the United States is arming, and its actions with regard to Iran also threaten to complicate the drive for stability in the Middle East. Gaining Israel's acquiescence to the NUD would be important and would be a part of whatever movements are then taking place in the larger Middle Eastern peace process, which is likely to be a central focus of the next U.S. administration.

## Historical Models

While it is absolutely necessary that he arise from a singularly Iraqi context, there are several examples throughout history of leaders who are cut from essentially a NUD mold. A quick examination of these examples reveals both some of the characteristics to look for as such a leader develops in Iraq, an idea

of how his rise to power might come about, and some of the challenges that his rule might face.

Abdul Karim Kassem is an excellent example of the type of Iraqi leader necessary to unite the country after a U.S. withdrawal. His rise demonstrates that nationalist movements have sprung up in Iraq in the past. After earning his reputation on the battlefield in 1948, Kassem went on to organize a coup that overthrew the monarchy and brought him to power in 1958. He was able to put down a communist rebellion the following year but was dislodged from power in 1963 by the Ba'ath Party which would retain control for decades. Kassem's rise and fall demonstrates both the power of appeals to Iraqi nationalism and the precariousness of leadership in a fragmented country.

Josip Broz Tito in Yugoslavia is another example of a leader who rose to power in a foreign occupied and ethnically fragmented country through an appeal to nationalism and on the strength of a military reputation. Because his rise through the ranks took place in a revolutionary context it is hard to judge exactly how quickly he was able to accumulate power, but the faith that Stalin placed in him was an indication that he was a highly valued leader. Tito also exhibited an ability to play one side off of the other by siding with the Allies against the Axis powers in World War II and by organizing his rule ideologically around Yugoslav nationalism rather than Soviet communism or sectarianism.

Reza Shah Pahlavi, the father of the Shah of Iran, is another example of a NUD-like leader who focused energy on opposing the presence of foreign forces within his country. Pahlavi rose through the lowest ranks to attain the position of Brigadier General and eventually led a coup that used Iranian nationalism as its powerbase.

Common to all of these leaders is a political awareness and ability to play stronger allies against each other that comes from years of political experience and natural leadership qualities, often on display early in life. Additionally, these examples support the idea that a coup would be the most likely avenue a NUD would use to assume power. These leaders often came from humble backgrounds, earned their reputations on the battlefield and appealed to different varieties of nationalism and a general hostility to foreign powers in the country to gather domestic support.

One possible model for the post-withdrawal relationship between an Iraq unified under a NUD is El Salvador, where the U.S. sent thousands of advisors in the mid 1980s and 1990s. The U.S. commander in Iraq, General Petraeus, is also said to be looking at the death-squad formation process in Malaysia for clues as to exactly how much freedom different factions need to be granted in order to bring the situation under control. A power sharing arrangement

similar to Lebanon's is unlikely because unlike Lebanon, Iraq has not had hundreds of years of elites being able to lead their communities and cut deals. Thus, stability is almost guaranteed to be based in military control of some variety.

## Conclusion

A policy of supporting the emergence of a NUD in Iraq reflects the re-emergence of realist thinking on the part of the United States after an ambitious but failed project to bring democracy to Iraq. The NUD scenario represents a rediscovery of the virtues of stability in the Middle East, a refocusing of American power on the fight against al Qaeda, and a prolongation—at least—of the timeline for democracy building.

Of the three scenarios developed by the CGA group, this is the only one from which a stable Iraq emerges. That stability is by no means guaranteed in the long-term. The relationship with the NUD could deteriorate over time, as it did with Saddam, or he could lose his grip on power.

The larger problem of increased Salafism and the impact the Iraq war has already had on the global terror threat will remain despite the emergence of the NUD, and institution-building and working towards a more participatory political system in Iraq, and the wider Middle East, should remain the long-term goal, with the NUD thought of as a stop-gap measure to help that process take place organically.

# Scenario Two: CONTAINED MESS

## Summary

The instability in Iraq continues, with the growing confrontation between Sunni and Shia-governed states fought mostly within Iraq's borders. As Iraq disintegrates into a brutal all-out civil war, neighboring countries, realizing the potential for contagion, go to great lengths to keep the chaos contained within Iraq. Proxy war is the result, along the lines of the Spanish Civil War. However, the chaos in Iraq affords al Qaeda greater opportunities in the region and confronting radicalization will be a constant challenge for Arab governments.

In this scenario, all players other than Turkey are prepared to keep the Iraqi caldron boiling. However, none want it to overflow. Thus, while the insurgency is fed from the outside, there is an unspoken agreement that the conflict will not be allowed to expand beyond Iraq's borders. Such a delicate balance could be tipped if one of the parties within Iraq gains the upper hand. In the interest of keeping the conflict contained, however, there is motivation to prevent this.

Refugee flows, sectarian violence, and ethnic cleansing keep neighboring states involved in the conflict. Since Iran and Turkey are the only real military powers in the region, most Arab neighbors participate through local proxies.

Everyone in the region knows how to muddle through. They've been doing it for the past fifty years, and continue to do so. While Iraq burns, states keep an eye on each other to make sure the status quo ante is not disturbed.

## Players: Iraq

Though U.S. troops are all but gone, the Iraqi army still depends on U.S. arms and support. At the same time, the army acts increasingly as an instrument of Shia political dominance, thereby extending Shia physical control and combating the growing Sunni insurgency supported by al Qaeda and Sunni governments. The Shia in the south assert themselves more, causing a country-wide conflict to spill out of Baghdad and the surrounding areas. The Kurds

abandon any efforts at reining in the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which raises the odds on Turkish intervention.

## Players: Turkey

Turkey considers itself to be outside the region and above its politics, but Turkey and Iran have both been invited to observe at the Arab League summit in recent years, suggesting a degree of collaboration among the regional powers. Turkey has common interests with certain actors, especially regarding a stable Iraqi government, secure Iraqi borders, as well as the prevention of Kurdish independence. Turkey receives significant support from the major Arab states—and in some cases from Iran—on these issues.

The Kurds are Turkey's central interest in relation to Iraq. With a decades-long rebellion in the southeast by the PKK, Ankara has had its share of terrorist attacks. In recent years the Kurds have become more comfortable in northern Iraq, have consolidated political and economic power in their enclave, and serve as a haven for the PKK. Turkey has already warned the Americans that such a situation cannot continue. More than once they have shot across the border in pursuit of PKK fighters. Were the PKK to increase cross-border incursions into Turkey after a U.S. withdrawal, the Turks would step in to fill the power vacuum and attempt to rein in the separatists. A significant amount of Turkish troops are already stationed in the region, and Ankara has threatened to step into the fray more than once.

**Iran is already the status quo power, so destabilizing Iraq any further, or spreading the conflict to Saudi Arabia, is not in Iran's interest.**

## Players: Iran

Given the contained nature of Iraq's chaotic conflict, it is in Iran's interest to avoid a formal military presence there. Iran may become more involved if Shia political control is threatened in Iraq or if Turkey intervenes in the north. Otherwise, Iran is already the status quo power, so destabilizing Iraq any further, or spreading the conflict to Saudi Arabia, is not in Iran's interest. Further, as Iran pursues its nuclear program, it seeks to avoid more regional or international attention.

Iranian military capacity is questionable. It still uses U.S. weapons systems more than 30 years after the fall of the Shah; therefore, we cannot presume the Iranian army is ready to enter Iraq. It has been a fiasco for the Americans, and the Iranians do not want to repeat the Americans' mistakes. In recent history, furthermore, Iran has not come close to invading a neighbor since the Taliban kidnapped Iranian diplomats in Afghanistan. However, Iran does have

experience supplying weapons to factions in neighboring states, as with the Northern Alliance in its fight with the Taliban.

If Turkey enters Iraq from the north to suppress growing PKK activity, Iran would be tempted to intervene more directly to protect its interests in the south and to prevent a loss of relative influence within Iraq vis-à-vis the Turks. A Turkish invasion could thus cause a domino effect of destabilization from the north to the center, and then from the center to the south, where Iran has primacy. However, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey currently has good relations with the Iranians, and there has been some military cooperation against the Kurds. Iran has a common interest with Turkey regarding Kurdistan, which could mitigate Iranian discomfort with Turkish action in the north, so long as Turkish actions are limited in levels of force, confined to Kurdish areas, and do not presage a prolonged occupation.

### Players: Syria

Syria currently plays host to 800,000 refugees from Iraq. It is also the main conduit for insurgents into Iraq. Both factors could destabilize Syria, thus providing sufficient reason for Bashar al-Assad to get more involved in Iraq's affairs.

Border control is essential. Syria maintains its policy of allowing foreign fighters into Iraq rein but does not grant them return passage. The Allawite regime might also begin cracking down on the mostly Sunni refugee inflows. It might attempt to force refugees back into Iraqi territory or to impose more restrictive conditions on refugees in Syria.

### Players: Israel

Israel is mostly concerned with its eastern front. It fears dynamics that might undermine regimes in neighboring countries such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia, thereby creating unknown new security threats.

By 2010, domestic political skirmishes over the summer 2006 conflict with Hezbollah and Lebanon will have faded; therefore, Israel will have no political reason to hesitate from attacking Iran or initiating another round with Hezbollah. However, while Israel has the capacity to strike Iran, it will not do so. On the one hand, Iran is further from a nuclear capability than Israel fears and the practical reasons not to attack outweigh the uncertain benefits. At the same time, Israel simply does not know the precise location of its target in Iran and is not confident that a tactical strike will do the job. Additionally, concerns over the regional reaction to an Israeli strike against Iran might hold it back. Critically, Israel still has faith in deterrence, and is content to let the U.S. take the lead on the Iranian question.

Israel will be under persistent U.S. pressure for restraint in Lebanon, on the West Bank and Gaza, and with respect to preventive strikes against Iran. The lower the Israeli profile, the more Arab balancing against Iran, both inside Iraq and regionally, is facilitated.

### **Players: Saudi Arabia**

The Saudis' backing of Sunni Islamists has already become a liability. The Saudis now fear the al Qaeda-fication of their population and a spillover from Iraq. Iraq's status as a safe haven for al Qaeda is a scary prospect for the Saudis—scary enough for them to begin building a wall to contain the mess in Iraq.

At the same time, Saudi Arabia must accept that it is not going to be a great regional military player on par with Iran. The Saudis simply do not have an army capable of taming Iraq or facing off against Iran. They do have tremendous soft power in the region, however, thanks to their wealth and religious influence.

Instability in Iraq will cause the Saudis to encourage the emergence of a National Unity Dictator (see Scenario 1) by providing financial and material help to make this happen. They will also provide support to Sunni groups opposed to al Qaeda in Iraq. This would be Saudi Arabia's contribution to a proxy war.

Domestically, the Saudi government will begin to guard Shia mosques to protect its Sunni population and to protect the Shia from the Sunni. So far the Saudis have done little to address the fatwas being issued in support of the jihadis. This will change.

### **Players: Terrorists**

Iraq serves as a power base and the first front of a wider conflict. Attempts to control non-state elements within Iraq fail in this scenario, as the sectarian animosities escalate and the insurgents gain traction among a dissatisfied and insecure population. Concurrently, al Qaeda will become increasingly anti-Shia.

It will be impossible to eradicate the jihadis as long as Iraq remains in chaos. Sunni militias will find sympathy on the Arab street and radicalization of populations in the region will increase. Thousands of young men will embrace the philosophy of international terrorism, gravitate to Iraq, then return home to continue the jihad, trying to destabilize other countries. Targets include the oil infrastructures in order to starve regimes of funds and power, Shia populations in the Arab states, and Arab leadership.

The outcome thus resembles the situation the Bush administration said it was trying to prevent in invading Iraq in 2003: a large country in the Middle East serving as safe haven and a training ground for terrorists who then target assets in the region and beyond.

As the number of jihadis grows, it will become more difficult to contain them within Iraq. They are already spilling over into Syria and might go after regimes in Jordan and Saudi Arabia next. Local regimes will crack down ruthlessly to maintain internal stability. Hamas in the Palestinian areas would resist this trend, as it would undermine the legitimacy it has built as stalwarts of anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism.

**The outcome thus resembles the situation the Bush administration said it was trying to prevent in invading Iraq in 2003.**

## **Players: United States**

In order for the Americans to justify a withdrawal, a containment of the conflict in Iraq must be ensured. As such, the U.S. will resist any Turkish attempts to intervene in Iraq, and might even leave a garrison and a military presence in post-pullout Kurdistan. The U.S. will keep the Iraqi army as its client, supplying it with weapons and pressing orders to keep al Qaeda engaged. A residual U.S. special forces deployment will continue to target terrorists. The U.S. will maintain a no-fly zone over the entire country that contributes to containment and serves as a geographic buffer separating Iran and Israel.

Regarding Israel, the U.S. has two options: one is to push hard for an Israel/Palestine solution in order to facilitate Arab balancing against Iran's rising influence, contain the Iraq conflict, and fend off resentment from the Arab street that could destabilize Arab regimes. Alternatively, the U.S. could sacrifice the Palestinian question, and allow the Arab states to ratchet up the anti-Israel rhetoric in order to stabilize their regimes and gain credibility in the face of Iran. The ultimate policy will fall somewhere in between.

## Conclusion

This scenario is difficult to sustain over time and could potentially lead into one of the others. The challenges are significant: keeping Turkey from retaliating in force against the PKK; keeping Sunni jihadis from taking their fight outside the confines of Iraq; keeping the Sunni and Shia populations from going at each other in neighboring countries while sectarian violence rages in Iraq; and holding the containment coalition together.

Resisting the outflow of jihadist activists and ideas is the most serious problem, even if overt war is contained inside Iraq. Iraq-hardened jihadists will fan out across the region and attempt to undo the stabilizing efforts of regional state actors by radicalizing their populations. They will seek to violently bring down any or all of the Arab regimes as they spread their revolution, and they will enjoy a degree of support among many of the locals. The key to Scenario Two is twofold: regional powers avoid direct state-to-state conflict while repressing internal jihadi activities as well.

Thus, the path towards Scenario One or Scenario Three unfolds. Should the destabilizing forces emanating from Iraq succeed, region-wide chaos ensues, engulfing the whole Middle East. Alternatively, fearing just such an escalation, all the major players in the region might allow, or even encourage, the emergence of a National Unity Dictator (NUD). If such a figure emerged, it is unlikely that anyone in the region will resist, even if the NUD proves to be less impartial than originally desired. However, given the proven ability of Arab regimes to muddle through under the most trying circumstances, an extended Scenario Two status quo could develop.

# Scenario Three: CONTAGION

## Summary

Iraq has descended into outright civil war. Instability spreads throughout the Middle East. The regional players, competing and insecure, fail to cooperate on matters of defense and counter-terrorism and prove unable to contain the fighting within Iraq. While U.S. pressure and the limited military capacity of local actors have succeeded in preventing all-out regional conflict between Sunni and Shia-led states, the proxy war fought on Iraqi territory (Scenario Two) spreads to adjoining states through refugee flows, growing radicalization of Arab populations, escalating non-state terrorism, and the deliberate efforts of regional rivals to destabilize each others' governments.

Existing regimes in the region cling to power, but with insufficient domestic political support or acquiescence to create coalitions and pursue effective balance of power strategies necessary to contain the Iraq civil war. Because their appetite for direct state-to-state conflict is limited, many regimes use sub-state actors to strike at their enemies. Regional rivalries flare up as various players vie for influence and control. Radicalization of Arab populations increases as sectarian strife radiates from Iraq. In these circumstances, unforeseen events—such as an Iranian-style revolution in a major Arab country—could radically alter the political landscape and reorder foreign policy priorities in the region.

Events could easily globalize this regional conflagration. A serious disruption to the oil supply, as the result of an attack on an important oil installation in the Gulf, is a likelihood in this scenario. Such an attack could come in various guises. Terrorists might target the energy infrastructure, with the U.S. retaliating against Iran as a target. The U.S. or Israel could also react to any number of Iranian provocations, including its imminent (by 2010) development of nuclear weapons, leading toward a major war.

## Players: Iraq

In this scenario Iraq is a killing field rather than a viable political or military actor. The government cannot resist Iranian influence, control its borders, subdue the Sunni insurgency, rein in its own militias, or bargain effectively with other states. An invasion of the north by Turkey is a strong possibility, and would certainly cause Kurdish terrorism to intensify. Iraqi refugees may also choose to collaborate with a resurgent Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. In Syria and Jordan, refugee communities will attempt to mobilize local populations against their Alawite rulers.

**In this scenario Iraq is a killing field rather than a viable political or military actor.**

## Players: Turkey

Turkey's greatest concerns are vis-à-vis the Kurds. As Kurdistan wins more and more autonomy from Baghdad in an unraveling Iraq, it becomes a haven for the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) and other pro-independence, anti-Turkish elements. Turkey may not be able to resist the pressure to invade Kurdistan and eradicate these elements, though it might end up as Turkey's "South Bank," Turkey might prefer such a standoff rather than endure continuing infiltrations.

In the event of a large Turkish occupation in northern Iraq to suppress the PKK, historical tensions and regional competition between Iran and Turkey increase the possibility of some form of conflict between the two. Cooperation in the battle against Kurdish nationalism may not be a sufficient bond to rule this out.

Big American bases and American influence may keep Turks from going south, but if they see a real threat of Kurdish independence, Turkey will resist U.S. pressure.

## Players: Iran

Iran will look to agitate against America through proxies or agents in countries such as Saudi Arabia or Kuwait, or decide to challenge Turkey in Kurdistan. For the time being Turkey's involvement in Iraq's north benefits Iran by subduing Kurdish aspirations for an independent state; however, a distinction must be made again between Tehran's acquiescence to occasional attacks against PKK positions in Iraq by the Turkish Army and an outright invasion and occupation. Were Turkey to occupy the north, Iran would feel the need to assert its own influence in Iraq, possibly by entering the south under the guise of protecting the Shia community there from the blowback from Turkey's incursion.

Dramatic changes in Iran's domestic power structure could also be a major driver. A generation of leadership founded on the views of Ahmadinejad could see the exporting of the Iranian revolution as the only solution to Sunni regional dominance.

Iran will use its allied terrorist groups as leverage with regimes like United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Kuwait. Should it be hit—or believe it is about to be—Iran will call upon these terrorist groups to spread disorder and undermine the stability of these regimes and others in the region. All the while, Iranian strikes via proxy on oil installations such as Ras Tanora in Kuwait could ignite major conflict.

## Players: Syria

A variety of factors could destabilize Syria. With many different elements operating within the country, it could become another arena for a proxy war. A growing sense of Sunni persecution in the ‘Shiite Crescent’ could provoke a Sunni insurgency against the Alawite regime. With the regime potentially weakened by the added pressure arising from UN success in prosecuting Bashar’s associates for the Harriri assassination, an opening for the Sunni could result.

To complicate matters, Syria is host to hundreds of thousands of predominantly Sunni refugees, which might create a revolutionary scenario within its borders. Though not many Syrians are keen to go through another civil war in such short order, the possibility cannot be discarded. Parallels with Lebanon in this regard are striking. Sunni Jihadism may spread beyond Iraq, prompting a Salafist generation to return to Syria, threatening not only the Shia ruling elites in Syria, but also the Sunni who have cooperated with them.

The Syrian government would attempt to quell rebellious groups within its territory. A purge along the lines of the Jordanian Black September would be a predictable reaction to any hint of a mass rebellion.

If the next regime in Syria were prone to al-Qaedaification, U.S. interests would become involved.

## Players: Saudi Arabia

As the sectarian violence in Iraq continues, and the involvement of outside powers becomes more apparent, Saudi Arabia will emerge as both a destabilizing agent in Iraq via its support of Iraqi Sunni insurgents, and a target for destabilization domestically via its own Shia minority. Saudi Arabia also provides shelter to neighboring Bahrain’s ruling class, who is forced by angry Shia in Bahrain to seek outside assistance. Saudi Arabia will effectively absorb Bahrain and turn it into a Saudi province.

In the event of a U.S. strike against Iran, Saudi Arabia will also be vulnerable to a strike by Iran against the Saudi oil infrastructure—possibly an off-shore oil platform or an oil-loading facility on the Gulf coast.

Saudis are already pressuring Syria to taper its support for the jihadist movement. They are also building a wall on the Iraqi border as a means of containment. Additionally, they have stepped up security in Shia neighborhoods and may turn a blind eye to U.S. strikes on Iranian nuclear installations—as long as the U.S. missions are successful.

### Players: Egypt

If the Muslim Brotherhood is running Egypt, they might rescind the peace treaty with Israel, although the Muslim Brotherhood's Mohammed Akef has said in recent years that he is committed to a two state solution and would honor Egypt's "international obligations"—widely understood to mean Egypt's peace treaty with Israel. Furthermore, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt doesn't want to let Sunni-Shia conflict in the region complicate what they are doing domestically. Egypt already faced a similar problem in the 1990s and was successful in putting it down. Though not directly threatened by the contagion of violence coming out of Iraq, Egypt might choose to become involved as a peacebroker. This might just be the opportunity Egypt has long sought to re-engage the region and reassert its leadership role in the Arab world.

### Players: United States

The U.S. does not want to be perceived as the power behind any regime in the Middle East. However, as Iran further destabilizes the situation in Iraq, the U.S. will come to play a more direct role in defending Arab states, thereby escalating its confrontation with Iran.

In regards to Iranian nuclear ambition, the U.S. will try to delay the day the Iranians actually become a nuclear power, but will accept it once it happens. Prevention has been so discredited in Iraq that there may be no way to prevent Iran from getting the bomb. One adjustment might be the extension of the U.S. nuclear umbrella to Gulf monarchies, showing Iran that it cannot intimidate its neighbors, and dissuading the region from attempting to develop its own weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

In a world with a nuclear-armed Iran, a cold war scenario may develop. The U.S. backed off in every other nuclear situation (Israel, Pakistan, India), thus lending credence to Iran's belief that once it is nuclear-ready it will be able to challenge the U.S. on its own terms. The U.S. will maintain control over Iraqi airspace and enforce a no-fly zone. This will give Americans and other allies the ability to strike at targets within Iraq from the air, acting on intelligence tips about al Qaeda-style training camps. This no-fly zone will also serve as a buffer between Iran and Israel.

## Players: Terrorists

Major attacks on oil installations are likely in this scenario, with extremely serious consequences. Attacks have been attempted before and there is little reason to believe that attempts would not be made as chaos and conflict spread out of Iraq. Pipelines and major ports are prime targets. The short-term impact of an attack on oil fields will drive a major spike in global oil prices.

Unresolved, escalating sectarian strife in Iraq inevitably increases transnational threats to regime stability throughout the region. Radicalization of populations intensifies the struggle in other countries. In this way, as distinct from state actions, war spreads in the region. This could happen in Lebanon, Syria and Bahrain.

As a new Salafist generation emerges in the region—via individuals coming from Iraq or influenced by what is going on there—Salafism may emerge in other states. The Salafist generation has the most impact if it is able to penetrate low-level military ranks, where key officers most instrumental in past coup attempts are to be found. If Salafism spreads, regional armies may be unwilling to put rebellions down. Inter-Sunni tensions may also play a critical role in regional developments. The jihadi threat will continue, but its focus on population radicalization will increase terror over time.

With continued weapons proliferation throughout the region, energized and hostile jihadists armed with nuclear weapons might emerge. Though nuclear weapons technology is very difficult to reproduce, dirty-bomb scenarios cannot be ruled out. Loose Iranian and Pakistani nuclear weapons are also a possibility.

Further al-Qaedaification in the region, coupled with regional regimes' inability to curtail terrorism, could lead to further attacks abroad. Europe—already worried about the blowback from Iraq—might become a favorite target for terrorists. There is no reason to think terror will stay concentrated in the region, especially given the focus of jihadist anger against the United States and its allies in the Middle East.

The link between terrorism and undemocratic regimes is not so clear-cut. Democratic principles will not satisfy those who are already prone to jihadist philosophies. However, autocratic regimes do foster the emergence of terrorist organizations. There is a need for gradual reform and accountability—rather than simple prescriptions for democracy—but in the end, reform will not solve all problems related to terrorists.

**There is no reason to think terror will stay concentrated in the region, especially given the focus of jihadist anger against the United States and its allies in the Middle East.**

## Conclusion

This scenario is not in the long term interests of any state actor—regional or global—and this fact argues for the higher probability of a stabilizing Iraqi dictator or sufficient regional collaboration to contain the conflict. The more this scenario is accepted as plausible, the greater the efforts of states to prevent it.

What keeps it in play, however, are several powerful forces. Terrorist groups are thriving in Iraq, have regional ambitions, and view chaos as an ally. The Sunni-Shia divide deepens in Iraq and is spreading regionally. Iran has a hegemonic past, similar hopes for its future, and ties to terror groups with strengthening positions in the region. Arab regimes are insecure, often unpopular, face radicalized populations, and are rife with inter-Arab rivalries that complicate balancing against jihadist or Iranian threats. In 2010, American popularity among Arab publics is at an all-time low, its physical presence is diminished, and its credibility among the region's states—both allies and rivals—is deeply wounded. Under these conditions, it would be imprudent to believe too confidently in the logic of “self-interest” in the Middle East.



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