POLICY FOCUS

THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE FOR NEAR EAST POLICY

W

Baghdad Between Shi'a and Kurds

By Ofra Bengio

Executive Summary

Since the formation of Iraq in 1920, the Sunni minority has held power and played the Shi'a and Kurdish minorities against each other. Aside from their shared enmity towards the Baghdad government, the Shi'a and the Kurds have nothing in common.

The Iraqi opposition is structurally weak and disorganized. Ideological and ethnic differences, geographical separation, a lack of foreign interest and the terror of the Ba'th regime have precluded the formation of effective opposition. After Iraq's invasion of Kuwait the opposition was torn between wanting to seize the opportunity to break loose of Baghdad and not wanting to appear unpatriotic. When they did rebel, their uprising itself encouraged Sunnis to rally around the Baghdad regime.

Allied acquiescence in the use of helicopters to crush the rebellion signalled to the Ba'th (and to Saddam Hussein) that the U.S. wanted the regime to retain the upper hand. The Kurdish exodus in April further helped Baghdad by depriving the Kurdish rebels of their bases and shifting Iraq's demographic balance. The outcome of the uprising demonstrated that the current regime can only be maintained through force and only removed through force. A change of regime can only be brought about by the army, yet the army is itself an inherently dangerous tool. Saddam has effectively exploited American ambiguities and mixed signals. Therefore, it is essential that the U.S. narrow the gap between its words and its deeds. Policy needs to find ways to distinguish between the Iraqi people and the regime and to recognize that democratization is only possible from within and cannot be imposed from the outside.

Distinct policies must be fashioned towards the Shi'a and the Kurds, respectively. The Shi'a have always been loyal to the Iraqi state, are inclined towards anti-Westernism and have not clearly defined their own aspirations, so policy toward them should be based on humanitarian concerns. By contrast, U.S. policy towards the Kurds ought to focus on getting Baghdad to honor its own agreements on Kurdish autonomy.

Saddam Hussein himself is not the glue holding together Iraq. Unless Saddam is removed there will be no change. But his practices have so permeated Iraqi society that it would take much more than uprooting him and his circle to heal the Iraqi polity. In the event of change, one can anticipate an interim period of instability. The only real chance for positive change would be a coalition of enlightened military officers and reformist civilians.

In 1932, when Iraq was about to gain independence, King Faysal warned the Iraqi government of its extreme weakness vis-a-vis the population, revealing that it possessed only 15,000 rifles, as opposed to the latter's 100,000 rifles. Noting the difficulty with which the army had crushed the 1931 Kurdish rebellion, the King raised severe doubts as to its ability to cope with two rebellions at the same time should the Shi'a and Kurds simultaneously challenge Baghdad's autonomy. To rectify this imbalance, Faysal urged the development of an army which would be strong enough to crush such insurrections.[1]

Faysal's vision became reality some sixty years later, when the Shi'a and the Kurds rebelled simultaneously at the end of the Gulf War challenging the regime and the state. Although the two uprisings were triggered by the same immediate causes and were motivated by the same short-term goals, the deep-rooted causes and long-term goals of each were wide apart, as were the regime's responses to each uprising. Indeed, each rebellion represented a completely distinct problem.

THE MINORITY-MAJORITY COMPLEX

For many years and up to the present, discussion of the Shi'i issue has been taboo in Iraq.[2] So sensitive has the subject been that the word Shi'i itself was all but effaced from the lexicon of the Iraqi media, from Iraqi literature and from Iraqi history books. When it was absolutely necessary to allude to it, the more neutral term al-Ja'fariyya (the fifth school of Islamic jurisprudence) was used. The Shi'a themselves, over whose heads hovered the accusation of sectarianism, willingly acceded to such policies. As a result, very little information on the Shi'a, their grievances, and their aspirations ever travelled to the outside world.

An important attempt to break through this iron curtain was made in 1989 with the publication outside Iraq of Hasan al-'Alawi's *The Shi'a and the Nation-state in Iraq, 1914-1990*.[3] al-'Alawi, a Shi'i journalist who had served under the Ba'th from 1955 to 1981, challenged conventional wisdom and crystallized the Shi'i critique of the Iraqi state. First, he attacked the British-Sunni collusion which, in the early days of the state, had granted a monopoly on power to the Sunni Arab minority, an act which he viewed as the source of all of Iraq's subsequent problems. Second, he refuted Sunni insinuations and accusations that the Shi'a had been deficient in their loyalty to Iraq, asserting that the Shi'a had, in fact, been the bearers of the banners of Iraqi independence since the "great Iraqi revolution" of 1920, the uprising against the British in which Shi'i clerics (or 'ulama) and tribes played a leading role. Most significantly, al-'Alawi aired deep-seated Shi'i political, military, religious, economic and social grievances. To keep power in their own hands, he argued, the Sunni government perpetuated all kinds of discriminatory policies against the Shi'i majority; accordingly, al-'Alawi maintained, they, and not the Shi'a, should be blamed for sectarianism. Even Shi'i members of the establishment, whom he derisively called Shi'at al-Sulta (Shi'a of the Regime), lent their hand to this discrimination, with the result that the Shi'a were deprived of any real representation in the centers of power. Nor did al-'Alawi shield the Shi'a themselves from his sharp criticism, blaming them for accepting their situation as a fait accompli, thereby assisting in the entrenchment of dictatorship in Iraq. In his opinion, the only way to break the vicious circle of Shi'a disenfranchisement is to bring about a radical change in the power system whereby the Shi'a would have political power commensurate with their numerical strength.

Even in 'Alawi's critique, the Shi'a ought not challenge the territorial integrity of the state. Instead, their main demands would revolve around their inadequate representation within the Iraqi political system. Furthermore, the Shi'a have normally been so quiescent that not since the crushing of the Shi'i tribal rebellions in the 1930s has a serious religious or political movement emerged to press for such limited demands.

The Kurdish problem has been entirely different. The clash here is between two distinct nationalities, Kurdish and Arab, hence its intensity and long duration. Rather than ease the problem, the passage of time has only exacerbated it. In contrast to the Shi'i acceptance of "submission" *(musalama)*, the Kurds sustained their struggle intermittently for seventy years, as the tribal uprisings of the 1930s and 1940s evolved into a more or less organized national movement. Moreover, while the Kurds had, on the whole, refrained from raising the slogan of independence, their very demand for autonomy was tantamount to challenging the territorial integrity of the state. Their cooperation with Iran against Iraq during the Iraq-Iran war of the 1980s also differentiated them from the bulk of the Shi'a who remained loyal to Iraq. And while the Ba'th stood firm against any radical change in the power system in Baghdad, it did acquiesce to some Kurdish demands and granted them an autonomy. That autonomy, "the Ba'th's original sin," set in motion a series of face-offs with the Kurds' Iranian backers which culminated in the Iraq-Iran war.[4]

Since the formation of the Iraqi state in 1920, political maneuverings have largely been the result of the Sunni-Shi'i-Kurdish triangle. The peculiar thing about this triangle is that although the Shi'a and the Kurds had nothing in common in terms of nationality or religious affinity, they both had to contend with the Sunnis in power. To maintain this dominance, it was of the utmost importance for the Sunnis to balance their two foes against each other or at least keep them apart as far as possible.[5]

History has shown that although the Shi'a and Kurds were united in their antipathy toward the Sunni government, they made little effort to join forces with a view to changing this balance of power. This long-standing situation, though jeopardized by the March 1991 uprising, survived that threat, too. For many reasons, then, the 1991 uprising offers valuable lessons for understanding the turbulent history of Sunni-Shi'i-Kurdish relations and their likely course in the future.

STRUCTURAL WEAKNESS OF THE OPPOSITION

The uprising of March 1991 was unique in modern Iraqi history, which is itself rich with revolts and uprisings. Its uniqueness lay in the fact that it was swift and spontaneous, that it simultaneously engulfed the Shi'i south and the Kurdish north, that it indirectly involved more than one neighboring country as well as the allied forces, and that it presented the most serious challenge to the integrity of the state since the 1930s. The story of the uprising itself is easily told. It began in early March, immediately after the end of the Gulf War. It lasted for a very short spring—barely one month—and left the Ba'th firmly in power. However, the details are much more intricate, for the uprising touched the very heart of Iraq's society and polity.

Theoretically, the way in which the Gulf War ended—that is, in near-destruction of the Iraqi army and near-collapse of the regime—provided a golden opportunity for the Iraqi opposition to give the *coup de grace* to, and take power from, the Ba'th. In reality, however, the pertinent factor was the relative balance of power between the opposition and the regime—in other words, whether the former had become strong enough to be able to overcome the regime even in its extreme weakness.

In discussions of Iraqi politics, the term "opposition" encompasses various forms of anti-government sentiments and activities, as well as various groupings and parties acting both inside and outside Iraq. By far the most important categories of opposition are the Kurdish and Shi'i groupings. Among the Kurds, the two most significant groups are the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (DPK) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) which have mobilized support among both peasants and the intelligensia. Though theirs is mainly a political, not an ideological, rivalry, two points should be mentioned. First, in the 1960s and 1970s, the faction led by Jalal Talabani which later came to be called PUK presented itself as more leftist than the DPK. Second, at one time in the late 1980s, the PUK raised the idea of an independent Kurdistan, while the DPK continued to adhere to the idea of Kurdish autonomy within the Iraqi state. Because of their political rivalry the two groups allied themselves with different groups and forces both internally and externally. Thus the DPK has cooperated more closely with Iran; the PUK, with Syria. Among the Shi'a the most important groups are al-Da'wa, Munazzamat al-'Amal al-Islami, and the Supreme Assembly of Iraqi Revolution (SAIRI).[6] Also, the "opposition" includes the Iraqi Communist Party and other small groupings (see appendix).

Taken as a whole, the opposition was extremely weak on the eve of the invasion of Kuwait, and it recognized this shortcoming. Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrisi, a Shi'i opposition leader, analyzed the root causes of this weakness in 1988, and ascribed it to lack of self-confidence; extreme dependence on outside forces; disunity and fragmentation; weak or nonexistent contact with the Iraqi masses; and helplessness vis-à-vis the government machinery which sought to crush opposition.[7] The problem of fragmentation was very acute; various estimates and statements have placed the number of opposition groups from 17 to 27. Even more acute was the ideological and political gulf separating the various groupings, including the Kurds and Shi'a. While the Kurds acted along national-secular lines, the Shi'a acted along Islamic-Shi'i lines; and while the former saw the solution to their problem in the formation of a genuine Kurdish autonomy within a democratic system in Iraq, the latter regarded the establishment of an Islamic republic as the best solution to Iraq's problems, including that of the Kurds. The Shi'i groupings were no more tolerant of the notion of a Kurdish autonomy than the Baghdad government itself. They viewed with jealousy any Kurdish achievement in this respect, fearing that it would jeopardize their own standing.

The ideological differences of the Shi'a and Kurds were also reflected in their relations with other groups, mainly the Iraqi Communist Party, which, though weak, still retained a certain appeal.[8] The Kurds and the Communists had a love-hate relationship as each tried to attract the Kurdish masses to their respective camps. At the

same time, however, they did develop a certain modus vivendi, and even a modus operandi, whereby the Kurdish movement gave shelter to the persecuted Communists, while the latter contributed in turn to Kurdish guerrillas fighting against government forces. The Shi'i groups, however, regarded the secular Communist Party not only as a rival but as a real enemy. Accordingly, any political rapprochement or even a dialogue between the two was viewed as a far-fetched idea. The Shi'a's fear of secularism illustrated a very important characteristic of the Shi'i opposition, namely that for most of the period, it was masterminded by religious leaders or religious parties. If there were any secular Shi'i groupings, they were not of great consequence. This lack of an all-Iraqi universal platform raised a high barrier between them and their potential supporters, not only among the Sunnis but also among the secular element of the Shi'i population.

As if this ideological division was not sufficient in itself to weaken the opposition, other difficulties were manifest. First, there was the physical separation between the Kurdish north and the Shi'i south, due not just to geographical factors but also to the fact that the Sunni-Arab sector of the population in the center of Iraq acted as a kind of buffer zone between the Kurds and the Shi'a. Indeed the fact that the government did its best to obstruct any contacts between the different parts of the opposition forced them to initiate contacts outside Iraq. Years of repression and persecution had forced all the organized groupings either to be clandestine or to exist in exile. Therefore, most of the leaders and many members of opposition groups were scattered in Iran, Syria, Britain and other countries. As a result; day-to-day contact with their potential supporters in Iraq was severely hampered, and no

charismatic leader emerged to unify all parts of the opposition. Another problem was the opposition's financial and organizational difficulties. Deprived of any source of income and unable to make use of the oil resources of their country, these groups had to rely on outside support, a necessity that severely restricted their independence and in fact turned them into their patrons' pawns.

Organization and military training were also crucial to the success or failure of these groups. Once again, there was a vast difference between the Kurdish and the Shi'i opposition. While the former had long-standing experience in both fields, the latter had very little.[9] However, neither seemed to have acquired any influence or following in the most important center of power—the army; and the threat of the death penalty for any non-Ba'thi group attempting to infiltrate the army did not make their task any easier.[10]

Crowning these difficulties was the opposition's inability to gain influence in the international arena, notably the West. The Shi'i fundamentalist groups were looked upon with the same aversion and suspicion as was the Islamic Republic of Iran, widely considered their primary patron. The Kurdish cause aroused some sympathy in the world media, but little else. No country in the west, and certainly not the United States or Britain, wanted to open a Pandora's box by granting legitimacy to the Kurds in any international forum. Nor were these quarters any more eager to question the legitimacy or wisdom of Britain's 70 year-old decision to confer power on the Arab-Sunni minority, thus setting in motion the imbalances inside Iraqi society and polity.

THE GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990 seemed to have changed the picture overnight. Emboldened by the regime's difficulties, the opposition began intensive efforts to unite its forces, to present a better or more viable alternative to the ruling Ba'th, and to initiate contacts with the anti-Iraqi coalition. But uniting its forces was more easily said than done. Well before the occupation of Kuwait, different opposition groups had initiated moves in London designed to bring about a rapprochement between the exile groups there. However, it was only at the end of December 1990 and after increased pressure from Syria that the 15-21 groups conferring in Damascus agreed on a joint platform.[11]

The long months of debate pointed not only to the depth of rivalry and ideological differences among the different groups, but, more importantly, to their inability to agree on constructive goals. What emerged from the discussions was that they were united in their wish to oust the Ba'thi regime, but in little else. While the 12-point resolution approved at the Damascus conference did present some very positive goals, such as the introduction of a new constitution and the establishment of a democratic system, the resolution seemed designed more to interest the Western allies than to represent the opposition's intentions.[12] Worse still, beneath this facade were deep ideological and political differences among the parties about the future political system in Iraq and the sharing of power, symbolized by debates on issues such as whether or not to open official announcements with the *Fatiha* (the opening verse of the Koran);[13] whether the Shi'i and Kurdish movements could co-exist; whether the establishment of an Islamic

Republic in Iraq would provide the solution to the Kurdish problem; and whether the Shi'i majority would impose its views and policies on the Kurds in a future coalition government or acquiesce to their demand for autonomy.

In an effort to overcome these problems, a five-man steering committee was appointed of two Shi'a, one Kurd, one (anti-government) Ba'thi and one communist, each having veto power.[14] This semblance of unity encouraged contact between the Iraqi opposition and various members of the anti-Iraqi coalition, which now came to include Saudi Arabia and Turkey, in addition to their traditional supporters, Iran and Syria. The Western media granted unprecedented coverage to the opposition, its leading personalities and views. However, the multiplicity of outside "supporters" did not enhance cohesion within the opposition, as each country supported different groupings and sought to mold them according to its own views and interests. Indeed, very much like the Iraqi factions themselves, the countries supporting the opposition were united in their enmity of the Ba'th but had little in common in their views of who or what should replace it. For example, Syria supported the unity efforts of the different factions because its chief desire was to see the Iraqi Ba'th ousted from power and replaced by a pro-Syrian government. Iran, on the other hand, was ideologically and politically more inclined to the Shi'i groups acting under its auspices, because it regarded the Islamic solution as the best alternative to the Ba'th.[15] Saudi Arabia, the newcomer in this field, encouraged the activities of various Iraqi ex-officers; these included 'Abd al-Rahman al-Dawud, who had masterminded the July 17, 1968 Ba'thi coup and was, for two weeks, defence minister in its first cabinet, and the

ex-deputy chief of staff, Hasan al-Naqib, an anti-Ba'th activist from the late 1970s. An even more innovative move was the Saudi attempt to establish contacts with heads of Shi'i tribes in the south whose political influence had long been dormant.[16] Turkey, for its part, seemed to limit its contacts to Kurdish groupings, inasmuch as its main concern was the fate of the Iraqi Kurdish north and the repercussions of their fate on its own Kurdish minority as well as on the general situation in the area.

It is not known what kind of support these countries granted the opposition in the pre-war period, but it seems quite probable that it included organizational, financial and moral support, although not a substantial amount of military aid. Certainly, these countries did not expect the opposition to be able to oust the Ba'th and prevent the war, but they used it for the purposes of their propaganda and psychological war against Iraq. At the same time, they prepared the ground for the post-war period. The U.S., chief arbiter of Iraq's fate, kept aloof from the Iraqi opposition and, even after the war started on January 16, was reluctant to establish significant contacts with it.[17]

At the beginning of 1991, three clandestine, opposition radio stations began broadcasting against the Ba'th: Voice of Free Iraq, Voice of Rebellious Iraq and Voice of the People of Kurdistan.[18] That the Kurds had a special station of their own indicated that they acted separately and independently of the Shi'i opposition groups, a fact which would manifest itself later in the uprising itself. While addressing the Iraqi people as a whole, the broadcasts urged the army to take action against the Ba'th and thus spare the Iraqi people another terrible war. The repeated appeals to the army indicated that

the opposition was keen on making a clear distinction between the political and military echelons of the regime and on upholding the latter as a national symbol. It also implied that the opposition felt itself too weak to be able to change the regime by itself and that it was willing, if the army would join it, to resort to the same violent methods used by its oppressors.

Fundamentally, the occupation of Kuwait and the ensuing crisis left the opposition with a dilemma. On the one hand, it regarded the demise of the regime as its own victory, and therefore it both sought the support of the anti-Iraqi coalition and necessarily lent it its own support. On the other hand, a "blatant" alignment with this coalition would brand it a traitor to the country and the nation. The opposition's way out of this impasse was to condemn both the occupation of Kuwait **and** the war against Iraq. This dual stance was not insincere. As on other occasions, the opposition was torn between its desire to see the regime defeated and its genuine fear that the Iraqi people would pay a heavy price. Its task was particularly difficult because under the Ba'th the dividing line between the regime and the state was indistinct. Such was the opposition's predicament that it always ended up aligning itself with Iraq's enemies, while the regime always emerged or posed as the patriotic defender of Iraq against both of them. Anxious to avoid this bind, the organized opposition decided to defer its open anti-Ba'th activities until the very end of the Gulf War.[19]

THE SHI'I AND KURDISH *INTIFADA*

The first signs of unrest appeared in mid-February, with anti-Ba'th demonstrations took place in Basra and then in Diwaniyya,

where protesters raised anti-Saddam slogans and reportedly killed a number of Ba'thi officials. It was not, however, until the unofficial cease-fire took place at the end of February that the Shi'i uprising started. The signal to the uprising was given this time from the Shi'i south, which was not surprising given the fact that the south was the site of the land battle, that it had suffered most of the consequences of the war and that it felt relatively secure because of the presence of the allied forces. The uprising, which engulfed most of the Shi'i towns and the countryside, was so intense and violent that it would not be an exaggeration to depict it as a civil war.[20] The two Shi'i holy cities, Najaf and Karbala, joined the uprising, and even the holiest shrines met military reprisals from government forces. In fact, this episode opened Shi'i wounds which had long seemed healed.[21]

The spokesmen of the Shi'i opposition described the uprising as a popular and spontaneous intifada initiated and led by the people themselves, with no support from the outside.[22] There is little reason to doubt the spontaneity and the popular nature of the uprising, which spread like wildfire within hours, feeding on new and old grievances arising from social and economic deprivation, political oppression and national humiliation. It is also doubtless that the population carried on its shoulders the primary burden of the uprising and its consequences. The rebels reportedly used light weapons which the government had earlier distributed among the population to defend itself against the allied coalition.[23] They were also aided by individual soldiers and small units who defected to their side with light weapons.[24]

Little is known about Saudi or other Gulf state involvement in the uprising. It is quite possible that having realized the direction which the uprising was taking, and fearing spill-over effects on themselves, they preferred to keep aloof. Throughout, Iraq blamed Iran for the outbreak and continuation of the uprising. Indeed, the rebellion did offer Tehran new opportunities to realize its long-standing aspirations of exporting the Islamic revolution into Iraq. Even before the uprising Iran had been reported to have prepared two divisions to help change the political system in Iraq. The first, the al-Tawwabin ("repentants") division, was composed of Iraqi prisoners of war who had remained in Iran after the exchange of POW's between the two countries in the latter half of 1990. The al-Badr division, on the other hand, was composed of Iraqi Shi'i exiles who had fled the country or had been expelled by the Ba'th over the years. At one point, the head of SAIRI boasted of his ability to mobilize 100,000 persons to the al-Badr corps, a figure that appears greatly exaggerated. It is not known when or in what way these groups entered Iraq, but some of them (probably even Iranians) acted as liaison officers coordinating the different foci of the uprising in the south. Iran also provided some logistical and political support, as well as strategic depth, for the uprising.[25]

The uprising in the Kurdish north started on March 4, not because of prior coordination between the two movements, but because the Kurdish leadership had been waiting, as it said, for the opportune moment. Even so, the leadership asserted that it started spontaneously without a green light from the leadership.[26] The Kurdish movement, with its long-standing experience in the struggle against the Iraqi government, began preparing the ground for the uprising

immediately after the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. The task was made easier by Baghdad's pressing need to dilute its forces in the north and dispatch them to the Kuwaiti front. The Kurdish guerrillas, the *peshmerga*, had suffered at the hands of the government following the Iraq-Iran war, and they subsequently started to build bases again in Kurdistan, relying on the infrastructure and organizational links of the past.[27] In contrast, the Shi'i opposition had to start from scratch because it had not had any guerrilla or other para-military organizations. In addition, while the Shi'a had to rely almost solely on Iran's support, the Kurds could rely on Syria and Iran as well as on Turkey's tacit approval.

Kurdish guerillas and activists began using the Tigris River as the main crossing point into Iraq months before the uprising. PUK leader Jalal Talabani maintained that guerrilla activities had started in Kurdistan shortly after the occupation of Kuwait but were stopped on the eve of the Gulf War. Even before the beginning of the uprising, pro-government Kurdish auxiliaries named *Juhush* (donkeys), who had acted on behalf of the government against the Kurds, started to join the Kurdish movement. By mid-March, some 60,000 soldiers had reportedly changed sides, bringing with them their military equipment.[28] As a matter of fact, the Kurds' main weaponry was said to be booty taken from the army.

As in the south, the vacuum which had developed in the Kurdish area immediately after the cease-fire encouraged the simultaneous spread of the uprising in different parts of Kurdistan. Emboldened by initial success, the Kurdish leadership ventured on a strategy never dared before, that is the occupation of the main towns and cities of Kurdistan which in the past had been garrisoned by the Iraqi armed forces. Within days not only Sulaymaniyya, Irbil and Dohuk fell into Peshmerga hands, but also the strategic oil city of Kirkuk, which had been the primary source of contention between the Kurds and the government since the early 1970s. This spectacular success could be attributed mainly to the government's urgent need to pull its forces out of northern Iraq to protect Baghdad and quell the Shi'i rebellion.[29]

DIVIDE AND RULE

But the euphoria of March did not last into April. Encircled by a double ring of internal and external enemies, the Ba'th pulled itself together in an attempt to win at least the internal war. Herein, indeed, lies a paradox and, hence, the miscalculations of the regime's enemies. It is quite possible that the very eruption of the uprising helped unite the Sunni section of the population around the ruling group, strengthening its cohesiveness; any alternative government might have jeopardized the privileged status of the entire group. The misconception lay in the view that there was symmetry between the Ba'th accomplishments in the external arena and those in the internal ones.

As to the intriguing question of how the regime weathered the crisis, the most obvious answer is that it managed to keep the balance of power in its favor. It was aided in this by its organizational abilities and long experience in suppressing any sort of dissent; by the fact that the means of coercion and the apparatus of power remained firmly in its hands; and by the determination of the ruling elite to stay in power. The mobilization of what one may call "the ruling family" was remarkable. As early as March 6, the tough 'Ali Hasan al-Majid, President Saddam

Hussein's cousin, was made Minister of the Interior, an act which in itself worked to instill fear in the opposition. Another cousin was made the governor of al-Ta'mim (Kirkuk), while brothers and others cousins, notably Hussein Kamil, Minister of Industry and Military Industrialization, played an important role in the suppression of the uprising. It also seems that the government brought to its aid ex-generals who had earlier retired or been punished, such as Hisham Sabah al-Fakhri and Mahir 'Abd al-Rashid.

One must weigh against this determination the relative weakness of the forces confronting it. The regime's task was greatly facilitated by Iran's qualified support of the opposition and the allied forces' vacillation between their desire to see the Ba'th ousted from power and their fear of the alternatives.[30] The tacit approval which the allies gave the Ba'th for using helicopters in order to crush the uprising was crucial for the success of this undertaking. But beyond its military importance, this approval bore political significance: *it signalled to the Ba'th and Saddam Hussein that the U.S. did not wish their destruction but, on the contrary, that it wanted them to have the upper hand in their encounter with the opposition.* These signals reportedly discouraged high-ranking military officers in their attempts to join the uprising and oust the Ba'th.[31] The structural weakness of the Ba'th's internal enemies also aided it greatly. It could observe their disunity. Although they acted simultaneously, the opposition was far from united. The conference in Beirut which was hurriedly set up in mid-March to assess the situation and discuss a post-Saddam government revealed the deep differences among the participants. The Ba'th knew only too well how to exploit this weakness, so as to divide and rule.

Aware of its inability to handle the two uprisings simultaneously, the government opted first to crush the Shi'a, figuring that the Shi'i revolt seemed both more threatening in the short run and easier to defeat. The proximity of Baghdad to the Shi'i "battleground," and the fact that Baghdad itself had a Shi'i majority, raised the specter of the uprising engulfing the capital and jeopardizing the very seat of power. No less of a worry for Baghdad was the stance of the allied forces and of Iran who seemed to lurk behind the possibility of the Ba'th's demise. It was thus of the utmost importance to regain control of the area as quickly as possible and to obstruct any attempts by those forces to involve themselves in the uprising. Baghdad also hoped that the quick breaking of the Shi'i uprising would discourage the Kurds or at least give the government the time needed to reorganize its forces and move them to the north, where the difficult terrain and the extensive experience of the rebels made the military challenge much stronger.

In breaking the Shi'i uprising, the government used its harshest measures ever, by some accounts even harsher than the previous gassing of Kurdistan. No doubt the government was surprised and infuriated by the Shi'i betrayal; in contrast to the Kurds, who had cooperated with Iran against Iraq during the Iraqi-Iranian war, the Shi'a had been loyal throughout. However, there was a big difference between the two wars, as far as the Shi'a were concerned. After the Iraq-Iran war, Iraq seemed the victor, the regime looked stronger than ever, and the outside force, Iran, was licking its own wounds and seemed neither willing nor able to encourage a Shi'i uprising in Iraq. Be that as it may, the Ba'th was now bent on punishing the Shi'a for their betrayal by teaching them a lesson they

would never forget. The country's elite force, the Republican Guard, had reserved most of its power, which it now applied on an infinitely inferior, inexperienced and unorganized force. By mid-March the conflict was settled in the government's favor. However, the revelations of different anti-government actions, such as the destruction of President Hussein's pictures, the looting and burning of government buildings and the execution of Ba'thi officials, were shocking to the regime as they demonstrated the depth of animosity toward the Ba'th; after 22 years in power it still lacked genuine legitimacy.[32]

Accordingly, and side by side with the suppression of the uprising, the Ba'th took various steps to appease the Shi'i majority and buy its goodwill. These included intensified contacts with different leaders of Shi'i tribes whom the Ba'th had considered "reactionaries" but who were now badly needed for the pacification of the Shi'a.[33] This episode proved that old tribal loyalties were still entrenched in Iraqi society and that Hussein was willing to manipulate the tribal chiefs much as the British did during the Mandate.[34] The meeting in mid-March between President Hussein and the Shi'i Grand Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim al-Kho'i, in which the latter reportedly denounced the uprising, was yet another attempt to rebuild bridges with the Shi'a, while deftly placating and intimidating them at the same time.[35] This process culminated in the cabinet reshuffling of March 23 in which for the first time in 22 years of Ba'thi rule a Shi'i, Sa'dun Hammadi, was made a prime minister. However, this too is to be seen as another time-winning tactic, rather than a change which would foster true Shi'i representation in the corridors of power. In the first place, Hammadi was ousted from office in September and his replacement, Muhammad Hamza

al-Zubaydi, although a Shi'i too, is much less influential than his predecessor. But more importantly, during Hammadi's brief tenure, decision-making continued to be the monopoly of Saddam Hussein and his close associates, while the cabinet remained yet another tool in his hands.

Baghdad's preoccupation with the Shi'a had led the Kurds to believe that the central government was too weak to mount a similar operation against them. Their festivals of victory continued almost to the end of March, when Jalal Talabani, who began to assume the mantle of a Kurdish national hero, returned triumphantly to Kurdistan after two years in exile. But as quick as the victory had been, so was the defeat that followed it. Having secured relative quiet in the south, the government could now divert most of its energies to the Kurdish north. In addition to deploying regular forces, Baghdad made use of helicopters, which played an important role in breaking the uprising. (Claiming that it intended to use them for civilian purposes, Baghdad contravened the cease-fire stipulation of not using helicopters).[36] By early April the defeated and demoralized Kurds began an exodus unprecedented in Iraq's modern history, encompassing up to two million people. The causes behind such a massive exodus are difficult to grasp at first, especially as the government did not go to the sort of extremes that would warrant it. Most likely, the use of chemical weapons against Kurds in Halabja in 1988 aroused the Kurds' collective memory, and the government's exploitation of that event surely encouraged such a flight. Thus, the Iraqi forces' extensive use of phosphorus shells[37] was probably designed to spread terror and panic among the Kurds, who mistook them for chemical bombs.[38]

The Kurds' exodus served both as Iraq's immediate and long-term goals. The Kurdish population had provided the main logistical support for the guerrillas, and thus their flight deprived the rebels of their important mainstay and precipitated the crumbling of the uprising. Even more important, mass flight was likely to change the demographic balance of the Iraqi population by lowering the percentage of Kurds in the population, a long-standing Ba'thi goal.[39]

In the aftermath of the exodus, the Iraqi government blamed the Kurdish leadership for having initiated and encouraged it. More likely the leadership tried to use their people's tragedy to internationalize their problem and to pressure the Iraqi government for genuine autonomy to be guaranteed by the allied forces. It was international pressure, as well as the need to gain time and to split the Kurdish and the Shi'i opposition, that eventually drove the government to open negotiations with the Kurds. For its part, frustrated by the prospects of internationalizing the issue, the Kurdish leadership went once more to the negotiating table in order to avert a bigger tragedy and to prevent demographic changes that would have far-reaching political implications. Negotiations for a new autonomy agreement proceeded for nearly a year, and were suspended in late 1991. One thing is certain—the elusive Shi'i-Kurdish unity was shattered, and the fruits of the short-lived uprising are in the hands of the regime to be distributed as it wishes.

THE BALANCE OF WEAKNESS AND STRENGTH

The uprising of March 1991 provides us with a yardstick by which to measure the strength of the Iraqi state and polity. A helpful framework for analysis may be structured from four pairs of determinants: 1) nation and state; 2) government and opposition; 3) the center and periphery; and 4) rulers and ruled.

Nation and State

It has become quite clear that the "territorial state" of Iraq remained intact despite the severe challenges to it by both internal and external forces (the Kurdish autonomous zone to which the Ba'th gave its consent as far back as 1970 still carries the seeds of separatism). Whether an Iraqi "nation" has crystallized over time is much more doubtful.[40] To the degree that the Ba'th has sought to use external wars as a kind of crucible in which to forge an Iraqi nation, it failed dismally as far as the Kurds were concerned. Rather than increasing their Iraqi patriotism, wars gave them an opportunity to try to realize their own national aspirations. The Kurds had no qualms about cooperating with Iraq's enemies to achieve their aims. Furthermore, the harsh measures which the government has used against them when quelling each uprising have enhanced the Kurds' separate identity at the expense of an all-Iraqi one. The Shi'a's behavior in the uprisings certainly cast doubt on the extent of their commitment to the nationalism disseminated from Baghdad. The rulers in Baghdad have wrought havoc on the country, and the people have hardly been encouraged to feel loyal to those who have posed as a symbol of the nation.

Government and Opposition

The uprisings demonstrated that, relatively speaking, the government had more power than any one of the opposition groups and all the groups combined. Given that fact as well as the "ideal" conditions which the

opposition enjoyed at the end of the Gulf War, one wonders what other preconditions would have been necessary to actually oust the Ba'th. The almost inevitable conclusion that the involvement of the army is crucial to oust the Ba'th highlights the vicious circle in which the Iraqi state has been moving since its inception in 1920. *The anomaly of a Sunni Arab minority's ruling over a Shi'i and Kurdish majority can be maintained only by force, but because all means of force and coercion are in the hands of this minority, the chances of peacefully altering the situation are remote indeed.* Little wonder, then, that in the seventy years of Iraqi statehood the political culture has shown a steady decline toward an increasingly totalitarian and dictatorial system.

Center and Periphery

One of the Ba'th's secrets of survival after such an ordeal is that the civil war hardly touched Baghdad, the center and seat of power.[41] As in many past encounters with the Shi'a and the Kurds, the more remote areas became the battleground. The government's command of the peripheral areas has always been more precarious; yet the very fact that the conflict was largely restricted to those areas bettered the Ba'th's chances of tipping the balance in its favor. In order to change things, the opposition would have to either win the loyalty of the people at the center or use force which is not yet at its disposal.

Rulers and Ruled

When King Faysal issued his warning in 1932 about the extreme weakness of the rulers vis-a-vis the ruled, he reflected the reality of those days. But things have changed dramatically since then. Indeed, under the Ba'th, the ruling machinery has become so overpowering—and the people so helpless—

that very little can be done to check the ruler's extravagance. The people have lost virtually all influence on their rulers, and they have become victims of absurd wars and ventures. Saddam Hussein, the creator and creature of this new reality, epitomizes the malaise of Iraqi society. No other Iraqi ruler has brought such catastrophes on his own people, and no other has escaped their judgment for so long.[42] So far, his adeptness at surviving has defeated all precedents.

THE VIEW FROM WASHINGTON: MISCONCEPTIONS AND MISCALCULATIONS

American policy during the Kurdish and Shi'i uprisings was determined by three major factors: a) the legacy of the past; b) poor planning for the post-war situation; c) a combination of misconceptions, miscalculations and both real and illusory concerns regarding the Iraqi domestic scene.

The U.S.' instinctive reaction to the uprising can only be understood in the context of its respective historical "experiences" with the Iraqi Shi'a and Kurds. Never before had the U.S. had any contact with the Shi'a opposition, direct or indirect. After the Islamic revolution in Iran, this distance and lack of interest turned into fear that Khomeini's revolution would engulf the Iraqi Shi'a as well. Indeed, this fear played a major role in cementing America's pro-Iraqi tilt during the Iraq-Iran War. The fact that there was not one single Shi'i secular group in existence, and that most of the Shi'i fundamentalist groupings were under the sway of Iran, blocked any significant American contact with them, even after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

America's approach to the Kurds was slightly different. Public opinion was, on the whole, supportive of the Kurdish cause. In addition, notwithstanding the State Department's aloofness toward the issue, there was some covert contact with them. As for the Kurds themselves, they have long been driven by the quasi-mystical belief that only the U.S. could solve their problem and hence have asked for American help time and again in the past five decades. In 1947, for example, Mullah Mustafa Barazani unsuccessfully sought asylum in the U.S. (he eventually was accepted by the USSR) and in 1962, the movement asked for help against the Baghdad regime of 'Abd al-Karim Qasim. However, as a rule, the U.S. rebuffed the Kurds' entreaties, either because it did not wish to antagonize its allies (like pre-Khomeini) Iran and Turkey, which had Kurdish minorities of their own, because it was unwilling to encourage a separatist movement which could lead to the disintegration of the Iraqi state or because it did not consider the Kurds strong or important enough for its regional and global policymaking. There was, however, one exception to this policy, when the U.S. provided some covert support to the Kurds from 1972 to 1975. But, if anything, this exception proved the rule: the support provided by the CIA—without the knowledge of the State Department—was symbolic (some $16 million); it was done at Iran's urging in order to destabilize its ambitious neighbor by fanning the flame of Kurdish rebellion in Iraq; and it fit in with America's global strategy of containing Soviet penetration into the Gulf after the signing of the USSR's Treaty of Friendship with Iraq in April 1972. In short, the U.S. never supported the Kurds for their own sake, and at no time did it desire significant autonomy for them in Iraq. This being its basic approach, the U.S. had no qualms in stopping aid to the Kurds when Iran and Iraq decided to settle their outstanding problems in March 1975.

Nor did the U.S. change its policy after the "covert deal" was leaked in 1976, arousing controversy in the American media.[43] The two undeclared guidelines continued to be non-interference in Iraqi internal affairs and the treatment of the Kurdish problem on a humanitarian basis. Ironically, though, the U.S. found it could not adhere even to a humanitarian policy. Following the gassing of the Kurds in 1988, it did absolutely nothing either to punish Iraq or to deter it from perpetrating further atrocities. The lessons that Iraq could draw from the contradiction between American declarations and deeds were that the U.S. was a paper tiger, that it would not abide by its own principles and values, and that Iraq could "fix" the U.S. and continue to ignore all principles of human rights and democratic values.

The surprise by which the 1991 uprising took the U.S. could be explained by the secretiveness of the Ba'th and the closed nature of Iraqi society, a lack of intimate knowledge about the Iraqi domestic scene, and poor planning for the post-war period. Careful, detailed and imaginative as military planning for Desert Storm might have been, political planning was, by contrast, faulty and uninspired. Having limited its planning to one scenario, namely a military coup against Saddam Hussein, the U.S. and its allies had to improvise policies which more often than not were self-contradictory and cynical in the extreme.

The U.S. approach following the surprise-shock of rebellion was driven by the following fears:

a) the disintegration of the Iraqi state;

b) the establishment of an Iraqi Shi'i Republic along the lines of the Islamic Republic in Iran;

c) a chain of reactions and spill-over effects among Iraq's neighbors and the Arab world at large.

Another set of American concerns had to do with its own involvement in the conflict, namely:

a) the fear of being drawn into an internal war;

b) anxiousness to adhere strictly to the UN mandate regarding the war aims;

c) reluctance to play an instrumental role in changing the map of Iraq, thus pulling the carpet from under its own feet regarding the moral justification for the war for Kuwait;

d) reluctance to enmesh itself in yet another national conflict.

While some of these concerns were justified, others were not, premised as they were on faulty assumptions. Thus, for example, much was made of the issue of the disintegration or "Lebanonization" of Iraq, despite the inappropriateness of the analogy. Unlike Lebanon, Iraq never had a formula of power-sharing between the different groups and communities such that when the balance of power between them was upset the other would fill the vacuum. In contrast, the Arab Sunni minority has always been the master of the land, and as such it managed to develop over the years all the necessary mechanisms and instruments to maintain supremacy inside Iraq. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that Iraq was an artificial creation, the seventy years of statehood did give this "creature" a life of its own which was not so easy to undermine or wipe from the map. Nor can the strength of the Iraqi army be compared

in any way to that of Lebanon—even after the severe reversals at the hand of the allies, the Iraqi army and especially the Republican Guard remained strong enough to overcome the combined power of the Shi'a and the Kurds. One is reminded of the serious tribal uprisings of the mid-thirties when the army had been incomparably weaker but nevertheless had the upper-hand in these encounters. It is true that one element was added now: namely the presence of the allied forces in the southern part of Iraq. However, as long as the center remained in Ba'thi hands, the danger of disintegration remained quite remote. It should be noted that throughout the modern history of Iraq, the center ruled over the countryside and periphery and only when a change occurred in the center and seat of power were there repercussions in the periphery too.

As for the fear of an Islamic Republic in the Shi'i south, this would have only been feasible if a vacuum developed and was filled by Iranian military forces; the Shi'i opposition was too weak to establish such a republic by itself, let alone rule over it for an extended amount of time. As to the repercussions of the domestic turmoil in Iraq for its neighbors, especially those with Kurdish minorities, these states have always known how to guard themselves against such spill-over effects. Furthermore, it can be argued that the exodus of two million Kurds to Turkey and Iran was not a lesser problem for these two states than the possibility of a Kurdish victory over the Iraqi regime.

The allies' fear of being drawn into a civil war was justified, to the extent that it entailed the occupation of Baghdad or other areas in Iraq. However, there is a vast difference between this reasonable apprehension and the abandonment of the Iraqi population to

Saddam's mercy under the questionable justification of not wanting to interfere in internal Iraqi affairs. Was there not a middle way between these two extremes? Were allied interests really best served by the prolongation of Saddam's regime? What was one to make of the blatant contradiction between the declared aim of seeing Saddam Hussein ousted from power and the actual policy of helping him stay? Alarmed by the uprising and the "imminent" disintegration of Iraq, the allies adopted a "wait and see policy" which, in the circumstances, meant waiting to see Saddam Hussein break his enemies and thus safeguard the country's integrity. However, it can be argued that there may have been better solutions to the dilemmas faced by the U.S. and its allies. If, as is contended here, Iraq was not on the verge of disintegration, then the issue could have been handled with a more cool-headed and less cold-blooded approach.

Possible alternatives were:

a) Preventing the Iraqi army's use of helicopters and tanks against the "rebels." Beyond its severe moral implication, turning a blind eye to the use of helicopters signalled to Saddam Hussein that the allies actually supported his survival over the rebels' success. Thus, although the helicopters were not the most important factor in deciding the outcome of the uprising, they did grant the regime the moral backing for crushing it.

b) The allies could have added to the cease-fire terms conditions preventing atrocities and human rights abuses against civilians.

c) The cease-fire could have been conditional on the ousting of Saddam Hussein, directly or by a coup, perhaps with UN support.

d) The exodus of two million Kurds could have been averted by granting them assurances and safeguards, as well as by warning the Ba'thi regime not to harm them and dispatching UN supervisors to act as a buffer between the Iraqi army and the Kurdish and Shi'a populations alike until the dust settled.

The problem did not lie in the lack of alternatives but rather in misconceptions and miscalculations. Interestingly, the allies and Iraq mirrored, somewhat, each other's miscalculation of the other. Thus, the Ba'thi regime inferred from its ability to crush its domestic opponents an ability to win a war against an external enemy, while the allies inferred from the Iraqi army's unimpressive performance on the battlefield a similar inability to crush its domestic opponents. The net result of these miscalculations was that, for the time being, the Ba'th lost the war against the allies but won the war against the Shi'a and the Kurds. By contrast, the allies won the war against the Iraqi army but lost the war on the domestic scene, namely the ousting of Saddam Hussein.

A VIEW TO THE FUTURE: CHOOSING THE LESSER OF TWO EVILS

In fashioning a policy toward Iraq, American policymakers must take into account both the complexities of the Iraqi state, as detailed above, and the constraints and pressures operating on the United States. The latter has to reconcile two opposite but unequal tendencies. On the one hand a number of weighty considerations militate against the U.S. playing an active role in Iraqi politics:

a) Preserving the integrity of the Iraqi state;

b) Preventing civil war and ensuring stability;

c) Guarding Iraq's neighbors—especially Turkey—against spill-over effects related to the Kurdish problem;

d) Assuring the Arab world, in general, and Iraq, in particular, that American aims in the region are not of an imperialistic nature;

e) Avoiding the opening of a Pandora's box with far-reaching implications not just for Iraq and its neighbors but for all states afflicted by ethnic, irredentist and national conflicts.

On the other side the following considerations argue for greater U.S. involvement:

a) The desire to eliminate Saddam Hussein;

b) The need to contain the Ba'th and keep pressure on it;

c) The need to accommodate American and international public opinion with regard to the fate of the Kurds and Shi'a;

d) Contending with domestic pressure to aid the Shi'a and Kurds from the Bush administration as well as from the nascent Iraqi-opposition lobby;

e) Using the leverage the U.S. has recently acquired as the sole superpower to establish a "new world order."

There is no ideal solution to these dilemmas. Nevertheless, one can suggest alternatives which may be the lesser of two evils. First, some general observations: Saddam Hussein effectively exploited American ambiguities and double messages in response to Iraq's unacceptable behavior—the most glaring examples being the Halabja affair, Iraq's procurement of nonconventional weapons and its brutal suppression of the

post-war uprisings. In those three cases (as well as others), the U.S. declared one policy and followed another. *Hence it is of the utmost importance for the U.S. to narrow the gap between declarations and deeds if it hopes to restrict Saddam's maneuverability.* Second, as it is impossible to reconcile calling upon the Iraqi people to oust Saddam and, at the same time, helping him stay in power, the U.S. must risk a decision on one course of action and be consistent about it.[44]

Similarly, the U.S. must seek new ways to distinguish more clearly between the Iraqi population and the regime. Since the invasion of Kuwait, the Iraqi people have been the main victim of the Iraqi regime and the allied policies alike. But the Ba'th knows only too well how to exploit their suffering in its anti-Western propaganda, thereby absolving itself of any blame for the situation.

Finally, the U.S. should devise a general strategy for post-war Iraq, prepare itself for several possible scenarios—from a new uprising or military coup to the consolidation of the status quo— and establish contacts on many levels with various groups within Iraq simultaneously. More specifically, a number of difficult issues must be examined head on: encouraging democracy in Iraq; supporting the Shi'a and the Kurds; and engineering a military coup to oust Saddam Hussein.

Encouraging a democratic and constitutional system is of course a laudable goal; however, it seems unrealistic given the conditions currently prevailing in Iraq. Past experience has shown that democracy cannot be imposed from the outside: Britain tried this in Iraq for 40 years and failed dismally.[45] *Democracy and democratization can only be the natural outgrowth of internal socio-economic and political developments. Under the Ba'th, these*

preconditions are almost non-existent. There is no single, organized group or party which might be called "liberal." There are of course individual liberals, but they are of no political consequence. Other factors militating against democratization are the *etatist* economy which places most industrial projects (especially military ones) strictly under government control, as well as the fact that the Iraqi middle class has vested interests in the Ba'thi regime, having encouraged its development in the first place.[46]

Nor does the U.S. seem to have leverage over Iraq on this issue. True, the U.S. was the undoubted victor in the Gulf War, but while it can dictate its conditions regarding military and some economic issues it cannot do the same with regard to internal politics (analogies with post-World War II Germany and Japan, do not hold here). Whatever steps Saddam Hussein has taken toward liberalization since the end of the war were done in compliance with internal rather than external pressures.[47] The U.S. would do well to follow such positive developments and lend assistance and encouragement wherever possible.

The question of democracy and constitutionalism is closely linked to the issue of equal representation for the Shi'i majority in the government. But this, too, is another unrealistic goal. Changing the power equation in Iraq would mean either confronting the legacy of 500 years of Sunni supremacy or occupying Baghdad and making the Shi'a the ruling faction by the force of American arms.

Insofar as support for the Shi'i and Kurdish opposition is concerned, a general word of caution is in order: No outside force can endow them with the strength they in-

herently lack or can hope to unite them for a constructive joint enterprise. *The Shi'a and the Kurds are a world apart, thus the respective approaches toward them should be different.* The approach toward the Shi'a should be on a strictly humanitarian basis, as it is an internal Iraqi problem, *par excellence.* Indeed the Shi'a have not even begun to define their problem: is it religious, social, or political?[48] In any case, however antagonistic to the central regime the Shi'a have been, they have always proved their allegiance to the Iraqi state and its integrity. Moreover, it can even be argued that their anti-Western feelings are more deeply rooted than those of the Sunnis, for both religious and historical reasons. Shi'i exiles who were exposed to Western political culture may present a different picture, but it is doubtful that they have the power to alter the situation from afar.

Notwithstanding these reservations, one can still plausibly argue that the U.S. has a role to play with regard to the Kurds, for the following reasons:

a) Such Kurdish autonomy as exists in Iraq was neither encouraged nor imposed by the U.S., but was the result of a bilateral agreement between the Iraqi government and the Kurds. Accordingly, the only thing the U.S. and the international community need to do is guarantee or support the regime's agreements with the Kurds;

b) The alternative to such a guaranteed autonomy might be much worse not only for the Kurds but even for Turkey, whose interests are a primary American concern. A new Kurdish uprising followed by a new exodus might be no less dangerous for Turkey than a stable Kurdish autonomy in Iraq. After all, the Kurds in Turkey, Iran and Syria were

aware that such an autonomy has existed for two decades, yet they have done nothing to imitate it;

c) While many argue that Kurdish autonomy is a state "in embryo," the Kurds are actually far from reaching such a stage, not because they do not aspire to it, but because they are too weak economically, politically and militarily to be able to implement it. Nor has the central government been weakened to such an extent as to permit the creation of an independent Kurdistan. Indeed, the real issue now is not a strong autonomy which might jeopardize the interests of the neighboring countries, but the Kurds' very right to exist. Paradoxically, under the rubric of autonomy, the Ba'th has been conducting the most fierce campaign in history against the Kurdish people and their national identity;

d) The Kurds may play an important role in containing Hussein and destabilizing him.

The army is bound to play a crucial role in any future scenario by staging a coup, supporting a popular uprising, or frustrating various anti-government actions. If the coup is to be in collaboration with a certain group within the Ba'th, then the new regime is likely to be much of the same. If it is carried out by officers from within the regular army it might clash with the generally loyal Republican Guard and possibly be overpowered by it. Given the centrality of the army and the vicious circle in which Iraqi politics has been moving since the first coup in 1936, it is absolutely necessary to take this fact into account when attempting to encourage directly or indirectly a change in Iraq. The irony is, however, that supporting the army will automatically mean strengthening the most important tool of oppression and militarism.

Saddam Hussein's omnipotent rule and his total identification of the Iraqi state with himself have given rise to two opposing theories. One suggests that merely ousting him would close the Ba'thi chapter and change the course of Iraqi history. The other, which emerged during the uprising, implied that Hussein was, as it were, the glue that held the country together, and thus his demise might precipitate its disintegration. Both theories seem to oversimplify reality. True, Hussein had a pivotal role in all the developments in Iraq during the last two decades. But precisely because of this, his practices and policies have permeated the very fabric of Iraqi society and polity such that it would take much more than ousting Hussein and his close associates to uproot them. On the other hand, no matter how strong Hussein has been, the fact that the entire country has been kept together cannot be attributed solely to him.[49] Either there is something in the structure of Iraq which keeps it from falling apart in spite of its inherent weaknesses and problems, or there is not. Hussein's removal, then, is a condition *sine qua non* for the beginning of any change in Iraq. However, the change may not be particularly quick or easy. In fact, one should expect an interim period of instability and internal social and political strife. *The only real chance for positive change would be a coalition of enlightened officers joining forces with a civilian group committed to democratic reform.*[50] Politics, after all, might be as Lord Moberly once described it: "The science of the second best."

APPENDIX: TABLE OF IRAQI OPPOSITION GROUPS AND PARTIES*

Name	Leadership	Remarks
Democratic Party of Kurdistan (DPK; *al-Hizb al-Dimuqrati al-Kurdistani*)	Ma'sud al-Barzani	Established in 1946. The oldest and strongest of the Kurdish parties. Its first leader was Mulla Mustafa al-Barzani, father of Mas'ud, the present leader. It negotiated the autonomy agreement with the Ba'th in 1970, which collapsed in 1974. The one-year war which ensued ended with the crushing of the Kurdish rebellion.
Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK; *al-Ittihad al-Watani al-Kurdistani*)	Jalal al-Talabani	Established in 1975. Talabani changed camps several times. In 1964, he split from Barzani's DPK. In 1966-70 he cooperated with the regime against Barzani. He was reconciled with Barzani during 1970-75, but was a rival of the DPK once again during 1975-86.
The Kurdish Socialist Party (KSP; *al-Hizb al-Kurdi al-Ishtiraki*)	Rasul Mamand	
The Popular Democratic Party of Kurdistan (*Hizb al-Sha'b al-Kurdistani*)	Muhammad Mahmud 'Abd al-Rahman ("Sami")	'Abd al-Rahman was a close associate of Mulla Mustafa al-Barzani. He broke with the DPK following the crushing of the Kurdish rebellion in 1975.
The Socialist Party of Kurdistan (*al-Hizb al-Ishtiraki al-Kurdistani*)	Mahmud 'Uthman	Another close associate of Mulla Mustafa al-Barzani who broke with the DPK following the crushing of the Kurdish rebellion in 1975.
The Iraqi Socialist Party of Kurdistan (*al-Hizb al-Kurdistani al-Ishtiraki fil 'Iraq*)	'Abd al-Khaliq Zankaw	
The Kurdish Hizballah (*Hizb Allah al-Kurdi*)	Muhammad Khalid al-Barzani	Established in the late 1980's. Believed to have close ties with Iran.
The Islamic Movement in Kurdistan (*al-Haraka al-Islamiyya fi Kurdistan al-'Iraq*)	'Uthman bin 'Abd al-'Aziz	

- 21 -

The Call Party (*Hizb al-Da'wa al-Islamiyya*)	Abu Isra al-Maliki; Muhammad Mahdi al-Asifi—spokesman; Muwaffaq al-Rubay'i—a leading member	Established in the late 1950s. Considered the oldest and most authentic of the Shi'i fundamentalist groups. Its spiritual leader was Ayatollah Baqir al-Sadr, who was killed by the Ba'th in 1980. That same year, the Ba'th issued a law decreeing the death penalty for membership in al-Da'wa.
Islamic Action Organization (IAO; *Munazzamat al-'Amal al-Islamiyya*)	Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrisi; Muhsin al-Husayni—spokesman	Established in the late 1950s. Competed with al-Da'wa for leadership of the Shi'i movement. Said to be more closely linked to Tehran than al-Da'wa. Tended to concentrate its activities inside Iraq.
The Movement of the Iraqi Mujahidin (*Harakat al-Mujahidin al-'Iraqiyyin*)	'Abd al-'Aziz al-Hakim	'Abd al-'Aziz is Baqir al-Hakim's brother. A third brother, Mahdi al-Hakim, was one of its first leaders and was killed by the Ba'th in 1988 while in Sudan.
The 'Ulama Mujahidin (*Jama'at al-'Ulama al-Mujadin*)	'Abd al-'Azim al-Kindi—a leading member	Established in 1980.
Jund al-Imam (*Harakat Jund al-Imam*)	Sami al-Badri	A small splinter group of al-Da'wa.
The Islamic Movement in Iraq (*al-Haraka al-Islamiya fil 'Iraq*)	Muhammad Mahdi al-Khalisi	Established during the 1970s. Now based in Damascus. Weak links with Tehran.
The Umma Party (*Hizb al-Umma*)	Sa'd Salih Jabr	The only secular Shi'i group. Based in London. Small and unimportant. Jabr is the son of Salih Jabr, the prime minister in 1947-48.
The Islamic Bloc (*al-Kutla al-Islamiyya*)	Abu Ahmad al-Rikabi—a leading member	Said to be the only movement representing both Sunnis and Shi'a in Iraq.
The Iraqi Communist Party (ICP; *al-Hizb al-Shuyu'i al-'Iraqi*)	'Aziz Muhammad 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Safi—spokesman	Established in 1933. Historic rival of the Ba'th as well as of the Islamic fundamentalists. Made peace with the Ba'th in 1973 when it joined the coalition. Became clandestine again in 1978. Extremely weakened since then.

The Independent Nationals (al-Qawmiyyun al-Mustaqillun)	Hasan Mustafa al-Naqib	Naqib was deputy chief of staff for six months in 1970 and was then appointed ambassador to Spain. He joined the PLO in 1978. He attempted to unite the oppostion against the Ba'th after the outbreak of the Iraq-Iran war.
The Iraqi Socialist Party (al-Hizb al-Ishtiraki al-'Iraqi)	Mubdir al-Luways	An unimportant group.
The dissident Ba'th Party (hizb al-Ba'th)	Mahdi al-'Ubaydi—a leading member	A weak pro-Syrian group. Based in Damascus. 'Ubaydi served as an economy minister under secretary in 1973.
The Tribal Bloc (al-Kutla al-Qabaliyya)	Sami 'Azara Al Ma'jun	
Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution of Iraq, (SAIRI; al-Majlis al-a'laLilthawra al-Islamiyya fil-'Iraq)	Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim; Mahmud al-Hashimi—spokesman	Established in 1982. An umbrella organization for various Shi'i fundamentalist groups, including al-Da'wa and the Islamic movement. Based in Tehran, which sponsors it. Hakim is son of the Grand Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim, who died in 1970. Members of the family were persecuted by the Ba'th; and 17 were killed in the 1980s.
Kurdistan Iraqi Front (al-Jabha al-Kurdistaniyya al-'Iraqiyya)	Jalal al-Talabani; Mas'ud Barazani; Hoshyar al-Zibari—spokesman	Established in 1988 in the wake of the Halabja affair. Its declared aim is to unite the Kurdish movement and achieve autonomy for the Kurds. It includes all the Kurdish groupings and the ICP, but not the Kurdish Islamic groupings.
Iraqi National Accord Group (Hay'at al-Wifaq al-Watani al-'Iraqi)	Shukri Salih Zaki—spokesman	Established in December 1990 in Damascus with the aim of toppling the Ba'th. Includes all factions of the Iraqi opposition.

*Note: All the groups function clandestinely and their members are persecuted by the Ba'th. Except for five or six groups such as the DPK, PUK, ICP, SAIRI, al-Da'wa and 'Amal, most are small and unimportant. The multiplicity of the groups creates internal strife and rivalries and ultimately weakens the opposition. While the Ba'th included Kurds and Communists in its coalition governments in the 1970s, it never approached the Shi'i fundamentalist groups to participate and never made peace with them.

- 23 -

Ofra Bengio is a Research Assistant at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and North African Studies of Tel Aviv University and was the 1991 Meyerhoff Fellow at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Prior works include The Kurdish Revolt in Iraq [Hebrew], (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuhad, 1989).

The views expressed in this research memoradum are those of the author and should not be construed as representing those of the Board of Trustees, Board of Advisors or staff of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

NOTES

1. 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani, *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat al-'Iraqiyya*, Part 3, pp. 189-95.

2. Even following the Shi'i uprising of March 1991, Deputy Prime Minister Tariq 'Aziz denied categorically the existence of any Shi'i problem in Iraq. He did admit, however, to the existence of a Kurdish problem. Radio Algiers, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), April 29, 1991.

3. Hasan al-'Alawi, a *l-Shi'a wal-Dawla al-Qawmiyya fi al-'Iraq, 1914-1990*, 2nd edition, (n.p., 1990). During the uprising, 'Alawi's name was mentioned as one of the opposition leaders outside Iraq.

4. When the Ba'th decided to grant autonomy to the Kurds in 1970, it hoped in the process to cut Iranian support to the Kurds, which had begun in the early sixties, and thus weaken the Kurdish movement. When the Ba'th consolidated its power in 1974, it unleashed an all-out war against the Kurdish movement, then led by Mustafa Barzani (father of today's Mas'ud Barzani), with a three-fold aim: to break the traditional and authentic Kurdish leadership, to impose an autonomy in name only on the Kurds and to prevent Iranian interference in the Kurdish problem. However, ongoing Iranian support for the Kurds, and Iraq's fear of being drawn into a war with Iran, led Baghdad to cede its sovereignty over Shatt al-Arab in return for Tehran cutting its aid to the Kurds. The urge to regain sovereignty over Shatt al-Arab was, in turn, the main motive for the war which Iraq unleashed against Iran in 1980. Then again, Iraq's failure to recover the Shatt al-Arab after an eight year war was a main cause for the invasion of Kuwait.

5. The divide and rule formula took different forms, including sending Shi'i soldiers to fight the Kurds, appointing a Shi'i, Hasan 'Ali al-'Amiri, as the Ba'th party "boss" in Kurdistan and transferring Kurds to the Shi'i south (after 1975) where they clashed with the Shi'i population. The most glaring example was after the last uprising in 1991 when the Ba'th started negotiating with the Kurds, while totally ignoring the Shi'i opposition. This tactic caused a severe rift between the Shi'i and the Kurdish opposition, with the former blaming the Kurds for betraying their common cause.

6. For a detailed discussion of the fundamentalist groups, see *al-Shira*', March 11, 18, April 1, 8, 15, 29 and May 9, 1991.

7. Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrisi, *al-'Iraq wal-haraka al-Islamiyya* (Iraq and the Islamic Movement), (London, 1988), pp. 32, 41-2, 77, 81-3.

8. There were ties between the Communist Party and the Soviet Union but as a rule the USSR preferred its interests and bilateral relations with the Iraqi regime over its ideological links with the Iraqi Communists.

9. Both Israel and the U.S. have offered the Kurds clandestine support over the years.

10. Middle East Watch, *Human Rights in Iraq*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 28.

11. Fifteen groups according to *The New York Times*, December 30, 1990; twenty-one according to *The Economist*, January 5, 1990 and *Middle East International*, January 11, 1990.

12. For the text see Damascus, Voice of Iraq, December 29, 1990; in FBIS, January 2, 1991. That the slogan of democracy was a mere tactic for placating the West could be inferred from a statement by one of al-Da'wa's leaders, al-Asifi, who declared later in January that democracy could not blend (*mazj*) with Islam. In August, Shi'a leader Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim declared that his movement's aim was to establish the Islamic *shari'a* in Iraq. *al-'Alam*, January 26 and August 10, 1991.

13. The Islamic movement had the upper hand in this debate, as the 12-point statement did start with the *Fatiha*.

14. *Middle East International*, January 11, 1991.

15. It should be noted, however, that Iran has no territorial claim on Iraq other than her demand that the border along the Shatt al-Arab be drawn according to the 1975 Algiers agreement. Also, PUK leader Talabani stated in an interview in February 1991 that Iranian support to the Kurds was resumed but he did not go into details. Kayhan (London), March 7, 1991; in FBIS, March 20, 1991.)

16. *'Ukaz* quoted the chief of the Samawa tribes as saying that if war broke out the tribes "[would] aim [their] fire at the regime," *'Ukaz*, January 13, 1991; in FBIS, January 17, 1991.

17. An opposition leader later complained that, ironically, the only two embassies in Damascus which were not permitted to have contacts with the Iraqi opposition were those of the U.S. and Iraq.

18. Voice of Free Iraq was said to be operating with the help of the CIA. It used transmitters in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. Its manager, Salah 'Umar al-'Ali, was a leading Ba'thi member in the cabinet of 1969. *The New York Times*, April 16, 1991. The Kurds had a clandestine radio station of their own operating on and off since the early 1960s.

19. Baqir al-Hakim, for example, emphasized the opposition's unwillingness to mount anti-Ba'thi activities during the war in order not to play into American hands. *al-'Alam*, January 19, 1991.

20. Opposition groups claimed that by March 10, the rebels held 29 cities and hundreds of towns and villages from the Kurdish north to the Shi'i south. *International Herald Tribune*, March 11, 1991.

21. The last time that Sunni military action had been taken on such a scale against the Shi'i holy places was in 1843, when Muhammad Najib, the Sunni Ottoman governor of Baghdad, forcibly suppressed a Shi'i rebellion in Karbala, and stormed the holy mosque of al-'Abbas, sparing none of the people seeking refuge inside. 'Abbas al-'Azzawi, *Ta'rikh al-'Iraq Bayn Ihtilalayn*, Part VII, (Baghdad, 1955), pp. 64-9. 'Azzawi commented on the event, saying that it was due to the feebleness of the government of the time, emphasizing that to his own days Karbala still needed a strong hand to govern it.

22. The term *intifada* for popular uprising was used in Iraq already in 1952. The Kurdish uprising in 1987 which predated the Palestinian *intifada* also used this term.

23. The distribution of arms was probably made through the popular army (*al-Jaysh al-Sha'bi*), originally the Ba'th Party militia; it is noteworthy that after the uprising, the Ba'th decided to dissolve the popular army. Reuters, April 26, 1991.

24. Desertion touched even the Republican Guard. A military communique of March 8 called on "deserters" of all eight corps, including the Guard, to join their units within a week. *al-'Iraq*, March 9, 1991.

25. *al-Shira'*, March 18, 1991; *International Herald Tribune*, March 21, 1991.

26. According to PUK leader Talabani, the lead-

ership of the Kurds (and the Shi'is) had not called for the uprising: "The Peshmerga were outside the towns and only later we decided to support the demonstrators." Vienna, *Wochenpresse*, April 11, 1991; in FBIS, April 16, 1991.

27. I have discussed these earlier experiences at some length in the volumes of *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, 1988 and 1989, respectively.

28. *Agence France Presse*, March 12; in FBIS, March 18, 1990.

29. *The New York Times*, March 13, 1991; *al-'Alam*, April 6, 1991; *Civil War in Iraq*, a staff report to the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, May 1991, p. 1.

30. Iran aided the uprising to a certain extent but did not go to great extremes, such as sending military support, because it was itself skeptical of the results of the uprising and did not wish to involve itself in a new war with Iraq.

31. *Civil war*, op. cit., p. 15. Opposition sources went so far as to blame the allies of actively supporting the regime by way of disarming the rebels, preventing the passage of food and medicine to them and allowing the Republican Guard to enter areas under their control. *al-'Alam*, March 16 and April 6, 1991.

32. *'Alif Ba*, March 27, 1991; *Financial Times*, April 15, 1991.

33. *al-'Iraq*, March 4, 14, 19, 24, 1991; *Babil*, April 22, 1991 (*Babil* is an Iraqi daily published from the end of March to the middle of November, 1991 when it was closed and then resumed shortly thereafter. Its editor is Saddam Hussein's son, 'Uday). In one of his speeches, later in July, Saddam Hussein stated: "... You find the morale of tribal chieftains and people who live in rural areas greater than in the city. Their endurance was greater." Iraqi News Agency, July 19; in FBIS, July 22, 1991.

34. For British policy, see Sluglett, op. cit., pp. 239-253.

35. Iraqi News Agency, March 20; in FBIS, March 23; *'Alif Ba*, March 27, 1991, *al-'Alam*, March 30, 1991. The opposition claimed that Kho'i was kidnapped and forced to make the statement. Nevertheless, Kho'i, who belonged to the traditionalist trend in the Shi'i movement, was said to earlier have given his tacit support to the Ba'th by opposing a Shi'i revolution in Iraq along Iranian lines. *al-Shira'*, April 8, 1991.

36. Commenting on the causes of the "quick collapse" of the Kurdish rebellion, *al-Jumhuriyya* said that the rebels had not fought for a just cause, that they were supported by foreign countries, and that they antagonized the Arab citizens of the cities they occupied. *al-Jumhuriyya*, April 15, 1991.

37. *Civil War in Iraq*, op. cit., p. 10

38. Western journalists were told so by Kurdish refugees. Iraqi forces also reportedly "staged" chemical attacks. *Ha'aretz*, April 15, 1991.

39. For the Ba'th's "demographic disinformation" regarding the percentage of Kurds, see Ofra Bengio, "Iraq" in *Middle East Contemporary Survey* 1989, pp. 396-7; *Hurras al-Watan*, July 15, 1990.

40. One is reminded of Richard Coke's observation at the beginning of the British Mandate: "The Mesopotamian nation was to be a new experiment in nation building; it was to demonstrate the belief prevalent in the West that there is nothing in the world which cannot, if necessary, be made by machinery. No great evidence was forthcoming that the native population of Mesopotamia wanted to be a nation ... but the League of Nations and the British government conceived it an excellent way of disposing of a country that was threatening to become a nuisance." *The Heart of the Middle East*, (London: Thornton, Ltd., 1925), p. 217.

41. As soon as the uprising began, the government promptly started collecting hundreds of thousand of arms which it had earlier distributed among the population of Baghdad. *Jordan Times*, March 23, 1991; in FBIS, March 27, 1991.

42. Shortly after the crushing of the uprisings, the military organ, *al-Qadisiyya*, published a poem in Hussein's honor: "The land is the body and you are the soul." *Al-Qadisiyya*, April 25, 1991.

43. The fact that the embarrassing deal came to the open when George Bush was the head of the CIA presumably did not make him any more sympathetic to the Kurdish cause when he later became President.

44. One of the allies' leaflets declared: "O' you soldier and civilian, young man and old, O' you women and men, let's fill the streets and the alleys and bring down Saddam Hussein and his aides."

45. One can argue that the negative experience with democracy and democratic institutions in Iraq during that period only helped to consolidate the dictatorship in the 1958 coup.

46. "Irak: Rente pétroliere et concentration du pouvoir," in *Maghreb-Machrek*, January-March 1991, pp. 3-12.

47. At the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Hussein initiated such moves in response to internal pressures. Shortly after crushing the uprising, Iraqi papers began discussing once again the issue of democracy and free expression. One paper defined democracy as "the bitter honey." *Al-'Iraq*, April 20, 1991.

48. A spokesman for SAIRI in London admitted in a private discussion on August 19, 1991 that only in the last two to three years had the Shi'i Islamic opposition begun articulating its demands along political lines, namely equal share of the Shi'a in power.

49. In fact this is the official Iraqi line. An article in *al-Thawra* maintained that without Saddam Hussein Iraq would have been divided into three statelets (*duwaylat*). *al-Thawra*, September 15, 1991.

50. Notwithstanding the assertions made by Iraqi exiles, as of this writing no such organized groups have yet emerged.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS OF THE WASHINGTON INSTITUTE

Peace Process Briefing Book—An authoritative guide to the Arab-Israeli peace process with maps and documents.

GulfWatch Anthology—A collection of the day-by-day analyses of the Gulf crisis as it was analyzed by the scholars and associates of the Washington Institute.

From War to Peace in the Middle East?—Proceedings of the Washington Institute's 1991 Annual Policy Conference featuring Richard Haass, Dan Meridor, Les Aspin, Oleg Derkovsky and Hanna Siniora.

American Strategy After the Gulf War—Proceedings of the Washington Institute's 1991 Soref Symposium with Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney and Israeli Knesset Member Ze'ev Binyamin Begin.

After the Storm: An American Strategy for the Postwar Middle East—The interim report of The Washington Institute's Strategic Study Group.

Policy Focus 17: *The Arab States and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process: Linkage or Disengagement* by Barry Rubin

Policy Focus 16: *Towards Middle East Peace Negotiations: Israeli Postwar Political-Military Options in an Era of Accelerated Change* by Dore Gold

Policy Paper 28: *The Arrow Next Time?: Israel's Missile Defense Program for the 1990s* by Marvin Feuerwerger

Policy Paper 27: *Palestinian Self-Government (Autonomy): Its Past and its Future* by Harvey Sicherman

Policy Paper 26: *Damascus Courts the West: Syrian Politics, 1989-1991* by Daniel Pipes

Policy Paper 25: *Economic Consequences of Peace for Israel, the Palestinians, and Jordan* by Patrick L. Clawson and Howard Rosen

Policy Paper 24: *The Future of Iraq* by Laurie Mylroie

Policy Paper 23: *"The Poor Man's Atomic Bomb?": Biological Weapons in the Middle East* by W. Seth Carus

Policy Focus 15: *Israel and the Gulf Crisis: Changing Security Requirements on the Eastern Front* by Dore Gold

Policy Focus 14: *Iraq's Economic and Military Vulnerabilities* by Patrick Clawson and W. Seth Carus

Policy Paper 21: *"The Sword of the Arabs:" Iraq's Strategic Weapons* by Michael Eisenstadt

Policy Paper 15: *Security for Peace: Israel's Minimal Security Requirements in Negotiations with the Palestinians* by Ze'ev Schiff

Policy Paper 14: *The Genie Unleashed: Iraq's Chemical and Biological Weapons Program* by W. Seth Carus

For a complete listing or to order publications, write or call The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1828 L Street, NW, Suite 1050, Washington, D.C. 20036
Phone (202) 452-0650, Fax (202) 223-5364