

INFORMATION, ANALYSIS
AND ADVICE FOR THE PARLIAMENT

INFORMATION AND RESEARCH SERVICES

Current Issues Brief
No. 19 2002–03

Iraq: Issues on the Eve of War

ISSN 1440-2009

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I N F O R M A T I O N A N D R E S E A R C H S E R V I C E S

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Iraq: Issues on the Eve of War

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18 March 2003

Acknowledgments

This is to acknowledge the help given by Andrew Chin and Frank Frost in the preparation of this paper.

Enquiries

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Iraq and Its Neighbours



Source: Central Intelligence Agency

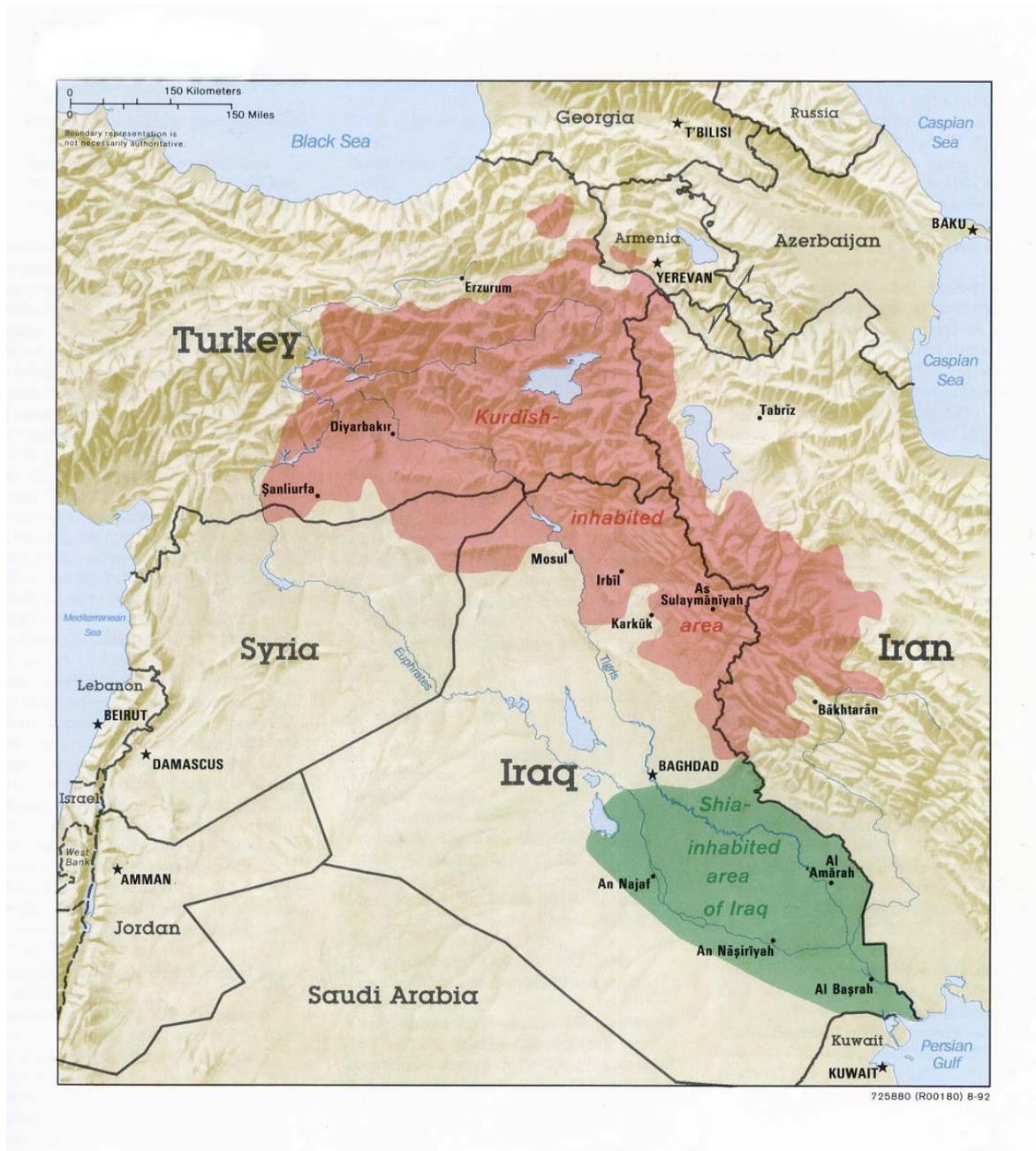
Location of Iraq's Ethnoreligious Groups



725881 (B01274) 8-92

Source: Central Intelligence Agency

Kurdish and Shia Dissident Areas



Source: Central Intelligence Agency

Executive Summary

The impending war against Iraq will have unpredictable consequences.

Internally these include the humanitarian crisis and post-conflict security situation.

The US plan is for full control under military command with minimal involvement of exiled groups but using the (vetted) existing regime network without the key elements of Saddam's regime.

There is widespread criticism that the plan does not deal with the key issue of political reconstruction and appears to represent a retreat from US declared aims of democratising Iraq.

A war may result in regional instability if Iraq fragments and creates problems for individual Arab states linked to the US.

Achieving regime change in Iraq is part of a wider US Bush doctrine to change the nature and dynamics of the Middle East (and the world). This is feared by the individual Arab states, though there have been some positive results in terms of superficial reforms.

A war against Iraq would, more likely than not, be seen as an anti-Islamic attack by the US and may win more recruits and empathy for Islamic extremism. This perception has not been helped by the religious overtones of President Bush's speeches and US support for Israel. Most Arab states are fearful of Islamic extremists and have suppressed them but they support the anti-Israeli groups, who are seen as 'freedom fighters' and 'martyrs' for Palestine.

Introduction

This brief seeks to examine the objectives and plan of the United States (US) in post-Saddam Iraq and the Middle East. It provides a background on Iraq, the events leading to the eve of war and highlights the humanitarian and security problems to be confronted. The US plan for post-conflict Iraq and the region are also critically examined.

Background

Modern Iraq is an artificial state carved out of three Ottoman provinces by the British following the end of the First World War and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Among the population of 22 million, there are three major communities: the Kurds (15 per cent) in the northeast; Arabs (75 per cent) consisting of Sunni Muslim Arabs in the middle; and Shia Muslims (both Arab and non-Arabs) in the south. Shia Muslims form 60 per cent of the population. The Christian, Armenian, Turkmen and Assyrian minorities form five per cent of the population. The Kurds also include Sunnis, Shia and Christians; Kurds are also found in Syria, Turkey and Iran, all bordering Iraq. Within these groups there are also tribal, clan and regional loyalties. The major groups are not internally united politically and are influenced by domestic factors and, in varying degrees, by external players such as Iran and Turkey. Iraq's territorial integrity has been maintained by a strong leader from the minority Sunni community; attempts to form coalition governments in the past have failed. Because of these factors there is fear that fragmentation of Iraq will cause regional instability. The fear of the disintegration of Iraq was one of the factors which allowed President Saddam Hussein to survive the Gulf War in 1991.

Since the end of the Gulf War, President Saddam Hussein, weakened by United Nations (UN) sanctions and 'no-fly zones' enforced by the US and Britain to the north and south of Iraq, has not posed a credible military threat to the United States, his neighbours or the world. However, the costs have been high for the civilian population. The catalyst for President Bush's new doctrine of preventive intervention, based on a newfound political will to act against Saddam, was the September 11 attack on New York's twin towers. This was undertaken by Al Qaeda, an extremist Islamic group which rejects the West's economic and cultural challenges; opposes Arab governments it claims have compromised Islam; and seeks to re-establish a pristine Islamic order.¹ It is led by Saudi-born Osama bin Laden. By linking its action to the 'War against Terrorism' the Bush Administration's immediate aim is to prevent a future, more devastating situation in the volatile Middle East as well as to undermine support for 'terrorist' groups. Iraq is more substantial than the

shadowy Al Qaeda. Other US objectives (see below) for the Middle East predate the events of September 11.

Despite internal disagreements among senior civilian and military officials,² the US is convinced that unless disarmed now, Saddam, could in future arm terrorist groups with weapons of mass destruction (WMD). On 8 November 2002 United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1441 was passed unanimously after eight weeks of negotiations with the undertaking by the US to key members that it would *not provide an automatic trigger for military action*. Commentators conclude that attempts by the US and Britain have produced no credible evidence in the form of a 'smoking gun'. The linkage between the Iraqi regime and terrorism have been rejected by many, particularly European, countries led by France, Germany and Russia, the Arab world and mass anti-war rallies worldwide.³ They argue that sanctions and renewed UN weapons inspections, given a more rigorous time frame and resources, would prevent such an eventuality. Saddam has not been totally uncooperative and has responded to increasing pressure in measured ways to frustrate the will of the US and its allies.

The US continues to state that it is prepared to act unilaterally no matter what the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) decides but a second resolution has become necessary, not the least to release the US from its earlier undertaking. For it to pass, the US, under UNSC rules, needs at least nine of the fifteen votes without a veto cast by France, Russia or China.⁴ Opponents have said there is no need for a second resolution. France, Russia and China have threatened to use their vetos should this be sought. Tremendous finance, trade and other pressure are being exerted on members of the UNSC by the main protagonists.⁵ Other political reasons for a second resolution include:

- The insistence of its major ally the British government which has, it is reported, yet to convince its own security establishment on the need for war.⁶ Prime Minister Blair is facing a Labour Party split, potential resignations, as well as further declines in public support without another resolution for action.
- The need to *increase* public support for UN sanctioned action, at home and abroad.
- Winning over wavering countries and strengthen the support for countries, such as Australia, committed to the 'coalition of the willing'.
- The need to involve more countries in reconstruction and humanitarian aid and thus reduce the costs for the US though the US is prepared to meet the costs alone. The 1990–01 Gulf War cost the US an estimated US\$4 billion with the rest, US\$76 billion, paid by its Arab allies and Japan. The direct military costs for a war are estimated to vary from, on the best to the worst scenario, between US\$50 billion to US\$140 billion, while follow-on costs have been estimated between US\$121 billion to US\$1595 billion.⁷

It should be noted that apart from current differences in dealing with Saddam, the key players (and other countries) in the UN Security Council debate have, in the past, actively aided Saddam's rise to power. The US, Britain, France, Germany and Russia for example, despite recent declarations of high principle, have been very selective in their memory of these activities and are also protecting their national and commercial interests in current and post-Saddam Iraq.⁸

Should the war against Iraq proceed, either mandated by the United Nations or unilaterally pursued by the United States and its 'coalition of the willing', there will be internal, and external challenges. This assumes that Saddam would not capitulate or go into exile and there is no internal coup to depose him. The nature of the internal challenges depends on how quickly or drawn out 'regime change' is achieved, the intensity of local resistance and as a consequence, how much destruction, human and economic, will be caused. Externally, the war may destabilise the Middle East, increase international terrorist activities, and alienate the Muslim community worldwide, influence international relations as well as have an unknown impact on the global economy. All these are difficult and complex issues, and given the nature of war and politics, unpredictable.⁹

Internal Challenges

While their extent will depend on the nature and duration of the invasion and subsequent destruction, the two major problems after an attack will be:

- establishing security and law and order, and
- dealing with the exacerbated humanitarian crisis and civilian casualties.

US demographer Beth Daponte estimated that the total casualties of the 1991 Gulf War and its aftermath were 205 500.¹⁰ While it is hoped that the military campaign will be quick and sharp, analysts have warned against expecting it to be a 'cakewalk'.¹¹ Unlike the Gulf War which did not attack Iraq proper, key Iraqi defenders will be fighting not only for their homeland but also for their own survival. Unknowns include the strength and depth of the resistance to the US, particularly by the forces most identified with the regime such as the Special Republican Guards and overcoming them will not, according to Toby Dodge, a Research Fellow at Chatham House, 'be quick, easy or without pain'.¹² The 60 000 elite troops are expected to defend the major cities, where 72 per cent of Iraqis live, by acts of suicide to prolong and inflict maximum casualties. Baghdad alone has a population of five million and is ten miles wide. The urban battles of Hue (1968) in Vietnam, in West Beirut (1982) and Mogadishu (1993) in Somalia have demonstrated the difficulties of urban warfare and while needing specialised forces 'the only solution in the future seems to be to avoid entering cities at all costs'.¹³ It has been observed by Professor Michael Clark of King's College, London, that despite a new doctrine of 'joint urban operations', 'the degree of operational, organisational and psychological competence of the US army to undertake an operation on this scale has still to be demonstrated'.¹⁴ Should the

urban battles be prolonged with resultant US troop and Iraqi civilian casualties, there will be domestic and international political consequences for the US and its allies.

In a worse case scenario Saddam may, with sealed orders to loyal troops in place, breach dams, destroy oilfields, and, according to President Bush, may have already given orders to use WMD by spraying from unmanned aerial vehicles.¹⁵ He may attack Israel with a few unaccounted Scud missiles as he did during the Gulf War, but this time with WMD warheads, linking his survival with the most potent of issues, the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, to win mass Arab sympathies and widen the conflict. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, given his policy of being tough with the Palestinians, may not be as accommodating as Yitzhak Shamir was in not reacting. It is expected that should this happen, Israel will retaliate.¹⁶

Establishing Security

Fears have been expressed that without strong military control, violent disorder will result from, for example, pent-up frustration, revenge-seeking and potential civil unrest along regional ethnic and sectarian lines. In evidence given to the US Senate, Scott Feil, Executive Director of the Role of American Military Power, a US Army body, estimated that military occupation would require 50 000 troops and 75 000 security soldiers, some of whom will need to have an understanding of the local politics, rivalries and language.¹⁷ There is public disagreement between Army Chief of Staff Eric Shinseki and Deputy Defense Secretary Wolfowitz on the actual numbers required. The former said it would require 'several hundred thousands' while the latter said it would be around 100 000 troops.¹⁸ The occupation may require participation from allies, or as in one of the proposed options in the US post-conflict plan (see below), UN personnel. Australia has suggested that the UN should play a key role but has yet to agree to any future role.¹⁹

The US expects the 200 000 Iraqi regular army, depoliticised (to minimise any political challenge) under Saddam, to surrender quickly as during the Gulf War, and hopes to be able to use it to help maintain security and law and order. However unlike that conflict the Iraqi army will be defending their country and avoiding open battles, and would be dispersed in the urban areas. Rounding them up will take time. There are also troops and militia belonging to opposition Kurdish (40 000) and Shia (7 to 15 thousand) groups, but using them could be a double-edged sword should they entrench themselves and support any future separatist moves. Six of these opposition groups, deemed democratic, have been given US\$92 million for military equipment and training, under the 1998 US Iraq Liberation Act, in December 2002.²⁰ There are also about 1000 former Iraqi military and security officers, operating as the Iraqi National Accord, living in the US and Europe who could be persuaded to return. Saddam's agents had infiltrated the organisation. About 3000 opposition members have been receiving US training in military and civilian relations, civil administration and translation in Hungary since January this year.²¹ The US is also recruiting one hundred Iraqi exiles as advisers during the proposed military occupation.²²

Humanitarian Aid and Refugees

An immediate problem will be providing humanitarian aid and dealing with refugee numbers likely to be caused by the invasion. This is in addition to the estimated 800 000 currently displaced internally and the 750 000 already living in neighbouring countries. The announced plan is that US forces following the combat troops would distribute food and other relief items and begin needed reconstruction to assure Iraqis that they are 'immediately' better off than under Saddam.²³ US international aid organisation USAID is training a 60-person civilian Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) who will move into liberated areas to assess needs and co-ordinate with the military, international organisations and non-government organisations (NGOs) in the provision of relief action. 'Massive' supplies have already been stockpiled in four neighbouring countries. The military will deal with the initial situation, but much of the work will be undertaken by civilian relief agencies.²⁴

While the actual needs of a post-invasion situation are speculative, what is known is that UN sanctions and Iraqi policy under them have already resulted in serious problems in terms of food, medicine, water quality and supply, and electricity. These are already strained and stretched and thus any prolonged disruption to supplies and the fragile distribution system, and new damage to infrastructure such as road, rails, power stations and bridges, would exacerbate the current situation. Currently, about 60 per cent of the Iraqi population are dependent on the UN for food. More than 40 per cent of the population is under 15 years old and has been vulnerable to diseases as a result of poor water supply and lack of medicine.

In planning under a 'medium-case scenario', the humanitarian arm of the UN plans to feed up to 10 million civilians and care for at least 2.6 million refugees if Iraq is attacked but stresses that this does not include the treatment of war casualties.²⁵ The UN has appealed for US\$120 million to pay for urgent planning. The US has offered US\$18.3 million with another US\$40 million in the pipeline. Australia has offered A\$10 million for humanitarian relief. Other countries, including the European Union, are also making contingency plans.

Humanitarian aid agencies have expressed dismay about the lack of planning, co-ordination and funds, and said the US military has only recently given licences to aid agencies. While planning for any new refugee crisis is seen by Gil Loescher of the International Institute for Strategic Studies as 'woefully inadequate'²⁶ the agencies have started making contingency plans, establishing networks, and stockpiling essential items in neighbouring countries such as Iran and Jordan.

Post-Saddam US Objectives and Plans

The outline of the US plan for post-Saddam Iraq was revealed to the US Senate on 11 February 2003.²⁷ However since March 2002, planning involving issues such as transitional justice to preserving cultural heritage have been the subject of 17 working

groups made up of 'free Iraqis' under the Administration's Future of Iraq Project. The Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance headed by retired General Jay Garner (to deal with the immediate post-conflict situation) was however, only established in January 2003.

Given the superiority of US forces²⁸ and assured eventual, but hopefully quick, military success with minimal casualties for the invading forces and Iraqi civilians, the Bush Administration, in testimony to the US Senate, sees its objectives within Iraq as:

... the liberation of the Iraqi people; the elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD); the elimination of its terrorist infrastructure; the safeguarding of its territorial integrity and the beginning of its political and economic reconstruction.²⁹

Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz has said that the US would not be 'an occupying force' and, according to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, would only 'stay as long as necessary and leave as soon as possible'.³⁰ The plan would, according to Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Marc Grossman, in his testimony to the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, involve three conceptual stages:

- stabilisation, where an interim Coalition military administration will focus on security, stability and order; laying the groundwork for stage 2
- transition, where authority is progressively given to Iraqi institutions as part of the development of a democratic Iraq, and
- transformation, after Iraqis have drafted, debated and approved a new democratic constitution and held free and fair elections, the only way for any future Iraqi government to be truly legitimate.³¹

Military and Transitional Regime

The US Council on Foreign Relations, an independent think tank, in identifying the principles for the post-conflict situation, has urged the 'fullest' involvement of the UN, international agencies, neighbouring Arab states and for 'Iraqis to play a major role'.³² The US plan while accepting some of the Council's principles, is however for 'full control' under an interim administration for up to two years, headed by a US civilian but reporting to General Tommy Franks, Commander of US forces in the Middle East.³³ This will include a US appointed 'consultative council' and, depending on developments, there are several optional plans, including a possible UN administration to replace the interim administration. Several Iraqi commissions would be established to, among other things, restore the judicial system and draft a new constitution to ensure, it was stressed by US officials, 'a representative' regime, but not necessarily to 'democratise' Iraq, a clear departure from earlier statements.³⁴

It would appear that the US administration, apart from the immediate post-conflict situation, is still undecided what course to take. In evidence before the US Senate officials implied that

developments in Iraq 'could lead them to revise the plan on the run'.³⁵ Marina Ottaway, from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, sees the plan as 'a technocratic approach well suited to a military administration obviating the necessity of understanding and facing the complexity of the society'. To her, the issue is not one of political reconstruction, which would involve a new bargain among the 'same old groups with conflicting interests and demands'.³⁶

In sum, apart from the immediate post-conflict situation, during which a military administration would be put in place, the US has yet to reveal how political reconstruction would be achieved.

Reactions of the Iraqi Opposition in Exile and Others

Earlier proposals had included elements of the mainly exiled Iraqi opposition, taking part in a provisional, and eventual, federal government.³⁷ The 50 opposition groups are by no means united and have, in the past, fought each other.³⁸ These diverse and competing groups led by the Iraqi National Congress under Ahmed Chalabi, are mostly financed by the US as well as Iran. They have held meetings in London, the US, Turkey and Northern Iraq and formed a group of notables (prominent members) to discuss their cooperation and plans, which include a federal system. Feeling betrayed, they have condemned the US plan as unworkable, undemocratic and relying on people associated with the present regime.³⁹ Chalabi is seen by observers to have little grass-roots support within Iraq, has said that Iraqis can govern themselves and should be allowed 'to build democracy on their own'.⁴⁰ An opposition Shia Arab leader, Mowaffak al Rubaie, has even predicted that there will be 'rebellion' under US occupation.⁴¹ Bush's envoy Zalmay Khalizad, met the opposition groups in late February, in Northern Iraq and assured them that the 'coalition allies' will work closely with the opposition committees and repeated US commitment to bring about a democratic government 'as soon as possible and then leave'.⁴² At that meeting, the opposition established a six-man leadership council and 14 committees, which, according to Khalizad, would be integrated into the US plan.

Saudi Arabia in responding to the plan has also warned that the US was 'deluding' itself if it thought it could control Iraq.⁴³ Domestically, Senator Joseph Lieberman warned against having 'one lead player and a dozen character actors who are offered bit parts'.⁴⁴ To allay these fears, President Bush has since restated the democratic aim for Iraq and the region.

Rationale of US Plan

The decision to incorporate elements of the present regime and not the exiled opposition is based on US fears that past rivalries among them and uncertainty of their popular support within Iraq would surface to complicate an unknown but inevitably difficult situation in term of chaos and instability. The military view seems to have prevailed. It is a realistic assessment of Iraqi political dynamics and culture. Saddam's regime, despite its brutal nature, has operated with the existence of a 'shadow state'. This consists of 'the networks of privilege and patronage where real power lies in Iraq', and it has colonised the state

apparatus.⁴⁵ The 'shadow state' is made up of kinship, tribes, clans and trusted individuals interlocked by loyalty based on rewards and exemplary punishment. Elements within this system are also divided based on varying degrees of loyalty, fear and sheer opportunism.⁴⁶ The system predates Saddam, but was re-moulded by him and reflects the artificial nature of Iraq when it was created after the First World War. Some form of its survival is deemed necessary for any regime in Iraq to operate effectively. The US plan to replace Saddam at its head and to maintain full control, would minimise any dislocation of this system. It is assumed that the vetted internal elements, given past patterns of behaviour would, with their fears of displacement allayed, help maintain control indirectly, thus minimising civil disorder.

Iraqi Oil Revenue

Of crucial importance is the control of Iraq's oil revenues, used to advantage despite sanctions, by Saddam to cement his rule. Some officials argue that they should be considered as 'spoils of war' while others say it should pay for the US occupation and both military and provisional administration.⁴⁷ The Council on Foreign Relations Report proposed that oil revenues be controlled by Iraqis and revenue shared fairly through the UN 'Oil for Food' mechanism. It warned that to do otherwise would convince Iraqis that war was undertaken for 'imperialist rather than disarmament reasons'.⁴⁸ Given the poor state of Iraqi oil infrastructure, and declining production of 100 000 barrels per day, any added and deliberate damage to the 10 oil refineries as a result of war will involve years of rebuilding and would cost billions.⁴⁹ While British and US firms are keen to exploit Iraq's vast reserves, some of these have already been allocated to French, Russian and Chinese interests by Saddam and await the lifting of UN sanctions to be effective.⁵⁰

A Risky Plan

The permutations and combinations of the above, with disarmed and vetted elements of the present regime in play along with possible actions on the part of interested neighbours makes the post-war environment difficult to predict. Depending on the duration of the US presence, the plan will test the resolve and stamina of the US, already called into question in Afghanistan. With limited US military support, the power and influence of the new Afghan government is restricted to Kabul. The US plan for Iraq, depending on its duration, is potentially risky for the following reasons:

- With minimal input from Iraqis the transitional US regime may be seen as a neo-colonial regime which would arouse nationalist and regional anger. This may undermine the legitimacy of the new regime, which would be tainted and seen as a creature of the US after the eventual handover of power.
- Though practical, the plan would legitimise elements of the 'shadow state' which had benefited from Saddam's regime creating only a more benign version of the status quo in terms of power and influence, alienating those who are not connected to the system unless incorporated by the US.

- It would marginalise and antagonise the largely exiled Iraqi opposition groups and the actions of some of these may cause internal instability. Both the Kurds and the Shias were encouraged by the US to revolt against Saddam after the Gulf War, and when they did, the US abandoned them. There is thus lingering distrust of US preparedness to protect their interests. Their activities may threaten the territorial integrity of Iraq, which the US has agreed to maintain, and will heighten fears in the neighbouring states of Turkey and Saudi Arabia.
- By emphasising 'representation' rather than 'democratisation' it may, as a by-product, contribute to an increase in sectarian, tribal and communal feelings which have been weakened, despite appearances, under Saddam's regime.⁵¹
- It is seen to be a withdrawal from the stated aims of early democratisation, which if implemented, may result in electoral success by forces inimical to US interests. (In Algeria in 1992 following preliminary election success, a military coup prevented an Islamic regime from taking power, which it would have done had the final round of elections been held. The coup plunged that country into virtual civil war thereafter). The US plan may result in perhaps a more benign but strong leader. The Saudis have already suggested that a Sunni Muslim general be appointed as leader.⁵²
- If the minimal involvement of the UN and other governments continues, the invasion would be seen as an exercise of US 'imperial' might with implications for other regional governments.

Regional Objectives

The stated objectives of regime change in Iraq and the disarmament of its WMD, do not include what some observers and Bush officials see as an historic opportunity for the US to determine the nature and dynamics of the Middle East (and beyond) by promoting democratisation and modernisation and, as a consequence, undermining Islamic extremism.⁵³ These views have been expressed by, among others, Fouad Ajami, Professor of Middle Eastern Studies at the School for Advanced International Studies at John Hopkins University, who has written that such US action would be welcomed by dancing in the streets.⁵⁴ Current US thinking on Iraq was initiated by Paul Wolfowitz now Deputy Defense Secretary and by Douglas Feith and other now senior officials who have advocated the fall of Saddam since the early 1990s. These views were later taken up by Vice President Dick Cheney who now leads the group known as the Neo-conservatives. Others who share the same views include Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Richard Perle, Chairman of the Defense Policy Board.⁵⁵ They argue that a democratic regime in Iraq will have positive effects in the region:

- It would discourage other states, i.e. Syria and Iran, from supporting 'terrorists', i.e. groups operating in Lebanon against Israel.

- These developments in turn would exert pressure on the Palestinian Authority, stripped of its regional supporters, to renounce terrorism and negotiate a peaceful outcome with the Israelis.
- With the US no longer relying on Saudi Arabia for its oil and bases, Saudi influence would decline, and it may be dissuaded from funding Islamic charities linked to terrorist groups such as Hamas which operates in Israel, and Al Qaeda.
- It would encourage citizens in the region to press for reforms, after a successful, prosperous and democratic Iraq is established, and though unstated, may result in other regime change in Arab states.

While regional objectives and pressures may be said to have produced some positive reactions already (see below), this overarching policy presented as a causal relationship, belies the complex and unpredictable nature of events in a volatile region. As Robert Higgs of the US Independent Institute notes, 'the sheer preposterousness of this expectation suggests that it is fuelled by more of a quasi-religious zealotry than by logic and evidence'.⁵⁶ Lord Douglas Hurd, former British Conservative Foreign Secretary, posed two critical questions in relation to war on Iraq and central to the US and British dilemma:

Do we help or hinder the essential struggle against terrorism by attacking Iraq? Would we thus turn the Middle East into a set of friendly democratic capitalist societies, ready to make peace with Israel, or into a region of sullen humiliation, a fertile and almost inexhaustible recruiting ground for further terrorists for whom Britain is a main target?⁵⁷

It needs to be noted that most of the 'terrorist' groups, both secular and religious, in the region are aimed at Israel while others, based on Islam, are against their own governments, some of which though brutal and oppressive, are supported by the US.

More important is the fact that Al Qaeda, though weakened, does not rely on state sponsorship and has operated through small semi-independent and like-minded groups. Al Qaeda opposes Arab states such as Saudi Arabia and Iraq. The Arab states likewise have no love for Al Qaeda or Islamic extremism, which threaten their regimes. Many of them including Egypt, Algeria and Syria have in fact acted violently against Islamic extremist groups and parties. Seen in this light, a US war against Iraq would not undermine Islamic extremism, which has resulted among other things, in the September 11 attack.

Regional and Other Fallout

The political and diplomatic fallout of an invasion will reverberate not only in the region, but also throughout the world. It has the potential to cause regional instability for the Arab states' relations with Iraq, internal domestic problems for the Arab and other Muslim States, strengthen anti-Americanism worldwide and may contribute to an increase in terrorist acts by extremist Muslims.

Arab Countries

The Arab countries while divided by their private fears of Saddam, are concerned about the future implications for their regimes of the US pre-emptive strike and the expected popular anger but have nonetheless have resigned themselves to the inevitability of war. As a response to recent events, in March 2003, Saudi Arabia announced a proposal for an Arab Charter to the Arab League to protect Arab interests, but this has yet to be discussed. The Charter seeks to 'improve the Arab condition' through reforms including 'enhanced political participation' and,

urge an awakening of the *Ummah* (the Muslim community) to solidify its will and to demonstrate its resolve to prove its vitality and its ability to face the threats and challenges of the latest developments and the consequences they entail.⁵⁸

This belated attempt, if successful in alleviating the economic and social conditions of the Arab masses, may yet prove to be an important key in undermining support for extremism. The other key would be a just settlement of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict.

There are also fears, which also apply to other countries, that strong opposition to the US will have long-term consequences. An unnamed US official said, 'they know that if they work with us they will reap benefits in the end'.⁵⁹ At the same time Arab leaders, including US allies, have warned that an attack would threaten the security of the region. Prince Saud al-Faisal, Saudi Foreign Minister said any unilateral US action would appear as 'an act of aggression'.⁶⁰ Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak also warned that an attack would have catastrophic consequences as well as 'set off a great fire of terrorism'.⁶¹

The 22-member Arab League has been unsuccessful in presenting a united front, with Kuwait dissenting, during its February meeting of foreign ministers when it urged members to 'refrain from offering any assistance of facilities' to the US. However, the League and its members are seeking to ensure that they retain some influence in the post-conflict situation.⁶² The US is still discussing with Arab leaders their proposal to allow Saddam and key members of his regime to go into exile.⁶³ The United Arab Emirates officially proposed the offer of exile, but it was rejected, at the Sharm el-Sheikh Arab League's emergency summit on 1 March, as precedent setting. The proposal provides immunity to Saddam and others to leave within fourteen days, after which Iraq would be placed under the control of the UN and the Arab League.⁶⁴ The Summit's declaration urged Arab countries 'not to participate in any military action aimed at Iraq's or any Arab country's safety and territorial integrity' and urged that more time be given to UN inspectors. It expressed their 'total rejection of any attack on Iraq' and called for its resolution through international channels.⁶⁵

Syria, Yemen and Libya are seen as the strongest opponents of war, and while the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan are seen generally as US allies, they too have expressed their objection, preferring action sanctioned by the UN.

Syria, with 35 000 troops in Lebanon, is a key player in the region and is one of the seven countries listed by the US as supporting terrorism. Syria, along with other states, supports anti-Israeli groups (which are condemned as 'terrorists' by Israel) because they are fighting to liberate Palestine. Syria is technically still at war with Israel which has occupied and annexed its Golan Heights, headwaters of the River Jordan. Aware of the changing environment, Syria, with its military forces needing an upgrade, and economy dependent on Iraqi oil, trade, and control of Lebanon, has responded and cooperated with the US since September 11 in providing intelligence information on Al Qaeda. Like Jordan, it lacks resources and urgently needs investments and foreign capital. Syria's relations with Iran, North Korea and Iraq and control of the anti-Israeli groups operating in Lebanon are key elements of its pivotal role in the region. It could if it so desires, cause instability in several countries such as Jordan and Lebanon. Under Syrian pressure Hizbullah (Iranian supported) has been withdrawn from the Lebanese border with Israel since May 2002 and Damascus-based Palestinian groups have taken a lower profile.⁶⁶ Syria's support for UNSCR 1441 surprised many but it still opposes an invasion, seeing itself as a potential future US target. While wary of US policy it has undertaken economic reforms and relaxed some of the tight political control under President Barshar al-Assad.⁶⁷ It has also recently conducted elections (on 2 March 2003), boycotted by five parties with the ruling coalition, the National Progressive Front, winning two-thirds of the 250 seats.

Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States are seen as allies (have either publicly or privately allowed the US to use their facilities) and are also concerned with their own domestic fallout in the event of invasion and have taken pre-emptive measures. In Egypt where the Muslim Brotherhood is the main opposition, some members have been arrested but the government sanctioned a rally of 100 000 against the war in Cairo. Jordan, with its majority population Palestinians and an opposition also led by the Islamic Action Front which is closely linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, has prepared contingency plans in case of mass protests. Elections will be held in June. These two countries receive substantial US military and other aid. Jordan enjoys a free trade agreement with the US but also relies on UN approved discounted Iraqi oil and trade.

Saudi-US relations have been strained since September 11 and discussions on the reduction, if not the withdrawal, of US troops were raised by the US in January 2002.⁶⁸ Most of those involved in the September 11 attack were Saudis. Saudi-born Osama bin Laden has accused the ruling regime of betraying Islam by supporting the US and having its infidel troops in the land of Islam. The Saudi Government has tried to reject this claim saying that the country is 'ruled by Islam' and is not under Western influence.⁶⁹ Saudi bases used to enforce the 'no-fly' zone in the south of Iraq were important during the Afghanistan campaign but because of strains, the US has developed an alternative base in Qatar. Despite US reports the Saudis have not announced that they would support the US. As noted above the Saudi Government wants Iraq to remain intact, fearing an expanded Iranian state at its border. A pro-US Iraq would also decrease US reliance on Saudi oil, reducing its future influence.

The United Arab Emirates have sent troops, as part of the 'Peninsular Shield' to defend Kuwait.

Turkey and Iran

The non-Arab countries bordering Iraq, Turkey and Iran, are concerned with spillover effects on their countries. Turkey, seeking European Union membership and the only Muslim member of NATO, with 12 million Kurds, is fearful of a breakaway 'Kurdistan'.⁷⁰ Since 1991 and under the no-fly zone, the Iraqi Kurds have enjoyed prosperity and regional autonomy from Baghdad. Having US troops in that region would limit Turkey's actions and the proposal to base troops in Kurdish Iraq has been rejected strongly by the Iraqi Kurds as well as the non-Kurdish opposition in exile. In anticipation of war in Iraq, Turkey has reinforced troops in the border region.

Turkey has also complained that UN sanctions against Iraq have cost it about US\$100 billion in trade. This has primarily affected its Kurdish areas where high unemployment has encouraged support for the separatist (Turkey-based) Kurdistan Workers Party, PKK. The US could only launch a northern attack in Iraq through Turkey but the US has warned that this 'would be desirable but not essential' to US plans.⁷¹ This has put Turkey under tremendous pressure since blocking the US would mean problems with its Kurdish area, no influence in the reshaped Iraq and no economic compensation.

Turkey's new Justice and Development Party government, which listens to its generals, faces popular (94 per cent) opposition to a war.⁷² The US is seeking to base 62 000 troops and has offered US\$24 billion in aid and loans, as an incentive to secure parliamentary agreement. The Turkish government, which was, despite promises, not adequately compensated after the 1991 Gulf War, apart from asking for more, insisted on a written offer. However, this US offer was narrowly rejected, with fifty government members crossing the floor in Parliament on 1 March.⁷³ A second vote is likely to take place following the election of Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his replacement of Abdullah Gul as PM. The US has since withdrawn its offer.

Iran, which fought against an Iraqi invasion between 1980–88, and was identified by the US as part of an 'Axis of Evil', fears future encirclement by pro-US regimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. During the Gulf and the recent Afghan War it helped the US and its allies in providing search and rescue missions. On Iraq, Iran has supported and has influence with the Shia-based Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution (which also receives US aid). The Iraqi Shias, who form 60 per cent of the Iraqi population, like the Kurds, are not united. There are also pro-Iranian Kurds. Many Iraqi Shia fought against Iran during the Iran–Iraq War. Mainly concentrated in the south, Saddam has crushed their resistance and revolt, which after US instigation, was abandoned by the US in the aftermath of the Gulf War. Saudi Arabia is fearful that a breakaway southern Iraq would join Iran, posing a threat to its security.

Since the 1979 Islamic revolution, which deposed the pro-American Shah, Iranians have been undergoing an internal struggle between the religious and liberal elements, many of whom favour some links with the US and more democratic space.⁷⁴ The conservative Clerics have used the current situation to impose stronger internal control, although this is being resisted. The outcome of this struggle will have a profound impact on the Muslim world but ironically and unfortunately, the impact of US policy has been to strengthen the less tolerant Clerics.

Islam, Anti-Americanism and Terrorism

The US and its allies have stressed that the war against Iraq would not be against Islam but against terrorism. However, the perception, reinforced by Muslim political and religious leaders, including neighbours of Australia, is otherwise. Indonesian Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda warned that it would radicalise some elements within Indonesia and like Malaysia's Dr Mahathir, said that it would be seen as anti-Islam and 'a war on Muslims'.⁷⁵ Osama bin Laden, in his latest speech, on 16 February 2003 has made this very clear, seeing the US as undertaking a new 'Zionist Crusade' and urged Muslims to use suicide attacks and bombings against the US to prevent a war on Iraq.⁷⁶

Most Muslims have little sympathy for extremist Islam and deplore the violence, death and damage caused by them. However, the religious overtones of President Bush's speeches, the actions of US and other authorities, in the treatment of suspects who are Muslims, and the detention of Al Qaeda suspects in Guantanamo Bay have provided a context to persuade some Muslims that anti-Islam may be the underlying motive of US action. New US legislation has also been criticised for breaching civil liberties and key values, such as the rule of law, raising questions for friends and foes alike about US commitments to them when they themselves are threatened.⁷⁷

The religious dimension of the conflict has been reinforced by President Bush, a born again Christian, who opens every cabinet meeting with a prayer. He has also used the term 'Crusade'⁷⁸ initially to describe the war against terrorism and has threatened to 'rain holy hell on them'.⁷⁹ In this he has the support of the Evangelical Christians who are not only influential within his Republican Party but are also strong supporters of Israel.⁸⁰ Bruce Lincoln, a professor of the history of religion in Chicago University, who has analysed Bush speeches, says that the religious overtones have been 'escalating'.⁸¹ In his speech to the American Enterprise Institute, for example, Bush repeated that the war on Iraq is a 'battle for the future of the Muslim world'.⁸² This view was originally stated in the 2002 US National Security Strategy document which Professor Paul Wilkinson, an authority on terrorism from the University of St Andrews, saw as 'curiously grandiose'.⁸³ He sees the US desire to reshape the world to its own image as not unlike the desire of some Muslim fundamentalists to do just the opposite. While acknowledging different faiths in the US, Bush in a speech in Nashville, has also singled out a special place for Christianity.⁸⁴

Apart from support by evangelical Christians in the US, attempts to secure the support of the Vatican⁸⁵ and other religious leaders on moral grounds have failed.⁸⁶ The Vatican fears that an attack on Iraq would be seen as a Christian crusade against Muslims and had sent an envoy to meet Bush in early March. It should be noted that Saddam has been condemned by Osama bin Laden as an 'apostate' who, in his 11 February 2003 message, called on the Iraqi people to overthrow Saddam, a fact ignored by US Secretary of State Colin Powell at the United Nations Security Council meeting.⁸⁷ Ironically, an attack against Iraq may result in terrorist retaliations, *not* in support of Saddam but as a defence of Muslims and Islam by Al Qaeda and other independent extremist groups against the actions of the US and its allies.

Anti-Americanism in the Middle East is reported to be at its worst. There are three major factors: the US policy of supporting unpopular authoritarian regimes, the unresolved Palestinian–Israel conflict, which is blamed on US bias towards Israel,⁸⁸ and US cultural values and material dominance which particularly affront the Muslim extremists.

The Anti-Americanism of the Arab masses has generally been ignored by US policy makers as a passing phase without much long-term effect, except in the case of Iran. However, Husain Haqqami, a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, notes that its significance is as 'a weapon of recruitment and motivation for extremist groups'.⁸⁹ Miriam Rajkumar, a Carnegie project associate, notes that present anti-American 'anger cuts across age, economic, social and intellectual spectrums and has reached alarming levels' with the US seen as the major threat to the Middle East.⁹⁰ Belatedly, private interests, with links to the US administration, are planning to launch an Arabic news and entertainment program to be called *Al Haqiqa* (The Truth) and exported to the Middle East in about March 2003.⁹¹ This is to counter the popular Qatar-based, *Al Jazeera*, which the US has tried, but failed to influence.

The failure of the 1991 Madrid Middle East Peace talks following the Gulf War will not convince the Arabs that the US would, after attacking Iraq, have the political will to find a just solution for them. This unresolved conflict continues to be the major issue for Muslims in general and Arabs in particular and has been exploited by both Saddam and Osama bin Laden. Several members of the Arab League linked Israel to US policy on Iraq at its 1 March meeting. As noted above they see the anti-Israeli suicide bombers as 'nationalist freedom fighters' or 'martyrs' for Palestine and *not* terrorists. Saddam has given up to US\$25 000 to families of 'martyrs' but the US has underplayed the fact that Saudi Arabia has also given millions, and in December 2001 set aside another US\$50 million, to the families of both the injured and 'martyrs'.⁹²

Arab and other Muslims leaders have warned that an attack on Iraq will result in terrorist acts against the US and its allies. The attack on the US Consulate in Karachi on 28 February by a local extremist group may be a precursor to future attacks. Friendly Middle Eastern states, such as Jordan and Egypt, as well as Indonesia, may face increased domestic instability and resort to tough and repressive measures fuelling the vicious cycle.

Conclusion

A war against Saddam will have unpredictable consequences. Unlike the Gulf War, the US has not only fewer allies who are willing to commit troops, but faces strong opposition from many of its friends in Europe. These countries and others have willingly supported the US-led War against Terrorism, as in Afghanistan, but have drawn a line against pre-emptive action against Iraq. The Arab countries, with few exceptions, are also against a war, seeing their own future under threat with the Bush doctrine of pre-emptive strike.

The US believes that unless force is threatened and with a demonstrated willingness to use it, Saddam will continue to survive. To date, Saddam's divide and rule policy, using his right to choose suppliers under the UN 'Oil for Food' program to reward and punish friends and foes alike has worked, both domestically and internationally, in his favour. The Iraqi leader may yet buckle at the last minute. His responses to date have been cleverly calibrated to ensure his survival. His recent Presidential Decree passed by a compliant Parliament, banning the import and production of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and destroying his Al Samoud missiles at the insistence of UN inspectors, is a case in point.

The US may have waded too far out and the momentum towards war may be unstoppable. Observers have pointed out that military action, despite dangers, may yet turn out to be the easiest part of US policy, but 'like a barbed hook once it goes in, there is no quick release'.⁹³ The US will not only have to deal with potential internal disorder and the humanitarian crisis in terms of refugees and civilian casualties, but also the more challenging task of political reconstruction. In this it faces a complex web of divisions, suspicions and fear among Iraqis as well as an uncooperative and suspicious region. This situation may be eased if the conflict is over quickly with minimum military and civilian casualties, but it will not be a short haul.

In getting rid of Saddam, outsiders may need to consider that while he is universally condemned for his brutality and excesses, his primary audience in the current crisis is *not* the world but the Arab and Muslim parts, with their diasporas in Europe, US and elsewhere. Faced with potential annihilation, he may yet choose to fight, seeing himself as a modern day Saladin, who incidentally was a Kurd. He is assured that in the eyes of millions, he (like Osama bin Laden) will be seen as an Arab, if not a Muslim hero, prepared to opportunistically stand up for Arab honour and the Arab cause against the most powerful nation in the world.

Although he might finally lose his life and in the process destroying many others, including Muslims, his actions have so far restrained the unilateralism of the US. His destruction would ensure that many others, with little prospect of a better life and misguided as they may be, would continue to fight against the US and its 'coalition of the willing'. It is from among them that future 'martyrs' will be spawned, perhaps not in the form of Al Qaeda but in their individual and independent acts, wherever they live. The war

against Saddam will thus ironically cause more acts of terror by people who had nothing to lose but their lives.

It may be argued that if a small part of the projected costs of the war were to be used to alleviate the social and economic condition of the Arab and other people in despair in the world, they would have less cause to support any form of extremism. This unfortunately would be harder and take longer to achieve but a war against Iraq is no magic panacea to deal with the real causes of terrorism either. The tragedy is that it may inspire more acts of violence and the world would be none the safer.

While much attention is focus on the impending war on Iraq, this brief indicates that it is but a part of a larger US policy to change the Middle East and perhaps the world. Professor Gary Sick of Columbia University sees this as 'an imperial moment' where pre-emptive action, based on unchallengeable, permanent power, the US would determine world affairs and the war against Iraq is 'a test and validation of the new doctrine'.⁹⁴ It is the wider implications of the war against Iraq that should concentrate our minds because this test will result with costs not only for the US but also for the rest of the world.

Postscript

It would appear that the US, UK and Spain have not been able to achieve majority support for a second resolution and have withdrawn it from the UNSC. A majority decision would have given them a 'moral' victory. France (with the support of Germany and Russia) has said that it would veto any Resolution which would result in war with Iraq. China also opposes war without UN sanction.

President Bush on 18 March 2003 gave President Saddam Hussein and his sons 48 hours to leave Iraq or face an US-led military assault.

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