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A Cynical Enterprise: US-Iraq Relations, Oil, and the Struggle for the Persian Gulf

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A Cynical Enterprise: US-Iraq Relations, Oil, and the Struggle for the Persian Gulf

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by

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The Most Dangerous Spot on Earth: First Origins and the Early Cold War

For the better part of the Twentieth century, the Middle East, and more specifically the Persian Gulf, have been areas of key importance to the United States. As the United States became increasingly reliant on Middle Eastern oil, it became more attuned to events in the Persian Gulf, seeking to create a regional order conducive to US interests. First and foremost among those interests were cheap and easily accessible oil, and a security situation which would not impede the flow of oil to the West. In order to create this situation, the US has sought to exert its influence on all of the states of the Persian Gulf. Among those states was Iraq. With proven oil reserves estimated by OPEC to be the fourth largest in the world, Iraq has always been valued by the US as a geopolitical prize.[1] While certainly not the sole interest in Iraq, oil proved to be the most important and enduring interest. In the course of pursuing its national interests, the US thrust itself into a deeply divided country with a troubled and violent history. In doing so, the US engaged in a series of ill-advised and short-sighted policy decisions, which in turn have provoked conflict, led to the deaths of millions of Iraqis, the destruction of a society, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the destabilization of the Middle East. Underlying this is a paradoxical phenomenon: the more the US attempted to bring Iraq under US sway and control, the more out of control the situation became. The more recent suffering of Iraq, from the US invasion to the scourge of ISIL, is very much a product of almost a century of US-Iraq relations. Then, as now, the relationship was based first and foremost around oil.

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[1] "OPEC share of world crude oil reserves, 2017", OPEC, accessed 21 February 2019, https://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/data_graphs/330.htm

In 1914, the Ottoman Grand Vizier oversaw the formation of an international oil consortium. Together with French, German, and Dutch interests, the Turkish Petroleum Company (TPC) was formed, granting its members the right to exploit oil within the Ottoman Middle East, including the three provinces which would become Iraq.[2] After the end of World War I, the French acquired the German shares. Claiming the mandate powers awarded by the League of Nations gave them exclusive rights over natural resources within mandate territory, the British and French sought to exclude any other state, including the US, from breaking up their duopoly. The US complained bitterly about the Anglo-French recalcitrance. It was American intervention in the trenches of World War I which turned the tide of the war in favour of the Allies, and it was due largely to US initiative that the League of Nations was established, they argued. Yet Britain and France were unswayed. "The Anglo-French combination is determined to keep American companies out of the new oil fields of the Near East," complained Hugh Wallace, US Ambassador to France.[3] Yet the US remained steadfast, demanding a quid pro quo for its efforts in World War I, driven by a growing energy demand.

In 1921, Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover organized America's seven-largest oil companies into a formidable consortium to take on the British and French. Its members included SOCONY (later Mobil), New Jersey (later Esso/Exxon), Texaco, Sinclair, Mexican, Atlantic, and Gulf. Britain and France gave in. With the Ottomans gone, the US was invited into the new consortium, the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC). In order to contain US ambitions, Britain and France made US membership conditional to a clause subjecting oil exploitation strictly within the IPC framework. In return, the US was

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[2] Geoff Simons, *Iraq: From Sumer to Post-Saddam* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 268

[3] Michael Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East 1776 to the Present* (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2007), 410

awarded a 23.75 percent share in the consortium.[4] For the US, it was a resounding

diplomatic victory. However, they had yet to grasp the jackpot they had stumbled upon.

Uncertain of the true volume of oil in IPC territory, the investment was very much a

gamble. Amid domestic fears of an impending oil shortage, shared among politicians,

scientists, and engineers, the investment was regarded as prudent. In 1919, the director of

the Bureau of Mines warned that "within the next two to five years the oil in this country

will reach their maximum production, and from that time on we will face an ever-

increasing decline," while United States Geological Survey director George Otis Smith

warned of a "gasoline famine."[5] Ultimately the gamble paid off, with the discovery of oil

in Kirkuk in 1927.[6] With oil yet to be discovered in Saudi Arabia, and a British monopoly

on Iranian oil, at that time Iraq represented America's greatest hope of extracting oil from

the Middle East. Thus marked the beginning of the long and troubled relationship

between Iraq and the US.

In order to do business in the IPC, the US found itself needing to be on friendly

terms with the Iraqi monarchy and Britain. As such, this ensured that Britain would take

the lead role in maintaining an order conducive to western interests in Iraq, especially

through military force, while the US could reap the benefits, with little to no cost to the

US. The modern state of Iraq was, after all, an artificial creation of Britain, as was the

Hashimi monarchy installed by Britain following the suppression of the 1920 rebellion. It

would not be until certain developments from 1945 onwards, with the strategic

partnership forged between the US and Saudi Arabia, the deepening energy dependence

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[4] Ibid, 411

[5] Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 178

[6] Gary Vogler, *Iraq and the Politics of Oil: An Insider's Perspective* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017), 36

on the Middle East, supporting the creation of the state of Israel, and the start of the Cold

War that the US took on greater direct and indirect role in influencing Iraqi affairs.

While many policymakers would not have known it, the US would later become

deeply entrenched in Iraq. In seeking to exert its power over Iraq, it would have

behooved the US to study the British experience. The most important lesson to be derived

from the British experience in Iraq is that while certain measures would succeed in

bringing short-term stability, in the longer term it would only breed resentment and lead

to a larger conflagration.

In 1917, as part of an effort to deprive the Ottoman empire of its Arab territories

during World War I, the British invaded the provinces of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul.

Out of these three provinces, Britain hobbled together the modern state of Iraq. The

British attempted to rule over the country directly, appointing Percy Cox as High

Commissioner of Iraq. By May 1920, Iraqi resentment boiled over, following efforts by

the British authorities to levy taxes and arrest some recalcitrant tribal chiefs.[7] The scale

and severity of the rebellion was made evident by how widespread it was, cutting across

deep sectarian and ethnic divisions. Prime Minister Winston Churchill remarked:

> It is an extraordinary thing that the British civil administration should have
> succeeded in such a short time in alienating the whole country to such an extent
> that the Arabs have laid aside the blood feuds that they have nursed for centuries
> and that the Suni [sic] and Shiah [sic] tribes are working together. We have even
> been advised locally that the best way to get our supplies up the river would be to
> fly the Turkish flag, which would be respected by the tribesmen.[8]

The British used the latest technology, including air power, to crush the rebellion. Royal

Air Force Wing Commander Arthur "Bomber" Harris remarked: "The Arab and Kurd

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[7] Christopher Catherwood, *Churchill's Folly: How Winston Churchill Created Modern Iraq* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004), 81
[8] Ibid, 88

now know what real bombing means in casualties and damage. Within forty-five minutes a full-sized village can practically be wiped out and a third of its inhabitants killed or injured."[9]

With its resources stretched thin after World War I, the British government understood that continued occupation and direct rule over Iraq would provoke further revolts, which the British treasury could ill afford.[10] Unwilling to leave completely, Britain opted to rule through proxy. During the 1921 Cairo conference, British leaders and leading orientalists elected to establish a monarchy in Iraq, led by Faisal al-Hashimi. Faisal was an outsider with no support base in Iraq, who would be wholly reliant on a foreign power to maintain his rule. After British support for his leadership of the Hijazi revolt, then allowing the French to invade Syria and topple his Damascus-based Arab kingdom, Faisal had nowhere to go. As such, the British saw in Faisal a pliant proxy, one which Churchill described as having the additional benefit of providing "[the] best chance of saving our money."[11] The British then foisted upon its pliant proxy the 1922 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty. The Treaty required the "employment of British officials in the Iraq government," with whom the Iraqi King would need to consult with on a regular basis. In matters of economics, foreign policy, and defense, the King was required to abide by "the advice of His Britannic Majesty tendered through the High Commissioner …" With regards to military affairs, Iraq was required to only purchase British arms, while

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[9] Simons, 214

[10] Marion Farouk Sluglett & Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2003) 13

[11] Catherwood, 133

granting basing rights and the right to return for British forces.[12] The terms of the Treaty effectively rendered Iraqi independence to be an illusion.

Equally illusory was the notion that this British creation would guarantee internal stability. As far as the Iraqi people were concerned, the system in place led to abject poverty and repeated humiliations, such that any successful efforts to create short-term stability would only succeed in provoking a much greater anti-colonial conflagration in the future. By chance, that large conflagration took place at a time when the US began to overshadow Britain as the dominant power in the Middle East, in the early days of the Cold War. As such, it is worth recalling the struggles of the Iraqi people in an anti-colonial context. Most of these struggles prior to the Cold War were overlooked by US policymakers as irrelevant backwater events. With the emergence of the Cold War, these struggles were viewed strictly through the lens of a monolithic communist conspiracy fomenting discord in the third world, to the detriment of the West. With this fundamental misunderstanding of Iraqi events, the US began its long and troubled blind stumble into Iraq. Thus it serves to briefly recall some of the more noteworthy anti-colonial struggles in Iraq.

While smaller-scale rebellions, protests, and riots were fairly common, there are two developments which best highlighted the anti-colonial nature of the struggles of the Iraqi people. The first development centered around the most unlikely of figures, King Ghazi. The second monarch of Iraq, King Ghazi embraced pan-Arab politics, which earned him the rare privilege of being supported by large swaths of the Iraqi people. From his radio station, Radio Qasr al-Zuhour, Ghazi called for the annexation of Kuwait to Iraq, and greater support to the anti-Zionist struggle in Palestine. In 1936, Ghazi lent

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[12] Treaty of Alliance Between Great Britain and Iraq, 1922

his support to a coup led by General Bakr Sidqi which led to the overthrow of Prime

Minister Yasin al-Hashimi and exiling of a coterie of pro-British politicians.[13] To the

lament of many Iraqis, Ghazi died in a car crash in April 1939. However, many Iraqis

believe that Ghazi was assassinated. The late Said Aburish pointed out inconsistencies,

such as the fact that Ghazi's car was relatively undamaged, the fatal wound was on the

back of his head, and the refusal of the doctor who oversaw Ghazi's autopsy to sign the

death certificate.[14] Nonetheless, as the British newspaper *The Guardian* reported,

"Ghazi's death solved a problem for the British who were thinking of removing him."[15]

The next major effort to unseat the British from Iraq came in 1941 when politician

Rashid Ali al-Kaylani and a group of four generals known as the Golden Square launched

a coup against the regent, Prince Abdul Ilah (standing in for the 5-year old King Faisal II)

and Prime Minister Taha al-Hashimi. Deeply embittered by Ghazi's death, the coup

plotters sought to expel the British from Iraq once and for all. For help, they turned to

Nazi Germany. However, allowing the royal family to escape into exile, failing to unseat

British forces from their last bastion at Habbaniyah air base, and the failure of the Nazis

to deliver sufficient aid in time sealed the fate of the coup. In under a month the British

invaded Iraq and unseated the Golden Square. Those who did not flee Iraq after taking

part in the coup were handed over to Abdul Ilah to do with as he pleased. The British

continued to occupy Iraq until 1947.[16]

For US policymakers, these events were perceived as insignificant disturbances in

a far-off backwater state. With the two interrelated issues of oil and the Cold War, the US

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[13] Simons, 220

[14] Said Aburish, *Saddam Hussein: The Politics of Revenge* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000), 29

[15] Ibid, 30

[16] Simons, 220

began to take a greater interest in developments in the Middle East, including in Iraq. Western leaders understood that cheap, easily accessible, and plentiful Middle East oil was vital to post-World War II reconstruction and the future development of Western economies. To this end, the US undertook several efforts, including the oil-for-security agreement forged by US President Franklin Roosevelt and King Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia, reinforcing the US position in the IPC, and attempting to break the British monopoly on Iranian oil. In light of the Cold War, the US viewed the Middle East as a region in which the USSR needed to be denied access, and as another front for containment. A series of documents, most notably George Kennan's "Long Telegram" and National Security Council Document 68 (NSC-68), touched on these issues. According to NSC-68, the "fundamental design of the Kremlin" was "the complete subversion or forcible destruction of the machinery of government and structure of society in the countries of the non-Soviet world and their replacement by an apparatus and structure subservient to and controlled by the Kremlin. To that end Soviet efforts are now directed towards the domination of the Eurasian land mass."[17] Thus, by implication, the USSR had designs on the Middle East.

In order to thwart any Soviet designs in the Middle East, the US sought to complete the encirclement of the USSR with military alliances by forming an alliance to link the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Southeast Asia Treaty Organization(SEATO). Initially, the US supported a British initiative to establish the Middle East Defense Organization (MEDO), together with France and Turkey. If the alliance was to have any teeth, Egypt was deemed to be vitally important. Egypt was "obviously the key" to the issues of the Middle East, said President Dwight

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[17] NSC-68, 10

Eisenhower.[18] This owed in part to its size, position, and due to its housing of the Suez

Canal, but more importantly, due to its new, charismatic leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser.

Having led an anti-colonial revolution against the British puppet monarchy of King

Farouk, and adopting a revolutionary, pan-Arab, and anti-imperialist stance, Nasser

appeared as the least likely candidate to join a western-led military alliance.

Despite these differences, there were some shared areas of interest which the US

hoped to exploit. Nasser's stance on Britain was very clear, yet his stance towards the US

seemed amenable. On all sides there was a realization that Nasser's revolution was still

young, and if it were to survive, he could ill afford to anger Britain, and the West at large.

He could not outright dismiss the west and, at least in the short term, would have to

acquiesce to its demands. Yet clearly the US was more willing to deal with Nasser than

Britain. This was made all the more easy by his very public condemnations of

communism. During the days of the United Arab Republic, Nasser passed a law which

outlawed the Communist Party.[19] Bearing this in mind, the US saw in Nasser a potential

ally in keeping the region free of communism. Furthermore, there were a large number of

Arabists in the State Department and CIA who believed that close relations with the

Arabs was in the interests of the US, and that Nasser was the key.[20] As the US began to

cultivate close ties to Nasser, the relationship began to hit a few snags.

The first snag came on 11 May 1953, when US Secretary of State John Foster

Dulles met Nasser in Cairo. High on Dulles' agenda was persuading Egypt to join

MEDO. Despite promises of US pressure against Britain, and aid, Nasser was

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[18] Roby Barrett, *The Greater Middle East and the Cold War: US Foreign Policy Under Eisenhower and Kennedy* (New York: I.B. Taurus, 2010), 15
[19] Ibid, 49
[20] Hugh Wilford, *America's Great Game: The CIA's Secret Arabists and the Shaping of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 54

uninterested by the proposal. Nasser asked at whom the defense pact was aimed, to which

Dulles replied, the USSR. While Nasser was anti-communist out of principle, he viewed

the US claim of a Soviet threat to the Middle East as unrealistic. Nasser asked Dulles:

> How can I go to my people and tell them I am disregarding a killer with a pistol sixty miles from me at the Suez Canal [i.e. Israel] to worry about somebody who is holding a knife 5,000 miles away? They would tell me first things first.[21]

Without Egypt, MEDO was deemed unfeasible, and was abandoned. This marked the

first step in the deterioration of relations between Egypt and the US. While the endpoint

had yet to be reached, Nasser demonstrated that he was no puppet, that would not submit

to the dictates of a foreign power on vital interests, and that Arab nationalism could not

be so easily co-opted to serve US interests. Nonetheless, the US remained determined to

create a military alliance in the Middle East. Rebuffed by Egypt, the US turned to Iraq.

Iraq was viewed as a prime candidate for a military alliance for two reasons. First,

Iraq's economic importance increased. In the early-1950s, large new oil discoveries were

made around Basra. In order to handle the greater output of oil throughout Iraq, the Iraqi

government turned to US firms such as Bechtel and Brown & Root to construct new

pipelines.[22] Second, much of Iraq's leadership were sympathetic with US views against

communism. As historian Adeed Dawisha wrote, "Iraq was the natural choice. With the

virulent pro-Western and anti-communist [Prime Minister] Nuri at the helm, particularly

now that he had pliant Parliament and muzzled press, there would be precious few

obstacles to the passage of such a pact."[23] Iraq's strongman Prime Minister Nuri al-Said

found common cause with America's anti-communist mission. Within his own country,

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[21] Barrett, 16

[22] Vogler, 36, 40

[23] Adeed Dawisha, *Iraq: A Political History from Independence to Occupation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 114

one of his greatest political rivals was the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), which, as historian Rashid Khalidi noted, was "one of the biggest and most active in the Arab world."[24] Since its inception in 1934, the ICP had been one of the most active parties in Iraq, boycotting British businesses, organizing unions and labor strikes, and pushing for improvements in the lives of the Iraqi masses. In January 1948, the ICP organized its largest strike to date. Over 3,000 oil workers rallied to demand higher wages at a pumping station near Haditha. When the IPC (Iraq Petroleum Company, not to be confused with the ICP) refused to meet their demands, the striking workers brought the pumping station to a standstill. After two weeks, authorities cut off food and water supplies to the station. After three weeks, the strikers decided to take their message to Baghdad, in what has been dubbed "The Great March." When the marchers entered Fallujah, the police intervened and arrested them.[25] In 1949, after the on-again off-again Prime Minister Nuri returned to his post, he unleashed a fierce crackdown against the ICP, ordering several of its imprisoned leaders be publicly hanged and left up for display.[26] While Nuri's crackdown dealt a severe blow to the ICP, it did not silence it, and the party remained active and influential until the ascendancy of the Ba'athists.

Nuri was seen as an ideal partner for the US, despite his human rights record. From the hangings of the Golden Square coup participants to the ICP hangings, it was perfectly clear how Nuri exercised power, yet this was not an obstacle for the US. Dismissively, Harold Glidden, a State Department analyst wrote in 1958 that "It was

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[24] Rashid Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis: The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009), 151
[25] Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 40-41
[26] Ibid

generally known for some years that the regime had little popular base: this is, however,

characteristic of Arab governments."[27]

Nuri did not have to be persuaded to join a western-backed military alliance.

Instead, he took the initiative. In January 1955, Iraq and Turkey entered an alliance called

the Baghdad Pact. Later in the year, Iran, Pakistan, and Britain joined as well. The US

had not joined, but pledged its support. Each country had its own political reason for

entering the Pact. Historian Charles Tripp wrote that "The pact thus served a further

purpose for Nuri al-Said: it ended the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930 without committing

Iraq to enter into another bilateral agreement. Nuri thereby hoped to retain the advantages

of the alliance with Great Britain (and indeed the Western powers more generally) whilst

at the same time avoiding the uproar which had followed in the signing of the Portsmouth

Treaty in 1948."[28] For the US, the Pact connected NATO and SEATO, fully encircling

the USSR.

The Baghdad Pact also sought to contain another political force, that of Nasser's

brand of Arab nationalism. Ever since Nasser's rejection of Dulles' overtures regarding

MEDO, relations between Egypt and the US began to deteriorate. In 1955, Nasser

attended the Bandung Conference, one of the first steps in creating the Non-Aligned

Movement (NAM). The US was opposed to the conference because it undermined the

narrative of a world split between US-led capitalism and Soviet-led communism. This

was soon followed by Egyptian diplomatic recognition of the People's' Republic of

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[27] Charlotte Morehouse, "Memorandum From Howard W. Glidden of the Division of Research and Analysis for Near East, South Asia, and Africa to the Director of Intelligence and Research (Cumming)", Department of State Office of the Historian, 16 July 1958. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v12/d120.

[28] Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq: New Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 140

China. Non-aligned states took a stand, refused to take sides, and reaffirmed their rights to exercise relations with whichever state they so desired. Nasser exercised that right when, in the same year, Egypt signed an arms deal with Czechoslovakia. The unprecedented move broke the British stranglehold over arms sales to the Middle East. As a soldier in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Nasser saw firsthand how Arab reliance on British arms had led to defeat, following a British Arms embargo.[29] While the Czech arms deal did not overhaul the Egyptian military into a formidable fighting force, it nonetheless set a precedent which undermined western control over the Middle East through arms sales. Perhaps most consequential was Nasser's decision to nationalize the Suez Canal. The move was prompted by the need to raise revenues for the construction of the Aswan Dam on the Nile River. Initially, the US, Britain, and France offered financial and technical assistance, but Egypt refused due to the conditions. Chief among those conditions was a demand that Egypt refrain from seeking aid from the USSR and Eastern Bloc, a condition Egypt viewed as a violation of its sovereignty. In a three-hour speech to the nation, Nasser unleashed Operation Dignity and Glory. With the utterance of the codeword "de Lesseps" (as in Ferdinand de Lesseps, the French engineer of the Canal), Egyptian security forces mobilized, bringing the Suez Canal firmly under Egyptian control.[30] Despite the fact that the US came to Egypt's rescue during the 1956 Suez War, pressuring Britain, France, and Israel to withdraw, the honeymoon with Nasser was over.

Faced with the dual challenges of communism and Arab nationalism, the US doubled down in its involvement in the Middle East. In January 1957, President Eisenhower announced the Eisenhower Doctrine. Under the Doctrine, any state in the

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[29] Ilan Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: One World Publications, 2007), 45
[30] BBC Suez A Very British Crisis, Part I

Middle East could request economic aid, military aid, or US military intervention "to

protect and secure territorial integrity and political independence of such nations,

requesting such aid against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by

international communism."[31] While not explicitly stated, the threat of Arab nationalism

was included as well, as was demonstrated a year later.

In 1958, US Middle East policy was put to the test. It appeared that the worst-case

scenario was coming true. In February, the first step was taken in uniting the Arab world

into one nation when Egypt and Syria merged into the United Arab Republic (UAR).

With growing unrest throughout the Middle East, western powers were fearful that more

states would join the union. In Jordan, where much of the population was supportive of

Nasser, spurred on in part by the Egyptian radio station *Sawt al-Arab* (Voice of the

Arabs), there was hope that Nasser would come to their support. In 1956, under immense

popular pressure, King Hussein dismissed John Glubb, the British commander of the

Jordanian military. Later that year, after Jordan's first parliamentary elections, Suleiman

Nabulsi was nominated by his party and by King Hussein to form a government. Nabulsi

went on an independence streak which proved too much for King Hussein and his US and

British benefactors to stomach. He proved receptive to Nasser, established diplomatic

relations with the USSR, and allowed the communist party in Jordan to operate in the

open. The following year, under pressure from his external backers, King Hussein

dismissed Nabulsi, and dissolved the Parliament.[32] With the renewed confidence given to

them by Nasser, many Jordanians took to the streets, calling for Jordan to unite with the

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[31] "The Eisenhower Doctrine, 1957", Department of State Office of the Historian, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/eisenhower-doctrine.

[32] Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 190

UAR. In the same year, Lebanon descended into civil war. In 1957, after buying his way into power with CIA money, Camille Chamoun was elected president.[33] The following year, after trying to force through an illegal amendment to the constitution to extend his term, Lebanon spiraled into civil war. Present among the groups fighting Chamoun were several pro-Nasser elements, calling on the UAR to provide support.

In order to contain the growing chaos, and potential for further Nasserist revolutions, the US gave greater military support to the Baghdad Pact, and midwived a proposed merger between the two Hashimi kingdoms of Iraq and Jordan. The aim of supporting the Iraqi-Jordanian Arab Union was to provide a counterbalance to the UAR. First, popular support for this initiative was nearly non-existent. Even Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri acknowledged that picking up Jordan's financial burden was unpopular from an Iraqi standpoint.[34] Nuri also pointed out that without financial assistance from the US, and without including Kuwait, the Arab Union was not economically viable.[35]

US policymakers grew increasingly hopeless when they realized they had no viable alternative to roll back the Arab nationalist tide short of direct military intervention. Then the worst case scenario came true. On 14 July 1958, a group of military officers led by Brigadier Abd al-Karim Qasim and Colonel Abd al-Salaam Arif launched a coup against the Iraqi monarchy. Coups were not unheard of in Iraq, much less the Middle East, but this one was unprecedented in its extreme violence. Qasim and Arif heeded the lesson of of the Golden Square, and eliminated any possible successor. As Said Aburish wrote: "To pre-empt any possibility of the monarchy being restored they

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[33] Khalidi, 195

[34] William Dale, "Memorandum of Conversation Macmillan Talks Washington, June 9-11, 1958", US Department of State Office of the Historian, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v12/d105.

[35] Ibid

made sure of murdering King Faisal II, Ghazi's son, towards whom the people felt affection because of his father. Killing a son to avenge the father's assassination was an ironic act of Shakespearean dimensions."[36]

The military finally got its revenge for Ghazi's murder, for the Golden Square executions, and for its humiliating defeat in Palestine in 1948. What was even more frightening was the popular outpouring in the Iraqi streets. After decades of subjugation, humiliation, and abject poverty, the reaction of the Iraqi people was unrestrained. The Iraqi people were very supportive of the coup, and were eager to take matters into their own hands as well. After his execution by the military, the body of the hated regent Prince Abdul Ilah was claimed by a mob, dragged through the streets, dismembered, and hung up in front of the Ministry of Defense.[37] Prime Minister Nuri was caught trying to flee Baghdad, disguised beneath an *abaya.* Said Aburish provided an account of what followed:

> Dressed as a woman, he feebly tried to face them with a pistol. They killed him, ran their cars back and forth over his body, buried him, then disinterred him and tore what remained into small scraps. His fingers and other parts of his body were paraded by people in the matter of a football trophy.[38]

Angry mobs proceeded to storm the Baghdad Hotel. Among the victims killed were a group of Jordanian officials dispatched to Baghdad to discuss the formation of the Arab Union. With their deaths, any hopes of creating a local counterbalance to the UAR were forever dashed. Qasim and Arif did not condone such spectacles of violence, but nor could they stop it, for such was the anger of the Iraqi people. The Iraqi people had gotten their revenge.

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[36] Aburish, 36
[37] Ibid, 38
[38] Ibid, 38-39

The 1958 coup sent US policymakers into a panic. Eisenhower remarked that "This somber turn of events could, without vigorous response on our part, result in a complete elimination of Western influence in the Middle East."[39] Secretary of State Dulles said that "Iraq today is the most dangerous spot on earth."[40] Every political element in Iraq that had been opposed to the monarchy, including communists and Nasserists, came into the open. The US believed that another Nasserist coup had just unfolded. Nasser did little to alleviate this fear. In fact, he was supportive of the coup, and believed its leaders would move to join the UAR. Shortly after the coup, he flew to Syria, and gave a speech at Aleppo in support of the Iraqi coup. He took the additional step of stationing a squadron of Egyptian Mig jets in Syria to deter any attempt at thwarting the coup.[41] Surrounded from both sides by Nasserist states, so the US believed, Lebanon and Jordan would fall imminently as well, and it was felt that military intervention might be necessary. The next escalation in the crisis was the US military deployment in Lebanon, and British deployment in Jordan.

Fearing that an Iraq-style coup was about to happen in his country, or so he told the US, Lebanese President Camille Chamoun evoked the Eisenhower Doctrine. Motivated more by seeking external support to prop up his tenuous rule in a midst of a civil than of a Nasserist takeover, Chamoun promptly demanded US military intervention, as well as the entry of the Sixth Fleet in the eastern Mediterranean within 48

[39] William Blum, *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II* (Monroe: Common Courage Press, 2004), 94

[40] Said Aburish, *A Brutal Friendship: The West and the Arab Elite* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 135

[41] Adel Darwish & Gregory Alexander, *Unholy Babylon: The Secret History of Saddam's War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), 19

hours.[42] The US obliged, and deployed over 14,000 Marines to Beirut. In Jordan, King

Hussein claimed to have discovered a coup plot within the army, organized by pro-Syrian

and pro-Egyptian elements.[43] After arresting over 40 officers, King Hussein requested

British military intervention to shore up his rule. Hussein was especially fearful after

watching his royal cousins in Iraq executed.

At the very minimum, the Anglo-American intervention was aimed at preventing

the fall of Jordan and Lebanon. In the worst-case scenario, it looked as if the US and

Britain were ready to strike Iraq. Indeed, invasion of Iraq was considered. Israel's Prime

Minister David Ben Gurion stated that if Turkey and Iran received US backing, the Iraqi

revolution could be crushed.[44] In a cable to US ambassador to Iraq, Walter John Gallman,

it was suggested that the US Marines in Beirut "might be used to loyal Iraqi troops to

counter-attack." However, Gallman continued, "No one in Iraq could be found in Iraq to

collaborate with. Everybody was for the revolution."[45] Not only did an invasion of Iraq

seem imminent, but so did a wider conflagration throughout the region.

Soon after, several events brought about a diffusion of the crisis. In Baghdad,

after a protracted argument with Arif, Qasim emerged on top. Arif was sympathetic to

Nasser, and wanted to join Iraq to the UAR, while Qasim maintained an Iraq-first policy,

and objected. Arif is said to have offered Nasser to kill Qasim, yet Nasser advised against

this move. Qasim then moved to alleviate western fears. In a meeting with British

Ambassador Michael Wright, Qasim assured the ambassador that the revolution was a

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[42] Allen Dulles, "Briefing Notes by Director of Central Intelligence Dulles", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 14 July 1958, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v12/d110.

[43] Ibid

[44] "Telegram From the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 15 July 1958, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v12/d114.

[45] Simons, 253

purely internal matter, and that Iraq had no intention of joining the UAR. He said that

Iraq would not interrupt the flow of oil, or interfere with foreign business interests, and

that there was no need to launch an attack from Lebanon and Jordan.[46]

In the US, cooler heads prevailed. The State Department urged caution, stating "in

our opinion any move by force from the outside into Iraq would meet with very little

Iraqi support and its success would be highly unlikely. Furthermore, since the signing of

the Mutual Defense Agreement yesterday, Nasser and the Syrians would promptly come

to the aid of the Republic of Iraq."[47] Further reports followed, giving the US more

optimism:

> Reports reaching us from Baghdad indicate that the new regime in Iraq (1) desires
> friendly relations with the West, (2) will maintain existing international
> agreements, (3) at least for the time being will retain membership in the Baghdad
> Pact, (4) will not nationalize the production of oil, (5) recognizes the UAR but is
> not joining.
>
> Although the new government came to power in an extremely bloody and
> completely illegal way, there can be no doubt that its popular support is far
> broader than that behind King Faisal. Furthermore, although the Republic of Iraq
> has indicated its plans to establish relations with the Soviet Union and other
> communist countries, Communist influence in the government appears so far to
> be limited[48]

The final reassurance came from a meeting between Qasim and Ambassador Gallman in

Baghdad. Qassim reiterated the points documented above, and told the ambassador "We

Iraqis want to be friends with the US."[49] With that, the crisis was diffused, for the time

being at least.

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[46] Said Aburish, *Saddam Hussein: The Politics of Revenge*, 41-42

[47] "Memorandum from the Director of Intelligence and Research (Cumming) to the Counselor
(Reinhart)", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 20 July 1958,
https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v12/d126.

[48] Ibid

[49] "Telegram from the Embassy in Iraq to the Department of State", US Department of State
Office of the Historian, 15 July 1958, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-
60v12/d116.

Tensions soon flared up once again, slowly but surely. Despite Qasim's assurances that Iraq wished to maintain good relations with the US, the offices of the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) and US Information Services (USIS) remained closed and inaccessible to US personnel.[50] US policymakers spoke among themselves of the increasing power of the communists. Qasim made clear his intent not to hand Iraq to the UAR, resulting in a bitter feud with Nasser. On this point, the US was reassured, but on Qasim allowing communists to operate openly and accepting their support, the US grew weary. Some analyses were more forgiving, with one stating that "Kassem must accept some communist support or stand alone against Nasser."[51] In another, more pessimistic analysis, Qasim was "the doop or the willing tool of the communists", or was too fearful of launching a crackdown and risking being overthrown.[52] The ICP was seen as a ticking time bomb. According to a February 1959 Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE), the ICP favoured a slow creep to power, as opposed to a sudden coup.[53]

The danger of a communist takeover was more than an abstract matter of politics and ideology. Buried beneath the jargon of fighting communism, US interests in Iraq were very clear. According to a State Department memorandum, "The principal Western

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[50] "Operational Guidance Concerning Iraq", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 18 February 1959, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v12/d162.

[51] "Memorandum of Discussion at the 392d Meeting of the National Security Council", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 23 December 1958, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v12/d155.

[52] "Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Rountree) to Acting Secretary of State Dillon", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 22 December 1958, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v12/d154.

[53] "Special National Intelligence Estimate: The Communist Threat to Iraq", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 17 February 1959, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v12/d161.

interest in Iraq (apart from denying the area to the USSR) is oil."[54] As with many

nationalist revolutions, there was a lingering fear of resource nationalization. This fear

had prompted the US to engage in covert operations against leaders such as Muhammad

Mossadegh of Iran and Jacobo Arbenz of Guatemala. Even measures short of

nationalization, such as simply demanding better terms under existing agreements, were

anathema to the US. It was this potential scenario in Iraq which worried the US. As was

stated in the 1959 SNIE:

> A Communist-controlled Iraq would also threaten Western access to Middle
> Eastern oil. Although we estimate that such a government might initially prove
> fairly reasonable with permitting continued Western access to Iraqi oil - in the
> interests of receiving continued revenue and of avoiding drastic Western response
> - it would at a minimum insist on substantial modifications in the terms and
> conditions under which Iraqi oil flows to the West. In any case the future of the
> Iraq Petroleum Company would be unpromising indeed - with ultimate
> nationalization likely.[55]

Indeed, events appeared to be moving in this direction, fitting neatly into US

predictions. In late-1958, the USSR signed its first ever arms deal with Iraq.[56] In

February 1959, after the resignation of six ministers, Qasim appointed six communist

replacements.[57] For the US, the final straw came in March, when Iraq withdrew from the

Baghdad Pact. Deprived of its founding member, the Pact was geographically divided in

half, and renamed the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO).

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[54] "Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Rountree) to Acting Secretary of State Dillon", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 22 December 1958, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v12/d154.

[55] "Special National Intelligence Estimate: The Communist Threat to Iraq", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 17 February 1959, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v12/d161.

[56] "Memorandum From Acting Secretary of State Herter to President Eisenhower", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 17 December 1959, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v12/d149.

[57] "Memorandum From the Director of the Office of Near Eastern Affairs (Rockwell) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Rountree), US Department of State Office of the Historian, 9 February 1959, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v12/d159.

With Iraq acting too independently of Western interests, the US sought out a strategy to contain and undermine Iraq, and even contemplated alternatives to Qasim. Among the elements identified as possible alternatives included nationalists, Baathists, and military officers.[58] Events in Iraq had led the US to shift its attention from the UAR to Iraq. Faced with a convergence of interests, Nasser and the US agreed to engage in limited cooperation to contain, if not undermine and usurp Qasim. "Nasser is the only acceptable source of outside support left to Iraqi Nationalist elements who may wish to move against the present regime," read a State Department policy paper. It continued: "Any accomodation with Iraq would, therefore, have to be in the nature of a limited experiment."[59] Nasser was more than happy to oblige.

In 1960, despite the trials and tribulations, and several violent conflagrations, Qasim was firmly in power. Part of this can be attributed to the broad support for Qasim from the Iraqi people. Unlike previous Iraqi rulers, Qasim tried, and in many cases succeeded in bringing improvement to the lives of ordinary Iraqis. Two weeks after toppling the monarchy, the Republican government abolished the *Tribal Criminal and Civil Disputes Regulation,* breaking the grip of the feudal tribal sheikhs over the rural population. Shortly after, Qasim implemented sweeping land reforms, putting a ceiling on individual land ownership, and launching a land redistribution campaign. By 1966, Qasim's land reform program granted land to over 300,000 families, many of whom had previously been landless and/or working as sharecroppers.[60] In 1960, in order to curb the explosion of slums in Baghdad, Qasim ordered the construction of *Madinat al-Thawra*

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[58] William Lakeland, "NSC Consideration of US Policy Toward Iraq", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 22 December 1958, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v12/d154.
[59] Ibid
[60] Adeed Dawisha, *Iraq*,180-181

(Revolution City) in the suburbs of Baghdad. Over 25,000 units of affordable housing were constructed, together with schools and hospitals, giving many of Baghdad's poorest inhabitants access to running water and plumbing, electricity, medical facilities, and schooling.[61] In order to continue the momentum of reforms, the Iraqi state had to obtain more money. To do so, it would demand greater say in the production and sale of its largest resource: oil.

Qasim's first move was to lend support to a multinational initiative to give oil producing states greater control over their oil reserves. In 1960, Venezuela and Saudi Arabia explored the option of forming a cartel with other oil-producing states. Qasim supported the initiative, and hosted a meeting in September in Baghdad to discuss the matter. Iran and Kuwait were also in attendance. The Venezuelan delegation put forth a proposal, and all members voted unanimously, creating the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).[62]

Qasim's next, more ambitious effort, was to bring Kuwait back under Iraqi control. Like King Ghazi and Nuri al-Said before him, Qasim revived Iraq's claim to Kuwait. In 1899, Sheikh Mubarak al-Sabah, the emir of Kuwait, signed a treaty with Britain, making Kuwait into a British protectorate. In 1961, Britain granted independence to Kuwait, withdrawing its forces from the newly-independent emirate. In the absence of the British, Qasim saw an opportune moment to revive Iraqi claims to Kuwait. At a 25 June press conference, Qasim made an offer to "liberate" Kuwait, claiming that Kuwait

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[61] Ibid, 181
[62] Said Aburish, *A Brutal Friendship*, 81

was "an indivisible part of Iraq" and "it is the Iraqi Republic and no one else which signs agreements for Kuwait."[63]

Amid the Kuwait crisis, Qasim took the additional step of partially nationalizing the IPC. With the passing of Law 80, all IPC concession territories not being exploited were put under the control of the state, while existing areas of production were to remain under IPC control. Qasim realized that full nationalization would lead to a shutdown of oil production, and thus sought to tread a fine line between state and popular demand for greater control of oil, and not fully alienating the companies of the IPC.[64] The US reacted with hostility, charging Qasim with a "unilateral violation of a major economic arrangement with Iraq."[65]

The US opposed the partial IPC nationalization for two reasons. First, the US consortium in the IPC still held the original 23.75 percent share first agreed upon in 1921, and intended to extract as much value as possible from its concession. Second, the threat to US interests posed by partial nationalization would have been magnified if Qasim were to successfully annex Kuwait and its enormous oil reserves. "If he can add Kuwait production (largest in ME) to that of IPC," warned National Security Council advisor

[63] Charlotte Morehouse, "Memorandum From Robert B. Elwood of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research to the Director of the Office of Near Eastern Affairs (Strong)", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 26 June 1961, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d66.

[64] "National Intelligence Estimate, Iraq", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 31 January 1962, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d183.

[65] "Memorandum From the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Talbot) to the Under Secretary of State (Ball)", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 18 December 1961, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d150.

Robert Komer, "he'll have stranglehold on ME oil."[66] To have one state have the ability to rival pro-US oil producers such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, was deemed unacceptable.

On the Kuwaiti front, the Iraqi military amassed in force along the border. It appeared that an invasion was imminent. Were an invasion to take place, it would be over in a matter of hours. The US was alarmed by the escalating crisis, but was unwilling to intervene. The most it was willing to do was to conduct reconnaissance on Iraqi maritime activity. "The reason for this," read a State Department memorandum, "is that there are twelve motor torpedo boats, some with partly Russian crews, at Basra at the moment and reports of Iraqi troops being sent to Fao which may indicate the intention of the Iraqis to on some maritime adventure."[67] Potential conflict with the USSR was not a risk US policymakers were willing to take. The British, however, were undeterred, and immediately redeployed to Kuwait.[68]

With the US hesitant to intervene, and the British too eager to intervene, it was the Arabs who played the decisive role in bringing the crisis to an end, most notably Nasser. Qasim hoped that by standing up to the British, he would enjoy widespread support from the Arab world. Quite unexpectedly and ironically, Qasim was met by condemnation from other Arab governments, especially from Nasser. Just as Qasim dashed Nasser's dream of expanding the UAR into Iraq, so would Nasser dash Qasim's hope of annexing Kuwait. Nasser was to do so by supporting Kuwait's successful bid to

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[66] Robert Komer, "Memorandum from Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs", 29 December 1961, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d156.

[67] Alec Douglas-Home, "Message From Foreign Secretary Home to Secretary of State Rusk", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 2 July 1961, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d77.

[68] "Message From the National Security Council Executive Secretary (Smith) to the President's Military Aide (Clifton)", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 30 June 1961, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d76.

join the Arab League, which was to condemn Qasim. On 20 July, the Arab League passed a 5-point Saudi-proposed resolution calling for Iraq to cease its threats and belligerency, for League members to support Kuwaiti entry, for a British military withdrawal, and for the deployment of an Arab League peacekeeping force to Kuwait.[69] Facing Arab League condemnation, and the deployment of a peacekeeping force manned largely by Egyptians right under Iraq's nose, Qasim realized he was almost completely isolated, and backed down. With the British withdrawal and replacement with an Arab League peacekeeping force, the threat of war receded.

After Qasim backed down, the US doomsday scenario of an Iraqi "stranglehold on ME oil" did not come to fruition. Nonetheless, under Qasim, there existed a powerful countercurrent to oil producers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia which, despite their membership in OPEC, remained generally accommodating to the US and its demand for low oil prices. Additionally, were Qasim's project to have progressed even further and been successful, it could set a precedent for other states to follow. Partial nationalization, it was feared, was a stepping stone to full nationalization. With US-Iraq relations at their lowest, if not lower than during the 1958 revolution, the US was eager to see Qasim replaced.

What remains unclear is to what extent the US worked toward replacing Qasim. Several academics and journalists, including Hugh Wilford, Tim Weiner, and Said Aburish, allege that in February 1960, the CIA engaged in a botched effort to assassinate Qasim. The source of this allegation is the 1975 Senate Select Committee report *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders*, which made mention of "a 'special

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[69] "Status Report on Kuwait Situation", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 24 July 1961, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v17/d89.

operation' to 'incapacitate' an Iraqi colonel believed to be "promoting Soviet bloc political interests in Iraq."[70] Many have interpreted this as an attempt to assassinate Qasim. However, Qasim held the rank of brigadier, not colonel. Whether this was a recording error, or whether this was a reference to another Iraqi official or to Qasim remains to be seen.

What is clear is that the US was exploring possible candidates to replace Qasim. One of the candidates the US took note of was the Iraqi branch of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party. On its face, this would appear to be an unlikely partnership, with Arab nationalism and socialism being anathema to the US. However, there were some common interests, namely hostility towards Qasim and his communist supporters. This fact was duly noted in a State Department document which identified the Ba'ath Party as a likely source of opposition to Qasim's cabinet reshuffle and appointment of communists.[71] This opposition was best demonstrated on 7 October 1959, when a Ba'ath hit squad which included a young Saddam Hussein ambushed Qasim on his commute through Baghdad. By almost all accounts, the assassination attempt was a dismal failure. Qasim survived the ambush despite two bullet wounds in the arm and shoulder. Several Ba'athists were killed or wounded, likely due to the crossfire from their fellow gunmen.

Despite their initial failure, the Ba'ath made another attempt to come to power. Unable to topple Qasim on their own, the Ba'ath entered into an uneasy alliance with Nasserists, Iraqi nationalists, and military leaders. On 8 November 1963, this alliance formed a cabal and launched a coup. Leading the coup was Qasim's former protege Arif,

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[70] Frank Church et al, *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders,* (Washington D.C.:US Government Printing Office, 1975), 181

[71] "Iraqi Cabinet Reorganization", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 9 February 1959, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v12/d159.

who was spared from a death sentence and released in 1961. As was expected by the

coup plotters, the coup was met with immediate resistance in the streets, from

communists and non-communists. With Qasim's government under siege, his most

fervent supporters demanded to be armed. Despite the dire situation, Qasim refused to

arm civilians and put them in harm's way. Despite Qasim's capture, resistance in the

streets continued. The new junta determined that if the resistance was to be crushed,

Qasim would need to be executed. Thus, Qasim was taken to a studio in Baghdad for trial

and execution. Qasim refused to play along with the charade of this kangaroo court.

Before being executed, Qasim shouted "long live the Iraqi people!"[72] The execution was

broadcast on a loop throughout the day, in order to eliminate any doubt among Qasim's

supporters that he was dead. In order to consolidate its gains and root out communists and

other opposition, the Arif junta unleashed the Ba'athists, who embarked on a series of

purges, kidnappings, death squads, and public executions. Among the participants of the

repressions was Saddam. Said Aburish details what transpired:

> Saddam Hussein, who had rushed back to Iraq from exile in Cairo to join the
> victors, was personally involved in the torture of leftists in the separate detention
> centres for the fellaheen or peasants, and the muthaqafeen, or educated class. And,
> tellingly, the eliminations were done mainly on an individual basis, house-to-
> house visits by hit squads who knew where their victims were and carried out on-
> the-spot executions. This explains the killing of seven out of the thirteen-man
> Central Committee of the Iraqi Communist Party - most after they were hideously
> tortured. The British Committee for Human Rights in Iraq, one of the few
> international groups to investigate what happened after the coup, confirmed all
> this in a 1964 report and compared the Ba'athist hit squads to 'Hitlerian shock
> troops'.[73]

For the US, the coup was a welcome development. According to Richard Murphy,

a former diplomat and Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian

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[72] Aburish, 57

[73] Aburish, *A Brutal Friendship,* 139

affairs, "The fact that there had been an enormously bloody put-down of the communists in Baghdad was surely welcome news in Washington."[74] What remains to be seen is to what extent the coup was influenced by US covert action. While the US did desire for Qasim to be overthrown, there is little in the way of declassified documents which shed any light on the US role in the 1963 coup. Clearly, the US had an interest in the coup succeeding. As it unfolded, the CIA and State Department judged that "if the coup is successful, relations between the U.S. and Iraq will be considerably improved."[75] While this does not prove the US played a central role in the coup, several sources are adamant that the US was deeply involved. According to James Akins, a former US diplomat stationed in Baghdad from 1961 to 1965:

> Personally, I considered it a real triumph of the CIA. They didn't have very many of them, there were alot of coup attempts that had gone sour, but this one worked and it was for a good cause. I think it was a very good thing that happened.[76]

Roger Morris, a former White House advisor, stated:

> There was a major involvement in the 1963 coup, and arms were flown clandestinely from Turkey. A lot of money, a lot of financial support, CIA planning was involved in the early stages of the coup. Now the Ba'ath was, of course, extremely eager to take power, but they did need American help.[77]

On the Iraqi side, former Ba'ath interior minister Ali Saleh al-Saadi remarked "We came to power on a CIA train."[78] In the absence of declassified material on the subject, and

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[74] Jacques Charmelot, *Saddam: America's Best Enemy,* directed by Pascal Vasselin (2005), Youtube.

[75] "Memorandum From Stephen O. Fuqua of the Bureau of International Security Affairs, Department of Defense, to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (Sloan): Iraq Coup", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 8 February 1963, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d153.

[76] Charmelot

[77] Ibid

[78] Tim Wiener, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (New York: Anchor Books, 2008),163

with only public statements from former US officials, what role the US played in the

1963 coup remains an open question.

Questions of CIA complicity notwithstanding, relations between the US and Arif

junta began amicably. Early assessments of the new government were optimistic. With

Qasim out of the way, and Nasser at odds with the US over the civil war in Yemen, the

new Iraqi government "[set] up a new power pole in the Arab world in fact competing

with Nasser."[79] Most importantly, with Ba'athist doctrine calling for a mixed economy,

"there is a wide scope for private enterprise."[80] The US was very eager to get back to

business, and took a number of steps to ensure the consolidation of the new government.

One such step was a series of arms sales. For fiscal year 1964, the US approved the sale

of 40 light tanks, 12 tank transporters, 500 heavy trucks, 15 large helicopters, 5 F-86

fighter aircraft, and 13 howitzers.[81] The aim of the sales was two-fold. The first was to

revive western arms sales to Iraq, previously severed under Qasim, and "with the ultimate

objective of having Iraq, and hopefully Syria, look to the West as the primary source for

necessary armaments."[82] The second was to assist the Iraqi state suppress the most recent

Kurdish rebellion. Although it was not openly acknowledged to be the goal by US

policymakers, what was acknowledged was that Iraq's most pressing military concern at

the time was the Kurdish rebellion.[83] Additionally, the Joint Chiefs of Staff anticipated

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[79] Dean Rusk, "United States Posture Toward Iraq", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 22 February 1963, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d161.
[80] "Interim Policy Guidelines for Dealing With Iraq and the Implications for the Middle East of the Recent Iraqi Coup", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 2 March 1963, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d174.
[81] "United States Military and Economic Assistance to Iraq", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 19 June 1963, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d276.
[82] "JCSM-623-63: US Assistance for Iraq (U)", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 15 August 1963, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d311.
[83] Ibid

the Kurds to object to US arms sales, yet it was determined that "it's more important to be responsive to the new regime."[84]

On the business front, the US encouraged its companies to resume business in Iraq.[85] "In particular,' read a State Department report, "US businessmen should be encouraged to seek opportunities in Iraq," which was "the second most populous and potentially powerful state in the Eastern Arab world after the UAR, and has a viable economy."[86]Additionally, the US began delivering food and agriculture aid via Public Law 480 (PL 480).[87]

Before the year was over, new developments would cast doubt on earlier optimistic assessments of the new Iraqi government. Ten months after the coup, prompted in part by the Ba'athist streak of violence, and internal power struggles, the military faction under Colonel Arif sidelined the Ba'ath. Some Ba'athists were exiled, while others, like Saddam Hussein, were arrested. Arif assumed power for himself, and the Ba'ath were driven underground once more. With Arif, "a supporter of Nasser", leading Iraq, the US feared a "resurgence of Nasser's influence in the Arab world."[88]

Making matters worse was Arif's overtures to the USSR. Although Iraq maintained a non-aligned posture, and maintained closer relations with the US after Qasim's fall, Arif sought closer relations with the USSR. Arif's Prime Minister, Subhi

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[84] "JCSM-197-63: US Assistance for Iraq (U)", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 9 March 1963, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d184.

[85] Dean Rusk, "United States Posture Toward Iraq", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 22 February 1963, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d161.

[86] "Interim Policy Guidelines for Dealing With Iraq and the Implications for the Middle East of the Recent Iraqi Coup", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 2 March 1963, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d174.

[87] "Memorandum From Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Kennedy", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 10 July 1963, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d293.

[88] "S-18, 895/P-3: (U) Military Take-Over In Iraq", US Department of State Office of the Historian, 18 November 1963, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v18/d363.

Abdul Hamed, suggested that he do so through Nasser. In May of 1964, the opportunity

presented itself. Arif was invited to commencement ceremonies commemorating the

beginning of construction on the Aswan Dam. Also in attendance was Soviet Premier

Nikita Khrushchev. Prime Minister Hamed organized the first meeting between Arif and

Khrushchev. After this meeting, Hamed explained:

> Iraqi delegations started going to Moscow to ratify new agreements. That's when
> the Americans felt that they were about to lose Iraq for good. We favored the
> Soviet Union over the United States.[89]

As Soviet-Iraqi ties expanded, US-Iraq relations hit a new low in 1967. In protest

to US support for Israel during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Iraq severed diplomatic

relations with the US.[90] In a report of a meeting with Iraqi Foreign Minister Adnan

Pachachi, a US diplomat paraphrased Pachachi as having said:

> He noted that in the Suez crisis of 1956 the United States had immediately and
> forcibly publicly stated that Israel would not be allowed any territorial gains. This
> time the United States had not done the same thing and had shown an utter lack of
> concern for the Arabs or considerations for their feelings.[91]

Once more, the US and Iraq became estranged. Although the US was content to

see Qasim executed, the changes which followed were not entirely to their liking. With

US policy during the most recent Arab-Israeli War, relations hit a low point. However,

this rift would not last long. New regional developments slowly brought the US and Iraq

closer together. A new phase in US-Iraq relations was beginning.

In this first phase of relations, the US developed a flawed framework for dealing

with Iraq, one which would last for the duration of the relationship. US interests were

clear enough: to keep Iraqi oil flowing, and to keep communism out. In the interests of

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[89] Charmelot
[90] Tripp, 188
[91] "Talk With Iraqi Foreign Minister Adnan Pachachi", US Department of State Office of the
Historian, 29 June 1967, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v21/d196.

US global power, and in the midst of the Cold War, the US believed it could influence and manipulate Iraq as it saw fit. Very much like their British colonial predecessors, the US adopted a divide-and-conquer strategy, believing it could to so in a controlled manner. With the growing rift between the Arif government and the US, it should have been abundantly clear that there were limits to US power in Iraq. Instead, what unfolded was a paradoxical phenomenon: the more the US tried to exert control over events in Iraq, the more unstable the situation became.

The Cynical Enterprise: The Rise of Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party

1968 marked a turning point in US-Iraq relations. Despite their deep misgivings about each other, the US and Iraq became increasingly reliant on each other as a means to achieve their respective goals. In July of that year, the Ba'ath regrouped and launched a coup, claiming sole power over Iraq. With Egypt's fall from grace following its defeat in the 1967 War, and Nasser's death in 1970, the Iraqi Ba'ath saw an opening to claim the supreme leadership role in the Arab world. In order to do so, Iraq embarked on an ambitious civilian and military modernization program, one which could be used to rally the Arab world behind the US. To launch this program, Iraq needed the input of the West, especially the US. In order to contain regional threats such as communism, the US needed Iraq. Although this new phase got off to a rough start, the relationship grew to the point that US policymakers spoke of a tilt toward Iraq. In the course of this uneasy alliance, the US engaged in a series of short-sighted and detrimental policies which led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, and destabilization of the region.

The tacit alliance which emerged between the US and Iraq was not an alliance in the traditional sense, but rather an alliance of convenience. Founded in Syria in 1947 by Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din Bitar, the Ba'ath Party developed a syncretic ideology combining pan-Arab nationalism with socialism and anti-imperialism. The Party utilized slogans such as "One Arab nation with an eternal mission," and "Unity, Liberty, Socialism." All of these ideologies were anathema to the US. However, the Ba'ath had a propensity for ruthlessness and violence, best explained by Aflaq: "When we are cruel to others, we know that our cruelty is meant to bring them back to their true selves."[92] These qualities were valued by the US when it came to containing threats such as communism or the spread of the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. As journalist Adel Darwish reported, the US viewed Ba'athists such as Saddam as "our man that we can actually use, he will be absolutely and totally ruthless."[93] Only as regional developments brought the two states together could the US harness this ruthlessness.

On 17 July 1968, the Ba'athists launched their comeback, when Ba'athist officers within the Iraqi military launched a coup. By all accounts, the coup itself was swift and bloodless. Unlike past Iraqi coups, the deposed leader was allowed to live. President Abd al-Rahman Arif was surrounded, and did not bother to fight back. Instead of killing Arif, the Ba'athists demanded that he surrender power and enter exile in London. The task of announcing the plotters' intentions to Arif fell on General Hardan al-Tikriti. After a few words of protest, Arif accepted the plotters' demands, but on the condition that he be allowed to have a last cup of tea with his deposer.[94] Soon after, the Ba'athists established the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) as the supreme ruling body of the Iraqi

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[92] Dawisha 215

[93] Charmelot

[94] Aburish, 74-74

state, and appointed Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr as chairman. In turn, Bakr appointed his

cousin Saddam Hussein as vice chairman.[95]

With his appointment to vice chairman of the RCC, Saddam set out to consolidate

the power of the new government through a reign of terror. As historian Adeed Dawisha

explained:

> As an Admirer of Joseph Stalin, Husayn well realized the value of the infamous
> 1930s purges to the longevity of the Soviet dictator's absolutist rule. Matching
> Stalin's ruthlessness and manipulative acumen, he spent the first two years
> consolidating his hold on power by promoting to positions of influence in the
> party and the security organizations men who were loyal to him personally, and
> eliminating potential rivals by uncovering real and imagined plots against the
> government.[96]

In one particularly gruesome and well-publicized episode, Saddam was to apply the

lessons of Stalin with a show trial of his own. In December 1968, the government

announced it had arrested 30 men which it claimed had been spying for Israel. Saddam

turned the episode into a public spectacle, filling the newspapers, airwaves, and

televisions with news from the show trials. The trials lasted until January 1969, when

fourteen of the suspected thirty were sentenced to death, and publicly hanged at

Liberation Square. The bodies were left suspended for over a day, with radio broadcasts

in Baghdad urging the public to witness firsthand "what happens to enemies of the

revolution."[97]

Initially, the US was at a loss as to how to react to the new regime. What was

clear from the beginning is that Saddam was increasingly becoming the real power

behind President Bakr. As vice president, Saddam was given wide authorities to appoint

officials within many of Iraq's ministries, which he exploited by slowly filling with his

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[95] Tripp, 197
[96] Dawisha, 211
[97] Aburish, 82

loyal confidants. According to former CIA analyst Stephen Pelletiere, "we knew of course from '68 on that he was the real power behind the throne, but we didn't attach any particular significance to him apart that he was a very ruthless guy, very tough."[98] Despite his ruthlessness, Saddam was also very pragmatic. According to former CIA analyst Judith Yaphe:

> There was a time through the early '70s when Saddam is a very visible presence to the kind of modernization and Westernization that many Iraqis were hoping for. He wore western suits, he talked about education, modernization, bringing in the West.[99]

By contrast, Said Aburish described Saddam's push for modernization as "to drag Iraq into the 20th century by its hairs, kicking and screaming."[100]

When it came to the Cold War divide, the Bakr-Saddam duo skillfully exploited the animosity between the two superpowers, playing both off of each other to extract as much aid as possible, on the best terms as possible. US policymakers effectively failed to devise a policy for the new government. US diplomat Richard Murphy stated that in debating whether or not to develop cordial or hostile relations, "at least superficially, it looks like we floated back and forth."[101] Similarly, in the coming years, the US pursued contradictory hostile and cordial policies simultaneously, further reflecting the lack of a well-thought out policy.

Initially it seemed that US attitudes towards the Ba'athists was more hostile than cordial. On the one hand, many policymakers and analysts recognized that Saddam's anti-western rhetoric was in large part aimed at a domestic audience, and that in reality he was more than willing to deal with the West. On the other hand, more skeptical

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[98] Charmelot
[99] Ibid
[100] Ibid
[101] Ibid

policymakers pointed out that whatever Saddam's intentions, Iraq maintained closer

relations with the USSR. In 1968, for example, Iraq turned to the USSR for two projects:

the development of the North Rumelia oil field, one of the largest in Iraq, and

construction of a deep-water port at Um Qasr.[102] For pessimists, most notably Secretary

of State Henry Kissinger, the final indicator of Iraq's stance came in 1972, when Saddam

and Bakr met Soviet Premier Aleksei Kosygin and signed the Iraqi-Soviet Treaty of

Friendship and Cooperation, paving the way for greater economic and military

cooperation. Perhaps the most alarming element of the treaty was the provision granting

the Soviet Navy ships port call rights at Um Qasr in the Persian Gulf.[103] As US energy

dependency in the Persian Gulf grew, it increasingly sought to become the dominant

power in the Gulf. With a Soviet toehold in the Gulf, the US lashed out at Iraq.

The US was not the only country to notice. Iran and Israel duly noted Iraq's

seemingly growing tilt toward the USSR. According to historian and analyst Trita Parsi,

"Iraq's power was still rising, and Washington, Tehran, and Tel Aviv viewed Baghdad's

pro-Soviet tilt, anti-Iranian orientation, and pan-Arab tendencies with great concern."[104]

Just as Iraq signed a Friendship Treaty with the Soviets, the same year, Bakr and Saddam

revived the unresolved issue of oil nationalization, first addressed by Qasim. Under

Qasim, only areas which were not being exploited were nationalized, leaving existing

areas of production to the Iraq Petroleum Company. Furthermore, many aspects of

Qasim's program had yet to be implemented, and the Iraq Petroleum Company remained

as a powerful force. When negotiations with the IPC did not produce the desired result,

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[102] Farouk-Sluglett & Sluglett, 124

[103] Kenneth Timmerman, *The Death Lobby: How the West Armed Iraq* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991), 12

[104] Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 54

Saddam and Bakr moved to completely nationalize the Iraqi oil industry. The IPC was

abolished and replaced by the Iraq National Oil Company (INOC), an entity which was

placed under the control of the state. According to historian Charles Tripp:

> Iraq was now well-placed to derive full benefit from the massive rises in oil prices
> which were to follow the Arab-Israeli war of 1973. These were also to place
> unimaginable wealth in the in the hands of a small circle of men who controlled
> the Iraqi state, providing them with a means of patronage that far exceeded
> anything available to their predecessors.[105]

The US policy debate remained confused, yet it had already been decided to

pressure and punish Iraq. The prospect of a powerful, centralized state with full control

over its most abundant natural resource, a pan-Arab orientation (albeit a lesser form

where individual Arab states rally behind a powerful vanguard state) and pro-Soviet tilt

was viewed as a threat. This analysis, as will be demonstrated later, was fundamentally

flawed. Saddam was more than willing to do business with the West, and in fact wanted

to reduce Iraqi dependency on the USSR. However, amid the debate in US policy circles,

the pessimist camp led by Kissinger concluded that Iraq had strayed too far, and had to be

pressured and pushed closer back to the West. In order to do so, the US joined Iran and

Israel in rousing the Iraqi Kurds into rebellion.

To launch the covert operation, Israel, Iran, and the US turned to Mullah Mustafa

Barzani, leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), the most powerful political

faction in Iraqi Kurdistan. For the US and Iran, the Marxist, Soviet-connected Barzani

made for an odd partner. During World War II, the USSR and Britain invaded Iran to

depose the pro-German Shah and secure the flow of Lend-Lease supplies to the USSR.

Immediately after the war, the USSR was reluctant to leave, and backed Barzani's effort

to carve out an independent Marxist enclave in northwest Iran called the Mahabad

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[105] Tripp, 208

Republic. Stalin hoped to use Mahabad as a buffer, as well as to prospect and exploit its oil.[106] This, and the Soviet refusal to withdraw from Iran led to a standoff with the US and Britain, in which the USSR backed down. After Mahabad was crushed by Iranian forces, Barzani fled to the USSR, where he resided until eventually settling in Iraqi Kurdistan. Now, despite his reputation as a "Red Mullah", Barzani found himself in the embrace of the US. In May of 1972, after a visit to Moscow, President Richard Nixon and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger stopped in Tehran on the way home. Among the topics discussed with the Shah was support for a Kurdish insurrection, which began shortly afterwards.[107]

Of course, no party involved genuinely wanted the Iraqi Kurds to establish an autonomous state. For the Shah, supporting the Kurds was a game with fire. A successful attempt to establish an autonomous state in Iraqi Kurdistan could set an example for Iranian Kurds to follow. Nor did the US want to see such a development take place. According to the final report of the 1975 House Select Committee on Intelligence (commonly known as the Pike Committee), the US aim was only to pressure Iraq and stretch its resources thin. Citing a CIA document, the Pike Committee reported:

> We would think that Iran would not look with favor on the establishment of a formalized autonomous government. Iran, like ourselves, has seen benefit in a stalemate situation … in which Iraq is intrinsically weakened by the Kurds' refusal to relinquish semi-autonomy. Neither Iran nor ourselves wish to see the matter resolved one way or the other.

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[106] Khalidi, 31
[107] Blum, 242

The Pike Report added to this by saying "this policy was not imparted to our clients, who were encouraged to continue fighting. Even in the context of covert action, ours was a cynical enterprise."[108]

Thus, the Kurdish insurgency dragged on, with no decisive victories between the KDP or the Iraqi government. When the 1973 Arab-Israeli War erupted, and Iraq deployed to the Syrian front, the Kurds saw an opportunity to launch a major offensive. Israel advised the Kurds to follow through, but the US objected, stating "we do not repeat not consider it advisable for you to undertake the offensive military actions that Israel has suggested to you."[109]

In 1975, the unexpected happened. On the sidelines of the 1975 OPEC summit in Algiers, the Shah pulled the rug out from under the feet of the Kurds, Israelis, and the US, by sitting down with Saddam. The Shah determined that he had put sufficient pressure on Iraq, and that the time was ripe for negotiations. Saddam agreed upon demarcating the Shatt al-Arab waterway along the *thalweg* (deepest point), thereby resolving the original dispute between Iran and Iraq. With the signing of the Algiers Accords, Iran ceased its support of the Iraqi Kurds. The agreement came as a shock to the US and Israel, none of which had been consulted by the Shah beforehand.

Now in a desperate situation, the Kurds pleaded to the CIA for help:

There is confusion and dismay among our forces and people. Our people's fate is in unprecedented danger. Complete destruction hanging over our head. No explanation for all this. We appeal to you and USG [United States Government] intervene according to your promises.[110]

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[108] Ibid, 243
[109] Ibid
[110] Ibid

No help was forthcoming. The US left the fate of the Kurds to the Iraqi military. The Pike

Report detailed what followed:

> Over 200,000 refugees managed to escape into Iran. Once there, however, neither
> the United States nor Iran extended adequate humanitarian assistance. In fact, Iran
> was later to forcibly return over 40,000 of the refugees and the United States
> government refused even one refugee into the United States by way of political
> asylum even though they qualified for such assistance.[111]

When questioned about this duplicity, Kissinger said "covert action should not be

confused with missionary work."[112]

The entire endeavor of rousing the Kurds proved to be entirely unnecessary as far

as US objectives were concerned. Although Iraq enjoyed close relations with the USSR,

it was by no means solely loyal to the Soviets, and was more than willing to work with

the West. After the Arab members of OPEC launched an oil embargo in protest of US

support for Israel during the 1973 war, global oil prices quadrupled, and Iraq found itself

flooded with record-breaking levels of oil revenue. This flood of revenue enabled

Saddam to finance his envisioned overhaul of Iraq, and created a veritable business

bonanza for foreign companies. By rousing the Kurds, the US restricted and

disadvantaged its own presence in the Iraqi market, to the benefit of its western European

allies. As Saddam explained to a group of Arab journalists in 1974:

> We have no fear of dealing with any state in the world, with the exception
> of the Zionist entity which we do not consider as a state and with whom we have
> no intention of cooperating, ever. The severing of diplomatic relations with the
> United States of America [after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War] was a political attitude
> based on principle … But we have no reservations about dealing with companies
> anywhere around the world, on the basis that guarantees respect of our
> sovereignty and ensures both parties a legitimate profit.

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[111] Ibid

[112] James Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 206

> Our country has large-scale projects, prodigious projects, and we have great ambitions. The idea that we might isolate ourselves from the world to live according to our own devices is foreign to us, and we refuse it categorically.
>
> Iraq today has contracts with American and West European companies. We are cooperating with numerous Western states, and with all the Socialist states, without exception.[113]

It should be noted that in June 1972, a mere two months after signing a treaty with the Soviets, Saddam flew to Paris and conducted a series of arms deals with France.[114] As much as the US was concerned about growing Iraqi-Soviet ties, the French arms deals proved that Iraq was far from a Soviet puppet. As was the case under Qasim, where even the most basic revision of terms within existing agreements on oil production were viewed unfavorably, the US viewed Iraqi relations with the USSR in terms of a zero sum game. Although US companies were already present in Iraq, they were fewer in number, and at a disadvantage to foreign competitors. For the remainder of the decade, US companies would sit in the shadows of their Western European competitors. However, they would not be far behind. For many of Iraq's projects to succeed, they would need access to western high-technology goods, especially those from the US.

In order to obtain US and Western technology for both military and civilian purposes, President Bakr, Vice President Saddam, and Saddam's uncle and future Defense Minister Adnan Khairallah, and Deputy Prime Minister Adnan Hamdani established the Strategic Planning Committee. The short-term aim of the Committee was to diversify Iraq's arms sources to prevent dependency on a single power and offset the dangers of an embargo. Its long-term aim was to develop Iraq's own arms industry, in the hopes of becoming the first Arab country to do so.[115]

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[113] Timmerman, 15
[114] Ibid, p. 13
[115] Ibid, 18

The first step in this process occurred in 1972, before the formation of the Committee, when Saddam Hussein traveled to Paris and met French President Georges Pompidou. Iraq wanted French arms and France wanted oil at concessionary prices. Under the deal reached during this meeting, France agreed to sell Iraq 16 Alouette helicopters and 128 Panhard armored vehicles.[116] The deal was small, but it was a first step in the growing Iraqi-western arms trade, and the first in a series of mutually reciprocated meetings between French and Iraqi officials.

In order to branch out further, and accommodate Iraq's growing arms imports, the Committee solicited the services of the Beirut-based Arab Projects and Development (APD). Run by Palestinian construction magnates Kamal Abdul Rahman and Hasib Sabbagh, the APD had no prior experience in the armaments industry, but it did have the necessary connections to begin to do so. The APD recommended that if Iraq were to be the most powerful state in the Arab world, if not the entire Middle East, it would have to acquire the arms necessary to achieve military parity with Israel, especially chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons.[117] In order to do so, the APD suggested that Iraq begin a massive drive to recruit the best and brightest engineers, technicians, and scientists in the Arab world and diaspora.

For Saddam, one of the most important aims of the Iraqi military was to develop a nuclear weapon. Early in 1975, Iraq turned to the USSR. However, the reactor the Soviets provided was small, and was not equipped to produce weapons-grade uranium. Rebuffed by the USSR, Iraq turned once more to France. Later that year, Saddam flew to Paris to meet Prime Minister Jacques Chirac. During the meeting, France agreed to provide Iraq

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[116] Ibid, 13
[117] Darwish & Alexander, 103

with two Osirak reactors, and provide assistance with construction and development.[118]

Shortly after, French technicians arrived at Tuwaitha, where construction of two reactors,

Tammuz I and Tammuz II, began. As is often the case with dual-use technologies such as

nuclear technology, there is always the concern of dual military and civilian uses.

However, Saddam was completely unambiguous about the purpose of the Tuwaitha site.

In an interview for the Lebanese newspaper *al-Usbu al-Arabi,* Saddam declared "the

agreement with France is the first concrete step toward the production of the Arab atomic

weapon."[119] Such red flags did not alarm the French, who continued to provide their

assistance to the project. Chirac's eagerness to conduct business with Iraq was duly noted

in the French press, who jokingly referred to the Osirak reactors as "O'Chirac".[120] Chirac

described Iraq as a "veritable bonanza."[121] Over the years, Iraq turned to numerous

foreign companies to assist in development. For "hot cell" radiation containment units

and laboratories, Iraq turned to the Italian firm SNIA Technit. For depleted uranium, they

turned to the West German consortium NUKEM. For computers and processors, Iraq

turned to the US hi-tech giant Hewlett-Packard. For a germanium detector, Iraq turned to

the US firm ORTEC.[122]

Obtaining nuclear weapons was a long-term pursuit. In the meanwhile, the APD

advised that developing chemical and biological weapons could serve as a stopgap.

Western Iraq was abundant with the phosphate necessary to construct chemical weapons.

All that was needed was technical assistance in constructing a plant, and the procurement

of precursor chemicals. Iraq had approached the USSR to request help to construct a

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[118] Aburish, 140
[119] Timmerman, 30
[120] Ibid
[121] Simons, 318
[122] Ibid, 319

chemical weapons plant. The Soviets refused. Next, Iraq turned to Imperial Chemical

Industries in London, purportedly to help develop pesticides. Alarmed by the Iraqis, who

sought to synthesize pesticides which were determined to be too deadly, and thus used

nowhere in the world for this purpose, the British declined to do business. Rebuffed by

the British, Iraq turned to the US company Pfaulder. After discussions with the Iraqis,

Pfaulder appeared ready to build a chemicals plant. During the course of discussions, the

Iraqis obtained blueprints for a chemicals plant. In 1978, citing dual-use concerns, the US

State Department denied an export license to Iraq. For the Iraqis, it mattered little.

Equipped with blueprints, the Iraqis turned to several European firms to build the plant

instead.[123] Thus, with blueprints from a US firm, the foundation of the Iraqi chemical

weapons program was laid.

In order to facilitate the Iraqi development program, and in order to ensure long-

term success, the APD recommended an overhaul of the education system. It was not

enough to merely import Arab scientists and technicians from around the world.

Although the primary emphasis of education overhaul was aimed at fueling the Iraqi

armament program, it would have beneficial ramifications for the civil sector as well.

Using Iraq's growing oil revenues, primary, secondary, and university education was

made free, and the number of students enrolled rose dramatically. According to historian

Adeed Dawisha:

> Between 1973 and 1980, student enrollment in secondary schools rose from
> 600,000 to almost a million, and at universities it almost doubled from 49,000 to
> 96,000. In the same seven-year period, the number of university teachers
> increased from 1,721 to 6,515. Thousands of Iraqi university graduates, armed
> with generous government scholarships, were arriving in West and East European
> capitals and cities in search of higher degrees.[124]

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[123] Darwish & Alexander, 140
[124] Dawisha, 220-221

Special emphasis was placed on opening education to girls and women, and opening up

careers which had historically been closed off or severely restricted to women. As more

Iraqi women received an education, the more they began to take part in the Iraqi

workforce. According to Dawisha, "by 1980, women constituted 70 percent of all

pharmacists, almost half of all teachers and dentists, and just under a third of all

physicians."[125] For the first time, women were allowed to enlist in the armed forces, and

enroll in the nation's military academies.[126]

One of the most notable achievements of the period was Iraq's literacy drive. In

1977, Saddam issued a decree to launch a sweeping eradication of illiteracy, making

literacy classes compulsory for all illiterate men and women.[127] In typical Saddam

fashion, failure to attend literacy classes could be punished with imprisonment, where

literacy classes were also compulsory.[128] Although seemingly harsh, the program proved

to be tremendously successful. By early 1980, almost 2 million Iraqis had been taught

rudimentary reading and writing, with more on the way during the coming decade. The

success of the literacy drive was duly noted by UNESCO, which closely studied the

program in its efforts to develop similar programs around the world.[129]

The second phase of US-Iraq relations saw the development of an alliance of

convenience. Although this phase began with deep distrust, demonstrated best by US

support for the Kurdish rebellion of 1972-1975, outstanding differences were

overshadowed by shared interests. In the Ba'ath government of Iraq, and especially in

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[125] Ibid

[126] Aburish, 114-115

[127] Ibid, 114

[128] Robert Fisk, *The Great War for Civilisation: The Conquest of the Middle East* (New York: Random House, 2005), 166

[129] Dawisha, 220-221

Saddam, the US saw a reliable and cutthroat tool to eliminate communism from Iraq, a reliable source of oil to the economies of the West, and a cash-strapped customer for arms and technology. In the US, Saddam and the Ba'athists found a partner to help reduce Iraq's dependence on the USSR for arms, and a source of arms and technology for its modernization drive. Once again, the US operated under the assumption that it could manipulate and control Iraqi behavior, regardless of the consequences for millions of people in the region. By supporting Saddam with arms and components for the Iraqi WMD program, the US entered into a de facto alliance with Iraq. By 1979, with a major development in the region, the US found a new use for Iraq.

The New Twin Pillars: The Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War

On 16 January 1979, the Middle East was forever changed. On this day, after over a year of unrest amid the Iranian Revolution, Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi fled Iran, paving the way for the establishment of the independent and anti-American Islamic Republic of Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini. With this new development, US-Iraq relations came to their closest yet. For the US, the Revolution saw the overthrow of one of its staunchest allies in the region, which acted under Nixon's "Twin Pillars" policy (the other pillar being Saudi Arabia) as a beat cop protecting US interests in the Persian Gulf. Iraq feared that the Shia Islamist Revolution could spread to its own predominantly-Shia population. Facing a common threat to their regional interests, the US and Iraq partnered up to contain Iran. When Saddam launched the Iran-Iraq War in 1980, the US stood with him every step of the way, providing financial aid, diplomatic cover, weapons,

and direct intervention in order to prevent an Iranian victory and the collapse of the Iraqi government.

The US-Iraq relationship of the 1980s came about in large part due to the failure of US Iran policy since 1953. US Iraq policy during this period represented an effort to contain the blowback of 25 years of trying to control Iran against the wishes of its people. Prior to 1953, many Iranians viewed the US as a neutral arbiter between its historic foes Britain and Russia (then USSR). In 1946, following the Soviet refusal to end its occupation of northern Iran (conducted jointly with Britain during World War II to unseat a pro-German Shah and facilitate the transport of Lend-Lease supplies to the USSR), the US condemned the Soviets and demanded an immediate withdrawal. Despite being a symbolic move, and the fact that the US was motivated more by the need to secure oil supplies for post-war reconstruction than benevolence, the action earned the goodwill of many Iranians.[130] After that, the US adopted a more heavy-handed approach toward Iran, one which inevitably backfired.

What followed was a systematic squandering of the goodwill of the Iranian people. The first and most pivotal action in this regard came in 1953, when the US and Britain launched a coup and toppled Iran's first democratically elected Prime Minister Muhammad Mossadeq. After negotiations with the Anglo-Iraqi Oil Company failed to bring better terms for Iran, Mossadeq moved towards nationalization. Refusing to compromise, Britain approached the US with the idea of organizing a coup. In order to bring in the US, Britain played on US fears of communism, and emphasized how

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[130] Christopher de Bellaigue, *Patriot of Persia: Muhammad Mossadegh and a Tragic Anglo-American Coup* (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2012), 117

Mossadeq allowed the communist Tudeh Party to operate freely. C.M. Woodhouse, the leader of the Iran operation, explained the strategy as follows:

> Not wishing to be accused of trying to use the Americans to pull British chestnuts out of the fire, I decided to emphasize the Communist threat to Iran rather than the need to recover control of the oil industry. I argued that even if a settlement of the oil dispute could be negotiated with Musaddiq, which was doubtful, he was still incapable of resisting a coup by the [communist] Tudeh Party, if it were backed by Soviet support. Therefore he must be removed.[131]

What followed was named Operation Ajax. Armed with suitcases full of cash, CIA and MI6 agents solicited the services of the criminal underworld and elements of the Shia clergy to create chaos in the streets, enabling a cabal led by General Fazlollah Zahedi to launch a coup and reinstall the Shah.

The next 26 years of the Shah's reign were mired by repression, torture, economic crises, and poverty. Through his quest to turn Iran into a regional superpower, his insatiable appetite for western arms, and over-the-top extravagance, the Shah ruined the Iranian economy, leaving most Iranians in poverty. As Egyptian first lady Jehan Sadat remarked to Anwar Sadat, "There will be a revolution. I can feel it. The rich here are too rich and the poor too poor without enough of a middle class to provide stability."[132] When discontent arose, the Shah resorted to the heavy handed tactics of SAVAK, his CIA-trained secret police, notorious for its use of torture, including techniques such as "whipping and beating, electric shocks, the extraction of nails and teeth, boiling water pumped into the rectum, heavy weights hung on the testicles, tying the prisoner to a metal table heated to white heat, inserting a broken bottle into the anus, and rape."[133] This led Amnesty International secretary general Martin Ennals to comment that "no country in

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[131] Bill, 86

[132] Andrew Scott Cooper. *The Oil Kings: How the U.S., Iran, and Saudi Arabia Changed the Balance of Power in the Middle East* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011), 304-305

[133] *Amnesty International Briefing: Iran.* (London: Amnesty International, 1976), 8

the world has a worse record in human rights than Iran."[134] Thus, it should have been no surprise that the Iranian Revolution was so single-minded in eliminating US influence and charting an independent course for Iran.

The Iranian Revolution was seen by the Iraqi leadership as an existential threat. The Ba'ath leadership believed that if the Iranian Revolution was left unchecked, it could spread, and take root among Iraq's Shia majority. In its ongoing territorial disputes with the Shah, the Iraqi state viewed the Shia clergy as a potential pro-Iranian subversive element, and thus tried to co-opt it into supporting the state. In 1969, when President Bakr attempted to persuade senior Shia authority Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim to condemn Iran over the ongoing Shatt al-Arab dispute, the Ayatollah refused. With the Shia clergy refusing to follow the dictates of the state, the state undertook several measures to silence the Shia community, such as expelling tens of thousands of "Iranian" religious students (many of whom were not Iranian), closing down Kufa University and confiscating its endowments, confiscation of property, and spreading rumors accusing Hakim's son of being an Israeli agent. These activities continued throughout the 1970s. Recitation of the Quran on television and public religious processions were banned, religious schools in the south were shut down, and several religious leaders were executed by the state.[135] These measures failed to pacify the Shia clergy, and instead provided the impetus for greater organization and violent resistance. When Ayatollah Hakim's successor Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr published a manuscript in defense of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Iraqi security services arrested him and his sister. Sadr was forced to witness the torture and execution of his sister, before he met the same fate. Such

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[134] Bill, 187
[135] Tripp, 202

gruesome measures only led to further escalation. In 1980, Sadr's Dawa Party struck back with a series of bombings and assassinations against state targets and officials, including a failed attempt to kill Deputy Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz at Baghdad University, which led to the deaths of several students.

Just as the Iranian Revolution represented a threat, it also represented another stepping stone for Iraq's ascendancy to the leadership of the Arab world. After the Arab defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Egypt's uncontested power began to diminish. With Anwar Sadat's pursuit of peace with Israel, culminating in the 1979 Camp David accords, Egypt was ostracized by the Arab world, and expelled from the Arab League. With Egypt's fall from grace, Iraq moved to fill the vacuum.

For Saddam, the Iranian Revolution and Camp David presented him with the opportunity to take the final step to establish his uncontested power. After over a decade of filling the ministries under his control with loyalists and cronies, Saddam was already the de facto leader of Iraq. Officially, however, Bakr was still president. Despite Saddam's growing power, and despite Bakr's reluctance to grant carte blanche to Saddam, Bakr still restrained Saddam on the rare occasion. Now, in the face of a growing Iranian threat, Bakr was seen as a liability. On 16 July 1979, Bakr resigned, citing health reasons, leaving Saddam to assume the presidency. In order to cement the transition, Saddam turned to his favorite tactic and launched a purge. Six days later, Saddam convened an assembly of Ba'ath Party leaders, announcing the discovery of a Syrian plot. In a very emotional display, alternating from puffing on a cigar to wiping tears from his eyes, Saddam read off a list of 68 Ba'ath Party members implicated in the plot. As the individual names were read off, plainclothes security officers arrived to drag each

individual from the auditorium. Those left in the assembly were whipped up into a frenzy, shouting slogans of support for Saddam. The whole affair was filmed, with Saddam distributing tapes of the proceedings throughout the party. The unlucky 68 were executed. To top off this grizzly affair, Saddam ordered some of the Ba'ath Party cadre to carry out the executions.[136]

Saddam was now the uncontested leader of Iraq. With no internal obstacles in the way, Saddam took the next, fatal step to claim the leadership of the Arab world, and set his sights on Iran. Fully aware of the fear harbored by most Arab states, especially among the Gulf Arab states of the spread of the revolution, Saddam hoped that the Arab world would rally behind Iraq in a war against the Persian menace. Furthermore, by launching a war, he hoped to settle a territorial dispute. Saddam believed that the demarcation of the Shatt al-Arab waterway under the 1975 Algiers Accords was unjust. Saddam took it further, and spoke of the need to liberate Khuzistan, the oil-rich southwestern Iranian province inhabited by an ethnic Arab population. With Iran still in chaos, cut off from American arms, and with the military in disarray following large-scale purges, Saddam believed that a war with Iran would lead to a swift victory. As tensions escalated, a final meeting was organized between Saddam and the Iranian foreign minister. Salah Omar al-Ali, Iraqi ambassador to the UN, hoped that war could be averted. As Ali recalled:

> When the meeting finished, Saddam asked me about my own impression. I said 'Mr. President, the war is not a joke, we will lose everything, and there is not any guarantee that we will win the war. The situation now, the problem [is] under your hand.' And then he didn't say anything. He kept silent about two or three minutes. And then he started to talk to me. He said: "Look Salah, prepare yourself and the United Nations. We will resume the war.[137]

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[136] Malik Mufti, *Sovereign Creations: Pan-Arabism and Political Order in Syria and Iraq* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 216

[137] Charmelot

Soon after, Saddam tore up the Algiers accords. On 22 September 1980, Iraq took the

fatal leap, and invaded Iran.

The Iran-Iraq War marked a turning point in US-Iraq relations, one which would

see the closest period of US support thus far. Acknowledging a convergence of interests,

many US officials, including National Security Advisor under President Jimmy Carter,

Zbigniew Brzezinski, advocated for embracing Iraq as a counterweight to Iran.[138]

Similarly, Richard Murphy recalled:

> The implacability of the hatred that the Ayatollah expressed toward western
> interests and particularly towards the United States, we were not hearing that from
> Saddam, and on the contrary what we were hearing was a universal Arab voice
> saying "support this leader."[139]

With the fall of the Shah, the US doubled down in an effort to defend its tenuous position

in the Persian Gulf. In January 1980, President Carter used his State of the Union address

to establish the Carter Doctrine, declaring the Persian Gulf an area of "vital interest" for

the US, and that any threat to these interests would be met by any and all means,

including military force.[140] The 1973-74 OPEC embargo and Iranian Revolution both

revealed how tenuous the US position was in the Gulf. Of course, the perceived threat of

Soviet forays into the Gulf, regardless of its merit or lack thereof, was one consideration,

but the top consideration was the emergence of a deeply anti-American Iranian

government with the potential to close the Strait of Hormuz. Thus, the Iran-Iraq War was

welcomed by the US, even tacitly encouraged. According to Brzezinski aide Gary Sick:

> Brzezinski was letting Saddam assume that there was a U.S. green light for his
> invasion of Iran, because there was no explicit red light. But to say the U.S.

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[138] Timmerman, 75

[139] Charmelot

[140] Howard Teicher & Gayle Radley Teicher, *Twin Pillars to Desert Storm: America's Flawed Vision in the Middle East From Nixon to Bush* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1993), 78

planned and plotted in advance is simply not true. Saddam had his own reasons for invading Iran, and they were sufficient.[141]

With the Carter administration on its way out, the task of forming a more concrete Iraq policy fell on the next administration.

Up to 1981, events in the war unfolded in Iraq's favor. Since the start of the war, the Iranian cities of Khorramshahr, Mehran, Ahvaz, Susangerd, and the surrounding areas fell to Iraqi forces. Iran's disorganized military failed to stem the Iraqi onslaught. With the war going in Iraq's favor, with its military amply supplied by the USSR and France, and with its foreign reserves largely intact, US assistance was not necessary at this point. However, the Reagan administration understood that this could change at any moment, and if it did, the US should be in a position to prevent an Iraqi defeat. "We now have a greater convergence of interests with Iraq than at any time since the revolution since 1958," wrote Middle East expert William Eagleton in a State Department telegram, adding "on Iran our views largely converge."[142]

That same year, the US began sending out diplomatic feelers to Iraq. Although the US engaged diplomatically with Iraq, albeit indirectly and unofficially, and US companies did business in Iraq, both countries had not enjoyed formal relations since 1967. Complicating matters further was the 1979 decision to list Iraq on the list of state sponsors of terrorism for its support for organizations such as the Abu Nidal group. In the wake of Yasser Arafat's peace overtures towards Israel, most famously his 1974 speech at the UN, Abu Nidal and hundreds of followers broke off from the PLO and joined the Palestinian "rejectionist" camp, vowing to continue the armed struggle. Unlike the PLO,

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[141] Timmerman, 76-77

[142] William Eagleton, "Department of State Telegram: Prospects for DAS Draper's Visit to Baghdad", April 1981, National Security Archive, 2

Abu Nidal's tactics centered almost exclusively around terrorism, opting to attack Israeli and dissident targets around the world, while making next to no contributions on the battlefield. Seeking influence in the rejectionist camp, and to use the group as a covert proxy, Iraq allowed Abu Nidal to move his headquarters to Baghdad.[143] Despite these obstacles, the Reagan administration launched the first step of a rapprochement between the two governments. In October 1981, detailing his correspondence with Iraqi Foreign Minister Saadoun Hammadi, Secretary of State Alexander Haig wrote that "the United States considers Iraq an important country, which had been carrying out an ambitious economic development program and which has the capacity to influence major trends in the region."[144] As would be demonstrated later, America's interest in Iraq's "economic development program" would be to secure business for US companies, and the "major trend" that concerned the US the most was the outcome of the war. Shortly after, Haig received a warm response from Saadoun.[145]

The Haig-Saadoun correspondence was soon followed by a series of meetings between US and Iraqi officials. During the first meeting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs Morris Draper led a US delegation to Baghdad to meet with an Iraqi Foreign Ministry delegation led by Muhammad al-Sahhaf. Draper reiterated Haig's statements about the US recognizing Iraq's ability to influence major regional trends in the region. A State Department telegram paraphrased Sahhaf as having said "a formal resumption in diplomatic relations would not be possible until the U.S. altered its basic Middle East policies", especially its policy toward the Palestine-Israel conflict. Despite

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[143] Patrick Seale, *Abu Nidal: A Gun For Hire* (New York: Random House, 1992), 76
[144] "Department of State Telegram, Subject: Secretary's Message to Iraqi Foreign Minister", April 1981, National Security Archive, 1
[145] Saadoun Hammadi, letter from Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs to US Secretary of State Alexander Haig, 15 April 1981, National Security Archive, 1

these outstanding differences, Sahhaf expressed a desire to engage in further talks on a resumption of relations.[146] In the next meeting, Draper led a US delegation to meet intelligence chief Zuhair al-Omar. According to Draper, the meeting "also provided an opportunity for me to make a strong pitch for the U.S. company bidding on the metro project."[147] The next meeting proved to be the most important, when US officials met with Tariq Aziz, head of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC). This marked the highest-level meeting between US and Iraqi officials since the break in relations in 1967. Thus, according to Eagleton, "with the opening of this contact, we are in a position to directly communicate with the leadership should we have any sensitive or particularly important message to convey."[148]

Amid these meetings, US-Iraq relations had yet to be formally resumed. Thus far, US support for Iraq in the war effort had been confined to limited intelligence sharing on a non-attributable basis. In late 1981, President Ronald Reagan signed a secret finding, authorizing the CIA to pass along intelligence to Iraq, using Jordan and Saudi Arabia as intermediaries.[149] However, this was soon to change, and US assistance to Iraq would increase. In the latter half of 1981, the Iraqi offensive stalled. The swift and easy victory that Saddam counted on was not to be. Saddam woefully underestimated the ability of Iran to reorganize and mount a defense. Kenneth Timmerman wrote that "instead of toppling that regime, the Iraqi invasion propped it up. Even the pro-monarchists in the

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[146] "Department of State Telegram, Subj: Meetings in Baghdad With Foreign Minister Hammadi", April 1981, National Security Archive, 2-3

[147] "Department of State Telegram, Subject: Meeting With Iraqint Chief Al-Omar", April 1981, National Security Archive, 2

[148] "Telegram, Subject: Meeting With Tariq Aziz", May 1981, National Security Archive, 1, 6

[149] David Crist, *The Twilight War: The Secret History of America's Thirty Year Conflict With Iran* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 102

Iranian air force closed ranks in defense of their homeland."[150] By 1982, Iranian forces

had managed to expel Iraqi forces from most of the territory they had occupied. In the

process, over 40,000 Iraqi troops had fallen into Iranian hands as prisoners of war.[151] In

response, Saddam offered a ceasefire. The Iranian leadership debated what to do next.

David Crist detailed the debate that followed:

> A divided Iranian leadership debated its next steps in the war. No one advocated accepting the ceasefire suddenly offered by Saddam Hussein. Ayatollah Khomeini's son Ahmed Khomeini, as well as the chief of staff of the army, pressed for an aggressive offensive to take Basra, overthrow Saddam Hussein, and establish an Islamic state within Iraq. But president and future supreme leader Seyed Ali Khamenei, foreign minister Ali Akbar Velayati, and the pragmatic speaker of the parliament Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, were less sanguine about invading proper. They argued for seeking punitive reparations and ending Saddam Hussein's ability to threaten the revolution. The chief of the general staff, General Zahir Nejad, opposed the invasion because he feared that the international community would see Iran as the antagonist and not the victim of aggression. Ayatollah Khomeini lay somewhere in between the two views. He deeply wanted to overthrow the Baathist regime and spread the Islamic Revolution, but he shared General Nejad's concerns about Iran being perceived as the aggressor. The supreme leader preferred to achieve Saddam Hussein's ouster without an invasion of Iraq.[152]

Ultimately, Khomeini was swayed into continuing the war. "The road to Jerusalem lay

through Karbala", Khomeini declared, spurred on by chants of "War! War until

victory!".[153] Iranian forces pushed into Iraq, reaching the outskirts of Basra by summer of

1982.

Even before the Iranians decided to push into Iraq, the rout of Iraqi forces alarmed

Washington. Already, Iraq had made requests via Saudi Arabia and Jordan for further US

assistance.[154] Several Arab leaders, including Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, warned of the

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[150] Timmerman, 82

[151] Tripp, 235

[152] Crist, 94

[153] Ibid

[154] Teicher & Teicher, 178

catastrophic consequences of an Iraqi defeat.[155] Anticipating the need to provide Iraq

with greater assistance in the war, the Reagan administration removed Iraq from the list

of state sponsors of terrorism.[156] Once Iranian forces crossed the border into Iraq, and

reached the outskirts of Basra, the Reagan administration decided to expand its

intelligence sharing operation. US satellites identified several weak points along the Iraqi

defense lines. Similarly, Iranians had identified the weak points, and amassed their forces

to strike. According to National Security Council advisor for Near East affairs Howard

Teicher:

> The strategic Baghdad-Basra road appeared to be the target. If the Iranians could
> cut the road, many analysts concluded, Iraqi forces along the front could be
> routed, bringing about the collapse of Iraq and the victory of Iran. In such
> circumstances, Iranian forces could march on Baghdad, intent on eliminating
> Saddam Hussein and imposing a fundamentalist regime answerable to Iran.[157]

Using Saudi Arabia and Jordan as intermediaries, the US offered to transmit this

intelligence to Iraq. However, this time, the offer was taken a step further. The US

offered to dispatch an intelligence officer to Baghdad to brief the Iraqis of the

vulnerabilities in their defensive positions. The Iraqis accepted the full package, and soon

after, received a US briefing, complete with satellite images and maps, recommending

adjustments to the Iraqi defenses. Several weeks later, when the Iranian offensive

commenced, the Iraqis successfully fought off the Iranians, imposing heavy casualties.[158]

As US support for Iraq grew, US policymakers began to debate the increasingly

farcical policy of neutrality in the war. According to a 1984 Senate Foreign Relations

Committee report: "Since 1982, when the Iraqis agreed to negotiate without conditions,

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[155] Ibid

[156] "Department of State Telegram, Subject: De-Designation Of Iraq As Supporter Of International Terrorism", February 1982, National Security Archive, 1-4

[157] Teicher & Teicher, 206

[158] Ibid, 207

United States policy has tilted toward Iraq. The United States has taken a number of steps to shore up Iraq and forestall an Iranian victory."[159] According to Philip Wilcox, a State Department liaison to the CIA:

> We did indeed tilt toward Iraq. We provided Iraq with intelligence, took Baghdad off the list of state sponsors of terrorism, and viewed positively comments from Saddam Hussein suggesting that he supported an Arab-Israeli peace process. Many began to view Iraq optimistically as a potential factor for stability and Saddam Hussein as a man with whom we could work.[160]

One of the most revealing sources on the growing US tilt toward Iraq is a State Department memorandum from October 1983. According to the document, two issues called into question "whether this policy [of neutrality] continues to best serve our objectives." The two changes were "the Iranian strategy of bringing about the Iraqi regime's political collapse through military attrition coupled with financial strangulation seems to be slowly having an effect." In order to alleviate Iraq's economic woes, the US encouraged Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states (Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar) to persuade Iran's ally Syria to reopen a pipeline running from Iraq, as well as authorized US firms to assist in the construction of an Iraqi pipeline running through Saudi Arabia to the Red Sea. In effect, the document concluded: "Our policy of strict neutrality has already been modified, except for arms sales, since Iran's forces crossed into Iraq in the summer of 1982. The steps we have taken toward the conflict since then have progressively favored Iraq."[161]

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[159] Charles Percy, et al, *War in the Gulf: A Staff Report Prepared for the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984), 1
[160] Wiener, 492
[161] Nicholas Veliotes, Jonathan Howe, "US State Department Information Memorandum, Iran-Iraq War: Analysis of Possible U.S. Shift From Position of Strict Neutrality", 7 October 1983, National Security Archive, 2-3, 7

As Iraq's economy teetered, the US provided economic aid which allowed Iraq to sustain its war effort. Due to the war, Iraq's ability to produce and export oil had fallen precipitously. In 1982, Iran's ally Syria closed the Banias pipeline, while the Iranian Air Force bombed the oil terminal at Fao. Iraqi oil revenues fell from $26 billion in 1980 to $9 billion in 1982. Falling oil revenues, coupled with war expenditures, led to a drop in foreign reserves from $30 billion in 1980 to $3 billion in 1983. To cover the deficit, Iraq increasingly turned to foreign loans, especially from the Gulf Arab states. By April 1983, Iraq's foreign debt stood at $25 billion.[162] Facing their own financial woes amidst low global oil prices, Iraq's Gulf Arab creditors proved reluctant and unwilling to provide further assistance. Without a source of additional funds, the ability of Iraq to sustain the war effort was in jeopardy. Thus far, Saddam had managed to ensure public support, or at least acquiescence to the war, by pursuing a policy of "guns *and* butter."[163] With the amenities of everyday life still available in abundance, most Iraqis, with the exception of frontline cities such as Basra, and the occasional Iranian air raid as far as Baghdad, quality of life had remained largely unaffected. With Iraq's dire economic predicament, this was bound to change. To alleviate the situation, the US extended a line of credit via the Commodities Credit Corporation (CCC). Under the CCC, the US government encourages private banks to offer loans to foreign states and companies to buy vital commodities such as food. In order to incentivize private banks to give loans, the US government acts as a guarantor against default. Should a recipient default, the US government steps in to pay the banks, while the recipient must then make payments to the US government. According to Kenneth Timmerman: "This is how the U.S. government

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[162] Aburish, 235
[163] Timmerman, 138

came to Saddam's rescue. U.S. food credits and government-backed loans allowed

Saddam to devote his remaining cash resources to the war against Iran."[164]

The tilt toward Iraq became more evident as US officials suggested an

increasingly accommodating stance towards Iraq's demand for arms and technology.

Although Iraq had successfully thwarted the Iranian offensive at Basra, Iranian forces

remained deeply entrenched on the outskirts of the city, poised to renew offensive

operations. In order to assist Iraq in bringing about an Iranian rollback, Ambassador

Eagleton suggested "we can selectively lift restrictions on third-party transfers of U.S.-

licensed military equipment to Iraq [...] we go ahead and do it through Egypt."[165]

According to NSC advisor Teicher, Iraq received arms from Egypt via a US program

known as "Bear Spares." Under the Bear Spares program, "the United States made sure

that spare parts and ammunition for Soviet or Soviet-style weaponry were available to

countries which sought to reduce their dependence on the Soviets for defense needs."[166]

Egypt, replacing its arsenal with American weaponry after Sadat's reorientation toward

the West, readily transferred much of its Soviet-manufactured surplus to Iraq. According

to Teicher, the US engaged in other third-party transfer agreements with suppliers of non-

Soviet arms, including the supplying of cluster bombs from Chilean arms dealer Carlos

Cardoen.[167]

Iraq would use its western assistance to attempt a breakthrough on the battlefield.

In February 1983, amid an impending Iranian offensive, the Iraqis issued a threat: "The

invaders should know that for every harmful insect there is an insecticide capable of

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[164] Ibid, 130-131, 138

[165] Ibid, 139

[166] United States of America v. Howard Teicher, United States District Court Southern District of Florida, 5

[167] Ibid, 6

annihilating it whatever their number and that Iraq possesses this annihilation

insecticide."[168] One of the earliest recorded cases of Iraqi chemical weapons use occured

on 9 August, when Iraqi planes dropped chemical munitions in northwestern Iran,

injuring over 50 Iranian combatants. This was followed in October when Iraqi artillery

units fired at least 20 chemical munitions at Iranian forces north of Panjwin, in northeast

Iraq.[169] By November, the State Department reported "what appears to be Iraq's almost

daily use of CW."[170] US reaction, as much of the world's reaction, was remarkably

muted. In fact, one State Department telegram attempted to deflect criticism and portray

Iran as the guilty party:

> While condemning Iraq's resort to chemical weapons, the United States also calls
> on the Government of Iran to accept the good offices provided by a number of
> countries and international organizations to put an end to the bloodshed. The
> United States finds the present Iranian regime's intransigent refusal to deviate
> from its avowed objective of eliminating the legitimate government of
> neighboring Iraq to be inconsistent with the accepted norms of behavior among
> nations and the moral and religious basis which it claims.[171]

The muted US response was not without cause. Calling attention to Iraqi chemical

weapons use might have also brought attention to the role that US companies and those

of America's western allies played in assisting the development of the Iraqi chemical

weapons program, making for an embarrassing political scandal. In November 1983, the

State Department noted that "we also know that Iraq has acquired a CW production

capacity, primarily from Western firms, including possibly a U.S. foreign subsidiary."[172]

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[168] "Department of State Telegram: Iraqi Warning RE Iranian Offensive", February 1984, National Security Archive, 1
[169] "Department of State: INA Reports Iraqi Regime Using Chemical Weapons to Stop Val-Fajr IV", 22 October 1983, National Security Archive, 1
[170] Jonathan Howe, "Department of State Information Memorandum: Iraq Use of Chemical Weapons", 1 November 1983, National Security Archive, 1
[171] "Department of State, Press Statement: Iraq's Use of Chemical Weapons", 4 March 1984, 3
[172] Howe, 1

According to the 1992 Riegle Report by the US Senate, the US provided extensive

assistance, not just with chemical weapons, but biological weapons and ballistic missiles:

> The United States provided the Government of Iraq with "dual use" licensed
> materials which assisted in the development of Iraqi chemical, biological, and
> missile-system programs, including: chemical warfare agent precursors; chemical
> warfare agent production facility plans and technical drawings (provided as
> pesticide production facility plans); chemical warhead filling equipment;
> biological warfare related materials; missile fabrication equipment; and missile-
> system guidance equipment.[173]

Despite these developments, and continued Iraqi use of chemical weapons, US-

Iraq relations continued to develop without impediment. Once more the US reiterated that

it "would regard any major reversal of Iraq's forces as a strategic defeat for the west."[174]

In December, the US proceeded with two high-level meetings with the highest levels of

the Iraqi state thus far. In the first meeting, Reagan presidential envoy Donald Rumsfeld

met with Tariq Aziz, where both sides expressed their common interests: "Peace in the

Gulf. Keeping Syria and Iran off balance and less influential. And promoting Egypt's

reintegration in the Arab world."[175] In the next meeting, Rumsfeld met with Saddam

Hussein. Rumsfeld wrote that as an independent and non-aligned state, "it was incorrect

and unbalanced to have relations with the Soviet Union and not the US." Rumsfeld also

conveyed Iraq's interest in accepting US assistance to construct oil pipelines to

circumvent the Persian Gulf.[176]

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[173] Donald Riegle Jr., Alfonse D'Amato, *US Chemical and Biological Warfare-Related Dual-Use Exports to Iraq and the Possible Impact on the Health Consequences of the Persian Gulf War,* (United States Senate, 1994), 5

[174] "Department of State Telegram: Talking Points for Amb Rumsfeld's Meeting With Tariq Aziz and Saddam Hussein", December 1983, National Security Archive, 2

[175] "Department of State: Rumsfeld One-On-One Meeting With Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz", December 1983, National Security Archive, 1

[176] "Department of State Telegram: Rumsfeld Mission: December 20 Meeting With Iraqi President Saddam Hussein", December 1983, National Security Archive, 2, 5, 15

Closer diplomatic relations paved the way for a deepening in economic relations. Despite the costs of the war, Saddam remained determined to continue his development program. In 1984, according to a State Department memorandum, Iraq had entered into agreements or was in the process of implementing existing agreements with the following US companies: Westinghouse, General Electric, Bechtel, Halliburton, Deleuw Cather, Midland International, Howe-Baker Engineers, NCR, Combustion Engineering, Bell Helicopter, and Lockheed. The list of projects included: power plants, the Baghdad Metro, the Iraq-Jordan pipeline, oil field equipment, a linear alkyl benzene plant, a turnkey ammonium storage plant, an antibiotics plant, and civilian ambulance helicopters.[177] In December 1983, Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Richard Murphy suggested that the US Export-Import (Exim) Bank provide loans to support Iraqi infrastructure projects.[178]

Some of these contracts, such as the ammonium plant and antibiotic plant, should have aroused concerns over exporting dual-use technology, yet no scrutiny was forthcoming. For example, when asked by the House Foreign Affairs Committee if the sale of 2,000 five-ton trucks to Iraq were for military use, a US official stated "we presumed this was Iraq's intention, and had not asked."[179] Increasingly, the policy of dual-use exports to Iraq was to ask no questions.

Most alarming, the policy of asking no questions applied to the export of nuclear technology as well. In May of 1984, the US launched a policy review for the sale of

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[177] "Memorandum to the Board of Directors Africa and Middle East Division, Country Review and Recommendations for Eximbank's programs (Iraq), 21 February 1984, National Security Archive, 2, 3, 5

[178] Richard Murphy, "Department of State: EXIM Bank Financing For Iraq", 24 December 1983, National Security Archive, 1-3

[179] "Department of State: Notifying Congress of truck sale", 5 March 1984, National Security Archive, 1

technology to Iraqi nuclear entities. The logic went as follows: "once the door was

opened to dual-use items being approved to non-nuclear Iraqi entities, it makes no sense

to deny them to nuclear entities."[180] The fact that Iraq had nuclear weapons aspirations

was well-known to the US government. In June 1983, the CIA published a National

Intelligence Estimate, which how "Saddam Husayn appealed for international assistance

to help the Arabs acquire nuclear weapons as a deterrent to Israel." In pursuit of this goal,

Iraq sought the cooperation of the USSR to develop a research and development program,

French assistance to construct the Osirak reactors at Tuwaitha, and lab technology from

Italy to develop the complete fuel cycle for extracting plutonium. Despite setbacks, most

notably the 1981 Israeli airstrike at the Tuwaitha site, Iraq remained determined to

develop a nuclear weapon.[181] These warnings went unheeded, and US exports to Iraqi

nuclear firms continued. Years later, in the course of the UNSCOM disarmament of Iraq,

a UN arms inspector reported that US technology was found at Iraqi nuclear sites.[182]

For the US, dual-use exports of nuclear technology were not done for the sake of

assisting Iraq acquire a nuclear weapon, but to secure business for US firms in spite of

Iraq's nuclear ambitions. Nuclear weapons were in any case, for all sides concerned, a

long-term ambition. The more immediate concern was to alter the course of the war. With

the failure of either side to achieve any territorial gains, and the prospects of any

breakthrough unlikely any time soon, the war began to move into a phase of attrition. In

1984, Iraq spread the war into the Persian Gulf. Armed with French Exocet missiles, the

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[180] Dick Gronet, "U.S. Dual-Use Exports to Iraq: Specific Actions", 9 May 1984, National Security Archive, 4

[181] Central Intelligence Agency, "The Iraqi Nuclear Program: Progress and Setbacks", June 1983, National Security Archive, 3, 7, 13

[182] Nafeez Ahmed, *Behind the War on Terror: Western Secret Strategy and the Struggle for Iraq* (East Sussex: Clairview Books, 2003), 54

Iraqi Air Force began striking at Iranian ships, especially oil tankers. Iran responded in kind by attacking Iraqi ships, as well as those of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, who were financing the Iraq war effort and ferrying supplies for Iraq. [183] Not to mention, Saudi Arabia and the UAE allowed Iraqi planes to refuel at their airfields.[184] In turn, both sides declared naval exclusion zones, where unauthorized ships were subjected to measures from inspection to sinking. Additionally, Iran took to laying mines in the Gulf, including next to the Iraqi port of Um Qasr, effectively halting shipping through the port.[185] The tanker war was born.

Saddam hoped that by taking the war into a body of water so vital to the oil trade, he could "internationalize the war."[186] In other words, Saddam hoped to draw the international community into the war in order to help end it, desirably in Iraq's favor. Saddam had ample reason to believe the international community would take the side of Iraq. When the UN Security Council passed Resolution 552, attacks on Saudi and Kuwaiti shipping were condemned, while attacks on Iranian shipping went unmentioned, implying that Iran was responsible for the tanker war.[187] Saddam's move was successful enough to ensure greater US aid, and set in motion a chain of events which increasingly drew the US military into the Gulf. In April 1984, the White House issued NSDD 139, in order "to deter an expansion of the conflict in the Persian Gulf." Additionally, it called for "consultations with the key Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Bahrein

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[183] Percy, 13
[184] Crist, 97
[185] Ibid, 238
[186] Ibid
[187] UN Resolution 522

[sic]", and for a US effort to "prepare a plan of action designed to avert an Iraqi collapse."[188]

To reinforce this policy, the US launched Operation Staunch, an arms embargo aimed at deterring foreign arms dealers from selling to Iran. According to Kenneth Timmerman, "by 1984, as Operation Staunch frightened many potential suppliers away from selling weapons and spare parts to Iran, Baghdad became the favorite watering hole for the world's arms salesmen."[189] While Iran was being strangled, Iraq engaged in a flurry of activity to diversify its conventional arsenal, and to further develop its WMD capability. For the bulk of its conventional arsenal, Iraq deepened its ties to the USSR and France. For armored vehicles, Iraq turned to Brazil. For cluster bombs, it turned to Chile. To modify the Soviet-made SCUD missile and extend its effective range, Iraq joined Argentina and Egypt to launch the Condor program. For chemical weapons precursors, Iraq continued purchasing materials from western countries, including the US, where a consignment of 74 drums of potassium fluoride were discovered by US Customs at Kennedy Airport in New York, destined for the State Enterprise for Pesticide Production in Baghdad.[190] Under license from the US Department of Commerce, Iraq received biological samples, including anthrax and botulinum, from US firms, including 59 shipments from American Type Culture Collection (ATCC) alone.[191]

Heading into 1985, a new force emerged in the US, pushing for closer relations with Iraq. As trade increased, a new lobby coalesced around Marshall Wiley. A career diplomat with extensive experience in the Middle East, including in Iraq, Wiley brought

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[188] "National Security Decision Directive 139: Measures to Improve U.S. Posture and Readiness to Respond to Developments in the Iran-Iraq War", 5 April 1984, National Security Archive, 1-2
[189] Timmerman, 166
[190] Darwish & Alexander, 105
[191] Riegle & D'Amato, 18-23

together some of the biggest companies in the US to form the US-Iraq Business Forum.

According to Wiley:

> The Iraqis were not at ease with working with the U.S. private sector because their experience until then had been primarily with the central planning structures of Eastern Europe. So I thought we needed an organization to get to know each other better. That's how I got the idea for the Forum.[192]

The Forum rallied some of the biggest names in the US business behind it, including Amoco, Exxon, Hunt Oil, Occidental, Texaco, AT&T, Bechtel, Brown and Root, Caterpillar, General Motors, Comet Rice, Bell Textron, and Lockheed, among others. Through a concerted lobbying effort, as well as connections to Reagan administration insiders such as former Bechtel executive-turned Secretary of State George Shultz.[193]

With support from the business community, Reagan opened the door for high-technology exports to Iraq. Soon afterwards, dozens of US high-technology firms flocked to a March 1985 trade fair in Baghdad. Some companies, such as Hewlett-Packard, followed up by opening offices in Baghdad.[194] At last, Iraq gained access to the technology needed to advance its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes. Once more, the US acted largely with disinterest to possible dual-use and diversion issues. According to General Accounting Office report, in 1986, 16 high-technology export licenses were issued to US firms engaged with the Saad 16 complex, despite knowledge that the site was engaged in ballistic missile development.[195]

The increase in US support came at an opportune moment. In February 1986, Iranian forces launched an amphibious assault across the Shatt al-Arab, capturing Fao.

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[192] Timmerman, 214
[193] Ibid, 219-220
[194] Ibid, 202-203
[195] *Arms Control: US Efforts to Control the Transfer of Nuclear-Capable Missile Technology* (Washington D.C., US General Accounting Office, 1990), 14

With the capture of Fao, Iraq's sole oil terminus in the Gulf was cut off. Further Iranian advances aimed at Basra and Um Qasr were thwarted, while Iraqi counter-attacks at Fao were also thwarted.[196] Once more, Iraq resorted to using chemical weapons. Reports of hundreds and thousands dying in the most excruciating manner possible, of battlefields littered with expended atropine needles, and an Iranian effort to send victims to capitals in the developed world for treatment, were met largely with silence. The US was no different, focusing instead on keeping Iraqi oil and US exports flowing.

In 1986, Saddam's effort to internationalize the war in the Gulf began to bear fruit. On 12 January, the American commercial ship *President Taylor* was interdicted by Iranian Navy vessels in the Iranian exclusion zone. Despite protests from the ship captain, he relented and allowed Iranian sailors to inspect the ship for war materiel and contraband. After Iranian sailors had verified there was no contraband onboard, the vessel was allowed to resume its course unmolested. The US responded with a State Department letter sent via the Swiss embassy in Tehran, containing a thinly veiled threat: "Irrespective of the legal issues involved, the visit and search of U.S. flag vessels by Iranian armed forces during a period of heightened tensions and regional conflict could lead to a confrontation between U.S. and Iranian military units, which neither nation desires."[197]

Following this incident, the US adopted a policy which made clear that all measures, including military force, would be used to prevent Iranian forces from boarding US ships. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger advocated for sending the US Navy to escort US civilian vessels. If Iranian forces attempted an interdiction on

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[196] Crist, 166
[197] Ibid, 168

suspicion of contraband, the US Navy would divert the vessel to a neutral port, conduct

an inspection, and report the results to Iranian forces. National Security Advisor John

Poindexter concurred, stating that if Iranian forces continued in their efforts to board US

ships, the "on-scene commander will use whatever means may be appropriate, including

measured military force, to forestall any such attempt."[198]

Although a rigorous US response to Iranian actions and ambivalence to Iraqi

actions was yet further evidence of a US tilt towards Iraq, new developments in October

and November 1986 shed light on the true nature of this relationship. The relationship

was always an uneasy one. As Said Aburish explained, "it wasn't a friend, Iraq was not a

friend. There was no trust. And it wasn't an enemy, wasn't a foe."[199] In other words,

although the US tilted toward Iraq, it did not view Iraq as an ally in the traditional sense

of the word, but rather an ally of immediate necessity. As cynical and calculating as

Saddam was, as the war dragged on, he became ever more weary of the intentions of the

US, suspecting it of engaging in double dealing. According to Aburish, who was one of

Saddam's advisors at the time, "Saddam Hussein made it very plain to me that if the

United States wanted the war to stop, they would stop it."[200]

Saddam had ample reason to suspect American duplicity. Although the US clearly

wanted to prevent an Iranian victory in the war, the prospect of an Iraqi victory was also

unappealing. "There was no great love for Saddam Hussein. Neither side was a good guy.

It's a pity the war could not have lasted forever," remarked Richard Armitage, who

served as Assistant Secretary of Defense under the Reagan administration.[201] In October,

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[198] Ibid
[199] Charmelot
[200] Ibid
[201] Crist, 97

in the most unlikeliest of places, Saddam's suspicions began to appear true. In Nicaragua,

a CIA pilot shipping arms for the Contras named Eugene Hasenfus was shot down and

captured alive by the Sandinistas.[202] Despite being barred by the Boland Amendment

from supporting the Contras, and despite Congress cutting off funds, the Reagan

administration remained committed to keep the secret war going. What remained unclear

was how the administration was able to continue funding the Contras. In November, the

Lebanese newspaper *al-Shiraa* published an expose, revealing that the Reagan

administration funded the Contra war by diverting proceeds from illegal arms sales to

Iran to the Contras. Arms sales to Iran were originally devised to act as a ransom

payment in return for Iran putting pressure on pro-Iranian Lebanese militias to release

American hostages kidnapped amid the Lebanese civil war. This policy of killing two

birds with one stone came to be known as the Iran-Contra scandal.

In the course of the Iran-Contra scandal, Iran purchased hundreds of Hawk and

TOW missiles, and spare parts, which enabled Iran to continue fighting a state which the

US was actively supporting. In the course of these secret dealings, Iran sent a request for

US military intelligence on Iraq via arms dealer and intermediary Manucher Ghorbanifar.

In order to keep the secret channel open, the US obliged. Simultaneously not wanting to

provide Iran with a decisive advantage, Deputy Director of Central Intelligence Robert

Gates advised that any intelligence provided "would give no significant advantage to the

Iranian military."[203]

Saddam protested American secret dealings and demanded a meeting with US

officials. The Reagan administration sent Richard Murphy to Baghdad to reassure

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[202] Christopher Dickey, *With the Contras: A Reporter in the Wilds of Nicaragua* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 12
[203] Crist, 186-187

Saddam that Iran-Contra was a one-time affair aimed at achieving narrow, short-term interests. Despite Saddam's earlier protests, Murphy observed that Saddam's response to the meeting was rather muted. According to Murphy, "It's curious, but there was never was clear, strong, angry protests from Baghdad, and the best interpretation I could ever give that reaction was one of cynicism. This is what great nations do. They don't necessarily keep to their word or their stated policy."[204] Ultimately, Iran-Contra served as a minor speed bump in US-Iraq relations, and continued as if nothing happened.

If Iran-Contra was indicative of how far Saddam would go to forgive the US, an Iraqi friendly fire incident indicated how far the US was willing to go to forgive Iraq. On 17 May 1987, an Iraqi fighter jet fired two Exocet missiles at the US frigate *USS Stark,* on patrol near an exclusion zone. The first missile failed to detonate, and the second one detonated, tearing a hole through the ship. As a result, 37 US sailors were killed, and 21 were wounded. Iraq immediately accepted responsibility for the incident, issued an immediate apology, reaffirmed the incident was an accident, and presented the US with $400 million for a settlement fund.[205] US reaction was muted, demonstrating a desire to brush the affair off. All that Secretary of State George Shultz had to say was "this event underlines once more the seriousness of the tensions that exist in the Middle East, and the importance of trying to do something about them."[206] President Reagan attempted to deflect blame for the incident, declaring "Iran is the real villain in the piece."[207]

For Iraq, if there was any silver lining to the *USS Stark* incident, it had the effect of drawing the US further into the tanker war. By May 1987, 227 ships had been

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[204] Charmelot
[205] *Claims Settlement Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Iraq,* US Department of State, 4
[206] Charmelot
[207] Bill, 307

attacked in the Gulf, 137 of them by Iraq, and 90 by Iran. Additionally, 153 of the ships were oil tankers, while 211 merchant seamen had lost their lives.[208] The *USS Stark* incident came to the Reagan administration as a warning for urgent action in order to bring the tanker war to a close. The next escalation in the tanker war came when Kuwait reached out to the US, seeking armed protection for its ships. The US obliged, and launched Operation Earnest Will. During this operation, Kuwaiti ships were reflagged under the US flag, and were accompanied by US Navy escorts.

Earnest Will got off to a rough start. On the very first escort mission, a Kuwaiti tanker, reflagged as the *MV Bridgeton,* struck an Iranian mine. Despite damage, the *Bridgeton* continued onwards, while its Navy escorts huddled behind for protection. The incident received widespread public attention, and raised doubts as to what the US Navy was really doing in the Persian Gulf. Commenting on the incident, Rear Admiral Harold Bernsen explained that "it may sound incongruous, but the fact is a large ship, a non-warship like the *Bridgeton,* is far less vulnerable to a mine than a warship … if you've got a big tanker that is very hard to damage with a single mine, you get behind it. That's the best defense and that's exactly what we did."[209] Middle East correspondent Robert Fisk raised a poignant question: "If the US Navy could not protect itself without hiding behind a civilian vessel, how could it claim to be maintaining freedom of navigation in the Gulf?"[210]

Ultimately, Earnest Will proved to be more of a political exercise, aimed at placating America's allies, and to satisfy demands to do something about the tanker war. Earnest Will was a stopgap measure aimed at maintaining freedom of navigation, as well

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[208] Fisk, 222
[209] Ibid, 248
[210] Ibid

as a justification for an increased US naval presence in the Gulf. In order to create a

lasting solution, and to stifle the tanker war, the US decided that the best way to do so

was target Iran. Although Iran had not started the tanker war, US strategists nonetheless

opted to knock Iran out of the fight in the Gulf. Ever since the Iran-Iraq War began, US

strategists had been developing contingency plans involving direct military action against

Iran. In 1980, Admiral James "Ace" Lyons formulated a strategy involving a Marine

invasion of Kharg Island, through which almost all Iranian oil export traveled through. In

1986, US Central Command (CENTCOM) drew up a contingency plan calling for the

bombing of Bandar Abbas and the mining of its harbor. In 1987, Lyons devised a plan

outside the proper military channels, involving the bombing of strategic and economic

targets on the Iranian coast, between Chah Bahr and Bushehr.[211] Earnest Will provided

political cover for an increased US naval presence, kicking off Operation Nimble Archer.

During the course of the operation, the US attacked three offshore oil rigs, converted for

military use.[212]

Heading into 1988, with the naval conflict escalating in the Gulf, with Iranian

resources stretched thin, Iraq renewed a series of offenses along the Iran-Iraq frontline. In

the first offensive, Saddam authorized northern commander Ali Hassan al-Majid to use

any and all means, including chemical warfare, to crush the Kurdish rebellion which

erupted amid the ongoing war and push the Iranians out of Iraqi Kurdistan. Unlike

previous Kurdish rebellions, the two dominant political parties, the Kurdish Democratic

Party and Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, usually feuding among

themselves, had put their hostilities aside, and were working together with Iran to launch

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[211] Crist, 30-31, 169, 257

[212] *Case Concerning Oil Platforms (Islamic Republic of Iran v. United States of America),* International Court of Justice, 6 November 2003, 9

a general insurrection. In the process, the KDP and PUK welcomed Iranian forces into

Kurdistan. To crush the rebellion and expel the Iranians, Iraq launched the al-Anfal

campaign. During al-Anfal, the Iraqi military launched a genocidal onslaught on the

Kurdish population, uprooting and destroying entire villages, conducting mass

executions, and making widespread use of chemical weapons. In the most well-known

episode of al-Anfal, Iraqi forces unleashed chemical weapons on the town of Halabja,

killing upwards of 5,000 people.

Once more, amid the largest use of chemical weapons since World War I, the

official US reaction, and indeed the international reaction, was largely one of silence.

According to former CIA analyst Judith Yaphe, "very little of that was made outside of

Kurdistan, outside of Iraq. Certainly you didn't see much of it in the American or

European press." During a disarmament conference, Swedish diplomat Rolf Ekeus

recalled that his condemnations of the Halabja massacre were met with "Dead silence.

Not one in that whole, with that time 38 states conference of disarmament, all major

weapons countries involved [...] no one lifted a finger."[213] Nor was any state likely to

condemn the massacre, for fear of exposing their culpability. As Iraqi Foreign Minister

Tariq Aziz remarked: "If Iraq or Iran or any other state is suddenly in a position to

produce chemical weapons, the raw materials and facilities were obtained from industrial

countries. Europe is the main source. For Europe to be outraged and shed crocodile tears

is pure hypocrisy."[214] In the US, the Reagan administration opposed Congressional

efforts to sanction Iraq.[215] Sanctions were rejected on the grounds that they would

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[213] Charmelot

[214] Gerard Schumayer, *Chemical Weapons Proliferation in the Middle East* (Carlisle Barracks: US Army War College), 10

[215] Ibid, 11

"undermine relations and reduce US influence on a country that has emerged from the Persian Gulf War as one of the one of the most powerful Arab nations."[216] Instead, Iraq was encouraged to continue offensive operations against Iranian positions. Joost Hiltermann, director of the International Crisis Group, summarized the US response most succinctly: "By any measure, the American record on Halabja is shameful."[217]

After Halabja, Iraq judged that international condemnation for chemical weapons use would be symbolic, if not nonexistent, no matter the scale and target. Far from condemning Iraq, the US dispatched a team of Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) officers to Baghdad to deliver satellite intelligence and targeting arrays. A month after Halabja, in April, Iraq launched Operation Blessed Ramadan, with the aim of recapturing Fao. Following a massive air force onslaught, using both conventional and chemical munitions, Iraqi infantry units stormed and recaptured Fao.[218] After the battle, DIA officer Rick Francona surveyed the aftermath, and reported witnessing a battlefield littered with hundreds of atropine syringes, used to counteract the effects of sarin.[219] Days after the recapture of Fao, the US launched Operation Praying Mantis. After a series of mutual escalations, such as the US Navy harassing the Iranian Navy, the Iranians ramping up mine-laying activities, and the frigate *USS Samuel B. Roberts* nearly sinking after striking four Iranian mines, a day-long naval battle erupted on 14 April. Defense Department historian David Crist documented the outcome of the battle as follows:

> The daylong fight had been a disaster for Iran. Although the United States lost one helicopter to nonhostile causes, the Iranian military had committed its air

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[216] Ahmed, 55

[217] Fisk, 214

[218] Crist, 338

[219] Shane Harris & Matthew Aid, "Exclusive: CIA Files Prove America Helped Saddam as He Gassed Iran", Foreign Policy, 26 August 2013, https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/08/26/exclusive-cia-files-prove-america-helped-saddam-as-he-gassed-iran/.

and naval forces piecemeal into the Gulf. With its platforms destroyed and unable to get any air surveillance over the Gulf, Iran operated in the blind against the U.S. Navy. The outcome was never in doubt.

After Operation Praying Mantis, Iran backed off from engaging the U.S. military. Having lost its most capable ships, the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy kept its remaining combatants in port for most of the remainder of the Iran-Iraq War.[220]

Having been expelled from Fao, and pushed back from Basra, the Iranian leadership had to debate whether or not to continue the war. With its navy rendered largely ineffective, and with the economy collapsing, the Iranian leadership had to weigh the uncertain possibility that Iraq would cross the Iranian border once more. For Khomeini, the prospect of suing for peace with the hated Saddam was unappealing, nor was the prospect of continuing a mutually destructive war with no end in sight. Iran was well aware that the US tilted toward Iraq, the naval engagements of 1987-1988 eliminated any doubts as to where the US stood. Then, on 3 July, the US missile cruiser *USS Vincennes* fired a missile at Iran Air Flight 655, flying over the Persian Gulf en route to Dubai. All 290 people on board were killed. The shoot-down was an accident, caused by a mixing up of flight tracking numbers, and the negligence and aggressiveness of the ship's commander. The Iranians, however, were convinced that the action was deliberate, and that the US was prepared to shoot down more Iranian civilian aircraft to force Iran to cease hostilities. Thus, Iran sued for peace, and accepted a ceasefire under UN Resolution 598. "Woe upon me that I am still alive and have drunk the poisoned chalice of the resolution," lamented Khomeini.[221]

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[220] David Crist, *Gulf of Conflict: A History of US-Iranian Confrontation at Sea* (Washington D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2009), 9

[221] Fisk, 273

According to the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), upon conclusion of the war, approximately 750,000 Iranians and 500,000 Iraqis lay dead.[222] After 8 years, the war ended in a stalemate, with both sides having failed in their stated objectives. The Iran-Iraq border remained where it was with the start of the war, as did the dividing line along the Shatt al-Arab. Iraq failed to annex Khuzestan, and each side failed to uproot the leadership of the other side. Far from being able to claim the leadership of the Arab world, Iraq accumulated a foreign debt of $100 billion.[223] According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the vast majority of Iraq's expenditures from 1980 to 1990 were dedicated to arms purchases. During this period, Iraq spent $80 billion on arms, compared to France ($69.5 billion) and Britain ($68.6 billion).[224] Despite these massive expenditures, Iraq had little to show for 8 years of war.

Nonetheless, Saddam declared victory. To commemorate this so-called victory, Saddam ordered the construction of a victory monument, comprised of two hands holding a pair of crossed swords. This was followed by a victory parade, with Saddam leading the procession through the Victory Arch. Saddam was very appreciative of the US role in bringing about this "victory." As part of its reward, Iraq granted US intelligence officers the opportunity to inspect and disassemble some of the latest Soviet weaponry. According to David Crist, US Army analysts produced a report of a Soviet artillery piece with an unusual caveat: "Secret/Not Releasable to Foreign Countries Except Iraq." In

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[222] "The Battle Deaths Datasheet version 3.0", Peace Research Institute Oslo, https://www.prio.org/Data/Armed-Conflict/Battle-Deaths/The-Battle-Deaths-Dataset-version-30/.
[223] Dawisha, 223
[224] Darwish & Alexander, 136

turn, Saddam named a new division of the Republican Guard "the Tawakalna Division,

short for *Tawakalna Ala Allah,* or 'In God We Trust,'the motto of the United States."[225]

For the US, the outcome of the war was seen as a success. US assistance had

helped avert an Iraqi collapse, and helped stem the spread of the Iranian Revolution. Iraq

had proven its worth to the US, so much so that policymakers began to speak of

resurrecting Nixon's Twin Pillars policy. To this effect, the George H.W. Bush

administration issued National Security Directive (NSD) 26, under the assumption that

"normal relations between the United States and Iraq would serve our longer-term

interests and promote stability in both the Gulf and Middle East." Among its provisions,

NSD 26 called for "U.S. firms to participate in the reconstruction of the Iraqi economy,"

for "developing access to and influence with the Iraqi defense establishment" through

"sales of non-lethal military assistance [...] on a case by case basis."[226] According to NSC

advisor Teicher:

> This policy was based on the assumption that Iraq and Saudi Arabia would protect
> America's vital interests in the Gulf. As a result of the tacit alliance between
> Baghdad and Washington against Iran and the growing distance between Baghdad
> and Moscow, NSD 26 directed the national security bureaucracy to strengthen
> Iraq to ensure that it would be a force for regional stability and a deterrent against
> Soviet and Iranian aggression. The tilt was complete.[227]

The third phase of US-Iraq relations marked the closest phase between the two

states. With the onset of the Iran-Iraq War, US support for Iraq reached unprecedented

heights, replete with carte blanche sales of conventional arms, dual-use exports, WMD

components, economic aid, and diplomatic cover for Iraq's most heinous acts. When

Saddam launched the Iran-Iraq War, the US took no substantive effort to signal

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[225] Crist, 362

[226] "The White House: National Security Directive 26", 2 October 1989, Federation of American Scientists, 2-3

[227] Teicher & Teicher, 394

disapproval of Iraqi aggression, and instead offered tacit approval. After Iranian forces

expelled the invaders and pushed into Iraq in 1983, the US stood with Iraq every step of

the way to sustain the Iraqi war effort and avert an Iraqi collapse, no matter the legality or

humanitarian consequences. In the short-term, the policy was seen as a resounding

success. The spread of the Islamic Revolution beyond Iran and the Shia quarters of

Lebanon, so feared by many, did not come to fruition. Despite the fact that both Iran and

Iraq were both thoroughly drained after eight years of war and with nothing to show for

it, it was Iran which sued for peace. As the war continued with no end in sight, partly due

to US double dealings in the Iran-Contra affair, the US business community stood ready

to exploit Iraq's enormous demand for hi-tech goods, agricultural commodities,

infrastructure development, and post-war reconstruction. For all concerned in the US, it

was regarded as a win-win scenario. Shortly after the end of the war, the illusory nature

of this success revealed itself.

Betrayal: Gulf War, Sanctions, Humanitarian Catastrophe, and Regime Change

      With the conclusion of the Iran-Iraq War, fissures began to emerge, showing the

fragility of the relationship. Despite the passage of NSD 26, and expanding trade

relations, a countercurrent within the US government began to call for a review of US-

Iraq relations. Absent an Iranian threat, the glue which held the US and Iraq together

began to dissolve. Despite emerging differences, the Bush administration remained

committed to deepening the relationship. This commitment remained to the very last day

before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Ultimately, the commitment to closer relations with

Iraq dissolved because the US failed to create an effective policy to clean up the mess it

helped create. After the Iran-Iraq War, Iraq was left with over half a million dead, massive infrastructure damage on its western front, a hollowed economy, tens of billions of dollars in debt, and a dispute with Kuwait over stolen oil. With these issues thrust upon a megalomaniac dictator, armed with one of the largest land armies in the world, equipped with chemical and biological weapons, aspiring for nuclear weapons, and with a sense of impunity bestowed upon him by complicit Western governments, these issues combined into a toxic mess, one which the US failed to address or take its due share of responsibility. Once it became clear that Saddam was beyond control, the US turned on its former client by launching the Gulf War, implementing devastating sanctions, and sponsoring covert regime change efforts. Once again, growing US efforts to exert power over Iraq, this time by force, only led to greater instability and loss of control. In doing so, the US laid waste to a society which enjoyed one of the highest standards of living and rate of development in the Middle East, producing one of the worst humanitarian catastrophes of the late-20th century. When covert operations and sanctions failed to unseat Saddam, and with the US determined to accomplish this goal, the next logical step was war, which was launched in 2003.

One of the first fissures to develop in the relationship emerged in the last day of the Iran-Iraq War. After the Halabja massacre, a group of 31 members of Congress put forth the Prevention of Genocide Act in the House of Representatives. The act called for sanctions against Iraq, prohibiting the US from importing Iraqi oil, providing loans and credits, and exporting military equipment to Iraq.[228] Immediately, the Iraq lobby launched a lobbying effort to kill the act. Marshall Wiley of the US-Iraq Business Forum wrote a

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[228] "H.R.5271-Prevention of Genocide Act of 1988", https://www.congress.gov/bill/100th-congress/house-bill/5271.

letter to President Reagan, lobbying against the bill. As Timmerman detailed, Wiley

"chose to write his letter on Forum stationery, which listed the organization's impressive

roster of Fortune 500 members. It was a none-too-subtle hint of whose interests he was

defending."[229] US companies did not want to be shut out of the lucrative Iraqi market. In

agriculture, Iraq ranked the twelfth-largest market for US agriculture exports, with one-

third of its food imports coming from the US.[230] By 1988, Iraq also became a major

supplier of oil to the US, having risen from zero barrels in 1981 to 126 million barrels in

1988, in effect selling one out of every four barrels of its oil to the US. Additionally, Iraq

gave US oil companies preferential treatment, selling oil at $1 per barrel below the price

European companies were paying.[231] Additionally, with Iraq in need of post-war

reconstruction, US companies were presented with further opportunities for business.

The lobbying effort proved successful, and the Reagan administration rejected the

act, with strategic and commercial interests taking precedence over human rights.

According to a General Accounting Office (GAO) report, "It seems that the U.S. desire to

build a strategic and agricultural trade relationship with Iraq outweighed the apparent

financial risks involved and discounted evidence of Iraq's human rights violations."[232]

For US companies, this ensured the continuation of trade with Iraq, despite the fact that

Iraq was rated a "high-risk market," and was falling behind on loan repayment.[233]

In short, US-Iraq relations continued, business as usual. Iraq was hungry for

foreign assistance in reconstruction. The US was eager to profit from reconstruction.

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[229] Timmerman, 307
[230] *International Trade: Iraq's Participation in U.S. Agricultural Export Programs* (Washington D.C.: United States General Accounting Office, 1990), 2
[231] Ahmed, 57
[232] *International Trade,* 2
[233] Ibid

Likewise, the US was eager to continue supporting Iraq as a means of deterring and

containing Iran. However, fissures began to emerge in the relationship. First and

foremost, Iraq was faced with a crippling foreign debt, putting Iraq at odds with

American allies among the Gulf Arab states. Second, isolated but growing voices within

the US government began to call for a review of relations with Iraq. Iraq's numerous

human rights violations were now to be scrutinized by the US, without acknowledging

the US role in tolerating and facilitating these violations. Third, Iraq continued

development of its WMD program, and took the first steps in building a domestic arms

industry.

The period from 1989 to the last day before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait is

marked by contradictions in policy. In 1989, for example, the Bush administration issued

NSD 26, as detailed earlier. Exports of dual-use technologies continued, in some cases

even expanded. At the same time, as mentioned earlier, there were several efforts in

Congress to sanction Iraq, largely in response to the Halabja massacre. Iraq was also

thrust into the center of the post-Cold War US policy debate. Since the developments of

1989, from the fall of the Berlin Wall to the Soviet withdrawal of over 500,000 military

personnel from Eastern Europe, to the collapse of the USSR in 1991, US policymakers

decided that the end of the Cold War would change nothing. Despite a weakened USSR

seeking rapprochement with the US, the US military posture and geopolitical strategy

would remain unchanged. However, given the diminishing power of the USSR, the US

justification for its military posture was equally diminishing. As Chairman of the Joint

Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell put it, "I'm running out of bad guys. I'm down to Kim Il-

Sung and Castro."[234] During the course of the Bush administration, US strategists began

formulating a global strategy in which it would exploit the fall of the USSR to expand its

power as far across the globe as possible.

In search of new villains, US military strategists began to seek out scenarios

where US interests might, in their minds, necessitate military intervention. In one such

scenario, military strategists turned to the Persian Gulf. According to Richard Murphy:

> So while observers wouldn't have seen any basic shift in American foreign
> policy, there were elements, and notably in command of the Central Command
> that were entertaining the potential of a new danger from Iraq. There had been a
> major annual military exercise, the commander was Norman Schwarzkopf, and he
> changed the basic scenario of a threat to American interests by saying there's no
> longer a serious threat from the Soviet Union, and he introduced this scenario of
> an Iraqi attack on Kuwait.[235]

While the US had been contemplating the possibility of a war with Iraq behind the

scenes, in public the US continued to assure Iraq that it desired a continuation of close

relations. In 1990, several developments put the US and Iraq at odds. In February, Voice

of America beamed a hostile broadcast into Iraq, replete with scathing criticisms of

Saddam Hussein.[236] Likewise, Saddam made an inflammatory statement, warning that if

Israel launched any aggressive acts against Iraq, then it would "devour half of Israel by

fire."[237] In March, six Iraqis were arrested in Britain for attempting to smuggle nuclear

triggers known as krytrons from the US through Britain.[238] Next, despite the Reagan and

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[234] Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 652

[235] Charmelot

[236] Bruce Jentleson, *With Friends Like These: Reagan, Bush, and Saddam, 1982-1990* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), 145

[237] Aburish, 275

[238] Jeff Gerth, "Atom Bomb Parts Seized In Britain En Route to Iraq", New York Times, 29 March 1990, https://www.nytimes.com/1990/03/29/world/atom-bomb-parts-seized-in-britain-en-route-to-iraq.html.

Bush administrations striking down Congressional sanctions, and urging a continuation of CCC loans to Iraq, the CCC reduced Iraq's access to commodity credits.[239]

Perhaps what did the most to drive a wedge between Iraq and the West was the execution of Iranian-born British journalist Farzad Bazoft. In September 1989, Bazoft arrived in Iraq to investigate an explosion at a missile plant south of Baghdad. Seeking to keep news of the incident from leaking, and concealing the fact that the plant was dedicated to arms production, Bazoft was arrested. After six weeks of detention and abuse at Abu Ghraib prison, Bazoft was charged with being an Israeli and British agent, and sentenced to death. Following the execution, Britain responded by recalling its ambassador from Iraq. The execution itself was cruel enough, but Iraqi rhetoric such as "Thatcher wanted him alive. We sent him back in a box," fueled a growing public outcry, driving a deeper rift between Iraq and its Western sponsors.[240]

Despite these developments, and growing criticism of Iraq in the west, the US reassured Iraq that it wanted to maintain a close relationship. Secretary of State James Baker ordered Ambassador April Glaspie to issue a formal apology to Iraq for the hostile VOA broadcasts. Glaspie then wrote a letter to Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz in which she emphasized "President Bush wants good relations with Iraq, relations built on confidence and trust, so that we can discuss a broad range of issues frankly and fruitfully."[241] With regard to the Bazoft execution, the official US response was one of indifference. When pressed by a reporter if the US was going to take any concrete steps, as opposed to

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[239] Jentleson, 137
[240] "Butchery in Baghdad", New York Times, 16 March 1990,
https://www.nytimes.com/1990/03/16/opinion/butchery-in-baghdad.html.
[241] Jentleson, 146-147

rhetorical condemnation, or with silence as it did before Bazoft's execution, White House

spokesperson Margaret Tutwiler replied:

> I don't know. Let me check on that. I know we have deplored this. We have made
> a very strong statement. I did not think to ask, are we going to protest it or
> withdraw our ambassador, et cetera. I'll be glad to ask.[242]

In April, shortly after Bazoft's execution, Senator Robert Dole led a US

delegation to meet Saddam in Mosul. The topic that dominated the talks was US media

criticism of Iraq. According to the senators present, Saddam was under the impression

that Bush was in control of the US media, just as he was in control of Iraqi media.

Senator Alan Simpson assuaged Saddam's concerns by saying "I believe that your

problems lies with the Western media, and not with the U.S. government," and by

describing the press as "haughty and pampered." Senator Dole falsely informed Saddam

that the VOA staffer responsible for the hostile broadcast was fired.[243]

While the Bush administration sought to reassure Iraq of its intent to pursue closer

relations, Saddam continued to harbor suspicions that the US wanted to undermine Iraq.

More specifically, he believed that the US had encouraged the Kuwaitis and Emiratis to

wage economic war on Iraq. At the end of the Iran-Iraq War, Iraq's foreign debt had

greatly affected its ability to finance reconstruction. Saddam appealed to the Gulf Arab

states to forgive, or at least reschedule Iraq's debt. He argued that the war with Iran was

not fought for the sake of Iraq alone, but for defense of the Persian Gulf, and indeed the

entire Arab world.[244] Whereas Saudi Arabia proved more accommodating to Iraq's

economic predicament, Kuwait demanded a full repayment of debt, and refused to amend

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[242] Ibid, 153-154
[243] R. Jeffrey Smith, "Saddam's Beef With the Press", Washington Post, 30 September 1990, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1990/09/30/saddams-beef-with-the-press/a8cb8c5a-ca68-484c-9dcf-3ee2efdf2b79/?utm_term=.27aba66082f0.
[244] Dawisha, 224

the terms. Further adding to Iraq's woes were low oil prices, largely being driven by

Kuwaiti overproduction. According to Saddam, for every dollar drop in the price of oil

per barrel, Iraq was losing $1 billion annually.[245] To add insult to injury, Kuwait had been

horizontally drilling into the Iraqi side of the North Rumaila oil field, stealing up to $2.4

billion worth of Iraqi oil.[246] Throughout the period, Saddam asked Kuwait to cease

overproduction, and to abide by its OPEC quota. Despite numerous meetings between

Iraqi and Kuwaiti officials, and Iraqi attempts to mobilize Arab support to put pressure on

Kuwait, Kuwait continued to overproduce oil. "Kuwait neither accepts nor is bound by its

assigned quota," declared Kuwait oil minister Ali Khalifa al-Sabah.[247] The US was fully

aware of these developments. According to a Bush administration official:

> Kuwait was overproducing, and when the Iraqis came and said, 'Can you do
> something about it?' the Kuwaitis said, 'Sit on it.' And they didn't even say it
> nicely. They were nasty about it. They were stupid. They were arrogant. They
> were terrible.[248]

With tensions mounting and the threat of war looming over the horizon, Iraq and

the rest of the world looked to the US for a response. Amid the deployment of Iraqi armor

units to the border with Kuwait, a reporter asked State Department spokesperson

Margaret Tutwiler if, in the event of hostilities, the US was obliged to step in to protect

Kuwait. Tutwiler's response was that "we do not have any defense treaties with Kuwait,

and there are no special defense or security commitments to Kuwait."[249] This statement

was repeated by Assistant Secretary of State John Kelly during testimony before

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[245] Aburish, 277
[246] Blum, 321
[247] Geoff Simons, *The Scourging of Iraq: Sanctions, Law and Natural Justice, Second Edition* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), 212
[248] Ramsey Clark, *The Fire This Time: U.S. War Crimes in the Gulf* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1994), 15
[249] Blum, 322

Congress.[250] Secretary of State James Baker insisted that calls for the US to retaliate in

the event of Iraqi WMD use were "a little bit premature."[251] Amid such lukewarm and

indecisive statements, the Iraqi leadership began to conclude that, after almost a decade

of support during the Iran-Iraq War, supplying chemical weapons precursors, biological

samples, technology for its ballistic missile and nuclear programs, military intelligence,

agriculture and commodity credits, and after overlooking such incidents such as the *USS*

Stark and the Halabja massacre, that the US would not object in any meaningful way to

an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

Saddam's assessment of US attitudes seemed to be correct. On 25 July 1990,

Saddam summoned US ambassador April Glaspie to discuss the ongoing crisis.

According to a State Department cable, the US was fully aware of Iraq's predicament:

> Saddam wished to convey an important message to President Bush: Iraq wants
> friendship, but does the USG [US government]? Iraq suffered 100,000's of
> casualties and is now so poor that war orphan pensions will be cut; yet rich
> Kuwait will not even accept OPEC discipline. Iraq is sick of war, but Kuwait has
> ignored diplomacy. USG maneuvers with the UAE will encourage the UAE and
> Kuwait to ignore conventional diplomacy. If Iraq is publicly humiliated by the
> USG, it will have no choice but to "respond," however illogical and self-
> destructive that would prove.[252]

When asked about the US position on the Iraq-Kuwait dispute, Glaspie responded that

"we have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with

Kuwait."[253]

After the meeting, Saddam was convinced that the US would not oppose an

invasion. The US had not given an explicit green light, nor had it given an explicit red

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[250] Ahmed, 77-78
[251] Simons, 2
[252] April Glaspie, "Cable 90BAGHDAD4237_a: Saddam's Message of Friendship to President
Bush", Wikileaks, 25 July 1990, https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/90BAGHDAD4237_a.html.
[253] Blum, 322

light, but rather a yellow light. Eight days later, on 2 August, Iraq invaded Kuwait. In the

course of only two days, the Iraqi military managed to occupy the entire country, sending

the ruling Sabah family into exile, and proclaiming Kuwait the 19th province of Iraq.

Immediately after the invasion, Glaspie fell under heavy scrutiny. Testifying before a

Congressional hearing, Glaspie remarked that "we foolishly did not realize how stupid he

was, that he did not believe our clear and repeated warnings that we would support our

vital interests."[254] However, as the record shows, there were no such warnings. Iraq was

given no reason to assume that a hostile action against Kuwait would be punished, neither

by her or the US government at large. As Glaspie explained in a *New York Times*

interview: "Obviously, I didn't think - and nobody else did - that the Iraqis would take all

of Kuwait."[255] Thus, it appears, a partial invasion of Kuwait would have been acceptable

to the US. Just how partial was not specified, but a full invasion proved to be a fatal

mistake. Like many past US clients, Saddam made the fatal mistake of acting too

independently of the US, and growing too powerful to control. On the day that Iraqi tanks

crossed into Kuwait, Saddam outlived his usefulness to the US. From that day on, the US

sought to overthrow Saddam.

As if by the flip of a switch, cautious US rhetoric became hostile, in some cases

unrestrained. Acts of aggression, tolerated when Iran was the target, was condemned

when Kuwait was the target. "Our jobs, our way of life, our own freedom, and the

freedom of friendly countries around the world will suffer if control of the world's great

oil reserves fell in the hands of one man," proclaimed President Bush.[256] Secretary of

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[254] Charmelot
[255] Flora Lewis, "Foreign Affairs; Between-Lines Disaster", New York Times, 19 September 1990, https://www.nytimes.com/1990/09/19/opinion/foreign-affairs-between-lines-disaster.html.
[256] Blum, 329

State James Baker declared "It is not about Kuwait and the flow of oil from its wells but about a dictator who, acting alone, could strangle the global economic order, determine whether we all enter into recession or the darkness of a depression."[257] Bush's rhetoric went further, comparing the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait with the German invasion of Poland, and Saddam with Hitler. Likewise, Bush suggested that Saddam be subject to Nuremberg-style trials, and handled accordingly. Failure to accede to US demands, Bush warned, "could be world war tomorrow." An alarmed Bush administration official remarked that someone needed "to get his rhetoric under control."[258]

From Saddam's perspective, there was no reason to believe that the US response would be as hostile as it was. Unbeknownst to Saddam, while the US was assuring Iraq that it took no position on "Arab on Arab disputes", it had been making security assurances to Kuwait. According to Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Salem al-Sabah, "Schwarzkopf came here a few times and met with the Crown Prince and Minister of Defense. These became routine visits to discuss military cooperation, and by the time the crisis with Iraq began last year, we knew we could rely on the Americans."[259] With US assurances, Kuwait felt that it could continue its oil overproduction agenda, and blatantly disregard Iraqi concerns. On 30 July, during one of the last Arab mediation efforts in Jeddah between Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt, the Kuwaiti delegation declared "We are not going to respond to [Iraq] … If they don't like it, let them occupy our territory ... We are going to bring in the Americans."[260] By the time Iraq had invaded Kuwait, Saddam was convinced that he had been deceived by the US. During the

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[257] Darwish & Alexander, 53
[258] Ibid, 327
[259] Milton Viorst, "After the Liberation", The New Yorker, 30 September 1991, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1991/09/30/after-the-liberation.
[260] Clark, 18

invasion, Iraqi forces discovered a Kuwaiti security memo, detailing a meeting between

US and Kuwaiti officials in 1989, in which both sides discussed a covert effort to

undermine Iraq economically. The memo read: "We agreed with the American side that it

was important to take advantage of the deteriorating economic situation in Iraq in order to

put pressure on that country's government to delineate our common border. The Central

Intelligence Agency gave us its view of appropriate means of pressure, saying that broad

cooperation should be initiated between us, on condition that such activities are

coordinated at a high level."[261] The validity of the memo has been debated. The CIA, for

example, issued denials, stating that the document was a forgery, and denying that Iraq

was discussed "at that meeting."[262] Iraq claimed the document was genuine, and

submitted it to UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar for review. Based on the

knowledge of past meetings between US and Kuwaiti officials, there is ample reason to

suspect that the document is in fact authentic.

The US had no intention of letting the occupation of Kuwait stand. Immediately,

the US moved to rally the support of the international community to isolate Iraq, and end

the occupation of Kuwait. Starting in August 1990, the UN Security Council passed a

series of resolutions concerning the Kuwait invasion. The first condemnation and demand

for an unconditional Iraqi withdrawal was issued under Resolution 660.[263] Under

Resolution 661, the Security Council implemented an embargo against all imports to and

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[261] "Iraqi Charges Alleged Kuwaiti Memo Proves a CIA Plot Against Baghdad", Washington Post, 1 November 1990, https://www.google.com/search?q=iraq+charges+alleged+kuwait+memo&rlz=1C1CHFX_enUS59 1US591&oq=iraq+charges+alleged+kuwait+memo&aqs=chrome..69i57j69i60.5796j0j7&sourceid =chrome&ie=UTF-8.

[262] Ibid

[263] Resolution 660 of 2 August 1990, United Nations.

exports from Iraq and Kuwait.[264] Under Resolution 678, the US obtained the much

sought after approval for the use of force. In the language of the resolution: "Authorizes

Member States [...] to use all necessary means to uphold and implement resolution

660."[265] Inherent in the resolution were flaws which inevitably led to gross abuse of

international law, in effect giving the US a blank check to wage total war against Iraq.

Former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark criticized the resolution as:

> a complete abandonment of UN duty, an open and unlimited assignment of all its
> power. It conveyed the authority to begin the very act the UN was created to end -
> waging war. The Security Council delegation of power was so complete, that in
> addition to giving no guidance and imposing no limitation, it required no
> reporting. The Security Council did not even ask to know what was done on its
> authority and in its name.[266]

With the passage of Resolution 678, the US set out to form a coalition to give a

multilateral veneer to US actions. This policy was outlined during the Clinton

administration by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright: "We act multilaterally when we

can, and unilaterally when we must."[267] Although numerous states joined the coalition,

the US was the undisputed leader, making the critical decisions, and doing the bulk of the

fighting. UN Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuellar complained that "It was not a

United Nations war. General Schwarzkopf was not wearing a blue helmet."[268]

In securing the necessary UN resolutions, and forming the coalition, the US

resorted to a combination of arm twisting and bribery. To avoid a Chinese veto, the US

promised to tone down its criticisms of the Tiananmen Square massacre, and to help

secure loans for China through the World Bank. Similarly, the USSR was promised aid

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[264] Resolution 661 of 6 August 1990, United Nations.
[265] Resolution 678 of 29 November 1990, United Nations.
[266] Clark, 155-156
[267] Simons, 66-67
[268] Blum, 317

from the US and its allies. Next were the non-permanent members of the Security

Council. Zaire was promised military aid and debt forgiveness. Ethiopia was promised an

investment deal. Zimbabwe dropped its objections after the threat of an IMF loan being

canceled. Next came the effort to enroll an Arab contingent in the coalition, providing for

an Arab facade. Initially reluctant to welcome US forces, Saudi Arabia was promised $12

billion in arms sales. Egyptian participation was secured with the US cancelling $7

billion in debt, and pressure on other states to cancel Egyptian debt as well. The US

secured Syrian participation by extending $1 billion in arms and aid, and by giving Syria

carte blanche to do as it pleased in Lebanon. Turkey, although not a member of the

coalition, allowed coalition forces to use Turkey as a staging area. This was done with the

help of $8 billion in arms, $1.5 billion in low-cost loans from the IMF, and US

sponsorship of a Turkish application to the European Community. In exchange for its

neutrality, Iran was promised a $250 million World Bank loan, its first loan since the

1979 revolution.[269] When Yemen vetoed a US-backed resolution, Secretary of State

James Baker told the Yemeni delegation "that is the most expensive no vote you will ever

cast," followed by a drastic cut in US aid.[270]

Amid the build-up to war, discussions of ending the crisis by diplomatic means

were conspicuously absent in the US. After Iraq invaded Kuwait, Iraq sent out feelers

indicating its desire to negotiate and end to the crisis and affect a withdrawal. Granted,

each peace overture could individually be assessed according to its merit. According to

Just War Theory, which forms part of the foundation of international law regarding the

conduct of armed conflict, war is a last resort which is only to be used when other options

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[269] Simons, 197-198
[270] Blum, 317

have been exhausted.[271] Iraq's numerous peace overtures, regardless of their merit,

should at least have been explored by the US. What is clear is that the US wanted war.

While the US ignored Saddam's overtures, his Arab neighbors proved responsive.

The Arab states involved in mediation efforts came to the conclusion that Saddam was

willing to withdraw from Kuwait, provided he be allowed to do so in a manner where he

could save face. A US Congressional staffer concurred, stating that "The Iraqis

apparently believed that having invaded Kuwait, they would get everyone's attention,

negotiate improvements to their economic situation, and pull out … a diplomatic solution

satisfactory to the interests of the United States may well have been possible since the

earliest days of the invasion."[272] First and foremost in pushing for a peaceful settlement

was King Hussein of Jordan. Joined by Egypt, the King announced that Saddam was

willing to withdraw, provided that the Arab League did not condemn Iraq. When King

Hussein informed Bush of his intent to pursue this line of diplomacy further, Bush told

Hussein that he had 48 hours to reach an agreement that led to an Iraqi withdrawal. Bush

presented an unrealistic ultimatum, one which allowed him to make a symbolic and

insincere effort to play peacemaker, an effort which would ultimately not stand in the

way of launching a war against Iraq. [273] Seeking a pretext to maintain astronomical levels

of military spending, establish a forward military presence in the Middle East, and to

punish its former client, the US wanted war.

With a coalition ready, the US drew up a plan for war. US war planners and

policymakers were thinking big. Although exhausted by eight years of war, Iraq

maintained the largest military in the Middle East, one complimented with chemical,

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[271] "Just War Theory", Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, https://www.iep.utm.edu/justwar/.
[272] Blum, 328
[273] Simons, 354

biological, and ballistic missile arsenals. The onslaught which followed was to be merciless, targeting every level of Iraqi society, including a systematic and deliberate targeting of the civilian infrastructure, paving the way for an enormous humanitarian catastrophe. The exact consequences were fully anticipated by the US, under a DIA study titled *Iraq Water Treatment Vulnerabilities.* The aim of the study was to map out the consequences of an attack on the water treatment infrastructure of Iraq. The study started out by noting that "Iraq depends on importing specialized equipment and some chemicals to purify its water supply." Amid sanctions, "failing to secure supplies will result in a shortage of pure drinking water for much of the population. This could lead to increased incidences, if not epidemics" of diseases such as "cholera, typhoid, and hepatitis." Prior to the invasion, Iraq had "probably had no more than a 2-month supply "for water treatment, and as a result of sanctions alone, "it probably will take six months (to June 1991) before the system is fully degraded." As it stood, "the water treatment system was unreliable even before the United Nations sanctions." In addition to the direct humanitarian consequences, the study weighed the consequences on the Iraqi economy, with "pure-water dependent industries becoming incapacitated, including petro chemicals, fertilizers, petroleum refining, electronics, pharmaceuticals, food processing, textiles, concrete construction, and thermal power plants."[274] Despite the knowledge that a massive onslaught would produce an enormous humanitarian catastrophe, US war planners went through with their plans anyways.

The plan that the US military implemented was called Operations Plan (OPLAN) 1002-90. Originally devised as a contingency plan to defend against a Soviet thrust through Iran to the Persian Gulf, the plan was revised, with Iraq taking the place of the

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[274] *Iraq Water Treatment Vulnerabilities,* Defense Intelligence Agency, January 1991.

USSR. The plan, originally devised to fight a superpower, was applied to a regional third-world power, already exhausted after 8 years of war. In the lead-up to the war, General Schwarzkopf declared "the United States might obliterate Iraq." Another US general remarked "we are closer to war with a Third World country. However, we are making plans as if it will be the Third World War."[275] Air Force Chief Michael Dugan remarked that it was important to target "what is unique Iraqi culture that they put a very high value on."[276] Fearing that Iraq might make use of its chemical and biological weapons against the coalition, Secretary of State James Baker issued a warning to his Iraqi counterpart Tariq Aziz: "We know that you have a vast stock of chemical weapons … Our sincere advice is not to even think of using them. If you do, or if we feel that you did, then our reply will be unrestrained."[277] This threat was broadly understood to include a threatened use of nuclear weapons.

When Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm got underway, the US response was largely unrestrained, bombing targets which went far beyond military necessity. During the course of the air campaign, in the 42 days from 16 January to 27 February, coalition forces dropped over 88,000 tons of bombs on Iraq, equivalent to a Hiroshima-sized bomb a week for seven weeks.[278] Among the targets of the campaign were stores, markets, residential neighborhoods, water and electrical facilities, schools, universities, hospitals, pharmacies, and archaeological sites. In one of the more well-known incidents of a civilian target being struck by US bombs, on 13 February 1991, two US laser-guided bombs struck the Amiriyah civilian air raid shelter, killing everyone

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[275] Simons, 1
[276] Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1991), 291
[277] Geoff Simons, *Iraq: From Sumer to Post-Saddam*, 8
[278] Simons, 4-5; also see Clark, xxx

inside, save for 17 people who managed to escape after the first bomb struck. Estimates

vary as to how many people were killed, from 400 to 1,500, and given the shelter's

capacity of 2,500, potentially even higher.[279] Part of the difficulty in identifying the

number of people killed was due to the grotesque manner in which the victims perished.

British MP Tam Dalyell, who visited the shelter, reported seeing the carbonized imprints

of the victims on the walls.[280] According to an account provided by the *Columbia*

Journalism Review:

> Nearly all the bodies were charred into blackness; in some cases the heat had been
> so great that entire limbs were burned off. Among the corpses were those of at
> least six babies and ten children, most of them so severely burned that their
> gender could not be determined. Rescue workers collapsed in grief, dropping
> corpses; some rescuers vomited from the stench of the still-smoldering bodies.[281]

Despite earlier denials, the US admitted to bombing Amiriyah, but with a caveat. White

House Spokesman Marlin Fitzwater remarked "It was a military target … We don't know

why civilians were at this location, but we do know that Saddam Hussein does not share

our value in the sanctity of life."[282]

Despite the expected fierce resistance from the Iraqis, and predictions of US

casualties running into the tens of thousands, Iraq was almost entirely powerless to stop

the US-led onslaught. According to former DIA officer and later advisor to General

Schwarzkopf, Rick Francona, the air campaign was so devastating that many US officers

forecasted a potential Iraqi withdrawal coming about without the need of a ground

campaign. "If the Iraqis were to state their intention to leave Kuwait prior to the initiation

of the ground offensive," wrote Francona, "they might escape with much of their combat

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[279] Clark, 70-71
[280] Ibid, 10
[281] Ibid, 70
[282] Blum, 335

power intact, leaving Baghdad with the wherewithal to continue its past pattern of unacceptable behavior."[283] As such, the US launched a ground war into Kuwait, and after expelling Iraqi forces, pushed into Iraq. Thus, the US exceeded the bounds of Resolution 678, which called for the use of force to expel Iraq from Kuwait, upholding Resolution 660.[284] Now that Saddam had acted too independently of the US, the US set out not only to punish Iraq for its act of aggression, but also to mercilessly destroy the monster it helped create.

This strategy was made abundantly clear during one of the most well-known episodes of the war. During the last days of the war in February, a column of fleeing Iraqi soldiers were trapped in a traffic jam along Highway 80, connecting Kuwait City with Basra. US aircraft attacked the head and tail of the over mile-long traffic jam, trapping the retreating Iraqi forces. US aircraft then proceeded to bomb and strafe the entire column with cluster bombs, napalm, and depleted uranium munitions. A US officer compared the attack to a "turkey shoot," stating that "it was like turning on the kitchen light late at night and the cockroaches started scurrying. We finally got them out where we could find them and kill them."[285] What was left was a mile-long scrapyard of twisted, tangled, and charred metal, surrounded by death. Journalist Greg LaMotte, who surveyed the aftermath, described "what you could only describe as a massacre [...] this was the most horrific thing I had seen in my life: bodies everywhere, body parts everywhere."[286] Tony Clifton of *Newsweek* described "bodies all over the place … I was

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[283] Rick Francona, *Ally to Adversary: An Eyewitness Account of Iraq's Fall From Grace* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1999), 133
[284] UN Resolution 678
[285] Fisk, 624
[286] Simons, 8

up to my ankles in blood … there were very white-faced men going around saying, 'Jesus. Did we really do this?'."[287]

With Iraqi forces in retreat, the US continued giving chase, occupying large swaths of southern Iraq. Despite the collapse of combat effectiveness and morale of the Iraqi forces, and despite the US goal of toppling Saddam Hussein, US forces did not move to occupy Baghdad. Bush administration Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney provided an explanation for why this was:

> Because if we had gone to Baghdad we would have been all alone. There wouldn't have been anybody else with us. It would have been a US occupation of Iraq. None of the Arab forces that were willing to fight with us in Kuwait were willing to invade Iraq. Once you got to Iraq and took it over. And took down Saddam Hussein's government, then what are you going to put in its place? It's a very volatile part of the world, and if you take down the central government in Iraq you can easily end up seeing pieces of Iraq fly off. Part of it the Syrians would like to have, to the west. Part of eastern Iraq, the Iranians would like to claim, fought over for eight years. In the north you've got the Kurds. If the Kurds spill loose and join with the Kurds in Turkey then you threaten the territorial integrity of Turkey. It's a quagmire if you go that far and try to take over Iraq.[288]

Although the US wished to see Saddam removed from power, it was not willing to occupy to accomplish this goal. Furthermore, the overthrow of Saddam was not guaranteed to be instantaneous, with the potential of becoming a long-term endeavor. If Saddam could not be overthrown right away, then, in the meanwhile, the "policy is to keep Iraq in its box."[289] Instead, the US devised a series of policies to accomplish the same goal by other means.

This policy was first put in practice in February, in the last weeks of the war, when Bush appealed to the Iraqi people. "But there's another way for the bloodshed to

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[287] Ibid, 9

[288] "Cheney '94: Invading Baghdad Would Create Quagmire", Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6BEsZMvrq-I.

[289] Simons, 1

stop," declared Bush, "and that is for the Iraqi military, and the Iraqi people, to take matters into their own hands, to force Saddam Hussein the dictator to step aside."[290] Similar statements by US officials calling for an uprising were followed by CIA propaganda radio broadcasts, including one where a man purported to be an Iraqi defector urged the Iraqi people to:

> Rise up to save the homeland from the clutches of dictatorship so that you can devote yourself to avoid the dangers of the continuation of the war and destruction. Honourable sons of the Tigris and the Euphrates, at these decisive moments of your life, and while facing the danger of death at the hands of foreign forces, you have no option in order to survive and defend the homeland but to put an end to the dictator and his criminal gang. Prove to your people and nation that you are faithful and honorable sons of this generous country and this honourable nation. Stage a revolution now, before it is too late. He thinks of himself alone. He is not interested in what suffering you have endured the past few months of this destructive crisis. He insists on continuing to push your faithful sons into this massacre in defence of his false glory, privileges and criminal leadership.[291]

In the south, Shia militants, as well as some retreating Iraqi soldiers, launched a revolt. Similarly, the Kurds, either forgetting or disregarding the record of US betrayals, from 1975 to sweeping Halabja under the rug, heeded the call and launched a rebellion as well.

Once more, history was repeating itself. As with the "cynical enterprise" of 1972-1975, the US took a series of actions to ensure that the rebellion put as much pressure on the Ba'ath government as possible, yet without being able to score a decisive victory and threaten the territorial integrity of Iraq. By encouraging a mutiny, Bush hoped to provoke a military coup. When a mass insurrection erupted instead, US officials were alarmed. Bush explained that "we were concerned that the uprisings would sidetrack the overthrow of Saddam by causing the Iraqi military to rally around him."[292] According to former CIA

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[290] Charmelot

[291] Fisk, 646

[292] Patrick Cockburn, *Muqtada al-Sadr and the Battle for the Future of Iraq (Expanded Edition)* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 66

case officer Robert Baer, "we were afraid of upsetting the balance in the Gulf between the Shia and the Sunni."[293] Providing further detail, Zalmay Khalilzad, director of policy planning at the State Department, explained: "The partition of Iraq will not serve our long-term interests. Iraqi disintegration will improve prospects for Iranian domination of the Gulf and remove a restraint on Syria."[294]

When the uprising erupted, the US stated its intention to stay neutral. According to Marine Major General Martin Brandtner, "There is no move on [the part] of U.S. forces to let weapons slip through [to the rebels], or to play any role whatsoever in fomenting or assisting any side."[295] This assertion, however, is false, as US actions helped ensure that Iraq could crush the uprisings and exact collective punishment on the Kurdish and Shia populations at will. During the official surrender talks at Safwan, General Schwarzkopf assured the Iraqis that, while Iraqi planes were barred from flying, helicopters could be flown so long as they did not pose a threat to coalition forces.[296] Whatever the intent of this agreement, it enabled Iraq to deploy troop transport and gunship helicopters to crush the rebellions with greater ferocity and speed. Although the US, UK, and France had established no-fly zones in the north and south, nothing was done to halt the heliborne slaughter. Additionally, the US refused to provide direct assistance to the rebels, and in some cases bombed arms stockpiles before the rebels could get ahold of them. In the end, the rebellion was crushed, with tens of thousands

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[293] Charmelot
[294] Cockburn, 66
[295] Ibid, 67
[296] Francona, 150

dead.[297] One Iraqi colonel who participated in the crackdown puts the death toll closer to 150,000.[298]

US actions surrounding the 1991 uprisings demonstrated the US policy of regime change, one in which the US sought the overthrow of Saddam, but not the dismantling of his system. This was essential to hold Iraq together to maintain a somewhat feasible deterrent to Iranian ambitions. At the same time, the US wanted to eliminate Iraq's ability to conduct aggressive actions against its neighbors. In the course of the Gulf War, this aim had been achieved in large measure with the destruction of WMD and ballistic missile sites and with the Iraqi military as a whole being devastated. The deliberate and systematic destruction, coupled with sanctions, ensured that Iraq would largely be unable to rebuild its military. To further this end in the post-war period, the US lent its support to UN Resolution 687. Among the most important stipulations of the resolution were those which called for a complete disarmament of the Iraqi WMD program, including chemical and biological weapons, ballistic missiles with a range greater than 150 kilometers, and nuclear program. To conduct inspections, disarmament, and monitoring of Iraq's chemical, biological, and ballistic missile programs, the UN created the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM). To dismantle Iraq's nuclear weapons program, seize its weapons-grade material, and enforce Iraqi compliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, the UN issued a mandate to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).[299] However, as is became evidently clear, Resolution 678 was doomed from the start. First, as UNSCOM inspector Scott Ritter explained:

[297] Micah Zenko, "Remembering the Iraqi Uprising Twenty-Five Years Ago", Council on Foreign Relations, 5 March 2016, https://www.cfr.org/blog/remembering-iraqi-uprising-twenty-five-years-ago.
[298] Cockburn, 72
[299] Resolution 687 of 3 April 1991, United Nations.

> Security Council 687 is an absolute resolution … Iraq will not be found in compliance until it has been disarmed to a 100 percent level … And this was the Achilles tendon, so to speak, of UNSCOM. Because by the time 1997 came around, Iraq had been qualitatively disarmed. On any meaningful benchmark - in terms of defining Iraq's weapons of mass destruction capability, in terms of assessing whether or not Iraq posed a threat, not only to its immediate neighbors, but the region and the world as a whole - Iraq had been eliminated as such a threat.[300]

Now that Iraq had been expelled from Kuwait, the primary justification for maintaining sanctions was disarmament. In other words, the lifting of sanctions was linked to Iraq's cooperation with UNSCOM. Yet the absolute resolution ensured that a mere bureaucratic error here or a loose chemical artillery shell there would get in the way of certifying Iraq as fully, quantitatively disarmed.

Even if Iraq had been disarmed 100 percent, down to the very last artillery shell, with every last page related to the WMD program accounted for, it would have had no effect on the lifting of sanctions. The US made it clear that it would use its veto power in the Security Council to maintain sanctions in order to create and maintain the conditions for regime change. White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater remarked that "all possible sanctions will be maintained until he is gone." CIA director Robert Gates stated that "any easing of sanctions will be eased only when there is a new government." In March 1997, despite announcements from UNSCOM officials that Iraq had been largely disarmed and that sanctions should be lifted accordingly, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright remarked: "We do not agree with those nations that argue that if Iraq complies with its obligations concerning weapons of mass destruction, [that] sanctions should be lifted."[301]

The idea of imposing sanctions in response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and as leverage for Iraqi compliance for UNSCOM was agreed upon in the Security Council.

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[300] Ahmed, 176
[301] Simons , 51, 243

Where disagreement arose was over scope and duration. Sanctions against Iraq were first

implemented under Resolution 661. Under 661, all imports from and exports to Iraq were

prohibited, with the exception of shipments meant "exclusively for strictly medical or

humanitarian purposes and, in humanitarian purposes, foodstuffs."[302] On its face, the

language of the resolution seemed straightforward. However, in the absence of any

working definitions for terms such as "humanitarian purposes" and "foodstuffs" ensured

that such terms could be arbitrarily defined by the members of the Security Council.

When non-permanent member Yemen proposed to create a framework to establish

working definitions for the terms, providing the Committee with a swift process to enable

the delivery of humanitarian goods, the US struck down the proposal.[303] Such arbitrary

political interpretations were put to work by the US, with tragic consequences.

   The primary vehicle through which the US maintained sanctions was the

Sanctions Committee. Established under Resolution 661, the Committee decided which

items could be imported into Iraq.[304] The Committee staff were provided by the members

of the Security Council, and as such, all decisions made by the Committee were subject

to veto by its members. Under Resolution 661, and reaffirmed under Resolution 687, the

Committee was required to make exceptions for medical and humanitarian goods, and

foodstuffs.[305] However, with no criteria established for defining what constitutes

humanitarian or medical goods, and due to the inherent operating mechanism of the

Committee, the US was able to use the body to make sanctions hurt the Iraqi people as

much as possible, barring the entry of essential goods needed to sustain life in a society.

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[302] UN Resolution 661
[303] Simons, 115
[304] UN Resolution 661
[305] UN Resolution 687

The US was able to maintain the sanctions through its veto power, and through the operating mechanism of the Sanctions Committee.

The mechanism implemented by the Sanctions Committee ensured that the overwhelming majority of urgently-needed goods would not be delivered in a timely fashion, if at all. If any organization wanted to conduct business with Iraq, the organization would need to enter consultations with the Committee at every step of the way. In order to merely talk with potential Iraqi buyers, a seller needed to apply for a negotiating license, which would be processed in three to four weeks. If in the course of negotiations the buyer and seller reached a deal, the seller would then have to apply for a supply license, taking up to 20 weeks. Amid the bureaucratic delay, inflation of the Iraqi dinar spiraled further out of control, it was highly likely that the Iraqi buyer would be forced to cancel the order, if not accept a reduced quantity of quality delivery. However, if any change was made to the original deal, the Committee demanded the buyer and seller start the process all over again. Throughout the process, any member of the Committee could demand a deal be subject to further review, or strike down a deal. Typically, it was the US and/or UK which took such actions, vetoing the deliveries of items included but not limited to: food, medicine, clothing, toiletries, household electronics, textbooks, pencils, vaccines, and many more. The sanctions were so strict that when an Iraqi woman attempted mailing hand-knitted leggings for her daughter and grandchild in London, the daughter was informed by the UK Customs and Excise that if she wanted to receive the leggings, she would first have to apply for an import license through the Sanctions Committee.[306]

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[306] Simons, 119

Already, by 1991, the sanctions, combined with the Gulf War, had a devastating effect on Iraqi society. In March, one month after the war, a UN investigative team led by Martti Ahtisaari traveled to Iraq. In his report, Ahtisaari reported:

> nothing that we had seen or read had quite prepared us for the particular form of devastation which has now befallen the country. The recent conflict has wrought near-apocalyptic results upon the economic infrastructure of what had been, until January 1991, a rather urbanized and mechanized society. Now, most means of modern life support have been destroyed or rendered tenuous. Iraq has, for some time to come, been relegated to a pre-industrial age, but with all the disabilities of post-industrial dependency on an intensive use of energy and technology.[307]

Additionally, following a visit to Iraq, a Harvard study team published a report forecasting that if the conditions maintained and exacerbated by the sanctions regime persisted, 170,000 children under 5 years of age would die, largely from water-borne diseases exacerbated by chronic malnutrition.[308]

The scourging of Iraqi society had gone to plan. The US hoped that by using its veto power in the Sanctions Committee that it could prolong sanctions indefinitely, making life within Iraq so miserable that elements within the country, namely the military, could be compelled into launching a coup against Saddam. "We wanted to let the people know, 'Get rid of this guy, and we'll be more than happy to assist in rebuilding. We're not going to tolerate Saddam Hussein or his regime. Fix that and we'll fix your electricity," said a US military planner.[309] Another Pentagon planner remarked candidly: "Well, what were we trying to do with sanctions - help out the Iraqi people?

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[307] Javier Perez de Cuellar, *Letter Dated 20 March 1991 From the Secretary General Addressed to the President of the Security Council* (United Nations Security Council, 1991), 5
[308] Blum, 355
[309] Fisk, 706

No. What we were doing with attacks on infrastructure was to accelerate the effects of

sanctions."[310] Similarly, Colonel John Warden III commented:

> Saddam Hussein cannot restore his own electricity. He needs help. If there are
> political objectives that the U.N. coalition has, it can say, "Saddam, when you
> agree to do these things, we will allow people to come in and fix your electricity."
> It gives us long-term leverage.[311]

Indeed, sanctions were effective in creating a climate for regime change, one

which the US readily exploited. In October 1991, the CIA issued a finding, creating the

Iraq Operations Group, authorizing the agency to facilitate efforts to overthrow Saddam

Hussein. The CIA partnered with Iraqi exile opposition groups such as Ahmed Chalabi's

Iraqi National Congress and Iyad Alawi's Iraqi National Accord, who in turn helped

connect the CIA with members of the Iraqi military with the means and desire to launch a

coup. In one such effort, the CIA enlisted a defector named Muhammad Abdullah al-

Shawani, who in turn enlisted three of his brothers in the security services to launch the

coup. However, the plot was infiltrated and thwarted by the Iraqi security services in

1996.[312] According to former CIA case officer Robert Baer, from 1994 to 1995, a series

of CIA teams, under Kurdish protection, infiltrated into Iraq, scouring for opportunities to

organize a coup, and recruit willing candidates. In January 1995, Baer reported, a CIA

team submitted a coup plan to the White House, which was ultimately rejected for

unspecified reasons.[313] Amid CIA-instigated efforts, there also emerged some indigenous

coup attempts. In one such attempt, a group of military officers from the Dulaimi

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[310] Barton Gellman, "Allied Air War Struck Broadly in Iraq", Washington Post, 23 June 1991, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1991/06/23/allied-air-war-struck-broadly-in-iraq/e469877b-b1c1-44a9-bfe7-084da4e38e41/?utm_term=.1af50692a09d.
[311] Ibid
[312] Scott Ritter, *Iraq Confidential: The Untold Story of the Intelligence Conspiracy to Undermine the UN and Overthrow Saddam Hussein* (New York: Nation Books, 2005), 128, 152, 162-163
[313] Charmelot

launched a failed coup. In response, Saddam engaged in collective punishment of the Dulaimi tribe, and ultimately issued an ultimatum to the tribal leaders that they should root out the traitors in their midst, or face greater reprisals.[314]

Throughout the decade, every coup attempt, both US-instigated and indigenous, failed, some in very bloody fashion. Despite the repeated failures to bring about regime change, the US resisted every international outcry calling for the lifting of sanctions. If sanctions could not be used as a tool of regime change, then they could at least be used as a tool of containment, while the US devised new strategies. UNSCOM inspector Scott Ritter explained the US rationale as follows: "If you lift sanctions, you break containment. If you break containment, you no longer have Saddam Hussein under control."[315] This tactic seriously jeopardized the UNSCOM mission, and gave Iraq fewer and fewer incentives to cooperate. UNSCOM director Rolf Ekeus warned that "The US position is that the embargo will not be lifted as long as Saddam is on power. There is no incentive for Iraq to cooperate."[316] Inevitably, Iraq lashed out, be it due to the continuation of sanctions, or ever more intrusive inspections of Iraq's most sensitive sites, including presidential sites and the headquarters of Iraq's intelligence agencies.

Amid the ongoing sanctions, the US put forth a muddled mix of justifications to launch military strikes against Iraq throughout the decade. In some cases, the US claimed to be responding to Iraqi noncompliance with UNSCOM, while in other cases, the US claimed to be responding to other Iraqi machinations. In one such instance, US and Kuwaiti authorities announced that they had intercepted an Iraqi plot to assassinate former President Bush in Kuwait in 1993. However, the accusation was of dubious merit.

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[314] Scott Ritter, *Endgame: Solving the Iraq Crisis* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 115
[315] Charmelot
[316] Ritter, *Iraq Confidential*, 66

According to Pentagon officials interviewed by *NBC,* "evidence for the plot was questionable and that heavy-handed Kuwaiti interrogation tactics [a euphemism for torture]" made the prisoners' testimony useless.[317] Amnesty International expressed similar concerns, adding that the prisoners were not given a fair trial and access to lawyers, and that they faced possible execution.[318] The *New York Times* commented that in order to accept the assertions made by the US government to build a case for striking Iraq would require "a leap of faith and a complete suspension of political cynicism."[319] In spite of these revelations, on 27 June the US launched 23 cruise missiles at Baghdad.[320]

Just as the UNSCOM mission was moving faster than expected, a crisis was manufactured to provide a pretext to prolong the sanctions regime. In October 1994, Kuwaiti UN ambassador Muhammad Abulhasan issued a formal complaint to the Security Council, alleging that Iraq had made threatening statements to Kuwait. According to Abulhasan, Radio Baghdad issued a statement which reads as follows:

> those badly intended parties, especially the American Administration assisted by the Chairman of the Special Commission, Rolf Ekeus, granting it the required cover-ups, are determined in their pursuit of harming Iraq. This Administration and its collaborators in the region, particularly the rulers of Kuwait, are determined to prolong the embargo as long as they can in order to kill the largest number possible of Iraqis through the policy of starvation and deprivation. This policy means to deprive the struggling Iraqi people from medicine and the basic needs of life and human rights [...] the Iraqi leadership does not have any other alternative but to reconsider a new stand which will restore justice and relieve the Iraqi people from the distress imposed upon it.

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[317] Simons, Iraq: *From Sumer to Post-Saddam,* 96
[318] Ibid
[319] Ibid
[320] Ibid

According to Abulhasan, the broadcast constituted a "clear threat against Kuwait", and an attempt by Iraq to "evade its legal responsibilities under Security Council resolution 687."[321]

Immediately, the issue was taken up by the Security Council, then under the presidency of the Sir David Hannay of the UK. Hannay took Abulhasan's accusations further, alleging that "substantial numbers of Iraqi troops, including units of the Iraqi Republican Guard, are being redeployed in the direction of the border with Kuwait."[322] Certainly, Iraq was growing frustrated with the unending sanctions. Equally clear was the intent of the US and Kuwait to maintain sanctions. The US made this clear with repeated statements linking the end of sanctions to the removal of Saddam Hussein from power. Echoing the position of the al-Sabah ruling family, in 1993 the Kuwaiti newspaper *al-Anbaa* declared "We say to the rotten people - yes people not leadership - of Iraq that Kuwaitis are much superior to you and much more honourable and pure than you can ever be … We say to Iraq as a whole, its people, its regime - present and future - you are the lowest of the despicable and pray the Lord to vengefully chastise Iraq and O Lord leave not even a stone in Iraq standing upright."[323] However, the impending crisis turned out to be hot air. Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and his military advisors, hardly friends of Iraq, commented that Iraq had neither the manpower or air cover to invade Kuwait. Robert Fisk of *The Independent* reported that "Many reporters in the desert discovered just a solitary Kuwaiti tank near the frontier, a vehicle which was subsequently used only to tow their own bus out of the sand. On the other side of the

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[321] Simons, *The Scourging of Iraq,* 224
[322] *Statement by the President of the Security Council* (United Nations Security Council, 1994), 1
[323] Simons, *The Scourging of Iraq*, 174

border, there were even slimmer pickings."[324] Nonetheless, the Security Council passed

Resolution 949, condemning "recent military deployments by Iraq in the direction of the

border with Kuwait."[325] The US scored a propaganda victory, and a means by which to

delay the lifting of sanctions, despite UNSCOM's progress in disarming Iraq.

While the US continued its pressure campaign against Iraq, the humanitarian

situation began to spiral further out of control. Through 1992, malnutrition diseases such

as kwashiorkor and marasmus in children under 5 years multiplied by 11.5 times, while

diseases such as polio, cholera, scabies, typhoid, measles, pneumonia, viral jaundice,

malaria, and diphtheria, many of which had been eradicated, had reached epidemic

proportions.[326] According to a December 1992 study published in *The New England*

Journal of Medicine, in 1991 alone infant and child mortality rates increased more than

threefold.[327] According to a study by the International Study Team, prices for staple food

items skyrocketed, such as a 247 percent increase for beef, 4,531 percent increase for

wheat flour, and items such as milk, bread, baby milk, sugar, cooking oil, rice, tea,

tomato, chickpeas, potatoes, eggs, onions, dates, and lamb in between.[328] By July 1993,

the school dropout rate approached one-fifth, compared to being negligible before the

war. One Iraqi school counsellor reported that sometimes children were "so hungry that

they steal from each other. Often we have to send students home because they are too

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[324] Robert Fisk, "Let's not cry for Kuwait: The wealthy emirate courts Western cash, while Iraqis starve, says Robert Fisk", The Independent, 24 October 1994, https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/lets-not-cry-for-kuwait-the-wealthy-emirate-courts-western-cash-while-iraqis-starve-says-robert-fisk-1444698.html.

[325] Resolution 949 (1994), United Nations Security Council, 2

[326] Simons, 124, 129

[327] Alberto Ascherio et al, "Effect of the Gulf War on Infant and Child Mortality in Iraq", The New England Journal of Medicine, 24 September 1992, https://www.nejm.org/doi/10.1056/NEJM199209243271306?url_ver=Z39.88-2003&rfr_id=ori%3Arid%3Acrossref.org&rfr_dat=cr_pub%3Dwww.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov.

[328] Laila Abdelnour et al, *Health and Welfare in Iraq After the Gulf Crisis: An In-Depth Assessment* (International Study Team, 1991), 31

sick from hunger to be able to sit up."[329] In 1992, a study titled *Unheard Voices: Iraqi Women on War and Sanctions* reported that Iraqi women were suffering from malnourishment, irregular menstrual cycles, excessive bleeding, little to no access to contraceptives, increased use of abortions (legal and illegal), skyrocketing rates of miscarriage, and undergoing cesarean sections without anesthetics.[330] In their 1995 study, researchers Mary Smith Fawzi and Sarah Zaidi reported that as a direct result of the sanctions, as many as 576,000 Iraqi children had died.[331]

Despite the growing international outcry, and an outpouring of information documenting the devastating humanitarian catastrophe, the US was unwilling to lift sanctions. However, the US realized that if it was to maintain sanctions at all, especially given the fact that Iraq had been qualitatively disarmed of its WMDs, it would have to support a loosening of sanctions. To this effect, the US voted in favor of UN Resolution 986, creating the "oil-for-food" program. "As a temporary measure to provide for the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people," the Resolution granted Iraq the ability to export petroleum and petroleum products "sufficient to produce a sum not exceeding a total of one billion United States dollars every 90 days" under the strict supervision of the Security Council. All revenues from the program were to be deposited into an escrow account controlled by the Security Council, and released as deemed appropriate.[332]

Seemingly a panacea for Iraq's humanitarian catastrophe, Resolution 986 proved to be more political than practical. One UN aid worker described the oil-for-food

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[329] Simons, 172

[330] Bela Bhatia, Mariam Shahin, & Mary Kawar, *Unheard Voices: Iraqi Women on War and Sanctions* (International Study Team, 1992)

[331] Barbara Crossette, "Iraq Sanctions Kill Children, U.N. Report", New York Times, 1 December 1995, https://www.nytimes.com/1995/12/01/world/iraq-sanctions-kill-children-un-reports.html.

[332] Resolution 986 (1995), UN Security Council, 1-5

program as follows: "We first break their legs and then offer them a crutch."[333] Worse

than that, the program proved inadequate to alleviate the humanitarian catastrophe,

warned Iraqi ambassador to the UN, Nizar Hamdoon.[334] This appears to be by design.

According to Resolution 986, citing Resolution 705, Iraq was to pay up to 30 percent of

its annual petroleum revenues as compensation to Kuwait.[335] Additionally, Iraq was

required to direct part of its revenues to funding UN programs in Iraq, including

UNSCOM.[336] Lastly, Iraq was required to make available up to $10 million every 90

days for a list of assorted operating costs listed under Resolution 778.[337] By the time Iraq

was able to purchase foodstuffs and medicines, it found that all related transactions were

still subject to scrutiny by the Sanctions Committee, inevitably leading to delay. The

delay was such that UN Secretary General Kofi Annan reported that "As at 3 March

1997, no consignment of humanitarian goods authorized under Resolution 986 (1995)

had reached Iraq."[338] Lastly, with limited exceptions to oil infrastructure equipment,

Resolution 986 contained no provisions allowing Iraq to import the supplies and

equipment necessary to rebuild the civilian infrastructure, devastated and unrepaired

since the Gulf War, guaranteeing that the humanitarian catastrophe would continue.

By 1998, it was clear that the US strategy in Iraq was failing. Despite the

worsening humanitarian situation, Saddam Hussein remained deeply entrenched, with

coup after coup being thwarted. International outcry in protest of the sanctions regime

was growing, both on humanitarian grounds, and on the grounds that Iraq had been

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[333] Simons, 52

[334] Ibid, 236

[335] Resolution 705 of 15 August 1991, UN Security Council.

[336] Resolution 986

[337] Resolution 778 (1992). UN Security Council.

[338] Kofi Annan, *Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to Paragraph 11 of Resolution 986 (1995)* (United Nations, 1997), 1

effectively disarmed of its WMD capability. One of the largest sources of protest against the humanitarian situation came from within the UN. At the forefront of dissent in the UN was Denis Halliday, Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq. Halliday reported:

> I recently met with trade union leaders [in Iraq] who asked me why the United Nations does not simply bomb the Iraqi people, and do it efficiently, rather than extending sanctions which kill Iraqis incrementally over a long period … Sanctions are undermining the cultural and educational recovery of Iraq, and will not change its system of governance. Sanctions encourage isolation, alienation, and fanaticism … Sanctions constitute a serious breach of the United Nations charter on human rights and children's rights.[339]

Hans von Sponeck, who became Humanitarian Coordinator after Halliday's resignation, decried "We're treating Iraq as if it were made up of 23 million Saddam Husseins, which is rubbish."[340] Like Halliday, von Sponeck resigned in protest, followed by Jutta Purghart, head of the UN World Food Program in Iraq.[341] In 2000, Halliday commented that "we are responsible for a genocide in Iraq."[342]

With sanctions failing to bring about regime change, US policy began to build towards a grim, logical conclusion. As Rolf Ekeus explained, "Sanctions and war are linked to each other. So if you go against sanctions [...] there is nothing but war left."[343] Increasingly, the US began to look towards a military option for Iraq. To facilitate this, the US began to push for ever more intrusive UNSCOM inspections targeting some of Iraq's most sensitive sites, including the Ministry of Defense, and a list of presidential sites, in the hopes that an Iraqi backlash could be used as a pretext to strike Iraq. After Iraq refused to grant UNSCOM inspectors access to several sensitive sites, and amid US

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[339] Fisk, *The Great War for Civilisation,* 709
[340] Ibid, 708-709
[341] Ewen MacAskill, "Second official quits UN team", The Guardian, 15 February 2000, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2000/feb/16/iraq.unitednations.
[342] Fisk, 709
[343] Charmelot

threats of military strikes, UNSCOM director Ekeus and Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz

reached an agreement which balanced Iraq's security concerns with UNSCOM's

inspection mission.[344] According to Scott Ritter, this agreement, plus the failure of the

Shawani coup, "was a strategic disaster for US Iraq policy."[345] Deprived of a plausibly

deniable covert operations option, and with the resumption of UNSCOM inspections

denying the US a pretext to strike Iraq, the US doubled down, pushing for more intrusive

sanctions.

By late-1997, Iraq's patience had worn thin. With the failure of the oil-for-food

program to deliver any aid, with cooperation with UNSCOM not yielding a lifting of

sanctions, and suspicions that the US was using UNSCOM as a means to collect

intelligence to be used in an effort to topple Saddam Hussein, Iraq took the first steps to

suspend cooperation with UNSCOM. According to Ritter, "by October 1997 the senior

Iraqi leadership realized that there could be no satisfying UNSCOM's search for truth

without compromising the security of Saddam Hussein to an unacceptable level. After the

withdrawal of UNSCOM 207, the Iraqi government made a decision to stop cooperating

with UN weapons inspectors until what they deemed the compositional bias (i.e. too

many American and British inspectors) was addressed."[346] By August 1998, Iraq

suspended cooperation with UNSCOM, alleging that US intelligence agents were using

UNSCOM to spy on Saddam Hussein.[347]

Initially, US officials denied the Iraqi allegations, and condemned the Iraqi move

as an unprovoked act of noncompliance. Despite these denials, US officials later

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[344] Ritter, 169
[345] Ibid, 169
[346] Ibid, 248
[347] Fisk, 721

conceded that there was indeed a US-led effort within UNSCOM to spy on Saddam

Hussein known as "Shake The Tree."[348] To help carry out its mission, UNSCOM had

developed a sophisticated surveillance network throughout Iraq. That network was

created in large part with US assistance. Aside from the Iraqi contribution, all related UN

resolutions set no guidelines for which states should fund and assist UNSCOM, and how

much they should contribute. Naturally, the US proved the most willing to provide

assistance. Ritter commented that "the willingness of the USA to provide UNSCOM with

personnel and material support, was making me feel as if Stu Cohen and the CIA likewise

were employing tactics based upon the 'keep your friends close, and your enemies closer'

line of thinking."[349] Besides assisting in the construction of a surveillance network used

for arms inspections, the US created a parallel, independent eavesdropping operation. The

US did not inform UNSCOM director Ekeus of this operation, nor did it share the

intelligence collected with UNSCOM. "We were very concerned about protecting our

independence of access," remarked a US official. "We did not want to rely on a

multinational body that might or might not continue to operate as it was operating."[350]

Another US official commented that Shake The Tree intercepts were "normal military

communications, not related to UNSCOM", information which UNSCOM declared it had

no use for.[351] According to military affairs analyst William Arkin, the US developed "a

diagrammatic understanding of the Iraqi government structure, as well as of the

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[348] Barton Gellman, "U.S. Spied on Iraq Via U.N.", Washington Post, 2 March 1999,
https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/daily/march99/unscom2.htm.
[349] Ritter, 75
[350] Gellman
[351] Ibid

intelligence, security and transport organizations that protect the Iraqi leadership."[352] Ultimately, the UN admitted that "UNSCOM directly facilitated the creation of an intelligence collection system for the United States in violation of its mandate. The United Nations cannot be party to an operation to overthrow one of its member states. In the most fundamental way, that is what's wrong with the UNSCOM operation."[353]

Following Iraq's decision to suspend cooperation with UNSCOM, the US responded with two measures. The first was the passage of the Iraq Liberation Act in October. The Act stated that "it should be the policy of the United States to seek to remove the Saddam Hussein regime from power in Iraq and to replace it with a democratic government." To accomplish this, the US would support "one or more Iraqi democratic opposition organizations" with "military education and training," radio broadcasts, and "humanitarian assistance."[354] In large part, the Act was largely symbolic, merely an open acknowledgement of the past seven years of US Iraq policy. At the same time, moving what was largely a covert policy unambiguously into public view was indicative of how serious the US was about regime change, and was in fact an escalation.

The next step was the launching of Operation Desert Fox by the US and UK from 16-19 December 1998. During the course of the oddly-named operation (Erwin Rommel's nickname was "Desert Fox"), the US launched 200 cruise missiles dropped 540 bombs on 100 targets, while British planes flew 28 sorties against 11 targets.[355] Ostensibly, the aim of the airstrikes was to punish Iraq for suspending cooperation with

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[352] William Arkin, "The Difference Was in the Details", Washington Post, 17 January 1999, https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/iraq/analysis.htm.
[353] Barton Gellman, "Annan Suspicious of UNSCOM Role", Washington Post, 6 January 1999, https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/iraq/stories/unscom010699.htm.
[354] H.R.4655-Iraq Liberation Act of 1998, https://www.congress.gov/bill/105th-congress/house-bill/4655.
[355] Fisk, 721

UNSCOM, for expelling the UNSCOM team from Iraq, and to degrade a WMD capability that Iraq was allegedly concealing. The latter claim has been repeated frequently, including by Colin Powell during his infamous 2003 presentation at the UN.[356] However, this allegation was false. Although Iraq had ceased cooperation, it did not expel UNSCOM. Instead, according to second UNSCOM director Richard Butler, it was he that withdrew UNSCOM, on US advice: "I received a telephone call from US Ambassador Peter Burleigh inviting me for a private conversation at the US mission... Burleigh informed me that on instructions from Washington it would be 'prudent to take measures to ensure the safety and security of UNSCOM staff presently in Iraq.' ... I told him that I would act on this advice and remove my staff from Iraq."[357] Furthermore, the claim that the airstrikes were aimed at degrading an alleged WMD capability is not substantiated by the targeting array. According to military affairs analyst William Arkin:

> Thirty-five of the 100 targets were selected because of their role in Iraq's air defense system, an essential first step in any air war, because damage to those sites paves the way for other forces and minimizes casualties all around. Only 13 targets on the list are facilities associated with chemical and biological weapons or ballistic missiles, and three are southern Republican Guard bases that might be involved in a repeat invasion of Kuwait.

> The heart of the Desert Fox list (49 of the 100 targets) is the Iraqi regime itself: a half-dozen palace strongholds and their supporting cast of secret police, guard and transport organizations. Some sites, such as Radwaniyah, had been bombed in 1991 (Saddam's quarters there were designated "L01" in Desert Storm, meaning the first target in the Leadership category).[358]

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[356] "Transcript of Powell's U.N. presentation", CNN, 5 February 2005, http://www.cnn.com/2003/US/02/05/sprj.irq.powell.transcript.05/index.html.
[357] Richard Butler, *Saddam Defiant: The Threat of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and the Growing Crisis of Global Security* (Blaine: Phoenix Publishing, 2001), 224
[358] Arkin

With UNSCOM out of the country, a growing international outcry to lift the sanctions, and the failure of the US to overthrow Iraq through a combination of sanctions and covert operations, the next logical step was war.

In this final phase of US-Iraq relations examined in this study, the US doubled down on a failed strategy. When US policy aims in Iraq could no longer be attained through more indirect means, it opted to do so through direct means. In its effort to exert more direct control over Iraq, the US only succeeded in losing control. Countless failed coups demonstrated that Saddam's government was too deeply entrenched to be toppled by any action short of a foreign invasion. The victimization of the Iraqi people throughout the 1990s had the effect of further entrenching his rule and allowing him to present himself as the defender of a people unjustly targeted by a vindictive and genocidal superpower. Instead of coming to the conclusion that regime change would fail, efforts to continue regime change would only increase the suffering of the Iraqi people, and that the US would lose more control over Iraq, the US doubled down yet again by invading Iraq in 2003.

Afterword: The Final Betrayal, and Iraq's Enduring Suffering

Much has been written of the 2003 Iraq War, and the deceit which led the US into that war. It is well-known how the 9/11 attacks were exploited to set in motion a series of regime changes in the Middle East, a grand strategy devised by a neoconservative think tank known as the Project for a New American Century (PNAC), whose members came to occupy the George W. Bush administration. Likewise, much has been written of the consequences of this criminal war, from the staggering death toll, to the scourge of ISIL.

Therefore this is not the place to excessively debate the finer points of the Iraq War. Doing so could easily take up another couple hundred pages of analysis. However, it is important to briefly reflect on how over sixty years of short-sighted, cynical, and failed policies led up to this point.

The aim of this study was partly motivated by a desire to contextualize the Iraq War against the backdrop of a much deeper history between the US and Iraq. Keeping this in mind, the Iraq War was merely a later chapter in a long history of the US attempting to exert its influence in Iraq, albeit a more devastating and blatant example. Brief glimmers were given into that long and troubled history. During an interview with *CNN,* a startled Donald Rumsfeld was confronted with footage of his infamous meeting with Saddam Hussein in Baghdad in the 1980s. While brief glimmers into a deeper history emerged, they were largely glossed over, thus giving the impression that the Iraq War was a more recent development. Perhaps this was by design. In absence of a deeper historical context, the Iraq War incriminates the Bush administration alone. With that context, it incriminates generations of US policymakers, as well as the the US foreign policy establishment itself. It shows that those policymakers did not learn their lesson, and instead decided to take the same actions over and over again, expecting different results.

In examining the consequences of these policies, the study was also aimed at highlighting the humanitarian consequences. Simply put, the wanton disregard of human rights by the US has helped lead to a catastrophe for the Iraqi people. One of the more startling revelations of the Iraq War came from a 2006 mortality study published in *The*

Lancet, which found that by July 2006, 654,965 Iraqis had died as a result of the war.[359]

In isolation, this figure is shocking. Taking into account the death and devastation

wrought on by the Iran-Iraq War, Gulf War, UN sanctions regime, and all that followed

after 2006, it reveals a humanitarian catastrophe decades in the making. Indeed, it is an

enduring catastrophe. Most recently, after the defeat of ISIL in Iraq, the Iraqi government

reported that reconstruction would cost up to $88 billion.[360]

What all this shows is that US policymakers have not learned the lessons of

history, and they have not learned from the failures of their past policies, nor have they

considered the consequences of their policies for the Iraqi people. For careful observers,

many of the consequences were easily predictable. Keeping in mind the failure to bend

Iraq to the will of the US through sanctions, to make Saddam Hussein into a loyal US

client, the British failure to exert direct control after the 1920 revolt, and the failure to

exert even indirect control after the fall of the Iraqi monarchy, it should have been

evident that any further attempts to bend Iraq to the will of the west would end in

disaster. In the short-term, they might succeed. In the long-term, it would ultimately fail.

Throughout every step of the process, it came at a high human cost. Despite this, US

policymakers adopted the same fundamental policy assumption and expected different

results, with disastrous consequences for the Iraqi people, and for the region.

Why it is that US policy towards Iraq was so cynical and callous, and why the US

continued pursuing disastrous and costly policies through the decades remain open to

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[359] Gilbert Burnham et al, "Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey", The Lancet, 21 October 2006, https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(06)69491-9/fulltext.
[360] Maher Chmaytelli & Ahmed Hagagy, "Iraq says reconstruction after war on Islamic State to cost $88 billion", Reuters, 12 February 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-reconstruction/iraq-says-reconstruction-after-war-on-islamic-state-to-cost-88-billion-idUSKBN1FW0JB.

question. Seldom do policymakers acknowledge the cynicism and blithe disregard for human rights, with exception to Kissinger and his infamous mantra that "covert action should not be confused with missionary work." Without a doubt, access to oil superseded human rights. Without a doubt, the greed of corporations and desire of politicians to satisfy their corporate constituents was a major factor as well. To what extent racism played a role is unclear, and also not openly acknowledged or deeply explored. Clearly there was a prevailing view until the George W. Bush administration that democracy was not possible in Iraq, and that a heavy-handed dictator was needed to keep the society from descending into chaos. For a state to engage in policies which lead to massive suffering for another people, they often engage in thinking which portrays people in other countries as something less than human, thus creating a justification to engage in such callous behavior. Lastly, there remains the question as to how many of these policies were the product of ignorance or indifference, be it towards the Iraqi people, their culture and history, or towards US-Iraq relations. When the Nixon administration launched the "cynical enterprise" of arming the Kurds, issues ranging from Vietnam to Watergate and detente with the USSR sucked resources away which could otherwise have been used to devise a smarter and more humane Iraq policy. During the Reagan administration there was undoubtedly a great degree of indifference, one which led the US to see as nothing more than a bludgeon to use against Iran. Such questions are not exclusive to US-Iraq relations, and can be applied to the relations the US has with other countries. Indeed, the US-Iraq relation is not the only "cynical enterprise" of US foreign policy, and it will certainly not be the last if there is not a fundamental review of US foreign policy.

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