Iraq on the International Stage

Foreign Policy and National Identity in Transition

Jane Kinninmont, Gareth Stansfield and Omar Sirri

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Charity Registration No. 208223

ISBN 978 1 86203 292 7

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Cover image: © Getty Images/AFP

Designed and typeset by Soapbox Communications Limited
www.soapbox.co.uk

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Latimer Trend and Co Ltd

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Acknowledgments

This paper was funded by a grant from the United States Institute of Peace. Particular thanks are due to Raya Barazanji, Senior Program Officer at USIP, for her support.

The authors would like to thank everyone who gave their time and shared their insights in interviews for this paper in Iraq (Baghdad, Erbil and Suleimaniya), the UK and the US, and particularly Mohamad Harissi and the Agence France-Presse bureau in Baghdad for their assistance and support. Thanks are also due to the participants in two workshops held in Washington, DC in November 2012 and in London in February 2013 to discuss Iraqi foreign policy dynamics. Preliminary findings were discussed at Chatham House's 'Iraq Ten Years On' conference and at the Suleimani Forum at the American University of Suleimaniya, both in March 2013.

Valuable comments on drafts of this paper were kindly provided by Dr Phebe Marr, Middle East Institute; Dr Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, Baker Institute Fellow, Rice University; Nadim Shehadi, Associate Fellow, Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Programme, Chatham House; and Dr Claire Spencer, Head, MENA Programme, Chatham House. Thanks are also due to Hayder Al Khoei, Gazwan Aldafai, Jessica Forsythe, Ghazaleh Djafari-Marbini, Sara Masry and Helen Twist (MENA Programme Manager, Chatham House) for their assistance with this project.

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Executive Summary

This report aims to shed light on the key actors, processes and narratives that are shaping Iraq's foreign policy behaviour and options, at a time when the country is seeking to emerge from international sanctions and resume a more normal role in international affairs, but is also facing intensifying domestic divisions over its position in a Middle East region that is increasingly polarized along pro-Iranian or pro-Gulf lines. The analysis draws on a series of first-hand interviews conducted in Iraq (Baghdad, Erbil and Suleimaniya) in 2012–13, as well as two expert-level workshops and interviews in London and Washington with a variety of Iraqi and other diplomats, politicians, analysts, historians and civil society voices.

Foreign policy as a sphere of contestation

Iraq's history of aggression against neighbouring states in the 1980s and 1990s gave a variety of regional and international powers – including the United States, Iran and the Gulf states – an interest in containing the country's ability to act as a strong military power or even a significant regional foreign policy actor. Yet ten years after its invasion and occupation, the concerns of its neighbours now centre on a weak Iraq that some of them perceive as little more than an Iranian proxy, and on the unpredictable actions of powerful non-state actors within its territory. As the conflict in Syria threatens to destabilize the country further, there are also growing fears that the Iraqi nation-state will collapse, threatening to dismantle the post-Ottoman territorial landscape.

Iraq's recent absence as a foreign policy actor is a historical anomaly. Like Egypt and Syria, it has traditionally been one of the most influential countries in the Arab world, and is thus also a country that others want to influence. Since 2003, the deeply contested nature of the country's occupation and post-occupation transition has provided an opening for other states, enabling them to form strong alliances with different internal factions on the basis of their respective interests in the region. This factional alliance-building reinforces the structural deficiencies of domestic state institutions and complicates efforts to develop consensus on foreign policy.

Views on these subjects are diverse and often polarized, largely in line with competing narratives about the key paradigm of internal Iraqi politics. For those who see Iraq as primarily engaged in a process of democratization, above all by introducing an elected majority government, the key regional dynamic is the efforts of other regional powers to block this democratic experiment in order to protect their own authoritarian models of government. Yet many of the Iraqi government's supporters are also profoundly concerned that the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria will empower forces inside and outside Iraq that are hostile to the Iraqi government and even to the Iraqi nation-state. The consequent tragic irony is that many of them now oppose the overthrow of an authoritarian Ba'athist government next door, despite having criticized the Gulf states for taking a similar stance over regime change in Iraq itself. For critics of the current Iraqi government, on the other hand, the problem is viewed the other way around. As they see it, the Iraqi government of Nouri al-Maliki is pushing its mostly Sunni and mostly Arab neighbours away by marginalizing Sunni Iraqis at home and by embracing Iran. And, by in effect supporting the Syrian regime Maliki is condemning Iraq to isolation in a minority pro-Iranian camp. This polarization of views is sustained by a diet of poor and politicized information, opaque and personalized decision-making, and uncertainty (for instance, over the extent to which the Iraqi government is facilitating, or merely turning a blind eye towards, the movement of matériel and fighters into Syria).

The complexity of the foreign policy landscape is compounded by the rise and legal institutionalization of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and its implementation of a de facto independent foreign policy that not only furthers the Kurds' claims to complete autonomy, but is also, at times, contrary to the foreign policy aims and aspirations of the government in Baghdad. While the KRG does not officially articulate an independent foreign policy, it has assiduously developed distinct policies to encourage foreign direct investment, negotiated its own oil and gas contracts with international oil companies, mediated between the government of Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers' Party, and involved itself in the affairs of Syrian Kurdish parties.

In search of a third way

The current outlook for the conflict in Syria suggests that Iraq's internal disputes over its regional alignment are only set to worsen. Yet there is a third way for Iraq: namely, a position of non-alignment and non-interference in an increasingly conflicted region.

The war in Syria highlights the deficit of credible and balanced regional diplomatic leadership at a time when the Middle East is trying to make a transition away from the unipolar dominance of the United States but has yet to develop effective structures or processes to support regional stability and economic development. Iraq is hardly alone in lacking a strategy towards Syria; but it is missing what could be a rare opportunity for one of the region's few elected governments, representing a multi-sectarian and multi-ethnic state, to move beyond a regional schism in which great-power interests dating back to the Cold War era are overlaid with increasingly poisonous sectarian politics.

Syria is the most divisive foreign policy issue facing Iraq. Yet these disparate factions share certain basic interests, above all the need to protect their country against the overspill of violence from the conflict next door. By UN estimates, more than 1,000 Iraqis were killed in political violence in May 2013, and the risk of a renewed civil war in Iraq looms large. But instead of making a concerted effort to help bring about a political solution to a crisis that is of paramount importance to the future of their country, both the government and the opposition seem resigned to pursuing a reactive approach, even as non-state Iraqi groups become actively involved on both sides of Syria's conflict.

A more enlightened approach seems to have prevailed in Iraq's renewed relationship with Kuwait, which is exemplified by progress in trade, the restoration of flights after two decades, and Kuwait's call for the UN to lift Iraq's Chapter VII status. These steps are beginning to heal the painful history between the two countries.

Consensus could also be built around Iraq's relations with rising powers, especially the oil-importing industrializing nations of Asia, which are becoming the primary markets for Iraq's main export, and with the Arab transition countries, which are themselves experimenting with elected governments and which do not have an interest in spoiling Iraq's democratic experiment. Long-term oil market trends imply an eastward shift of foreign relations. At the same time, like other states in the region, Iraq may gradually seek to diversify its foreign alliances and sources of arms away from the United States, still the country's main military and security ally. In stark contrast to the United States, Asian powers, notably China and India, emphasize a non-aligned approach to regional relations – not least because they import oil from both Saudi Arabia and Iran – which could fit well with Iraq's aspirations to play a more neutral role.

However, Iraqi political players still use the country's foreign relations principally as a means to gain power within the state, rather than to further the country's interests in the region. Both the conflict in Syria and the political violence in Iraq are partly shaped by the legacy of authoritarian governments that relied heavily on coercion and refused to permit space for effective opposition to develop peacefully. The legacy of dictatorship and colonialism in the region has also contributed to a widespread sense that agency is limited and decisions are made elsewhere – narratives that very easily become self-fulfilling prophecies.

The risks of neglect

Foreign policy-making often suffers from short-termism during times of crisis. But it is essential for Western governments to remember that Iraq's current problems have been profoundly shaped both by the invasion and occupation, and by the preceding dictatorial rule of Saddam Hussein, which Western governments once supported as a counterweight to Iran. The modern history of Iraq is one of many examples that belie the assumption that repressive government brings stability, rather than creating a superficial façade behind which dissent is hidden.

Key Western governments, notably those of the United States and the United Kingdom, today demonstrate an 'Iraq fatigue' that has much to do with their domestic politics. As a result, the 2003 invasion of Iraq is largely portrayed as the mistake of a previous administration, with its overblown promises made about the invasion which have largely been met with disappointment. Engaging with Iraq is not a popular foreign policy, nor is it straightforward. But it is essential that Western governments do remain engaged, above all to help protect the country's borders and territorial integrity against the threat of overspill from Syria. International governments and multilateral institutions also need to integrate Iraq, Lebanon and Turkey into a more coordinated response to the Syrian refugee crisis, now involving more than 1.5 million people.

Iraq's future fortunes remain profoundly relevant to a host of Western strategic objectives in the region, from security and counter-radicalization to economic development, oil policy and beliefs about democracy. A new civil conflict in Iraq would both jeopardize these objectives and be seen by many people as compounding a Western legacy of failure there. The United States, United Kingdom and other key European governments need to refocus on Iraq. They should also strive to discourage their Gulf allies from instrumentalizing anti-Shia sectarianism as part of their efforts to mobilize Arab public opinion against the governments of Syria and Iran. This is an easy short-term fallback position that would have immense costs in terms of regional radicalization and conflict in the longer term, and which could drive Iraq further towards Iran by making a much-needed rapprochement with its Gulf neighbours seem all but impossible.

Iraq and Surrounding Countries

Source: United Nations Department of Field Support, Cartographic Section, Iraq Map No. 3835 Rev. 5, March 2011. The boundaries and names shown and designations used on this map do not imply endorsement or acceptance by the authors or Chatham House.

1 Introduction

For the past two decades, Iraq – traditionally one of the most influential countries in the Arab world – has not been considered to be a significant foreign policy actor. While the events in the country since 2003 have had seismic effects on the rest of the region, this has largely been the result of changes to its own power structures, rather than concerted efforts by the Iraqi state to bring about foreign policy outcomes in the region. Where its neighbours formerly feared the impact of a strong Iraq that was seen as belligerent and expansionist, since 2003 their threat perceptions have centred instead on the risks emanating from a weak Iraq, from powerful non-state actors within it or even from the collapse of the nation-state with the potential to trigger separatist movements elsewhere in the region.

Yet Iraq's absence as a foreign policy actor in the past two decades is a historical anomaly. As a nation-state today, Iraq occupies a geostrategically important location, owns immense natural resources, and has one of the larger populations (33 million people) in an Arab world comprised of relatively small states.

Iraq's regional impact

Under the previous Ba'athist regime, Iraq initially played a significant role both in the foreign relations of the Middle East region and on the wider global stage. Yet its approach to foreign policy was marked by aggressive attempts to project influence over the region, to the point of entering into two highly destructive wars. The first, with Iran from 1980 to 1988, was supported by Gulf states and Western powers. The second, the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, led to a US-led military intervention to restore Kuwaiti sovereignty, and then to Iraq entering a phase of exceptional international isolation.

The country's history of aggression against neighbouring states gave a variety of regional and international powers an interest in containing it as a military power and foreign policy actor – including, despite their very different strategies and objectives in the region, Iran and the US-allied states of the Gulf, as they had been the targets of Iraqi military action. Since the 2003 invasion, a sharp divergence in the interests of Iran and the Gulf states in Iraq has contributed to a broader Iranian–Saudi 'cold war' in the region. It has also contributed to the contestation for power between Iraqi political factions, in a complex competition where politicians seek external support to strengthen their hand domestically and where domestic political disputes are deeply linked to foreign alliances.

Even when Iraq is preoccupied mostly with internal dynamics, its centrality to the region means that internal developments resonate well beyond the country's borders. This was true in the 20th century with the influence of the Ba'athist coup, the Iraqi Communist Party and transnational

Shia religious movements, notably the Islamic Dawa Party. A number of dramatic changes in Iraq since 2003 have had a profoundly destabilizing effect on the Middle East: the advent of an elected government in the region with the world's greatest democratic deficit; the empowerment of Shia and Kurdish parties, which has emboldened others; and political violence that, while drawing in fighters more than exporting them, has nevertheless shaped fears and sharpened communal tensions in other countries. The potential for Iraq to have a 'demonstration effect' adds to the incentives for neighbours to try to influence its domestic political calculations, in order to contain any potential for deliberate outward aggression and to influence the domestic power balance and power structure.

Sovereignty, independence and regional fears

Questions of sovereignty and independence persist, unsurprisingly in a post-colonial state in a region of major importance to old and new world powers. With much of its state apparatus destroyed in the past two decades, Iraq is again going through a period of post-colonial state formation, years after other countries in the region, while simultaneously undergoing a transition from authoritarian rule that started a decade ahead of the new Arab transition countries.[1] After the invasion of Kuwait, regional powers feared the Iraqi government was expansionist, seeking regional hegemony and willing to use military means to achieve it. These concerns have now almost been reversed as neighbours worry that the Iraqi state is fragile and excessively dependent on Iran. Some of them see Iraq's government as little more than an Iranian proxy. But Iran is not the only country that has sought to penetrate and influence the nascent Iraqi state.

For their part, Iraq's foreign policy officials often depict their choices of regional alliances as being constrained by political, sectarian and personal differences with some of their Gulf Arab neighbours and, increasingly since 2011, with Turkey. They see the country as being caught between other powers – Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and increasingly Qatar – that are perceived as seeking regional hegemony. Each of these countries has its allies in Iraq, but there are also elements of mistrust and bet-hedging in these alliances.

Hopes of regaining influence

As Iraq seeks to rebuild itself after nearly a decade of foreign occupation, a wide variety of Iraqi officials and factions speak of a desire for it to regain an influential position in the region – something seen, for instance, in the cross-party support for hosting the Arab League summit in 2012. Iraq's growing wealth is also likely to encourage such sentiment, increasing the potential for trade partnerships with neighbours and the options for wielding soft power (for instance, through foreign aid or even a sovereign wealth fund), while also gradually affecting the balance of power with Iran. The success of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in developing strong diplomatic and economic ties with Turkey, despite a history of mistrust, is an example of the influence Iraqi actors could have on the regional stage. The relationship moved from being constrained by Turkey's fears of its own Kurdish separatist movement, to a situation in which the Iraqi Kurds have a positive role to play in helping Turkey deal with its own Kurdish question.

1 Iraq's relations with the new Arab transition countries are explored in more detail in Chapter 6 below. The role of the US-led military intervention in the regime change has complicated the responses to it in the Arab world and has limited the spillover effects.

However, there is as yet little consensus on what a more active Iraqi foreign policy would look like. Foreign policy is particularly contentious when it comes to relationships within the immediate region. The continued resonance of ethno-sectarian identity politics means that Iraq's internal identity debates are intertwined with different views about its desired place in the region. Above all, the nature of the relationship with Iran has become highly contested, and Iraq's approach to the Syrian conflict has become deeply divisive within the country. Given the importance of Syria to the region, the conflict there may be Iraq's most high-profile foreign policy test, yet also the one that is the most difficult for it to deal with.

The making of foreign policy is further complicated by the ongoing contestation over the powers of different state institutions and actors, including some competition between the prime minister's office, the foreign ministry, the KRG and different Iraqi political groupings. The foreign ministry has focused its efforts on issues of relative consensus: above all, negotiating with the UN and United States to restore the country's legal sovereignty and bring about an end to the international sanctions on Iraq. Strategic alliances – chiefly those with the United States and Iran – tend to be handled from the prime minister's office and are more contentious.

A range of Iraqi politicians express the desire to share experiences with the Arab countries that began political transitions in 2011, and diplomats have also suggested that Iraq could mediate in Syria or Bahrain. There may be new opportunities to engage with fledgling democracies after a decade of being largely isolated by authoritarian neighbours – but Iraq is a long way from being any kind of model. Its neighbours still do not perceive the country as fully independent or sovereign. Political violence threatens to rise further, partly through a spillover effect from Syria, where different factions are pursuing contradictory and antagonistic foreign policies. It is possible to imagine options for a less divisive foreign policy approach, but making this a reality would demand feats of leadership and trust that have so far been lacking.

This report is based on a series of first-hand interviews conducted in Iraq (Baghdad, Erbil and Suleimaniya) in 2012–13, as well as interviews and two expert-level workshops held in London and Washington, with a variety of Iraqi and other diplomats, politicians, analysts, historians and civil society voices. It aims to shed light on the key actors, processes and narratives that shape Iraq's current foreign policy behaviour and future foreign policy options. Chapter 2 places Iraq's foreign policy in historical context, and is followed by an outline of the state's foreign policy infrastructure, both as laid out in the constitution and as it is perceived by different actors in practice. The third chapter analyses the growing international role of the Kurdistan Regional Government, which pursues its own foreign policy goals in all but name. Chapter 4 unpicks the divisions between Iraq's various political factions when it comes to foreign policy and questions of regional alignment. Iraq's tricky – and unique – balancing act in maintaining strategic alliances with both the United States and Iran is analysed in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 assesses Iraq's regional relations in a context where the growing regional polarization between pro-Iranian and pro-Gulf camps is proving to be deeply domestically divisive for a multi-sectarian and multi-ethnic Iraq. Chapter 7 analyses some of Iraq's longer-term interest in developing relations outside the region, particularly with rising Asian powers which will increasingly be the main markets for Iraq's key export, oil.

The report concludes by examining the ways in which foreign relations mesh with internal divisions, and discusses the possibility of a 'third way', more neutral regional position. It offers some policy recommendations for Iraqi and international governments, primarily to devise a clearer and less divisive Iraqi approach to Syria, a conflict that threatens to unravel Iraq's own fragile political settlement. It appears that US and UK military disengagement from Iraq has been accompanied by simultaneous political disengagement – especially given changes of government in both countries since the 2003 invasion, and given that continued insecurity and corruption in Iraq have hindered the development of economic ties to replace military ties – but neglecting Iraq also poses risks to a host of Western interests in the region.

2 Putting Iraq's Foreign Policy in Context

Much has been written on Iraq's foreign relations since 2003, but a great deal of this analysis has focused on other countries' policies towards the country, treating it as an object of policy rather than a proactive player. This is a dramatic contrast with the pre-sanctions period (before 1990), when Iraq was seen as an unpredictable and aggressive regional actor, with a powerful military dominating a state where governance was based more on coercion than consent.

The state of Iraq was initially formed under British mandatory rule in the 1920s, and became independent in 1932 under a monarch, King Faisal. In the 20th-century post-colonial era, Iraq's military played a critical role in state-formation, whether in putting down an Assyrian nationalist movement in the north or in providing employment opportunities that gave tribes a stake in the state. Under the monarchy, Iraq remained closely aligned with the United Kingdom, with an alliance made explicit in the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi Treaty. During the Second World War, when a new prime minister, Rashid Ali Gailani, proposed to restrict the United Kingdom's ability to move troops through Iraqi territory, a power struggle ensued: Rashid Ali led a military coup after the king called on him to resign, but British troops entered the country to put it down, citing his violation of the treaty, and occupied the country until 1946. After the failed coup, Iraq declared war on Germany and the Axis powers, in line with British policy. Iraq also participated in the 1948 Arab–Israeli war, sending a few thousand troops to fight in what was then Palestine alongside Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian forces.

The eventual overthrow of the monarchy has been attributed to a series of unpopular foreign policy decisions it made in the following decade. In 1955, the Baghdad Pact created a mutual defence arrangement between Iraq, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and Britain, which was intended to isolate Nasser's Egypt as well as to contain Soviet influence. Nasser responded by calling on Iraq's military to overthrow the monarchy, in line with his broader anti-monarchy stance. Iraq's alliance with the United Kingdom became even more unpopular during the 1956 Suez crisis. In 1958, the British-supported Iraqi and Jordanian Hashemite monarchies agreed a short-lived union, but only six months later the Iraqi monarchy was overthrown in a military coup. In 1959 the military government announced Iraq's departure from the Baghdad Pact, triggered by objections to the US intervention in the 1958 Lebanon crisis.

The military regime had a track record of belligerence towards its neighbours. Iraq laid claim to the territory of Kuwait in 1961 when that country gained independence from the British empire; the then prime minister Abd al-Karim Qasim became isolated in the Arab world as a result. Iraq participated in the 1967 war with Israel and broke off relations with the United States (a situation that lasted until 1984). In 1975 it came close to conflict with Syria over water. Saddam Hussein, who first came to power as an influential deputy president in 1968 and formally became president in 1979, became close to the USSR in the 1970s, partly on the basis of shared opposition to the Western-backed government of the Shah of Iran and to the role of Western oil companies in the Middle East.[2] As part of the rapprochement with the USSR, Communists were briefly included in the Iraqi cabinet, indicating the potential for factions to strengthen their domestic position through foreign alliances. Some rapprochement with the West – especially France – had already begun when Iraq attacked Iran in 1980, after an escalation of tensions over a border dispute. Underlying the border dispute were ideological tensions with a new Iranian regime that pledged to export its Islamic revolution and proffered pan-Islamic claims to international influence, competing with Iraq's pan-Arab ideology. Relations with the United States were strengthened throughout the 1980s but sharply reversed when, in 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, resurrecting the old territorial claim that it had tried to legitimize through the promotion of pan-Arab nationalism and outreach to the Kuwaiti opposition. Saddam's former ambitions to be a non-aligned leader of global stature foundered as the Cold War ended and as his invasion of Kuwait triggered the unintended consequence of deepening the US military presence in what was to become a far more 'unipolar'[3] Middle East – at least until the 2003 US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq.

From the early 1990s Iraq was under the most extensive international sanctions regime ever devised. It was internationally isolated, except for the UN-administered oil-for-food programme, which became deeply corrupt, and other smuggling and illicit exchanges. In 1998, US policy began to shift towards support for regime change, not just containment, with the passage of the Iraq Liberation Act (later cited by the US administration in the case for war in 2002–03).[4] The main international legal justification for the 2003 war – that Saddam possessed weapons of mass destruction (which proved to be untrue) – was also based on the narrative that Iraq was a belligerent and expansionist state that might well use such weapons against its neighbours. Meanwhile, a variety of political motivations for the war also reflected the perception that Iraq was a pivotal power in the region that was likely to influence the internal politics of other states, as well as the relationships within the region. All told, the country's foreign policy has consistently been a primary concern for major regional and global actors.

Identity, personality politics and international geopolitics

Most of the available literature on Iraq's foreign policy focuses on the pre-2003 period. Four themes recur: domestic challenges related to identity, nation, and state; personality politics; geopolitics and regional issues; and global power politics. Through its formative decades under colonial administration, the years of dictatorship under Saddam Hussein, and its most recent tumultuous experiences under occupation, Iraq's foreign policy decisions have come about from a synthesis of these competing themes.

2 Francis Fukuyama, 'The Soviet Union and Iraq since 1968', Rand, Washington DC, 1980, p. vii, http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/notes/2007/N1524.pdf. The author argues that Iraq's pragmatic approach to both superpowers was largely intended as 'a means towards ultimate hegemony in the Persian Gulf and perhaps throughout the Middle East […] at the expense of both superpowers'.

3 At the end of the Cold War, a number of analysts, led by Charles Krauthammer, began to speak of a 'unipolar moment' in world history, with the United States emerging as the sole superpower. Charles Krauthammer, 'The Unipolar Moment', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 1, America and the World 1990/91 (1990/1991), pp. 23–33, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20044692. Samuel Huntington wrote in 1999 that the Gulf War had highlighted this unipolar moment, which would last one or two decades before ushering in a new multipolar era. Samuel Huntington, 'The Lonely Superpower', *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 1999, http://users.dickinson.edu/~mitchelk/huntington.pdf.

4 A 1999 article by a Rand analyst argued one good reason for the United States to support the Iraqi opposition was that even if it did not achieve regime change, it would distract Saddam from foreign adventurism. 'A strong opposition will force him to devote attention to ensuring that his key supporters remain loyal, making it less likely that he will engage in high-risk adventures abroad.' Daniel Byman, 'Proceed with Caution: U.S. Support for the Iraqi Opposition', *The Washington Quarterly* (Summer 1999), pp. 23–37, http://www18.georgetown.edu/data/people/dlb32/publication-32009.pdf.

Deep internal disputes over Iraq's post-2003 foreign policy have led to an impression, as stated by various participants in research workshops held as part of this project, that 'Iraq has no foreign policy'; or that it has multiple and sometimes contradictory foreign policies; or that it has foreign relations, but no clear policy. While this report goes on to discuss different actors' and factions' views of Iraqi foreign policy, its depiction of the determinants and dynamics as being contested, factionalized and personalized is not intended to suggest that this situation is unique to Iraq. Particularly over the past 25 years, foreign policy analysis has moved away from the traditional (realist) approach that treats states as monolithic rational actors with fixed interests (just as other areas of social science, especially economics, have questioned traditional approaches based on 'rational choice'). The focus now is more on human decision-making in a context of imperfect information, competition between institutions or factions, misperceptions and other factors that create uncertainty and contestation, not only over power but over interests and identities. The notion of a fully institutionalized, objective and uncontested foreign policy is probably a myth in any country.

However, the damage done to state institutions during Iraq's recent years of war and sanctions has greatly exacerbated the fissures created in the process of making foreign policy. The incentives for external actors to seek to influence Iraqi foreign policy through local allies or proxies are particularly high in this context.

Both in the literature and in our research interviews, discussion of foreign policy has been inescapably intertwined with analysis of domestic political dynamics, with the interests and identity of the state contested in both domains by multiple characters competing for influence.[5] There is evidence of this today between the prime minister's office – and the apparent steps taken to centralize greater control in Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's hands – and the foreign ministry, which has argued for greater institutionalization of policy-making through its offices. Beyond purely political competition, analysts and interviewees have repeatedly returned to the themes of national identity and the 'nation-state project',[6] or the attempt to transform multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian society into a national community. The relevance of regional factors is hotly debated here, for example the extent to which domestic religious and cultural identity of the Iraqi Shia population can be linked to Iran.

Personality politics is another core theme in the literature on Iraq. The belligerent approach to the country's neighbours is often portrayed as partly resulting from the personality of Saddam Hussein and its importance in a state where power was extremely concentrated in the hands of a single ruler, who was in effect the central decision-maker for 35 years, and the 'people of trust' around him. At the same time, it is worth remembering that Saddam's war with Iran was supported by Western and Gulf countries, rather than being seen as the anomalous behaviour of an unruly despot, even if the latter narrative is more convenient for Western memories. Though the state identity is no longer wrapped around one-man rule, personality politics remains an issue today, particularly in Maliki's strained relationships with the president of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Massoud Barzani, and Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah bin Abdel-Aziz Al Saud. However, there can also be a tendency for some to over-estimate the role of a single individual in a state that is no longer so centralized.

5 Charles Tripp, a historian of Iraq, calls the Iraqi state a 'terrain of contestation' where multiple actors occupying the Iraqi political space are in competition. Charles Tripp, 'The Foreign Policy of Iraq', in Ray Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (eds), *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), p. 167.

6 Phebe Marr, writing on this theme, identified Kurdish identity as the most serious challenge to the Iraqi nation-state project. Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004).

By contrast, geopolitics and resource issues remain a factor supporting some continuity in Iraq's regional relations. Geopolitical continuities that remain in place after the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq include border issues and natural resource disputes such as hydrocarbons and fresh water supply, while there are also new regional trade and investment initiatives with the neoliberal economic opening up of Iraq.[7] These wider regional issues influence the nature of Iraq's bilateral relationships with its six neighbours – Turkey, Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria. In the last decade Iraq has had mixed results in trying to establish friendly relations with these countries. Its bilateral relationships with its neighbours are discussed below, especially how each fits into a regional dynamic that continues to evolve more than two years after the Arab uprisings started.

In turn, regional dynamics feed back into domestic politics, to such an extent that Iraq has been described as a 'penetrated state', in which neighbouring states have sought to influence domestic politics by backing specific groups and actors.[8] The interplay between domestic and regional politics contributes to what has been called an 'omni-balancing' approach to foreign policy, where different actors within the state seek to promote their domestic interests abroad while using foreign relations to further legitimate themselves at home.[9]

Finally, global power politics have played an outsized role in the evolution of Iraq's foreign policy. The invasion and occupation of Iraq have been the central issue for the country's position within the international community for the past decade. Since the last US troops withdrew in December 2011, the Iraqi government has slowly begun to reach out to other powers such as Russia and China in attempting to chart a less US-dependent path. Much of today's literature on the Iraqi–US relationship has been produced by American analysts and academics, and focuses on the activities and decisions of US policy-makers, politicians and military figures operating in Iraq in the past decade.[10] However – corresponding with our own in-country fieldwork – a sense is beginning to emerge that in the decade after the invasion US influence in the country has slowly declined.[11]

Actors, institutions and structures

Iraq's foreign policy institutions and processes need to be seen in the context of severe challenges to all the institutions of the state, after the damage done by years of sanctions, looting, occupation and purging. Control of borders and airspace also remains problematic: at one point in 2011, while US forces were still present in the country, Iran and Turkey engaged in military attacks inside northern Iraq, claiming the right of hot pursuit of Kurdish militant groups engaged in separatist movements in their own territory. Ultimately, Iraq's neighbours do not yet regard it as an entirely sovereign state.

7 Phebe Marr and Sam Parker, 'The New Iraq: The Post-2003 Upheavals and the Regional Aftershocks', in Henri Barkey, Scott B. Lasensky and Phebe Marr (eds), *Iraq, Its Neighbors, and the United States: Competition, Crisis, and the Reordering of Power* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 2011).

8 Gareth Stansfield, 'The Reformation of Iraq's Foreign Relations: New Elites and Enduring Legacies', *International Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 6 (November/December 2010), pp. 1395–1409, http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/International%20Affairs/2010/86_6stansfield2.pdf.

9 Stansfield (2010); see Steven R. David, 'Explaining Third World Alignment,' *World Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (1991), pp. 233–56; Ray Hinnebusch, *The International Politics of the Middle East*, (Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 8.

10 Michael Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama* (London: Vintage, 2012).

11 Kenneth M. Pollack, 'American Policy Toward Iraq After 2011, Testimony to the Senate Committee on the Armed Services', 15 November 2011, http://www.brookings.edu/research/testimony/2011/11/15-iraq-pollack.

This started with the occupation that began in 2003. According to Ali Allawi, a former finance minister, during the direct occupation period, 'the Coalition Provisional Authority and Washington determined Iraq's foreign policy in all matters of significance […] in many countries the US Embassy doubled up as Iraq's unofficial diplomatic mission.'[12] Allawi also notes that this perception lingered: even after the 'supposedly sovereign' interim government was formed, Iraqi ministers were not necessarily treated by foreign interlocutors as sovereign representatives. Such perceptions are still a factor today, but for a different reason. Officials from other governments, especially in the Arab world, routinely claim that Iran is interfering in Iraq to an extent that prevents it from being fully sovereign. Meanwhile, US observers say the Iraqi government still depends on US officials, especially on the National Security Council staff, to represent its interests in the United States, as well as (and sometimes even more than) its own diplomats.

Following years of state weakness, the prime minister has sought to bolster his own power, including by centralizing power over foreign policy. He and his supporters now tend to interpret the challenges that domestic opposition protests and militant groups pose to their authority through the lens of Iraq's foreign relations, seeing regional rivals – especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar – as the ultimate driving force behind these challengers. The perception that Gulf states are trying to undermine the Iraqi government at home is a powerful factor in Iraq's foreign relations with these countries.

Constitutional provisions on foreign policy

Although the Iraqi constitution delineates the powers of the prime minister, the cabinet and ministries, as well as the role of parliament, these different institutions compete and negotiate over their relative share in power over foreign policy, as in other areas of politics. Intra-state elite competition is seen often in governments, particularly in parliamentary systems. Such competition matters in Iraq particularly because the system under which the 'new Iraq' is governed is still nascent. Nouri al-Maliki is the first elected prime minister to serve a full term since the fall of Saddam Hussein. Governing norms have yet to take hold and there is no consensus on interpreting the constitution or the separation of powers, either judicially or politically.

The new Iraqi constitution was drafted and approved by popular referendum in 2005, and came into force in 2006. Despite a less than adequate drafting process – the text was hurried through committees in roughly two months, subjected to political bargaining among political elites under the watchful eye of the US embassy behind closed doors, and voted for despite boycotts and disapproval by a significant portion of the population – the constitution has broadly outlined how the state is to be structured and to function. An explicit part of the federal government's remit is the exclusive authority over foreign policy, including policy formation, diplomatic representation, and entering into international treaties and agreements.[13] Already the contested nature of the Iraqi state, and constitution, is apparent here as the KRG maintains diplomatic representation abroad, including in the United Kingdom (discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 below).[14]

12 And 'on official missions it was the CPA's or Washington's representative who was accorded the status of real decision-makers'. Ali A. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning The War, Losing The Peace* (Yale University Press, 2007), p. 294.

13 Constitution of Iraq, 2005, Article 110.

14 The KRG also argues it has the right to enter into certain international agreements despite federal government disapproval, such as with multinational oil companies – though this can be and has been disputed in other clauses of the constitution that specifically pertain to hydrocarbons and revenue.

The make-up of the federal government further determines how this remit is carried out; the council of ministers or cabinet, headed by the prime minister, develops and implements the federal government policies. The president, as head of state, holds a largely ceremonial post and is elected by the parliament (Council of Representatives) as 'a symbol of the unity of the country and represent[ing] the sovereignty of the country'.[15] The parliament has – at least in theory – oversight over the prime minister and cabinet, and it has the authority to question any minister if requested by 25 of its members. The parliamentary foreign relations committee's work covers reviewing government policies and approving appointments, including that of ambassadors. However, the effectiveness of these oversight powers is challenged in practice. For example, in January 2013 members of parliament reportedly collected the 25 signatures required to question the prime minister on alleged violations of the constitution, but his questioning has yet to occur.[16]

In the formal state apparatus, the actions of and interplay between four key institutions require analysis: the ministry of foreign affairs, the prime minister's office, the ministry of state for national security, and the parliament and its foreign relations committee. The national security ministry has taken on an increasingly important role since 2011, when, owing to an impasse with the opposition in which the appointment of key ministers could not be agreed upon, the prime minister assumed the role of acting minister of state for national security and appointed a new national security adviser reporting directly to him. In addition to the politicization of the security portfolio, issues of national security, such as fear of spillover from the conflict in Syria, remain dominant challenges facing Iraq.

The foreign ministry

The Iraqi foreign ministry has been led by Hoshyar Zebari since 2003, making him the longest serving minister in the 'new Iraq'. The ministry has identified three foreign policy priorities that it holds up as success stories.

According to Zebari, the first was ending the US occupation:

> *The key issue for us after 2003 was to regain our sovereignty, to become a normal country, and to reach an amicable agreement with the Americans for the troops withdrawal. I think our interests coincided to reach that, and that was a major achievement.*[17]

Zebari highlights the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) reached with the US government in 2008, which negotiated a fixed deadline for the end of the US occupation of Iraq. This was subsequently implemented, with the last US forces withdrawing from Iraq in December 2011.

Second, just as important was restoring good relations with the international community: '[Iraq] was at war with the whole world, it hadn't just invaded two of its neighbours, it was in defiance of the whole international community.'[18] Changing this has involved normalizing diplomatic

15 Constitution of Iraq, 2005, Article 67.

16 Patrick Markey and Raheem Salman, 'Iraq PM foes demand he face questioning in parliament', Reuters, 9 January 2013, http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/09/US-iraq-protests-idusBRE9080VJ20130109.

17 Interview, Suleimaniya, March 2013.

18 Ibid.

relations with many countries on a bilateral basis. This process is still ongoing, with just under 100 countries now having diplomatic missions in Iraq.[19]

A third, related priority for the foreign ministry has been pulling Iraq out of the UN's Chapter VII status – which the UN Security Council was due to review again in summer 2013 – and effectively normalizing its sovereignty. Chapter VII of the UN Charter[20] gives the UN Security Council sweeping powers to take economic, military and other measures to address a threat to international peace and security. It is under this chapter that the UN sanctions on Iraq were authorized. Although coming out of Chapter VII status is a clear area of consensus for all Iraqi foreign policy actors, how Iraq meets its obligations to achieve that has been subject to some dispute. For example, the country has been required to resolve outstanding issues from the Gulf War with Kuwait, such as border disputes, property claims, and the status of prisoners and missing persons. According to officials at the foreign ministry, there has been greater difficulty in reaching domestic political consensus on how to resolve disputes with Kuwait and other neighbours than in reaching out to other members of the international community such as European states.

Deputy Foreign Minister Labid Abbawi, before retiring in June 2013, said:

> *We had a lot of problems getting unanimity [within Iraq] on how to deal with Kuwait. Sometimes we felt at the foreign ministry we were at odds with everybody. We used to go out on media a lot and argue for our position.*[21]

The foreign ministry identified the issue of competing non-state actors as an obstacle to its own work, specifically on how Iraq deals with its neighbours. According to Abbawi, 'Everybody likes to speak on foreign affairs, and be an expert on foreign affairs. When anything happens you get all sorts of conflicting statements.'[22] To counter this, he said, the foreign ministry has 'tried to give more weight to different departments of the ministry, give them a margin to take their decisions within the boundaries of their responsibility' – for example, by requiring other ministries to contact the foreign ministry to receive authorization for inter-state correspondence.

A challenge to this institutionalization of the foreign ministry work has been in the appointment process, where an emerging trend has been an effort to achieve ethno-sectarian 'balance' – or *mohassassa*. According to Abbawi,

> *If we want to appoint anybody we have to consider so many Shia here, so many Sunni there […] We have told all the ambassadors that once you are appointed in the ministry, irrespective of your political beliefs or affiliation, your allegiance is to the ministry and to the ministry's instructions. It is not allowed for you to phone the prime minister's office or your other leaders and ask them what to do.*[23]

19 The most recent country to announce it was reopening an embassy in Baghdad was Hungary in April 2013. See also Chatham House MENA Programme, 'Iraq's Foreign Policy in a Changing Middle East', Workshop Summary, February 2013, http://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/papers/view/192059.

20 Charter of the United Nations, Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression, http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter7.shtml.

21 Interview, London, February 2013.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

The issue of ethno-sectarian balance – a way of appointment and governance that is most prominently on display, and widely accepted, in the confessional system of Lebanon – does not just apply to foreign ministry appointments. It now affects virtually all significant governance decisions in the country, from the appointment of the presidency council to governance throughout the ministries. Thus the foreign ministry must at times contend, like other state institutions, with allegations that it puts the interests of Iraq second to the interests of a particular ethno-sectarian group.

This intra-state competition has led senior Iraq analysts in the United Kingdom and the United States to argue that the foreign ministry as an institution is ultimately not the most important actor in foreign policy-making.[24] American observers say senior US officials tend to go directly to Baghdad to liaise on important issues, while the prime minister routinely sends personal envoys to Washington for similar reasons. Having to manage the internal divisions within the Iraqi state, most prominently those of an ethno-sectarian nature, the foreign ministry can at times be seen as more of a manager of foreign policy rather than a maker of it. This is not intrinsically a negative trend, insofar as various elected and appointed bodies are supposed to have a say in foreign policy, but intra-state competition can at times reach damaging and confusing levels. The internal state competition is most pronounced with the office of the prime minister.

The prime minister's office

Nouri al-Maliki has been Iraq's prime minister since 2006, and began his second term in 2010 after a political bargain was agreed upon eight months after the inconclusive March 2010 national elections. His role in foreign policy, as in other areas, has become increasingly contentious as his critics have accused him of the 'accretion of power' and the 'micromanagement from the prime minister's office' of all domestic and foreign policy-making.[25] The centralization of power under Maliki has drawn acerbic comparisons to the Saddam era.[26]

Despite this focus on personality politics, which is perhaps inevitable when Maliki is the first full-term prime minister after Saddam, the debate over the powers of the prime minister is in part a constitutional one. Though specifying the federal executive's authority over such areas as foreign relations, how that authority is carried out and the norms of executive practice remain to be negotiated. This also takes shape in debates about the meaning of the constitution. Ultimately constitutional interpretation lies with the Federal Supreme Court, but, as with other institutions, this is also subject to political wrangling. The prime minister's critics charge him with politicizing the court by implementing de-Ba'athification mechanisms to remove justices who hand down politically inconvenient rulings.

For their part, Maliki's advisers and supporters describe his approach to foreign policy-making as reconciling two visions, already similar in nature: the state foreign policy as outlined in the Iraqi constitution, and the foreign policy goals of the Islamic Dawa Party, which he leads.

24 Chatham House Middle East and North Africa Programme, 'Iraqi Foreign Policy: Actors And Processes', Meeting Summary, November 2012, http://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/papers/view/188277.

25 Interview, Feisal Istrabadi, London, March 2013.

26 Toby Dodge, *From War to a New Authoritarianism* (London: Routledge/International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2012).

According to Tareq Najem, political adviser to the prime minister, non-interference in other countries' affairs is a key principle of Iraq's foreign policy:

> *The state policy, codified in the constitution, is [that] we want to have good relations with all countries, to protect our sovereignty, and to have good relations based on our country's interests. Ultimately we do not enter the domestic issues of other countries, nor do we want any country entering into our own domestic issues.*[27]

Thamir Ghadhban, chairman of the Advisory Commission to the Prime Minister, likewise articulated a principle of non-alignment in regional and international politics, contrasting sharply with the tendency of Iraq's opposition, and some of its neighbouring states, to portray the prime minister as taking Iraq firmly into Iran's camp. According to Ghadhban, Iraq's stance is grounded in the experiences of war and conflict that have hampered Iraq for more than three decades:

> *We are also not to take sides. This is a mark of especially Maliki's standing. He does not want to take a stand, to be part of a bloc or a group.* Mehwar *– or axis – we do not want this. This is based on bitter experience of the past. Saddam took sides and this was detrimental.*[28]

He argued that the prime minister is seeking both to normalize relations with the international community, and – against the claims of his critics, who argue his foreign policy decisions are highly centralized, personalized and often opaque – to foster a greater institutionalization of foreign policy-making:

> *It has developed, there is positive progress compared to before. Iraq was closed and had lots of problems with Western powers – now it is more open. Embassies either did not exist or there was no ambassador but now we're fully engaged. We're trying today to be normalized, have normal relationships.*[29]

Ghadhban added that Iraq has also made an effort to have embassies in countries that do not reciprocate with ambassadors, especially in the Arab world, and in countries with which there is little trade.[30]

The internal divisions of the Iraqi state have challenged the coherence of Iraqi foreign policy-making. Ghadhban said that 'there are principles of policies. But think of it as a spectrum […] Iraq is a highly diversified country. There are many blocs within the spectrum, and affiliations.' People who are not qualified to speak on foreign policy matters do so, Ghadhban said, in order to promote their own personal narrow ambitions and interests.[31]

Supporters of the prime minister argue that his foreign policy stance, and that of his party, are predicated on non-interference in the domestic affairs of Iraq's neighbours, normal and peaceful relations with all states in the region, and prosperous trade and cultural relationships with the

27 Interview, Baghdad, March 2013. The theme of the importance of abiding by the constitution was emphasized by many interviewees, though interpreted in different ways.

28 Interview, Baghdad, March 2013.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

international community.[32] However, Maliki's critics argue that practice does not match rhetoric.[33] They see the prime minister as taking a much more partisan and political stance on a variety of foreign policy issues, one that is less nationalist and more based in party politics and ethno-sectarian discrimination. And they cite the important role of individual envoys in developing relations between Iraq and its neighbours, so that the interpretation of trends in foreign policy often relies on observing visits of powerful individuals – such as Qasim Suleimani of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard – and speculating about discussions that take place behind closed doors.

The nature of Iraq's internal divisions also plays a significant role in the debate over executive authority. The issue of ethno-sectarian balance also influences how the executive sees its powers and role in relation to other parts of the state apparatus. Among other things, this affects the dynamic between the prime minister's office and the foreign ministry.

Debates about the prime minister's foreign policy stance have increasingly focused on the security aspect, owing to the worsening security situation inside the country. The first half of 2013 saw continued bombings across Baghdad, protest movements accused of harbouring militias (such as the Naqashbandi organization) and Al-Qaeda in Iraq temporarily merging with the Syrian militia Jebhat Al Nusra. The politicization of the security issues in Iraq became increasingly relevant in 2011 when disputes between factions resulted in the prime minister appointing himself as acting minister of state for national security and Falah al-Fayyad as national security adviser.

Maintaining oversight over this portfolio has enabled the prime minister to dispatch the national security adviser as an envoy on key foreign trips. In December 2011, nine months after the Syrian uprising began, Fayyad met President Bashar al-Assad on behalf of Maliki, as Iraq became increasingly concerned with the spillover of violence. And in early 2013 Fayyad was in Washington to discuss Iraqi security issues and US–Iraqi relations with his counterparts in the White House.

Fayyad too has recognized the challenges built into the state apparatus and the dynamic between the prime minister's office and the foreign ministry:

> *I was not aware that Iraq had a foreign policy. Political and social strife, a weak national identity and disunity still influence Iraq's representatives abroad […] we have yet to craft a political policy that reflects the identity of the new Iraq […] Another factor is the fact that the administration is preoccupied with domestic issues and internal security, which in itself is a serious structural flaw.*[34]

As Fayyad is a key ally of the prime minister, this statement can be read in two ways: first, as a criticism of the foreign ministry, echoing the view among the prime minister's supporters that it plays a relatively minor role in key foreign policy issues; and, second, as a statement that the institutionalization of foreign policy is most likely a far-off goal – if an achievable goal at all – and more a constantly contested idea that influences how domestic actors engage in political battle. How national security issues, and their politicization, will develop in Iraq is another key indicator to analyse when focusing on foreign policy-making.

32 See also Dawa Party of Iraq, 'Vision of Iraqi Foreign Policy', February 2013.

33 Maliki has made various speeches accusing regional actors of fomenting sectarianism for political ends, for instance at an international Islamic conference held in Baghdad in April 2013, and has threatened to sue perpetrators of sectarianism.

34 Mustafa al-Kadhimi, 'Iraqi National Security Adviser says terrorism linked to havens in Syria', *Al-Monitor*, 25 February 2013, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/02/iraq-national-security-advisor-interview.html#ixzz2RrhhS0WN.

The National Security Strategy

The National Security Strategy currently being developed by the national security adviser and his team is an exhaustive list of domestic and international security concerns, including food and water security, land and maritime border security, and hydrocarbon security.[35] Given its goals of normalizing relations and enhancing domestic and territorial security, the foreign ministry regularly confronts the challenges of constitutional interpretation and ethno-sectarian divisions. This was highlighted by Deputy National Security Adviser Safa Hussein, who said that the constitution and national security strategy laid out key principles on which there was broad consensus, but that divisions lay in the details:

> *There is agreement between different political parties, on having good relations with everybody and a military for the defence of the country and not to frighten others […] But in more detail, for example on Iran, Syria, Turkey, US – there is division. Some say we don't have foreign policy, just foreign activity or relations […] There is some policy, but within it are some contradictions. It is not very coherent.*[36]

These differences are then promoted by internal actors seeking regional assistance, and used as justification by regional actors to intervene in Iraqi domestic politics:

> *We have political disputes inside Iraq – with these disputes there is a gap [in which] foreign countries can intervene in one degree or another. Our political parties look for help from outside. From both sides […] Outside intervention makes it more difficult for us to reconcile inside Iraq.*[37]

To mitigate perceptions of ethno-sectarian bias, the national security team stresses that Iraq is operating from a defensive security position and not an offensive political one. For example, on Syria:

> *We are not trying to intervene for our own interests. We are defensive by strengthening the border for emergency security control inside the Iraqi desert with Syria. We are also trying to explain, with little success, the Iraqi policy that we don't want to help militarily on either side of the conflict there.*[38]

Part of this too is combating the perception that, on Syria, Iraq is doing the bidding of Iran:

> *Iran has a different strategy than Iraq in the region. We are not on the same strategic line with Iran on Syria. Iran is trying to help the Syrian [government] to survive – or a controlled change to the regime […] For Iran it is a matter of sphere of influence, for us it is a matter of defence […] Of course Iran tries to make us be aligned in its policies, so do other states. We try to work on this thin and difficult line.*[39]

Any country would be concerned by a violent civil conflict on its doorstep that has so far claimed the lives of more than 93,000 people at the time of writing. The conflict in Syria is becoming

35 Chatham House Roundtable, London, March 2013.
36 Interview, Baghdad, March 2013.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.

increasingly sectarian in nature[40] and Iraq has already seen incidents of violent spillover from it[41] – following its own bout of sectarian violence in 2006–07, not to mention its political environment continuing to grapple with a similar dynamic. However, the national security team's argument that it maintains a security focus on the issues it addresses is often not accepted by those negatively affected by government actions, who perceive the security services as having largely partisan or personal motivations. For example, the government response to what have been termed 'Sunni protests' in the western part of the country has become more aggressive. This was exemplified by the raiding of a protest site in the town of Hawija near Kirkuk in April 2013, which killed more than 20 people. Ultimately it may not matter whether those responsible for national security do not engage in ethno-sectarian debates or discrimination. If the continued narrative among a group that claims disenfranchisement is one of government discrimination, any action or rhetoric by a government group attempting to go against this grain is viewed with suspicion, if not outright contempt. Moreover, as the Middle East continues along a path of growing political polarization, which is taking an increasingly sectarian turn, the internal dynamics in Iraq directly affect its standing in the region and relationships with its neighbours.

Parliament and the foreign relations committee

The parliament is another relevant, albeit lesser, player in the Iraqi foreign policy-making apparatus. Its foreign relations committee is led by Sheikh Humam Hamoudi of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI).[42] Recently the committee has sought to play a greater role by hosting a series of seminars to establish and shape foreign policy.[43] It is less involved in actual policy-making than in scrutinizing other parts of the state apparatus responsible for foreign policy, and then linking its criticisms to what are fundamentally issues related to domestic divisions.

Safia al-Sohail, a member of the foreign relations committee, and a former member of Maliki's State of Law coalition who has now become an independent MP, reiterated a common criticism:

> *There is no coherent foreign policy […] A number of colleagues on the parliamentary committee have been pushing for relations with more countries. But many [of them] are still thinking the same way as if they're in opposition or exile. […] Minister Zebari is doing great [but] there is not a policy. Rather what Iraq is witnessing is changing power balances. Our foreign relations depend on the influence and demands of other countries.*[44]

Part of the difficulty in assessing the role of parliament is that the great majority of parliamentary blocs are technically part of a consensus government; there is no clear opposition in the traditional parliamentary sense. Moreover, though Iraq is slowly emerging as a more important foreign policy actor, it still remains subject to the actions and desires of surrounding states that seek to expand their spheres of influence – especially Iran, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

40 Geneive Abdo, *The New Sectarianism: The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Sunni-Shia Divide*, Analysis Paper No. 29, The Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, April 2013, http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/research/files/papers/2013/04/sunni%20shia%20abdo/sunni%20shia%20abdo.pdf.

41 'Dozens of Syrian troops killed in Iraq ambush', *Al-Jazeera*, 4 March 2013, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/03/20133415512939806.html.

42 In 2005 Hamoudi served as chairman of the Constitutional Drafting Committee for Iraq's permanent constitution.

43 'Foreign Relations Committee holding a preparatory symposium for the foreign policy of Iraq', Hamoudi.org, 16 October 2012, http://www.hamoudi.org/arabic/news.php?action=view&id=1137.

44 Interview, Baghdad, March 2013.

Jabir al-Jabiri, also a member of the foreign relations committee, and an Iraqiyya MP from Anbar, partially disputed this and argued against allegations that Gulf countries are intervening in domestic Iraqi politics and supporting Sunni-affiliated groups and politicians: 'We wish they would stop the Iranian influence, just to create balance, but none of them do anything.'[45] Jabiri added that Gulf states such as Kuwait have sent Shia ambassadors to Baghdad, further evidence that they are not supporting Sunnis over Shia.

Though the role of parliament and its Foreign Relations Committee in actual policy-making is relatively weak compared with the other three institutions considered here, parliamentary actors are relevant to the foreign policy debate as they further link Iraq's at times controversial foreign relations with its domestic divisions. By making the international intra-national, parliamentary actors contribute to the 'inside-outside', or transnational ethno-sectarian, discourse that seems to be dominant in the Middle East today. This ultimately adds to questions about what constitutes the Iraqi nation, the dynamics of state–society relations, and how Iraq relates to the Arab and Muslim worlds.

45 Interview, London, March 2013.

3 The Institutions, Actors and Interests of the Kurdistan Region

The questions discussed above are also being keenly addressed in what has emerged as a second *de facto* foreign policy centre in Iraq. Few developments emphasize as starkly the complexity of the country's post-2003 development, and its foreign policy landscape, as does the rise and legal institutionalization of the Kurdistan Region. Its foreign policy not only serves the furthering of the Kurds' autonomous project, but is also, at times, contrary to the aims and aspirations of Baghdad's agenda. In many ways, the story of Iraq since 2003 is one of two countries. The first is focused upon an Arab-dominated government in Baghdad, existing with significant Kurdish engagement, seeking to manage a host of sectarian and ethnic problems in an environment of deep insecurity, foreign occupation and external intervention. The second is what the Kurds have referred to as the 'other Iraq', which is focused upon an almost wholly Kurdish-dominated government in Erbil, with no Arab engagement and little other minority involvement (except from Christians and Turkmens to a very limited degree). This government seeks to protect and project the autonomous Kurdistan Region entity established in 1991 in an environment of relative security, no foreign occupation,[46] managed and largely developmental external partnerships, and the ability to have a powerful agency in domestic as well as regional affairs.

This peculiar situation has long-established roots. The Kurdistan Regional Presidency (KRP), the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Kurdistan National Assembly (KNA) were founded in the Kurdish-dominated northern governorates of Erbil, Dohuk and Suleimaniya, and part of Kirkuk and Diyala, in the aftermath of Saddam Hussein's defeat in Kuwait in 1991. But this region has older antecedents, corresponding roughly with the previous 'Kurdish Autonomous Zone' established by the March Agreement between Baghdad and the Kurdish leadership in 1970, and the Autonomy Law of 1974.

Unable to fully control the rebellious north, and needing to centralize power in Baghdad in the aftermath of his defeat, Saddam Hussein withdrew the offices and officials of the Iraqi state (including civil servants, teachers, and doctors) and the military from this area. In the ensuing vacuum, the leadership of the Kurds – with the most powerful entities being Massoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) – held elections for the KNA. The result, which saw the parliament divided between the two parties, allowed the formation of the first cabinet of the KRG. The Kurds did not have an easy decade, however. Internecine rivalry between the KDP and PUK, along with external intervention and the use of Kurdish groupings as proxies by Turkey, Iran and Iraq, tore the nascent KRG apart. As a result the Kurds spent most of the 1990s divided into two regions, one dominated by the KDP in Erbil and the other by the PUK in Suleimaniya. However, following British, Turkish and

46 The Kurdish *peshmerga* have been responsible for security within the KRG area. However, the border between the KRG and the disputed territory was heavily monitored and policed by US-led forces during the occupation. The KRG's external borders have also at times been violated by both Turkey and Iran, claiming 'hot pursuit' of Kurdish militants.

US intervention towards the end of the 1990s, a peace process brought together the two parties, normalizing their relationship and ultimately paving the way for them to present a unified front within the Iraqi opposition in the run-up to regime change, and in the early days of the post-2003 state-building period. They gained an influence that has continued to grow to the present day.

During this period, the Kurdish leadership learned quickly and by necessity the skills of foreign policy-making and the mechanisms of engagement with the international community. This was not easy. Indeed, Kurdish leaders often found it difficult, if not impossible, to be accepted as anything other than party political leaders of rebel-held territories by governments wary of engaging in any discourse that could be seen as undermining the established norm of non-intervention in the internal workings of sovereign states. Still, the Kurds nurtured a capable diplomatic cadre, and built a network of trusted and powerful friends across the capitals of the world. These experiences, as well as those of their own civil war between 1994 and 1997, meant that the Iraqi Kurds entered the post-2003 period as some of the mature statesmen of Iraq, alongside their non-Kurdish counterparts from either the exiled opposition or the ranks of the previously politically marginalized communities of Iraqis not associated with the all-encompassing Ba'ath Party.

The Kurdistan Region and the Republic of Iraq

During the 1990s, the Iraqi Kurds toyed with the idea of drafting their own constitution, but ultimately backed away from doing so owing to the reality of their own divisions and the problems that would ensue from neighbours if they took an action that could be construed as being a first step towards independence.[47] In terms of managing its internal affairs, the KNA passed a range of laws structuring the KRG and mandating its activities. In the realm of foreign affairs, the regulatory framework was understandably limited. Rather than establish a Ministry of Foreign Affairs – which would be taken as a clear statement of Kurdish sovereignty in the north of Iraq – the KNA allowed for a Department of Foreign Relations to be established, under a director with ministerial rank. This sleight of hand satisfied sensitivities enough to allow the KRG to develop a diplomatic body of representatives (not ambassadors) and open representations (not embassies) in numerous countries. At first, these representatives achieved relatively little – often being the same persons as the dominant KDP or PUK representatives in particular cities – but over time they developed into accepted players on the diplomatic stage of Western capitals. In some countries – in the United Kingdom and the United States in particular – the KRG representatives were often far more vocal than their Iraqi embassy counterparts.

But the KRG did not constitute the principal foreign policy voice of the Kurdistan Region, just as it was not the pre-eminent power within the domestic setting of the region. Instead, the foreign relations of the Kurdistan Region were the preserve of the KDP and PUK, each of which

47 The belief that the Kurdish leadership has always been secessionist in outlook is not supported by the evidence of the 20th century. A strong case can be made that the Iraqi Kurds have consistently adopted integrationist approaches towards their position in Iraq, but have expressed this through the rhetoric of self-determination and the application of its tenets to ethnic and cultural rights and through the aim of achieving an autonomous region within a federal Iraqi state, a bi-national state or a state that houses a Kurdish region in an asymmetrical relationship with the centre. Whether the Kurdish leadership has adopted this strategy in recognition that geopolitical realities in the past militated against the formation of an independent state, or because they recognize the benefits of existing as a region within a stronger and larger Iraqi state, in a neighbourhood that has at times been unwelcoming to them, is of course an interesting question, and Kurdish leaders usually respond by saying that 'it is their right to dream', but that they also have to recognize realities. For an analysis of the Kurds as integrationists rather than secessionists, within the context of Iraq, see Sairan Ahmad, 'The Role Played by the Kurdistan Regional Government in the Reconstruction of the Iraqi State Since 2003', PhD Thesis, University of Exeter College of Social Sciences and International Studies, 2012.

maintained its own set of relationships with regional and international actors. This made sense in the 1990s: the Kurdistan Region and the KRG had only *de facto* standing in the international community, with the region being an 'unrecognized state' or '*de facto* state', existing outside the international state system, and thus constituting a challenge, or even threat, to other states whose internal dynamics and conditions were similar to those inside Iraq. For other states, dealing with the KRG would have implied recognizing its legitimacy, and even sovereignty, over the autonomous region; dealing with the representatives of the KDP and PUK, even if they were the same as KRG representatives, was quite acceptable. (This is just one example of the ways in which the tendency of Iraqi political factions to play a role in international relations have been shaped by the history and experiences of interactions with foreign powers, rather than being only a symptom of an internally weak state.)

This dual-track approach saw a differentiation in roles and duties between the KRG and the parties, which to a considerable degree continues to this day – although the relative importance of the offices of the KRG (and especially those of the prime minister and the director of foreign relations) has increased. In effect, the KDP and PUK maintained strong diplomatic missions and empowered their officials to represent Kurdistan's interests abroad, and to pursue foreign policies that were ostensibly of the Kurdistan Region but were usually very heavily coloured by partisan concerns – particularly during the civil war period. The KRG representatives became increasingly focused on managing the foreign relations portfolio inside the region – planning and hosting visits of dignitaries and making public statements on key overseas events on its behalf. But the overlap and interplay between the two poles of Kurdish foreign policy structures was clear. Some individuals had dual roles (in the KRG and the party) and many others, including the current serving KRG director of foreign relations, Falah Mustafa, was highly placed in the KDP's foreign relations establishment before being transferred to his KRG position.[48]

Following regime change in Iraq, the Barzani-Talabani leadership emerged from their civil war and managed to present a unified front in the negotiations that started in the aftermath of Saddam's demise. From 2003 onwards, the Kurds continued to press ahead with developing their region. Instead of pushing to create an independent state, the leadership planned to 'defend Kurdistan from Baghdad', rather than from the 'green line' separating the Kurdistan Region from the rest of Iraq.[49] In so doing, the Kurds identified early on that the drafting of Iraq's new constitution would be critical in protecting their gains and in allowing them to continue on their highly autonomous path.[50] The result was a constitution that was influenced strongly, if not dominated, by the Kurds. From the outset, in Article 1, Iraq was established as a federation, with the Kurdistan Region entitled to its own constitution within the framework of the Iraqi constitution.[51] In the realm of foreign policy, Article 110 stipulates clearly that

> *the federal government shall have exclusive authorities in the following matters: First: Formulating foreign policy and diplomatic representation; negotiating, signing, and ratifying international treaties and agreements; negotiating, signing, and ratifying debt policies and formulating foreign sovereign economic and trade policy.*[52]

48 Interview, Falah Mustafa, Erbil, October 2012.

49 Interview, Dr Fuad Hussein, Chief of Staff to President Barzani, Erbil, October 2012.

50 See Michael Kelly, 'The Kurdish Regional Constitution within the Framework of the Iraqi Federal Constitution: A Struggle for Sovereignty, Oil, Ethnic Identity, and the Prospects for a Reverse Supremacy Clause', *Penn State Law Review*, Vol. 114, No. 3 (2010), pp.. 707–807.

51 Ibid., p. 727.

52 Constitution of Iraq, 2005, Article 110, para 1.

In addition, Article 121 stipulates that 'offices for the regions and governorates shall be established in embassies and diplomatic missions, in order to follow cultural, social, and developmental affairs'.[53]

The position, therefore, seems quite clear and also accepted by politicians in Kurdistan. Aso Karim, the chair of the KNA Foreign Relations Committee, straightforwardly stated that 'the KRG is part of Iraq, and foreign policy is the exclusive domain of Baghdad'.[54] However, as with any constitution, there has proved to be significant room for the Kurds to manoeuvre, and the fact that Iraq is still very much in a formative phase has allowed the Kurds to continue with following previous patterns, irrespective of Baghdad's antipathy towards their actions. With regard to foreign representations, for example, few, if any, KRG representative offices reside inside Iraq's embassies. Rather, they continue to operate from dedicated offices – often in more impressive locations than the Iraqi embassies themselves. Furthermore, the KRG has welcomed into the region more than 20 consulates from foreign governments – sometimes before these opened embassies in Baghdad.[55]

Constitutionally, the KRG and its leaders are responsible for the internal administration of their region, including its security, and also contend that they are justified in pursuing an oil and gas policy that is independent from that of Baghdad. The management of oil and gas was not included in Article 110 of the constitution as an exclusive competence of the government of Iraq, and is instead covered in Article 112, which specifies that 'present' fields (i.e. currently producing) shall be managed in partnership between the federal government and the regional government – with the Kurds then claiming that the lack of mention of 'future' fields means that the responsibility to develop these (i.e. those within the Kurdistan Region) falls to the region itself.[56]

These two examples, of security and of resource management, help explain how the KRG is able to justify its ventures when the constitution of Iraq clearly identifies foreign policy as a competence of the federal government. It does so not on the basis of formulating sets of national interests that are pursued as foreign policy by a Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Rather, it does so according to specific sectoral interests, and then pursues the dimensions of these interests that are external to Iraq through the offices of specific ministers, the KRG prime minister, the KRG president, and also the more opaque structures that remain very powerful in the party political realm. In so doing, the Kurds can justifiably state that they are keeping to the letter of the constitution, if not fully to the spirit as defined by their Arab counterparts and as agreed in 2005.

This strategy allows the KRG to pursue an independent foreign policy in all but name. Encouraging foreign direct investment into the Kurdistan Region,[57] negotiating oil and gas contracts with international oil companies, mediating between the government of Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leadership located in the north of the Kurdistan Region (in Qandil), and being involved in the affairs of Kurdish parties in the civil war that now engulfs Syria (along with many other examples) have all been interpreted by the KRG as legitimately falling within its competences – on the basis that these matters have a direct impact upon affairs inside the region. As such, the KRG has a very assiduously planned set of foreign policies, carefully constructed foreign relations and keenly followed national interests – but which are never articulated publicly as such.

53 Ibid., Article 121, para 4.

54 Interview, Erbil, October 2012.

55 Ibid.

56 Constitution of Iraq, 2005, Article 112, para 1.

57 For examples of Kurdish investment-promotion literature, see Kurdistan Regional Government, 'Invest in the Future 2008', 'Invest In The Future 2009', and 'Invest In Democracy 2011', available from http://www.kurdistaninvestment.org/publications.html.

4 Political Parties on the Regional and International Stage

Different Iraqi political groupings also play a role on the regional and international stage, where they seek international support as well as striking postures over issues that matter to their domestic supporters. The utility of international backing was starkly illustrated by the 2003 regime change and the subsequent empowerment of leading figures from the opposition-in-exile in London and Washington. The composition of Iraq's political class today is still strongly affected by the previous influence of the United States and other Western countries on forming the country's first post-Saddam administrations. Today, however, Iraqi Arab politicians typically prefer to seek support within the region than to compete for US or Western backing, whereas the Kurdistan Regional Government has maintained effective diplomacy and lobbying in Western capitals, mindful of its need as a small non-Arab entity to keep its options open in and beyond the region.[58] A striking example is the fact that the post of Iraqi ambassador to London lay empty from 2007 until 2013.

One of the central political differences between Nouri al-Maliki and his main rival in the 2010 election, Ayad Allawi – a former prime minister of the interim government, founder of the Iraqi National Accord and a leading figure in the Iraqi National Movement (Iraqiyya) – was over the role that Iraq should play in a region that is increasingly polarized between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Regional alliances became a prominent part of the campaign, with Allawi making a high-profile tour to the Gulf and promising to end Iraq's isolation from the Arab world – an implicit contrast with Maliki's close relationship with Iran. For the opposition, Maliki's approach to Iran is a significant obstacle to progress in relations with the Gulf countries. By contrast, the prime minister's supporters tend to portray the main barrier as a lack of will on the part of the Gulf states to accept an elected Shia-led government for reasons of sectarianism and authoritarian solidarity.

These differences create a self-reinforcing cycle whereby rival regional powers develop implicit alliances with different Iraqi factions, lending particular support in the hope that shifts in the balance of power within Iraq will strengthen their own interests in the country. In a sense Iraq internalizes these regional rivalries. In the run-up to the 2010 election, reports of visits by Iraqi politicians to regional capitals fuelled speculation about funding from neighbouring states, in a manner reminiscent of Lebanese politics, despite the fact that Iraq is a much larger and richer power than Lebanon and should have greater bargaining power. Likewise, visits to Iraq by Iranian and US officials in particular gave the impression that both countries were seeking to act as power-brokers in the formation of the new government. At the same time, the relations of Iraqi factions with larger powers usually also include elements of mistrust and bet-hedging; none wants to be entirely reliant on a single larger power, and the recent history of Iraqi politics illustrates the potential for alliances to undergo shifts and reversals.

58 'The KRG knows that limiting its options to only Turkey would limit its clout and shift the balance of power too much towards Turkey. Therefore, the KRG is keeping its options open with Iran, Baghdad, the US, and to an extent Syria.' Shwan Zulal, 'Survival Strategies and Diplomatic Tools: The Kurdistan Region's Foreign Policy Outlook', *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (2010), pp. 1–18, at p. 10.

This situation of relative weakness reflects the fact that Iraq is still going through an interrupted process of post-colonial state formation, with much of the infrastructure of the state destroyed as part of the regime change. Since the dismantling of the army, the authorities have struggled to fully control the borders and still do not have a monopoly of force within Iraq's territory. This has caused significant tensions with neighbours, for instance when Kata'ib Hizbollah, a splinter group that broke off from the Mahdi Army, threatened a Kuwaiti port project in 2011. Moreover, beyond these elements of hard state security, there is little consensus on the less tangible issue of national identity – including what this means for Iraq's place in a region where other leaders have sought to define alliances partly on the basis of being Arab, or being Sunni or Shia.

This question of national identity was often cited as a vital but problematic issue for foreign policy-makers by interviewees and commentators from across Iraq's political spectrum during the research for this report. As nebulous and elusive a concept as 'national identity' is, a sense that it is underdeveloped or absent or from Iraqi politics appears to be a concrete concern for many.

For instance, former ambassador Feisal Istrabadi argued:

> *We have a Shia national identity and a Sunni national identity and the two are almost mutually exclusive. The Shia nationalist vision of the state says the Sunni Arabs supported Saddam and were indifferent to all our suffering. The Sunnis are different because their primary fear is Iran. And this gets played out in foreign policy. The vision of the state is different.*[59]

Interviewees frequently expressed a sense that Iraq's national interests were suffering from this factionalization and that external actors were ultimately exploiting factional divisions to pursue their own agenda. At the same time, there was an assumption that this situation would continue for the foreseeable future. This reflects a collective-action problem where each faction feels the need to seek external support in order to balance the support it assumes its rivals would inevitably enjoy.

Even if domestic politics were more harmonious, it is perhaps to be expected that Iraq's religiously and ideologically based movements would still have transnational links with their counterparts. This is partly a result of the legacy of the years when Iraqi opposition groups were forced to operate in exile, and set up offices in London, Washington, Damascus, Tehran and other places, seeking alliances with international powers that they hoped would help them change the regime. It also reflects the fact that a number of key political parties are associated with international Islamic movements that have taken different forms in the different countries in which they operate (as was also the case with the communist, socialist and Arab nationalist movements that preceded them). New transnational links, diaspora groups and hubs for opposition have also been created by the migration of Iraqis to other parts of the region as refugees or to seek better economic opportunities.

Some of the key parties and movements, and their foreign policy positions, are outlined below. Most of these also face internal differences, and most have undergone splits since 2003. This further complicates the formation of policy positions, as entrepreneurial politicians and militia leaders may be taking their own positions, seeking their own alliances and making their own compromises.

59 Interview, London, March 2013.

The Islamic Dawa Party of Iraq

The prime minister's party, Dawa, was the first Shia Islamist political party in the modern world, founded in 1957 in Najaf. Its principles and programme were largely devised by Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Baqr al-Sadr, who in part was inspired by the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood and wanted to delineate a complete Islamic political, social and economic system, partly in order to offer a religious alternative to the increasingly popular theories offered by the Communist Party.[60] Dawa officials say their party set a precedent for thinking about the compatibility of Islam and democracy; al-Sadr advocated the concept of *wilayet al-umma* ('rule of the people').

Dawa was active internationally before Iran's Islamic revolution and was an influential force in the Gulf countries in the 1960s and 1970s. While it was broadly backed by Iran against Saddam Hussein, the relationship has never been straightforward. In the 1980s, when Dawa and other Shia movements took refuge in Iran, a fundamental split emerged within the party over its attitude to that country, particularly after 1982, when Iran rejected Iraq's proposed ceasefire and sent troops into its territory. While the party's senior clerics remained in Iran, its lay activists left. These included Nouri al-Maliki, who went to Syria, and Ibrahim Ja'afari (later an interim prime minister), who went to London.[61] Theological differences and debates have continued as the Iranian model of *wilayet-e-faqih* ('rule of the jurisprudents' in Persian) has become one of the central points of dispute in Shia theology and politics. Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Fadlallah, traditionally seen as the cleric with the most influence over the Dawa party, moved from being a supporter of the Iranian revolution to expressing his own doubts about the model, while Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the most popular cleric in the Shia world, does not favour the close involvement of clerics in politics.

According to a senior Dawa MP, Sadiq Al-Rikabi,

> *The centre of Shia Islam is in Najaf rather than Qom. As Iraqis, we believe we are the real and historical leaders of the Shia rather than the Iranians, but maybe the West accuses us of following Iran for political reasons. Iran welcomes this accusation so they can use the Shia of Iraq as another card on the table in their dealings with the West.*[62]

Dawa officials interviewed – as also noted above – emphasized a policy of balanced foreign relations and regional non-alignment, in stark contrast to the more widespread perception that the Iraqi government is situated in a pro-Iranian or 'resistance' camp within the region. According to Tareq Najem, a political adviser to Maliki,

> *In 1991 this party started its political programme regarding its policy to respect all […] and to look after the interest of our country; it was the first to open to all parties and countries and not limit itself to the Islamist parties.*[63]

In 2013 the party published a document summarizing its foreign policy vision, which focuses on three broad themes:

60 Laurence Louer, *Shiism and Politics in the Middle East* (London: Hurst, 2013), pp. 14–16.
61 Ibid., pp. 67–69.
62 Interview, Suleimaniya, March 2013.
63 Interview, Baghdad, March 2013.

- ***Economy, trade and tourism:*** promoting economic cooperation and interdependence as a means to regional peace and security, as seen in the post-war development of the European Union. The document argues Iraq should in future be measured not by the size or influence of its army but rather by economic indicators such as the number of oilfields it has and its GDP growth.

- ***Values, ideology and culture:*** promoting moderate interpretations of religion, confronting the promotion of violence and sectarianism, and continuing to build relations with other democratic states to help ensure domestic political stability

- ***Politics, sovereignty and security:*** the document emphasizes that Saddam Hussein's wars had a disastrous effect on the Iraqi population and that Iraq should never again be a threat to international peace and security. At the same time, protecting borders and sovereignty are key concerns for Iraq.[64]

Few would disagree with these broad principles; the disputes that other parties have with Dawa are largely over their implementation and over their differing views of threats and opportunities in the region. Where Dawa depicts itself as acting in the national interest, but facing isolation and threats from neighbours motivated by sectarianism and opposition to Iraq's democratization, the party's opponents likewise accuse it of aligning with Iran and failing to build ties with Gulf countries for reasons of sectarian prejudice.

The Iraqi National Movement (Iraqiyya)

Iraqiyya is a cross-sectarian alliance including the Iraqi National Accord, led by former interim prime minister Ayad Allawi, with nine other parties, including the Iraqi Dialogue Front headed by Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq and the Renewal List headed by former deputy prime minister Tariq al-Hashemi, as well as independent politicians. The cross-sectarian nature of the movement, and a strategy of effective diplomatic outreach to the Gulf countries on the basis of shared concerns about Iran, have helped Iraqiyya build links with the Gulf, while al-Hashemi is now based in Turkey since a death sentence was passed against him *in absentia* in 2012.

Immediately before the 2010 election, Allawi visited Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt in a tour that his aide Hassan al-Alawi described as an attempt to break 'what is akin to a diplomatic blockade [on Iraq] from the Arab world' and to 'send a message to the Arab world informing it that the coming Iraq is open to the Arab atmosphere and is cooperative and has a major role, and the forthcoming elections will end Iraq's isolation from the Arab world'.[65] Al-Alawi was also quoted as saying that Saudi Arabia represented 'the Arab paradigm'.

According to one member of parliament, Jabir al-Jabiri, 'Iraqiyya have three red lines: we will not accept Iranian influence, the Sadrists being kingmakers, or the marginalization of Sunnis and the Iraqiyya bloc.'[66] Mohammed al-Nujaifi, the chief adviser to (and brother of) Osama al-Nujaifi, the speaker of parliament and an Iraqiyya leader, articulates widely held concerns about Iranian influence:

64 Dawa Party of Iraq, 'Vision for Iraq's Foreign Policy', February 2013.

65 'Allawi visits Saudi Arabia to return Iraq to Arab system – sources', *The Majalla*, 23 February 2010.

66 Interview, London, February 2013.

> *Iran is putting its foot in the way to stop Maliki being replaced […] Last June in Erbil the Iranians and the US ambassador were lobbying for Maliki not to be replaced, and Kurdish unity was shattered […] Do we want to go back to being satellite states of empires?*[67]

Such criticisms are deeply intertwined with disputes over the domestic balance of power; Nujaifi also decries the continued existence of Shia militias as well as the prime minister's attempts to centralize power: 'He doesn't believe in coexistence, partnership or power-sharing […] Now we see a genuine civil resistance and he doesn't recognize it.'[68]

The Sadrist movement

The followers of Moqtada al-Sadr, a Shia cleric and political activist, constitute a religious, political and social movement rather than a formal party with membership. The Sadrists seek to portray themselves as an authentic, indigenous national movement – in contrast to other groups whose leaders spent lengthy periods of time abroad, although Moqtada al-Sadr spent a substantial time in hiding outside Iraq after the invasion – and as one of the primary opponents of the foreign occupation of Iraq. They pitch themselves as 'a grassroots social force with religious foundations, loyal to the leader and the [al-Sadr] Office […] not dependent on politics and elections', a stance that has some resonance given the widespread disaffection with the political elite. Their rhetoric is heavily anti-imperialist – for instance, in a March 2013 speech, al-Sadr said asking for the help of global superpowers was '*haram*, ugly, irrational, undesirable and socially impermissible.'[69] Nonetheless, according to the movement's London spokesman,

> *Sayyed Moqtada said recently that he would love to visit Washington. We don't have a problem with the US or with Britain, but with foreign occupation. We are not against US participation in rebuilding Iraq. But we are not a project that started in 2003 for Iran and the US to compete over.*[70]

The rhetoric of the movement also focuses heavily on crossing Iraq's sectarian divide, although in the 2006–07 civil conflict the group's militia, the Mahdi Army, was heavily implicated in the sectarian ethnic cleansing in Baghdad. In 2008 the Iraqi army took on the Mahdi Army in Basra in what became known as 'The Charge of the Knights' operation, after which al-Sadr spent much of the next three years in Iran. Since then, al-Sadr, who was previously seen as close to the Iranian government, has reinvented himself as an Iraqi nationalist opposition figure (a stance that he also took before 2006, and that echoes the approach taken by his father). He formed an opposition alliance with Iraqiyya and the Kurds, distancing himself from some former allies accused of sectarian killings, and, most recently, reaching out to the mostly Sunni leaders of the protests in Iraq's western provinces. Nevertheless, many in the Gulf still view him as an Iranian proxy.

In terms of regional politics, al-Sadr has taken a high-profile stance over Bahrain's political crisis: in May 2011, a statement on his website said that he had discussed the crisis in Bahrain with the emir of Qatar, who had then promised to intervene personally to mediate in the crisis (this did not materialize, partly because the Bahraini government was not at the time open to Gulf

67 Interview, London, February 2013.

68 Ibid.

69 Ali Abel Sadah, 'Muqtada al-Sadr lashes out against US, Maliki', *Al-Monitor*, 18 March 2013, http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/03/sadr-nasrallah-speech-similarity.html#ixzz2SnFgPK45.

70 Interview, Dr Hassan al-Sadr, London, April 2013.

mediation).[71] Meanwhile, Syrian opposition groups have said there are Mahdi Army fighters in Syria, alongside other Iraqi Shia fighters from Asaib al-Haq and Kata'ib Hezbollah, two militias that emerged as splinter groups from the Mahdi Army, and in addition to Iranian and Lebanese (Hezbollah) forces. For its part, the Sadrist movement's official position is similar to that of the Iraqi government: it claims to support the legitimate demands of the Syrian people but not the armed opposition. Its spokesman argues that Iraq could be doing more 'to support peaceful demonstrators and groups that represent the people rather than foreign financial support'.[72] In May 2013, in response to Israeli airstrikes on Syria, al-Sadr called for Syria's 'prestige' to be defended against Israel – a more popular stance than calling for support for the Syrian regime against its own people.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq

The ideology of Al-Qaeda is fundamentally a transnational one, challenging the existing nation-states in the Islamic world and calling for the restoration of a caliphate, although in practice local dynamics are often important factors in understanding the behaviour of local affiliates. Internationally, the conflict in Syria has provided an opportunity for Al-Qaeda and other jihadi groups to capitalize on. Previously, the international influence of the organization had been questioned as a result of the Arab uprisings – which appeared to validate a non-violent, mass approach to politics as a more effective answer to authoritarianism and foreign dominance than the violence of a minority had been – and the assassination of Osama bin Laden the same year.

In March 2013, a statement released by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, head of the Islamic State in Iraq (Al-Qaeda in Iraq), declared that the group would merge with a Syrian jihadi militia, Jebhat al-Nusra, under the name 'The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant'. His authority to make this statement was contested by some of the Jebhat al-Nusra leadership, and subsequently *Al-Jazeera* published a letter attributed to Ayman al-Zawahiri, the most prominent Al-Qaeda leader, saying the merger had been annulled in order to end the dispute.[73]

By many accounts, Syrian intelligence may have played a role in establishing Jebhat al-Nusra in the early years of the occupation of Iraq. This was in a period when Syria was facilitating jihadi fighters confronting US forces in Iraq (fearing that if the United States was too successful in Iraq, it would move on to Syria afterwards) – illustrating the risk that proxies can prove unreliable, engender blowback and even become enemies over the longer term.

71 'Al-Mutairi: "Amir Qatar wa'ad samaha al-Sayyed al-Sadr biltadkhil shakhsiya lihol azma al-Bahrain wa tashkil lijna limitab" al-mowdhow'a' ('Al-Mutairi: 'Emir of Qatar promises Sayyed al-Sadr to intervene personally to solve the crisis in Bahrain and to establish a follow-up committee'), Al Sadr Online, http://www.alsadronline.net/ar/permalink/4872.html, 8 May 2011. Cited in English in Nayla Razzouk, 'Qatari Emir vows to resolve Bahrain crisis, Iraq's Sadr says', Bloomberg, 9 May 2011, http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-05-09/qatari-emir-vows-to-resolve-bahrain-crisis-iraq-s-sadr-says.html.

72 Ibid.

73 Basma Atassi, 'Qaeda chief annuls Syrian-Iraqi jihad merger', *Al-Jazeera*, 9 June 2013, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middle east/2013/06/2013699425657882.html.

5 The Key Strategic Alliances: the United States and Iran

Iraq's two most important strategic alliances are with the United States and Iran. In both cases, the relationships go well beyond traditional diplomatic and economic relations, having a direct bearing on Iraq's national security and sovereignty. Both US and Iranian officials also become deeply involved in Iraq's internal power struggles, for instance around the 2010 elections. This is supported by anecdotal accounts, but it is never transparent, and thus tends to be viewed with some suspicion. The large gaps in the available information are filled with speculation and assumptions, adding to the general uncertainty of the public about how foreign relations are conducted, and encouraging a polarization of narratives.

The United States

As the world's pre-eminent military power and the key external actor in the Middle East, the United States remains critically important to Iraq in terms of defence, diplomacy and aid. However, for Iraq there has been a step change in the importance and relevance of the United States since the withdrawal of its troops, which was completed by the end of 2011. This comes in a broader context of perceptions that the United States is pulling back from the Middle East, in part because of the experience of occupying Iraq, a wider war-weariness and a desire to concentrate on the home front at a time of austerity. President Barack Obama has also spoken of pivoting US foreign policy towards Asia. This partly reflects the importance of the rise of China as the country most likely to overtake the United States as the world's largest economy. It also reflects changes in the global energy market that are deemed likely to lessen US economic dependence on Middle Eastern oil, though the price-setting power of the key Arab oil exporters will remain of profound global importance. China is overtaking the United States as the world's largest oil importer, and the 'shale gas revolution' is forecast by the International Energy Agency to make North America a net oil exporter within two decades.[74] By contrast, the countries in Iraq's region, including Iran, can make the argument that they will be neighbours forever and that they need to cooperate on trade, water and energy as well as strengthening diplomatic ties.

Security, aid and diplomacy are more important areas of Iraqi–US cooperation than trade and energy, where exchanges are limited: even the investments by international oil companies have been well below pre-invasion expectations, and a US–Iraq Trade and Investment Framework Agreement negotiated in 2005 was only ratified by the Iraqi government in 2013. From Iraq's point of view, the focus of foreign policy towards the United States has above all been on negotiating an end to the occupation. This was something that most Iraqi factions agreed upon in principle,

74 International Energy Agency, *World Energy Outlook* 2012, http://www.iea.org/publications/freepublications/publication/English.pdfhttp://www.iea.org/publications/freepublications/publication/English.pdf.

though there were differences over the timing, over the Status of Forces Agreement (opposed by some on the basis that it appeared to legitimize the occupation even as it brought it to an end), and over the relative efficacy of violent and non-violent strategies to end the occupation.

From the United States' point of view, ambitions for Iraq have been scaled down dramatically from the earlier visions of a regime change that would reshape the region to more modest hopes that the country will stay together, stabilize, avoid destabilizing or threatening its neighbours, and not re-emerge as an enemy. Earlier plans to maintain long-term 'super-bases' in Iraq were dropped in the face of sustained opposition.

Under a Strategic Framework Agreement signed in 2008, the two countries agreed that the United States would not use Iraqi land, sea or air as a launching pad for attacks against other countries, and that it would not request a permanent military presence in Iraq.[75] Instead, the United States maintains its largest foreign embassy in Iraq; at the time of writing, 10,500 diplomatic staff are stationed there (most of them security staff and contractors supporting fewer than 1,000 diplomats), but a reduction to 5,500 is planned by the end of 2013.[76] At the same time, the Iraqi government and army have sought to continue cooperation with the US military. The Strategic Framework Agreement also provides for long-term business, educational and scientific cooperation between the two countries, including sending thousands of Iraqi students to US universities.

The Iraqi government also seeks diplomatic support from the United States, given the latter's importance in the eyes of the states with which Baghdad has had the most difficult relations, notably those in the Gulf. The Strategic Framework Agreement provides for the United States to support the Iraqi government in establishing positive relations with other countries in the region. The United States has also played a diplomatic role behind the scenes in Iraq, including in the recent military negotiations on the role of the *peshmerga* between Baghdad and the KRG. One US diplomat commented 'they were not asking Iran to negotiate or observe'.[77] Iraqi diplomats have also called for the United States to press American oil companies not to enter into deals with the KRG without approval from the central government.

On this thorny issue, the US Department of State has said that investments in the Kurdistan Region without the approval of the central government are legally risky, though no attempt has been made to block them. The official US position is to support a negotiated agreement, based on the constitution, between Baghdad and the Kurds, to end the legal uncertainty that otherwise prevails; meanwhile, exports – and pipeline plans – should be coordinated with the central government. At the same time there is a general US interest in seeing Iraq maximize its oil exports in order to moderate the international price of oil. At the time of writing, there was also a view that higher Iraqi oil exports would add to the economic pressure on Iran by reducing the international price it can earn for its oil.[78] That would need to be weighed up against the potential for Iraq to give greater support to the Iranian economy, for instance through trade and the provision of hard currency.

75 The United States Government and the Government of the Republic of Iraq, A Strategic Framework Agreement for a Relationship of Friendship and Co-operation Between The United States Government and the Government of the Republic of Iraq, July 2008, http://www.acq.osd.mil/log/ps/p_vault/se_sfa.pdf.

76 Adam Schreck, 'US diplomatic presence in Iraq shrinking fast', Associated Press, 20 March 2013. http://bigstory.ap.org/article/US-diplomatic-presence-iraq-shrinking-fast.

77 Interview, Iraq, March 2013.

78 Interview, Iraq, March 2013.

Iran

The relationship with Iran is one of the most hotly contested issues in Iraqi foreign policy. Iran's extensive influence over Iraq is undoubted, though there are differences of opinion over the extent to which it dominates Iraqi decision-making. Under the previous regime, Iraq was a major military threat to Iran, which has an interest in ensuring that, at a minimum, this does not occur again. While Iran has supported the advent of an elected Shia government in Iraq, it is also in its interest to keep it as a junior partner. A strong Iraq, even with a relatively sympathetic Shia-led government, would pose a variety of challenges to Iran, notably to its claim to be the spiritual centre of the Shia Islamic world, a role traditionally played by the Iraqi city of Najaf. A successful, stable and prosperous Shia-led democracy in Iraq could also represent a political and theological challenge to Iran's model of government. Moreover, Iraq – now a larger oil exporter than Iran – will eventually re-emerge as a force in OPEC, where Iran seeks to encourage a more hawkish position on oil prices than the more pro-US states such as Saudi Arabia. Iran's opponents also view it as seeking to establish hegemony over Iraq, to control key aspects of its foreign policy (for instance, over Syria), to infiltrate and take over the clerical establishment in Najaf by interfering with the succession to Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the most revered cleric in Shia Islam today, and to establish a broader sphere of influence in the region.

There are economic and geostrategic reasons for cooperation. The two countries share a long border, and several of the tributaries that feed into Iraq's Tigris river originate in Iran. There are unresolved differences over the borders – the disputed borders around the Shatt Al-Arab waterway having been the trigger for the Iran–Iraq war – and occasional tensions over water and trade (for instance, Iraqi farmers periodically complain that Iranian imports are driving prices down). The bitter memories of the 1980s war, which killed over a million people, are beginning to recede for the younger generation in both countries. But rival nationalisms and claims to Islamic leadership are expected to remain a source of tension. The countries are also major trade partners and Iran has invested in infrastructure projects in Iraq. Given the increasingly restrictive international sanctions on Iran, the Iraqi market is all the more important for it. For their part, the Iraqi authorities say they are opposed to the extensive international sanctions on Iran (and on Syria) because of their own disastrous experience with sanctions, which killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqis without dislodging Saddam Hussein's regime. Yet as Iraq's oil production recovers and sanctions are biting into Iran's oil sector, the economic balance between the two countries is tilting. This may encourage Iraq not to accept junior-partner status in the future.

Future OPEC politics will be an important indicator to watch. Iraq is currently exempt from OPEC quotas, but it has overtaken Iran as the second largest OPEC producer and will eventually be expected to re-enter the organization's quota system. So far, discussions about future quotas – and who should bear the brunt of any future production cuts – have sparked tensions with Saudi Arabia rather than with Iran. But OPEC cuts are more often sought by Iran, a relative price hawk, than by Saudi Arabia, which sees its 'moderating' effect on oil prices as one of the elements of its alliance with the United States. Tensions could emerge with an Iraq that has no desire to see its oil production curtailed again after years of security-related disruptions. In a bullish statement in December 2012, Iraq's OPEC governor, Falah Alamri, declared, 'Iraq will never cut production […] This is a sovereign issue, not an OPEC issue.'[79]

79 Amena Baker and Peg Mackey, 'Iraq-Saudi OPEC standoff over next oil curbs', Reuters, 12 December 2012, http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/12/12/US-opec-meeting-idusBRE8BB0TH20121212.

Officials from Iraq's ruling party note that the close relations with Iran are partly due to Iran's proactive cultivation of links, first with the opposition and then with the new government, something that Saudi Arabia has not matched. 'When all the Arab doors were shut, the Iranian door was open,' says Dawa MP Sadiq Al-Rikabi. However, he adds:

> *When we return to our healthy state in Iraq, we will force all the states, including Iran, to respect us and to stop any intervention in our internal issues. The first principle is that we should have immunity from external forces interfering; the second principle is that Iran is our neighbour with a 1,200km border, and we need to overcome the past and build a mutually beneficial relationship.*[80]

Another Dawa MP, Mohammed al-Sa'adi, argues that 'Iran is trying to shift its battlefield outside its own territory, so if it is attacked, it will be attacked in Syria and Iraq.'[81] A sense of resentment of Iran's approach is expressed fairly widely, but so is a perception that Iraq has few options for making regional allies. For its part, Iran has almost no state allies in the Arab world, despite its successful cultivation of links with a variety of non-state actors. Iraq may become increasingly important to it as the regime in Syria is threatened, but more through the cultivation of ties with individuals and factions than through relations between institutions of state. Though it is not as factionalized as Iraq, Iran's foreign policy is also affected by internal divisions. Qassim Suleimani, the head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, is a leading figure in relations with Iraq, sometimes bypassing both foreign ministries to go straight to Nouri al-Maliki and the heads of other Iraqi factions. Over the years, Iran has sought to develop relations with a variety of Iraqi factions, rather than being tied to a single one or individual, as part of a bet-hedging strategy.

Balancing between two enemies

The need to balance these two strategic alliances with countries that have diametrically opposed strategies and worldviews puts Iraq in a tricky position. At the same time, having an alliance with both countries could be an asset, creating the opportunity to act as a bridge or a mediator. This unusual position has even prompted some in Iraq and the wider region to speculate that the regime change in Iraq was a conspiracy between the United States and Iran, despite all their supposed mutual enmity. This reflects a tendency to view the United States as near-omnipotent, and a reluctance to believe that unintended consequences could instead have resulted from incompetence and human error – in this case, that the US strategy for the regime change in Iraq was based on flawed intelligence and significant miscalculations (and it only serves to highlight the continued importance of misperceptions in foreign relations). It is much more plausible that certain common interests and tacit accommodations have emerged between the two powers, as has also been seen in Afghanistan from time to time. Notably, both countries have in effect agreed to accommodate Maliki's premiership for different reasons. The various lofty US ambitions for Iraq to help reshape the Middle East were substantially scaled down in the years after the invasion.[82] Among other goals, in the run-up to the 2003 invasion, some US analysts had envisaged Iraq becoming a democratic Arab Shia counterweight to Iran[83] and also Saudi Arabia

80 Interview, Suleimaniya, March 2013.

81 Interview, London, January 2013.

82 See also Claire Spencer, Jane Kinninmont and Omar Sirri (eds), *Iraq Ten Years On*, Chatham House MENA Programme Report, May 2013, http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Middle%20East/0513pr_iraqtenyearson.pdf.

83 'It was thought they would become an alternative to the Islamic republic [...] the elevation of the Shias to power in Baghdad would be the best means to weaken Iran.' Louer, *Shiism and Politics in the Middle East*, pp. 2–3.

in the aftermath of 9/11 and the subsequent questioning of the benefits of the US–Saudi alliance. Under such a scenario, the United States would be able to focus on simply containing Iran instead of the previous policy of 'dual containment' of Iran and Iraq.

However, the United States did not, and does not, expect the post-Saddam Iraq to remain alienated from Iran; it has some understanding of Iraq's need to accommodate its larger neighbour. In practice, various trade-offs and accommodations are made between the three powers. Notably, it is a priority for Iraq to ensure that, were there to be a military conflict between the United States, Israel and Iran, its airspace would not be used. Another contested area is the presence in Iraq of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI/MEK), an Iranian dissident group that has in the past provided the United States with apparent intelligence on Iran's nuclear programme.[84] In 2012, Iraq hosted a round of talks between the 3+3 powers and Iran on the latter's nuclear programme, highlighting the potential for its links with both Iran and the United States to allow it to act as a bridge or a go-between, though only limited progress was made.

The conflicting Iranian and US stances on Syria pose fresh dilemmas for Iraqi policy-makers. Since 2012, senior US officials have repeatedly pressed the Iraqi government to halt, or at least inspect, Iranian planes that fly over Iraq to Syria on a daily basis. The United States suspects these of carrying arms to the Syrian government. The Iraqi government contends they are providing humanitarian aid, but the credibility of these claims is undermined by reports that the Iraqi authorities have only inspected a token handful of the planes. A US official said in April 2013 that rather than penalizing Iraq, the United States would offer it an incentive to halt the arms traffic by offering it a seat at the table in international negotiations against Syria as a reward.[85] This approach may reflect a US assumption that Iraq's options are limited; US Secretary of State John Kerry has portrayed the overflights as a violation of Iraq's sovereignty by Iran.[86]

Iraq's own airport falls under the purview of the Ministry of Transport, which is controlled by Hadi Al Amiri, a minister representing the Badr organization. This group, traditionally close to Iran's Revolutionary Guard, split from the ISCI in 2012. For Iran, it may be important to maintain direct links to the officials who control this key infrastructural asset, if the example of Lebanon is anything to go by. In Lebanon the need for Hezbollah to control Beirut airport has been a flashpoint; in May 2008, moves by the prime minister to sack the airport chief of security and to crack down on Hezbollah's parallel telecoms network prompted street fighting and a political crisis that was only solved by a power-sharing agreement and the reinstatement of the chief.[87]

84 In 2008 the Iraqi cabinet declared that the MEK, who number some 3,4000, would be expelled from Iraq; in 2009 the national security adviser stated that Camp Ashraf, its base in Iraq since the 1980s, would be closed. Most of the MEK exiles were moved to a new refugee camp, Camp Liberty (a former US military base near Baghdad airport) in 2012; they have alleged it is akin to a concentration camp. The UN backs a programme to resettle the MEK in third countries but progress in identifying new host countries has been slow. See International Federation for Human Rights, 'Iraq must protect the rights of Camp Ashraf residents', 31 July 2009, http://www.refworld.org/docid/4a842418c.html. In April 2013, US Secretary of State John Kerry told the US Congress that he believed the Iranian government was responsible for a mortar attack on the MEK's camp that killed seven people there in February, and that he had raised this directly with Nouri al-Maliki. For its part, the Iranian government says the MEK has carried out terrorist attacks inside Iran.

85 Paul Richter, 'Maliki resists Kerry's call to halt flow of Iranian arms to Syria', *Los Angeles Times*, 24 March 2013, http://articles.latimes.com/2013/mar/24/world/la-fg-wn-kerry-maliki-20130324.

86 For instance, Kerry said during his visit to Iraq in March 2013, where he raised this issue with Maliki, that 'Iraq's success will require the resolve to defend the sovereignty of the country and its airspace.' At the same meeting, journalists reported that Kerry joked to Maliki that his predecessor, Hillary Clinton, had told him the Iraqi government would do whatever he said, and that Maliki responded in kind by saying 'We won't!' Anne Gearan, 'Kerry: Iraq helping Syria's Assad by allowing arms flow', *Washington Post*, 24 March 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/kerry-asks-iraq-to-stop-syria-arms-flow/2013/03/24/61eec97e-9467-11e2-95ca-dd43e7ffee9c_story.html.

87 The importance of air links was further underlined by the targeting of Beirut airport by Israeli airstrikes in the 2006 war. Damascus airport was also attacked in May 2013 at the same time as Israeli airstrikes in Syria were being reported.

6 Iraq's Regional Relations

Regional alignment?

The Middle East has long been an area where international powers have played out their own rivalries. Despite the end of the Cold War, attempts to define the region as split into two 'camps' have continued to capture imaginations, even if they tend to break down on a closer analysis. Currently the dominant narrative is of a region polarized between pro-US and pro-Iranian camps, or even between Sunni and Shia countries. Iraq does not fit neatly into either division. Initially, its occupation by the United States created some suspicion on the part of other governments in the region. But subsequently it has been Iraq's alliance with Iran that has alienated neighbouring states, most of which have their own close alliances with the United States.

Iraq would not be alone in wanting to balance relations with various camps in the region. Oman is able to do so, partly thanks to its fairly insulated position; despite a long imperial history it now eschews engagement outside its borders. Qatar and Turkey formerly attempted to balance between the two but since the start of the Arab Spring have moved closer to a broadly pro-US Sunni Islamist camp (though again this is full of contradictions). Iraq may instead come to resemble Lebanon, which hedges its bets when it comes to public state positions (e.g. UN votes over Syria), while factions sometimes pursue directly contradictory policies (above all, over Syria).

Syria: the most contentious foreign policy issue

Iraq lacks a strategy on the conflict in Syria. This is partly a reflection of its severe internal and competing external pressures. It is also because of its limited capacity to implement a policy, since the conflict is largely outside its control. Iraq's internal divisions complicate its ability to act as an effective mediator or facilitate a dialogue. Its stated policy is to support dialogue and a negotiated political solution, while opposing sanctions and militarization of the opposition. Meanwhile, however, Iraqi militants are involved on both sides of the Syrian conflict. There are accusations that the authorities have allowed fighters (mainly from Shia militias such as Kata'ib Hezbollah and Asaib al-Haq) to enter Syria in support of the Assad regime, and that Sunni tribes have facilitated the entry of fighters in support of the opposition, while the KRG has acknowledged that it has trained and supported Kurdish opposition groups.

The Iraqi government is largely opposed to a regime change that it fears would threaten its interests; it shares with Assad the sense of a common enemy, rather than ideological or personal solidarity. Some officials express sympathy with the demonstrators, saying they understand the brutality of Ba'athist rule. Although Maliki was once a political exile in Damascus, in recent years he and his government strenuously objected to what they saw as Syrian encouragement and facilitation of international jihadi fighters entering Iraq. Yet the government takes a 'better the devil you know' attitude, seeing the only alternative in Syria as being a largely Sunni Islamist government, which they presume would be hostile.

This may be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Iraq's policy towards Syria is exacerbating the divisions within Iraqi politics, as Iraqiyya expresses solidarity with the Syrian protestors and with Iraq's Sunni Muslim protestors, while Al-Qaeda in Iraq and Iraq's Muslim Brotherhood are seeking to capitalize on the Syrian conflict in order to bolster their domestic position. Meanwhile, there has been a shift since March 2013, when observers in northern Iraq suggested the KRG was avoiding visible training of Syrian Kurdish opposition fighters out of sensitivity to Turkish interests. Two months later, in early May, the Kurdistan regional prime minister, Nechirvan Barzani, said the KRG was training Syrian Kurdish fighters, arguing this was to help them defend their territory against extremists.[88]

Iraqi factions have sharply polarized views of threats and opportunities resulting from the situation in Syria, and over how they are responding to these. The picture is cloudy, as facts on the ground remain shrouded in a 'fog of war' that is exacerbated by the high-stakes international propaganda struggle. Differences in the constructions of interests and threat perceptions are exacerbated by the absence of a solid, reliable and complete picture of events in Syria, the uncertainty over the nationwide strength of different opposition groups (as the situation is in flux, and as funds and arms come from a variety of different sources and through several different entry points, making a comprehensive overview almost impossible for any of the actors involved to establish) and the opacity over what is taking place within the inner circles of the regime. Given the uncertainty and the extreme asymmetry of information, speculation and rumours are all liable to fill the gap. Assumptions based on ideology or identities also constitute a powerful filter through which the competing and contradictory claims are sifted – albeit with a distorting effect. This situation of poor and politicized information is bound to make for bad decision-making, especially in a context of fear.

Moreover, differing perceptions of the strategic importance of regime change in Syria relate largely to identity politics – focusing on prospects of empowerment of Sunni Islamists who are either 'like us' or 'against us', and allied to regional powers who are likewise seen as allies or enemies, rather than focusing on the prospects for a political accommodation with a new Syrian government, for instance on the basis of shared trade interests or a common desire to contain Al-Qaeda. This is partly because of fears that the very structures of the nation-state are collapsing and that the transition will be led by militant and ideological movements.

For its part, the Iraqi government appears to have no Plan B for dealing with regime change in Syria or with a protracted civil conflict there, even though these are highly plausible scenarios for which the entire region needs to be prepared. Iraq is locked in a defensive posture, concerned about the risks but seeing few options for mitigating them. Where the KRG leaders have become influential statesmen in the Syrian and wider regional context, Baghdad seems to have retreated from tentative early attempts to engage with Syria's opposition, particularly since Saudi Arabia and Qatar are now among the most prominent supporters of the opposition. Iraqi actions seem to be largely reactive and opportunistic rather than reflecting strategic policies. (This criticism could be levelled at many other countries too.) Government officials have also sought

88 'We have done some training but I want to be clear – this is not to interfere in the internal affairs of Syria. We want the Syrian problem to be solved through dialogue,' said Barzani. Quoted in Sharmila Devi, 'KRG to train Syrian Kurds to stop extremists gaining ground', *Financial Times*, 9 May 2013, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/f3e76df2-b8bd-11e2-a6ae-00144feabdc0.html#ixzz2Spv8vJ3V.

to influence US thinking on Syria after initial concerns that US policy was not taking Iraq's interests into account. Not unlike their Israeli counterparts, Iraqi officials say they warned the United States in 2011 that Assad would not be leaving in a few months' time. They also note that the situation has changed dramatically since 2010, when, they say, Maliki could not convince the United States to put serious pressure on Assad on the issue of securing Iraq's borders, because of the appetite at the time for engaging with Assad. Most prominently, in 2013 the *Washington Post* published an article bylined by Maliki, warning the United States that it should not repeat the mistakes it made in supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan by backing a Syrian opposition that includes jihadis. This editorial made no mention of any legitimate concerns on the part of the Syrian protestors or opposition.

The Gulf states

The Iraqi government has a troubled relationship with Saudi Arabia, exemplified by the fact there is still no Saudi ambassador in Baghdad 10 years after the regime change.[89] It also faces increasing tensions with Qatar, which it sees as supporting hostile forces in Iraq and Syria. But relations are different with each of the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, indicating that there is room for policy decisions, not only differences in regime type and sectarian makeup, to define relations. Where relations with Saudi Arabia and Qatar are strained, there has been better progress with Kuwait in particular, as both countries have sought to resolve outstanding issues dating back to the Iraqi invasion in 1990 and to develop business ties. Kuwait has also called for stronger cooperation between Iraq and the GCC as a bloc. Since 2011, however, the GCC has focused more on developing relations with the two other Arab monarchies, Jordan and Morocco, than on ties with Iraq and Yemen, both of which are larger, less secure and ruled by republican governments. The UAE has also made investments in Iraq. Initial attempts to develop trade with Bahrain have been derailed since 2011 by that country's political crisis, in which Iraqi Shia factions have taken an interest, but although they have struck postures over it, they have not become overtly involved. Finally, there is little interaction with Oman, although it offers an interesting example of regional non-alignment, maintaining relations with Iran and the United States and occasionally acting as a mediator.

Personal relations between the king of Saudi Arabia, Abdullah bin Abdel-Aziz Al Saud, and Maliki are known to be strained, but the difficult relationship between the two countries has deeper roots. For Saudi Arabia, the new Iraq presents major challenges in terms of some of its main concerns in the region: containing the influence of Iran, which is sometimes, though not always, seen as linked to the empowerment of religious Shia groupings; preserving, for the most part, the stability of the existing – largely authoritarian – Arab state order; and maintaining its unrivalled influence over world oil markets. These major challenges and potential clashes of interests could only be dealt with by extremely skilful diplomacy; instead, in a context of poor personal relationships, they are the source of significant tensions. Relations are further hampered by historical baggage, identity politics and narratives about sectarianism.

Saudi Arabia supported Saddam Hussein as a counterweight to Iran up until the invasion of Kuwait. Even during the post-1991 containment era, Daniel Byman observed that

89 Iraq has had an ambassador in Riyadh since 2007. When the Arab League summit was held in Baghdad in 2012, Saudi Arabia needed an ambassador to represent it, so it appointed the ambassador to Jordan to the post on a part-time basis, to remain based in Amman.

Both Turkey and Saudi Arabia are, at best, ambivalent about the Iraqi opposition. Ankara, of course, is ambivalent about any plan that might increase Kurdish autonomy […] Saudi Arabia is also hesitant, due to fears of Shia domination.[90]

Reading this 1999 comment today, it is striking how little has changed between Saudi Arabia and the Iraqi political leaders and how much has changed between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurdish leaders. Dawa officials are right in saying that Saudi Arabia opposed regime change and that it has its own reasons to oppose the advent of democracy and the empowerment of a Shia majority in its own backyard (because of the potential for Iranian influence and the prospects for emboldening political demands among Saudi Arabia's own Shia population, concentrated in the oil-rich Eastern province). However, the contrast with Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds – who managed to overcome their traditional suspicion – is instructive. The Turkey/KRG example indicates that with creative leadership new ways of dealing with traditional identity-based rivalries can be found, with economic interdependence creating more positive outcomes for both sides.

In the case of Iraq and Saudi Arabia, by contrast, each side blames the other for taking a supposedly sectarian stance in the face of its own apparently generous attempts to reach out. Meanwhile, there is little in the way of diplomatic or trade cooperation, though there have been some recent attempts at security cooperation involving the two interior ministries, especially since the accession of a new younger-generation Saudi interior minister, Mohammed bin Nayef, in 2012.

Identity politics and concerns about sectarianism are widely cited among the reasons for the reportedly poor personal relations between the Iraqi and Saudi leaders. In terms of the personal dynamics, Maliki's opponents point to anecdotal accounts of the first meeting between King Abdullah and the prime minister. According to Feisal Istrabadi,

King Abdullah was the first head of state to meet Maliki as prime minister. He told him if he'd be with the Arabs, he'd be his greatest friend, but if he was with Iran, he'd be against him – and he extracted promises he would integrate the Sunnis.[91]

Istrabadi added that the king later told the United States he felt Maliki had deceived him. 'I don't think he'll reconcile with Maliki while he's alive, though others around him may want to make overtures.' Mohammed al-Nujaifi had a similar account: 'Maliki promised [King Abdullah] he'd have a fair deal for everyone, nothing sectarian, but he never delivered.'[92] Yet it is also reported that King Abdullah has great respect for Iraq's Ayatollah Sistani, the most revered religious leader in the Shia world. It is an oversimplification to see Saudi policies as necessarily anti-Shia, and important voices within the Saudi system acknowledge that Arab Shia and Iran do not necessarily have identical interests. King Abdullah himself oversaw the return of former Shia exiled dissidents to Saudi Arabia in the 1990s, and the subsequent election of some of them to Saudi municipal councils.

Dawa officials tend to counter criticisms of Iraqi sectarianism by pointing to Saudi Arabia's own lack of religious freedom, to the violent *takfiri* fatwas issued by some Saudi clerics and, above all, to the entry of thousands of Saudi jihadi fighters and suicide bombers into Iraq since 2003. This has massively undermined trust between the two countries and has no parallel in the other

90 Byman, 'Proceed with Caution' (see note 4 above).
91 Interview, London, March 2013.
92 Interview, London, March 2013.

direction. While the opposition points to Saudi concern with sectarian violence in Iraq,[93] many Iraqis also ask why the same solidarity was not shown to them when Saddam crushed a largely Shia and Kurdish uprising in 1991, to be greeted with at best silence and at worse applause from the wider region. This further illustrates the impact of the legacy of dictatorship, and the sense of isolation and victimhood, on regional relations today.

But history does not have to determine the future so inevitably. A tentative contrast can be made with Saudi relations with the new Egyptian government, which likewise started on a bad footing because of Saudi Arabia's close relationship with Hosni Mubarak and its very public opposition to the change of government. While mutual suspicions have generated tensions, attempts at outreach have led to the seeming emergence of an implicit bargain in which Saudi Arabia supports the Egyptian government (with some financial aid) and the Egyptian government does not overtly challenge Saudi interests in the region. Although both governments are Sunni Muslim, they favour rival interpretations of Sunni Islam (especially as regards the relationship between religion and politics), but seem to be seeking a political accommodation, at least for now.

Another interesting example is the development of better relations with Kuwait, despite the bitter history between the two countries. The Kuwaiti emir was the only Gulf leader to attend the 2012 Arab League summit in Baghdad. Progress has been made partly owing to strenuous efforts on the Kuwaiti side to build a more positive and economically interdependent relationship as a means to ensuring future peace. Kuwait's large and well-off Shia minority has also helped to drive economic ties in the tourism sector, for instance by developing tourist infrastructure around the holy city of Najaf. In one positive signal, direct flights between Baghdad and Kuwait, which had stopped since the 1990 invasion, were reinstated in March 2013.

Meanwhile, relations with Qatar have been deteriorating as that state has taken on a more prominent role in supporting Sunni Islamist groups across the region, most notably in Syria. Statements by a senior Qatar-based Egyptian cleric associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, Yusef al-Qaradawi, criticizing Maliki and Shia groups more generally, are a periodic source of tension. Qatar's state-funded Al-Jazeera was among 10 television channels banned by Iraq in April 2013 for its coverage of the 'Sunni protests' in western Iraq. There is a possibility that the accession of a new Qatari emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, in June 2013 could present an opportunity to improve relations, although Sheikh Tamim has been seen as one of the driving forces behind Qatar's good relations with the Muslim Brotherhood.

Bahrain, the only other Shia-majority country in the Arab world, was one of the first Arab countries to open an embassy in Iraq, though Bahraini opposition groups also claim the country recruited former Ba'athist *mukhabarat* (secret police) into their own security services. Initially, both countries sought to develop trade relations, with Bahrain pitching itself as a liberal gateway to other larger Gulf markets, while Iraq's Shia pilgrimage industry became a lucrative business for Bahrain's airlines, the state-owned Gulf Air and royally owned Bahrain Air. Gulf Air had set up routes into five Iraqi cities by the end of 2010. But in 2011, by government orders, these airlines suspended all flights to Iran, Iraq and Lebanon, seemingly a knee-jerk reaction to pro-opposition statements by Shia religious and political leaders in all three countries. Flights to Lebanon were the first to be restored despite Hezbollah's continuing statements about the political situation in Bahrain. This indicates Lebanon's success in re-establishing relations, imputed by

93 In an interview with the authors in March 2013, Feisal Istrabadi said: 'The ethnic cleansing of Baghdad in 2006 and 2007 by Maliki's allies was a deal breaker with the Arab world. He'd have excellent relations with other Arab countries if it wasn't for this treatment of Sunnis.'

some to diplomatic efforts by Prime Minister Najib Miqati, a Sunni businessman. Flights to Iraq took months longer to reinstate. The débâcle resulted in the already indebted Gulf Air making additional losses, and contributed to the collapse of Bahrain Air in 2013.

There are strong networks of family, religious and trading links between Iraqi and Bahraini Arab Shia, encouraging a solidarity that comes with personal familiarity, not just shared religious belief. In particular, the Dawa Party has historically been a significant influence on the Bahraini opposition; some of the latter's leaders who are now in prison began their political activism in Dawa's Bahraini cells in the 1970s. The most senior cleric in Bahrain, Sheikh Issa Qassim, studied under Dawa's founder, Ayatollah Mohammed Baqr al-Sadr. Links between Bahraini and Iraqi opposition Shia movements developed further in the years of exile in the 1980s and 1990s, although in the past decade the opening up of domestic political space in both countries encouraged a renewed focus on national objectives. Nevertheless, in London, for instance, regular protests outside the Bahraini embassy from 2011 onwards attracted politically active British Iraqis far more than Iranians or other Gulf activists.

In Iraq, Shia support for the Bahraini protestors was exacerbated by the sight of Saudi troops entering the country and a number of Shia mosques and *mataams* (religious gathering halls) subsequently being demolished. Maliki said in March 2013 that Iraq opposed foreign interference in Bahrain and had not moved to support the Bahraini opposition for fear the situation there could ignite a wider sectarian war in the region. He appeared to be trying to balance pressure from the Sadrists and others to support the Bahraini protestors – with some MPs reportedly calling for economic assistance to be sent to them – and calls from leading Iraqi Sunni politicians such as Osama al-Nujaifi for Bahrain to be left to resolve its own problems without interference.[94]

Meanwhile Iraqiyya representatives have suggested that the government exhibited strategic short-sightedness in its stance on Bahrain, managing to alienate Saudi Arabia without achieving anything concrete for the Bahraini protestors. Some Bahraini opposition representatives have also said that Iraq's sectarian disputes are making it more difficult for them to resolve their own political crisis, as relations between Bahrainis from different religious traditions are being affected by the various narratives and fears around events in Iraq. The role of the clerics in Najaf is also important here, as Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani is believed to be the most significant spiritual authority for Bahraini Shia, whose small country lacks an indigenous *marja'* (a highly qualified cleric seen as a source of religious emulation). His representative in Bahrain, Ayatollah Hussein Najati, was formerly a voice in favour of democracy in the country but has been quieter since his passport, and those of his family, were temporarily revoked in 2011. Sistani has avoided becoming directly involved in Bahraini politics. By contrast, an Iraqi cleric from the Shirazi tradition, Sayed Hadi Modaressi, has issued statements supporting the 'revolution' in Bahrain (having also encouraged a revolutionary movement there in the 1980s).

While Iran has tended to identify US and Saudi interests in and policies toward Bahrain as one and the same – as part of a worldview identifying the GCC monarchies as little more than imperialist puppet states – Iraqi officials see subtle differences between the United States and Saudi Arabia on this issue. This reflects their own experience of balancing between the United States, Iran and the Gulf countries, and their awareness that the United States and Saudi Arabia have considerable differences in strategy and attitude when it comes to Iraq.

94 Qassim Abdul-Zahra, 'Iraqis eyeing Bahrain protests with anger, caution', *Washington Post*, 17 March 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/03/17/AR2011031700781_2.html.

Turkey

Iraq's relations with Turkey, initially bolstered by strong trade ties, have deteriorated since 2011, as a result of conflicting policies towards Syria, Iraq's issuing of a death warrant against its former vice-president Tariq al-Hashemi, and a shift in Turkey's own foreign policy orientation from 'zero problems with the neighbours' towards a more proactive support of Sunni Islamist movements. This is in sharp contrast to Turkey's development of relations with the KRG despite a difficult history laden with competing identity politics; rather, the KRG appears to have helped Turkey develop a fresh policy towards its own Kurdish issues.

In 2007, the two countries managed to avoid a crisis over PKK fighters in northern Iraq, which the Turkish foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, cites as one of the success stories for Turkey's 'zero problems' policy. In 2009 they signed a number of economic cooperation agreements. While Turkish trade and investment with the KRG area has drawn particular attention, Turkish business interests exist much more extensively across Iraq, including in Basra (industry), Karbala (housing) and Nineveh (housing and electricity). In 2011, Iraq was Turkey's second largest export market, buying \$8.3 billion of goods, mainly iron and steel for construction, food and electrical equipment.[95] Turkey was the fifth largest foreign investor in Iraq.

However, diverging responses to the Arab uprisings and a sense on both sides that the other party is becoming more motivated by sectarian impulses have led relations to sour. Turkey's involvement in Syria in particular has prompted Iraqi government officials to accuse it of a 'neo-Ottoman' policy, and raised their suspicion that it is trying to set up a *de facto* protectorate in Iraqi Kurdistan or even has designs on Mosul. Turkey's strong relations with Iraqi Kurdistan are further emphasized by the ongoing development of a bilateral oil pipeline from Iraqi Kurdistan into Turkey against the wishes of the Baghdad government. This will allow the KRG to export energy directly to Turkey without the revenues going through the central government's exchequer.[96] Turkey's foreign policy has been controversial within the country itself and was one of the issues cited by opposition activists during a wave of domestic protests in June 2013. This raises questions about whether the Turkish government may seek to moderate its regional position somewhat in response.

Jordan

Pipeline and energy politics have also been a key feature of Iraqi foreign policy towards Jordan, and in April 2013 the two countries signed an agreement to build an \$18 billion oil and gas pipeline from Basra to Aqaba. This is critical for energy-poor Jordan, which experienced riots in late 2012 after it cut fuel subsidies. One Iraqi diplomat notes it is a valuable strategic move for Iraq to send its oil west and thus reduce its dependence on the Strait of Hormuz.[97] Thamir Ghadhban, chairman of the Advisory Commission to the Prime Minister, was quoted as saying Jordan is the 'nearest' country to Iraq and that Iraq looked forward to enhancing the relationship.[98] This is one area of broad consensus between Iraqi factions.

95 According to the website of the Ministry of Economy, Turkey, http://www.economy.gov.tr/index.cfm?sayfa=countriesandregions&country=IQ&region=4.

96 Michael Knights, 'Turkey's Choice In Iraq: Burned Bridges or Win-Win-Win', Washington Institute, 5 April 2013, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/turkeys-choice-in-iraq-burned-bridges-or-win-win-win.

97 Interview, London, March 2013.

98 Mohammed Ghazal, 'Iraq signs "strategic" pipeline deal with Jordan', *Jordan Times*, 8 April 2013, http://jordantimes.com/iraq-signs-strategic-pipeline-deal-with-jordan.

Egypt and the transition countries

The advent of new elected governments in the Arab world presents an immense opportunity for Iraq to improve its foreign relations in a region long dominated by authoritarian rulers who opposed its regime change. Iraqi officials say they support the democratic revolutions that started in 2011 – including in Syria, though usually with the caveat that they do not support the armed opposition. Iraq has reached out to Egypt, particularly through offers of economic and energy cooperation. In 2012 Iraq agreed to provide Libya with assistance in destroying stockpiles of chemical weapons left over from the previous regime.[99]

However, there is also a sense of opportunities being missed. The foreign minister has noted that Iraq's preoccupation with domestic political problems has diverted it from making the most of the changes in the region.[100] The country's stance on Syria has also alienated other 'Arab Spring' governments. Furthermore, the increasing sectarian violence in Iraq increases the risk that relations with these mostly Sunni countries will be defined by ethno-sectarian identity politics rather than more substantive issues.

In April 2013, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood issued a statement condemning the Iraqi government's use of violence against (mostly Sunni) protestors in western Iraq and calling for political dialogue: 'This is no way to rule over people. It cannot achieve either security or reform.'[101] As with the tensions with Saudi Arabia over Maliki's stance on de-Ba'athification, the statement indicates the relevance of Iraq's internal developments to its foreign relations. Egyptian salafi groups, some of which receive funding from sympathizers in the GCC states, sometimes explicitly use anti-Shia rhetoric when discussing the country's relations with Shia-majority countries (as when they criticized the Egyptian tourism minister's visit to Iran in May 2013).

Meanwhile, one of the issues that has dogged Iraq's relations with Tunisia is the treatment of Tunisians who have been charged with carrying out bomb attacks in Iraq as part of Al-Qaeda or other jihadi groups. The Ennahda Party, the leading party in Tunisia's transitional government, said in 2011 that 'human rights' would be the main factor determining future relations between Iraq and Tunisia.[102] This was after Iraq executed a Tunisian national, Yosri Trigui, who had been convicted of bombing two Shia shrines and murdering a journalist; senior Tunisian officials, including the interim president, asked Iraq not to execute him, but the Iraqi authorities had little sympathy for this request. The two countries are continuing to discuss possible arrangements for the transfer of Tunisian prisoners in Iraq into Tunisian jails, with messages being passed between the heads of state on this issue.[103]

One of the critical questions for the future of the Middle East is the extent to which the various religious-political movements that dominate popular politics can cooperate on the basis of shared values, political aspirations and economic interests, rather than being sidetracked by

99 Agence France-Presse, 'Iraq to help Libya destroy its chemical weapons', 12 April 2012, http://news.nationalpost.com/2012/04/12/iraq-to-help-libya-destroy-its-chemical-weapons/.

100 Interview, Suleimaniya, March 2013.

101 The Muslim Brotherhood, 'Egypt Muslim Brotherhood statement condemns Iraqi Government use of violence', Ikhwan Web, Cairo, 27 April 2013, http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=30885.

102 Ahmed Medien, 'Ennahda: "Respect of human rights will determine future relations between Tunisia and Iraq"', Tunisia Live, 18 November 2011, http://www.tunisia-live.net/2011/11/18/ennahdha-respect-of-human-rights-will-determine-tunisia-iraq-future-relations/.

103 'Tunisia: "Iraq started procedures to pardon Tunisian prisoners" says Presidency', All Africa News, 22 March 2013, http://allafrica.com/stories/201303230073.html.

religious differences that are being increasingly politicized by the regional competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Maliki began to reach out to Egypt even before the revolution there. He visited the country in 2009 in what Iraqi analyst Hadi Jalo said at the time was an attempt to 'penetrate the Arab rejection shield of his government' through Egypt, having decided that Saudi Arabia's door was closed.[104] Since the revolution, Iraq has been interested in sharing its own experiences of transition, for instance by convening a conference in Cairo to discuss its own experience in constitution-making – though Egyptians are unlikely to see Iraq as a model, both because of the insecurity there and because of the residual suspicion of a regime change wrought by foreign intervention. Economic cooperation has proceeded more rapidly, given Egypt's need for economic support. In March 2013 it was reported that Iraq would start providing up to four million barrels of crude oil per month after the Egyptian prime minister, Hisham Kandil, visited Baghdad, although Iraq declined an Egyptian request to support its currency by depositing $4 billion in reserves with the Central Bank of Egypt (Qatar and Saudi Arabia have deposited smaller amounts). Iraq also issued an amnesty for 33 Egyptian prisoners.[105]

Like Iraq, post-Mubarak Egypt is seeking a greater foreign policy role in the region. Politicians from across the political spectrum there express a sense that one of the problems with the previous regime was that Egypt had lost the central role in regional diplomacy that its large population and historical influence warranted. So far, the government of Mohammed Morsi has taken on a prominent foreign policy role both over Gaza, helping broker a ceasefire with Hamas in November 2012, and over Syria, where he has sought to bring Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia into 'Islamic quartet' talks on a political solution. While being prepared to talk to actors that Western countries will not contact directly (Iran and Hamas), Morsi has generally avoided taking steps that would radically challenge the core aims of the United States or GCC states in the region. Some Gulf countries had feared that the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood would mean that Egypt would switch alliances away from the United States and Gulf, and towards Iran – in their view, just as Iraq has, in their view, moved into Iran's orbit. Mindful of the need for foreign aid, not wanting to be isolated in its region and preoccupied with its own internal divisions, Egypt has avoided any such dramatic moves. Yet there are open questions about how the Egyptian government might orient its foreign policy five or ten years down the line. Egypt and Iraq could potentially have a common interest in avoiding the sectarian alignment that is increasingly threatened in the region.

104 'Iraq PM in Cairo to improve ties with Egypt', *Seattle Times*, 20 December 2009, http://seattletimes.com/html/nationworld/2010554609_apmlegyptiraq.html.

105 United Press International, 'Iraq frees 33 Egyptian prisoners', 5 March 2013, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2013/03/05/Iraq-frees-33-Egyptian-prisoners/UPI-11701362515433/.

7 Beyond the Middle East

The United Kingdom and other EU countries

When it comes to Iraq's foreign relations with countries that are further afield, there is more consensus on national interests – but most Iraqi politicians and policy-makers are preoccupied with the more divisive issues that are closer to home.

The historical relationship between Iraq and the United Kingdom is a double-edged sword in the current situation, given the sensitivities and suspicions related to the imperial past and more recent involvement in the invasion and occupation. Britain's traditional role as a hub for political refugees and opposition activity means there are many personal and family links with it among senior Iraqi politicians (both Arab and Kurdish). Yet this is not something systematically exploited by either side. From the UK side, Iraq appears to have become less of a strategic priority since the withdrawal of British forces, which ended combat operations in Iraq in 2009 and completed their withdrawal in 2011. This stance partly reflects disappointment with the continued instability in Iraq, and the limited progress of trade and investment relations. It also reflects Britain's change of government in 2010, as the coalition has sought to distance itself from previous policy towards Iraq, which was closely associated with former prime minister Tony Blair. The perception that only limited opportunities exist for British business in Iraq was underscored by the United Kingdom's decision to close its high-security and high-cost consulate in Basra in 2012. By contrast, the UK government since 2010 has concentrated far more on developing trade relations with the GCC states, while since the start of the Arab uprisings in 2011, its Middle Eastern diplomats have also focused on the Arab transition countries, especially Egypt, Yemen and Libya.

The EU signed a Framework Agreement for economic cooperation with the Iraqi foreign ministry in 2012, one of the agreements the latter cites as evidence of the country's progress in normalizing relations. Previously, in 2010, the EU had signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and Memorandum of Understanding on Energy Cooperation with Iraq. However, bilateral relations with a few individual member states are more important. Germany and France, despite their opposition to the 2003 invasion, have both developed ties based on business interests.

France had fairly strong relations with the previous regime; in the late 1970s, when Ba'athist Iraq was largely dependent on the USSR for arms, France became its main Western alternative source of weapons.[106] It was also a key European opponent of the 2003 invasion. A few French companies have invested in Iraq, particularly in the KRG region, where Total and Lafarge are active.

An Italian firm, Technital, is leading a consortium to develop what is supposed to become Iraq's largest port, at Fao. But the insecurity and corruption in Iraq have deterred many investors, and

106 Fukuyama, 'The Soviet Union and Iraq since 1968' (see note 2 above).

the limited interest in business opportunities has also constrained Iraq's ability to develop ties with European countries which, facing recession at home, are increasingly focused on trade and investment promotion when it comes to their foreign relations.

Asia: diversifying alliances?

The International Energy Agency predicts that by 2035, about 80 per cent of Iraq's oil production will go to China. Other Middle Eastern oil exporters with close ties to the United States are seeking to diversify their diplomatic and trade relations, capitalizing on the trend of world oil demand shifting east and reducing their dependency on a single superpower. It remains to be seen how Iraq's relationships with these eastern powers will evolve, whether positive trends with Russia and China will come at the expense of its relationship with the United States, and whether there is even an appetite among the Iraqi political elite to replace US leadership with that of emerging powers. So far, politicians have tended to be preoccupied by the immediate region.

However, there has been outreach to Asian countries, particularly on the economic side. Already, according to Dunia Frontier Consulting, an Iraq-based business consultancy, the single largest source of new inward investment in the country in 2011 was South Korea.[107] Korean companies are investing in water and sanitation, electricity, including the construction of a 1,500MW power plant in Basra, and housing. There has been some controversy over plans for an affordable housing project, Basmaya, however. The $7-billion contract to build homes for 600,000 Iraqis was awarded to Hanwha, a Korean construction company, in May 2012, but the Iraqi parliament subsequently criticized the apparent lack of progress on the ambitious project. In 2013, Iraq's National Investment Commission announced that the two countries had signed a strategic investment agreement and that South Korea had emphasized its commitment to completing the housing project, underscoring the importance of the project for Korea's image in Iraq.[108]

China has also established growing business links with the new authorities in Iraq, confounding pre-invasion expectations that Western countries that supported the war would reap economic benefits from new business opportunities. 'They dealt practically with us,' said the Iraqi foreign minister, adding:

> *After the regime change, they opened up to Iraq from day one. Their top priority was to negotiate to resume work on their old oil contract in Wasit. And at that time, no one else was willing to sell us any weapons.*[109]

In 2007, for instance, the Iraqi police ordered $100-million worth of light arms from China, which President Jalal Talabani used as leverage to press the United States to speed up its own arms transfers. 'China is doing very well in economic relations with Iraq […] Chinese companies are very competitive and take more risks' according to Safa Hussein, deputy national security adviser.[110] Even in the immediate aftermath of the invasion, as a former adviser to President

107 Dunia Frontier Consulting, 2011, 'Foreign Commercial Activity in Iraq', February 2012, http://duniafrontier.com/products-page/research-reports/2011-foreign-commercial-activity-in-iraq.

108 'Strategic investment agreement signed with South Korea', *Aswat Al-Iraq*, 12 January 2013, http://en.aswataliraq.info/%28S%280jukjtakrgd3mseaixomf545%29%29/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=152119&l=1.

109 Interview, Suleimaniya, March 2013.

110 Interview, Baghdad, March 2013.

Talabani observed, 'our allies would come to us surrounded by armed guards, while the Chinese and Russian envoys would turn up just in a single car'.[111]

In 2012 Iraq started negotiations on arms purchases from Russia, but these fell apart amid accusations of corruption and bribe-taking. The United States has not officially objected to this move but tends to be wary about its allies purchasing arms from Russia. Iraq's deputy national security adviser remarked: 'Our main trend is to have armaments from the West, especially the US, but the big delays in the deals with the US have encouraged Iraq to seek other sources.'[112]

In stark contrast to the United States, Asian powers, notably China and India, emphasize a non-aligned approach to regional relations – not least because they import oil from both Saudi Arabia and Iran. This could fit well with Iraq's stated aspirations to play a more neutral role.

111 Discussion with author, Suleimaniya, March 2013.
112 Interview, Baghdad, March 2013.

8 Conclusions and Recommendations

Many of the interviewees for this project expressed a desire to be seen as acting responsibly in the national interest, but the notion of what this means is deeply contested and is itself a source of conflict. The expression of a desire for a better state of affairs was often combined with a sense that they have few realistic choices. The deep intertwining of foreign policy and domestic political competition tends to exacerbate this. The likely outlook for the conflict in Syria suggests this situation will worsen in the foreseeable future. However, it is still possible to imagine Iraq developing common ground behind a non-aligned position in the region, if its various factions were able to coalesce around issues of national interest and in the process develop greater trust that could diminish the politically constructed and instrumentalized fears between ethno-sectarian groupings.

Instead, foreign policy appears likely to be formulated and fought over in a context of increasingly contentious domestic politics. This could exacerbate all the negative features discussed here – polarization, factions undermining each other overseas, mutual misperceptions, distrust, and a tendency to fall back on speculation and caricature in the absence of solid information and transparent processes. It could also reduce the chances for progress in further developing policy institutionalization, the normalization of Iraq's relations with the rest of its region and the development of diplomatic capacity. Continued weaknesses of central state institutions are in turn likely to add to secessionist sentiment in the KRG region, challenging the long-term future of the nation-state.

For all their subjection to the foreign policy goals of Iraq's neighbours, the country's political players still largely use foreign relations as a means to gain power back at home, rather than to further the country's role in the region – despite foreign policy issues that seem to suggest a more united national front could be achieved.

Beyond the politics of sectarianism

The meshing of domestic and regional politics, a recurring theme in the analysis of Iraq, appears only to be intensifying. Yet the emphasis that both Iraqi policy-makers and many external analysts place on Iraq as the victim of manipulation by neighbouring states risks understating Iraq's own agency and choices. Undoubtedly, a variety of interests including geopolitical competition, ethno-sectarian affiliation and an aversion towards the spread of democracy in the region have led certain regional powers to work to effect outcomes in Iraq to the detriment of an already debilitated domestic state apparatus. But attributing too much agency to Iraq's neighbours prevents a fuller appreciation and critique of Iraq's own role.

As much as identity politics have been instrumentalized by others working to destabilize the country, members of Iraq's own political elite have become expert in this practice. In one sense the politicization of ethno-sectarian groupings is part of a wider political game of power and influence. But those who engage in this rhetoric have themselves come to believe they are victims of xenophobic discrimination by the Iraqi 'other' – whether Sunni Arab, Shia Arab or ethnically Kurdish. This can then implicitly or explicitly affect approaches to foreign relations and policy, constraining the choices that policy-makers see before them.

For instance, some within Shia political parties such as Maliki's Islamic Dawa Party or the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq may believe that the Sunni Saudi royal family and its conservative form of Islam will always be antagonistic towards them, and this encourages Shia political parties to push for stronger ties with the Shia theocracy in Iran. In one sense such existential fears seem logical. Dawa is the first elected party founded on Islamic Shia principles to rule an Arab country; not only is its identity tightly bound up with its own governing philosophy and self-perception, but it also influences how it reacts to criticism of its style of government.

Yet it is easy to fall into an over-deterministic analysis of the impact of religious identity on Iraq's domestic and foreign policy. A simplistically sectarian picture begins to break down given that some prominent figures in the Iraqi opposition, such as Ayad Allawi, are Shia; that ethnic and party affiliations are more important in Iraqi Kurdish politics than religious identity; and that most political leaders in Iraq, including Shia ones, are opposed to the Iranian theological-political model of *wilayat-e-faqih*. When it comes to foreign relations, the idea that Saudi Arabia will inevitably be hostile to an elected Iraqi Shia government is too fatalistic. It contrasts starkly with other experiences, such as the development of relations between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurdish leadership, which at one point had seemed equally fraught with identity-based tensions, but which have progressed remarkably. Another example might be the nascent ties between Saudi Arabia and the post-Mubarak Egyptian government, which – despite many points of tension including explicit Saudi opposition to the overthrow of Mubarak – have made some progress. But it is convenient for politicians to assume that while they are acting objectively and rationally, their rivals are motivated by sectarian or ethnic prejudice. This presumption of irrationality conveniently appears to absolve them from the need to accept responsibility or change policy.

The focus on an identity-based fatalism neglects the role of leadership, personalities and policy choices. The emphasis on different religious and ethnic identities in politics varies over time, and the recent rise in sectarian politics in the region has a variety of political causes and functions. The reliance on sectarian solidarities and fears reflects their utility in mobilizing people and forming alliances, as a short-term substitute for the harder, slower and more painstaking work of post-war nation-building in a context of division and distrust.

As the first full-term elected prime minister since the fall of Saddam Hussein, Maliki has had to contend with a legacy of dictatorship. Although the political culture argument is fraught with complications, the authoritarian rule that gripped Iraqi society for 35 years has created unprecedented challenges to the US attempt to impose democracy. But Maliki's approach to governance has led to fears of a slide back toward authoritarianism. Rightly or wrongly this has come to challenge his own democratic legitimacy, especially after his contested re-election in 2010, which both the United States and Iran ultimately supported after eight months of political wrangling. Responding to these challenges, Maliki and his party have repeatedly returned to sectarian identity politics, hoping it will continue to provide them with the sustenance it has in the past: the mobilization of their political base. This has manifested itself to varying degrees in the government's approach to and conduct of its foreign relations. For example, Maliki has accused Turkey of meddling in Iraq's domestic affairs and of stoking sectarian divisions by supporting Sunni politicians, including the exiled former vice-president Tariq al-Hashemi.

Although the legacy of dictatorship remains potent, equally important is the legacy of contemporary great-power dominance – and the destabilizing effect the invasion and occupation of Iraq had on regional power dynamics. By installing democracy through the use of force, the United States and United Kingdom naively believed – though others argue something more sinister was at play – they could impose the conditions necessary for popularly legitimate governance to flourish quickly. In turn they would get a new geo-strategic and economic ally in the region, perhaps one more reliable than the Gulf states whose legitimacy remains hampered by their own democratic deficit.

Yet democratic legitimacy does not result just from holding contested elections; rather it is negotiated through an ongoing process between state and society. This is particularly true for a conflict/post-conflict nation-state like Iraq, where a crude approach to majoritarianism risks destabilizing the fragile post-war political settlement. Instead of supporting this process by responding to demands for better services, improved security and economic opportunities, Iraqi political actors have exploited the domestic wedge issue of sectarian affiliation, and then sought external support for their positions through their neighbours – or else have turned them into bogeymen, as exemplified by the Iraqi government's animosity towards Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, or the opposition's antagonism to Iran.

The 'Sunni protests' in the western part of the country since the beginning of 2013 display the alternative forms democratic expression can take. The demands of the protestors have included the release of those held under the anti-terrorism law, reform in the use of informants that leads to a disproportionate number of Sunnis being imprisoned, and an end to rules denying former Ba'ath Party members, mostly Sunni, employment and government benefits – laws and measures implemented by the United States during the occupation. For its part the government has sought to delegitimize the protests by claiming that they have been engineered and supported by foreign elements, or that they are actually the activity of Sunni terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda in Iraq, cloaked in civil disobedience; or some mix of both. Though there may be foreign support for elements of the protest movement, the authorities could reduce their vulnerability to interference by addressing some of the protestors' legitimate demands, rather than dismissing them as a conspiracy (repeating a pattern seen in other Arab countries).

Reconstructing an Iraqi national interest

Ultimately there is a third way for Iraq: the non-aligned approach that has been much touted by so many of the domestic political elite, both in government and opposition, is one that says Iraq will respect the sovereignty of its neighbours but will also protect itself from interference and security threats to its own nation. That approach seems to have prevailed in its renewed relationship with Kuwait, exemplified by the signing of numerous agreements to promote further cooperation and trade, and the call by Kuwait to the UN to lift Iraq's Chapter VII status – positive developments between two countries that just over two decades ago were at war with each other. The development of the KRG's relations with Turkey through economic cooperation also indicates the scope for creative approaches to resolve traditional conflicts.

Though perhaps not immediately evident, the conflict in Syria also gives rise to some common interests for all Iraqi political groups centred on overwhelming concern that the overspill of violence could lead to renewed civil war in Iraq, which has not been seen since the days of 2006–07. By UN estimates, over 1,000 people were killed in Iraq in May 2013; technically this figure crosses a commonly accepted threshold for a conflict being described as a civil war.[113] A Chatham House report, *Iraq Ten Years On*, forecasts that the war in Syria could become the key driver of Iraqi political and social dynamics in the coming years.[114] But instead of concerted engagement to effect a political solution to a crisis that is of utmost importance to the security and territorial integrity of Iraq, there seems to be a level of resignation among government and opposition figures alike that they can and should only react to developments there, while being unable or unwilling to prevent – or at times actively stoking – the involvement of non-state Iraqi actors on both sides of the conflict.

More broadly, the Syrian conflict is exposing a deficit of legitimate regional – as well as international – foreign policy leadership. Instead, a Cold War mentality has prevailed among regional powers, with Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia deploying funds and arms to topple Assad, and Iran and its proxy Hezbollah fighting to save him. Further, those countries lack their own legitimacy or will at best only be seen as legitimate by one side in the conflict. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia have been promoting sectarian narratives about the Syrian conflict partly because neither can claim to be defending democratic self-determination.

This regional polarization and lack of any real leadership to resolve the conflict in Syria is precisely why it is a missed foreign policy opportunity for Iraq, led as it is by a government that officially aspires to be non-aligned. Every other regional power has intervened and aligned on one side or the other, operating in a zero-sum mindset.

While policies, behaviour and attitudes towards the conflict in Syria are among the most divisive issues facing Iraqi politicians today, more consensus could be built around defining a foreign policy strategy and sense of national interest around Iraq's relations with rising powers, especially the oil-importing industrializing nations of Asia, and with the Arab transition countries.

Practical steps forward

There is awareness across Iraq's factions that the country faces many issues beyond the identity politics currently dominating the regional debate. Resource issues – developing oil and ensuring water and food security – are likely to drive both cooperation and competition with neighbouring states. Long-term oil market trends imply an eastward shift of foreign alliances over time. Like other states in the region, Iraq may wish to diversify its alliances and sources of arms away from the United States. In this respect it is on common ground with some of its Gulf neighbours, and it might even take some ideas from them in terms of investing in students going overseas, learning the languages of rising powers, or developing sovereign investments overseas to ensure economic interdependence goes well beyond the finite resource of oil.

However, it is both likely and understandable that issues in neighbouring states, above all Syria, will continue to preoccupy Iraqi decision-makers. To protect against the risk of full-blown conflict, Iraq's political groupings need to develop at least a basic agreement on their strategic

113 According to UN Special Envoy to Iraq, Martin Kobler. BBC News, 'Iraq Violence: May Was Deadliest Month For Years – UN', 1 June 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-22740452. There are no comprehensive data on deaths from political violence in Iraq and estimates of deaths since 2003 vary significantly for both data quality and political reasons. See Spencer, Kinninmont and Sirri (eds), *Iraq Ten Years On*, for more detail on this. Figures for May deaths from the carefully sourced Iraq Body Count database had not yet been published at the time of writing.

114 Spencer, Kinninmont and Sirri (eds), *Iraq Ten Years On*.

response to the conflict. The government currently lacks any back-up plan for a scenario in which the Assad regime falls, and if it does not at least hedge its bets it is likely to have a very hostile neighbour in the future. The Gulf countries could help create a more conducive environment for a process of political compromise and reconciliation by signalling to the Iraqi government that they would be more accepting of Maliki as the elected prime minister if they saw genuine outreach and compromise (whereas if relations are inevitably going to remain sour, these neighbours have no incentives to offer). Confidence-building measures could include the restoration of a Saudi ambassador to Baghdad, initiatives to calm the rise in sectarian tensions, or at a minimum a reining in of the increasingly alarming sectarian rhetoric from prominent religious figures across the Gulf. International policy-makers and analysts need to study ways in which sectarianism is produced as a political ideology, and not overstate its role as an essential determinant. They should caution their allies that the exploitation of sectarian discourses is easier to start than to finish and could have toxic effects on the region for at least a generation.

The longer-term prospects for Iraq's foreign relations will be determined partly by the fact that it is no longer alone in undergoing a transition away from the authoritarian Arab republican model that dominated the region in the second half of the 20th century. Where the transitions will lead is far less certain, and will be determined by whether decisions, policies and patterns of behaviour are defined by the legacy of dictatorship, or more imaginative approaches to a different future. The conflict in Syria and the ongoing political violence in Iraq are partly shaped by the legacy of authoritarian governments that relied heavily on coercion, force and the techniques of a police state to maintain authority, and that refused to permit space for peaceful opposition to become effective or credible within the domestic arena. The legacy of dictatorship and colonialism in the region has also contributed to a widespread consciousness of fatalism, victimhood, and a sense that agency is limited and decisions are made elsewhere – narratives that very easily become self-fulfilling prophecies. But this is a failure to represent the aspirations of the people. For Iraq to develop a coherent, national foreign policy agenda, its political elite would need to accept a cohesive Iraqi nation that appreciates and even promotes its religious and ethnic diversity.

Although foreign policy-making often suffers from short-termism during times of crisis, it is essential for Western governments to remember that Iraq's current problems have been profoundly shaped both by the invasion and occupation, and by the preceding dictatorial rule of Saddam Hussein, which Western governments once supported as a counterweight to Iran. The modern history of Iraq is one of many examples that belie the assumption that repressive government brings stability, rather than a superficial façade behind which dissent is hidden.

Key Western governments, notably the US and the UK, today demonstrate an 'Iraq fatigue' that has much to do with their domestic politics, where the 2003 invasion of Iraq is largely portrayed as the mistake of a previous administration, and with the overblown promises made about the invasion, which have largely been met with disappointment. Engaging with Iraq is not a particularly popular foreign policy, nor is it straightforward. But it is essential that Western governments remain engaged, above all to help protect the country's borders and territorial integrity against the threat of overspill from Syria. International governments and multilateral institutions also need to integrate Iraq, Lebanon and Turkey into a more coordinated response to the Syrian refugee crisis, now involving more than 1.5 million people.

Iraq's future fortunes remain profoundly relevant to a host of Western strategic objectives in the region, from security and counter-radicalization to economic development, oil policy and beliefs about democracy. A new civil conflict in Iraq would both jeopardize these objectives and would be seen by many people as compounding a Western legacy of failure there. As well as encouraging the Iraqi government to focus on domestic reconciliation and address the real grievances that underlie domestic 'Sunni protests', the United States, United Kingdom and key European governments should strive to discourage their Gulf allies from instrumentalizing anti-Shia sectarianism as part of their efforts to mobilize Arab public opinion against Syria and Iran. This could put a much-needed rapprochement between Iraq and the Gulf countries further out of reach. More broadly, for all concerned, drawing on sectarian solidarities and fears may be an easy short-term fallback, but would have immense costs for the region and the world in the longer term.

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