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YOUNIS, NUSSAIBAH

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the impact of state weakness on Iraqi foreign policy since the US invasion. Drawing on the concept of the social contract in political theory, this project seeks to untangle the relationship between state legitimacy, violence and foreign policy. In the aftermath of the toppling of Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi state has undergone many forms of weakness. Each chapter of this dissertation deals with a qualitatively different moment in the trajectory of Iraqi state weakness and analyses the impact on the key foreign policies or relationships of that period.

The limited research that has been conducted on post-invasion Iraq's foreign relations has tended to portray Iraq as a passive victim of external interference. There have not been any comprehensive examinations of the way in which Iraq's internal politics influence the activity of foreign powers in Iraq; nor of Iraq's own foreign policy activity. The result is that little is understood about how post-invasion Iraq is positioning itself in a volatile regional environment. The literature on foreign policy analysis has a propensity to focus overwhelmingly on the role of great powers in the international system. Where small or weak states have been addressed, they are seen as merely responding to their vulnerable position in the hierarchy of powers. Drawing on recent work on the international relations of African states, this study introduces a new research agenda that seeks to understand the relationship between state weakness and foreign policy production.

HOW CONDITIONS OF STATE WEAKNESS HAVE  
INFLUENCED IRAQI FOREIGN POLICY PRODUCTION  
2003-2013

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
NUSSAIBAH YOUNIS  
SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS  
UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM  
2014

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This thesis is the result of my own work. Material from the published or unpublished work of others which is used in the thesis is credited to the author in question in the text.



Nussaibah Younis

4<sup>th</sup> February 2014

‘Your foreign policy is a reflection of your domestic politics, if you have a cohesive, unified, politically stable country, internal security, a unified vision of your interests then it would be very, very easy to conduct your foreign policy.

But if you have instability, if you have insecurity, if you have terrorist attacks, if you have civil strife let’s say, if you have poverty, if you have these things...it would be extremely difficult.’

Hoshyar Zebari, Iraqi Foreign Minister  
Interview with the Author



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# INTRODUCTION

There has been a tendency to see post-invasion Iraq, bedevilled as it has been by internal instability, as irrelevant to regional and international politics. This thesis argues that, by virtue of its weakness, Iraq is playing and will continue to play a crucial role in shaping conflict dynamics in the Middle East. Iraqi actors are involved on both sides of the Syrian civil war, Iraq is a locus of the wider regional competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and indeed its geostrategic location, its vast oil reserves,<sup>1</sup> and its sectarian fault lines all indicate that Iraq's future foreign policy choices will have a formative impact on the region. When Iraqi foreign policy is not dismissed as irrelevant, it tends to be characterised as either driven by sectarian considerations or as subservient to the demands of foreign powers. Such depictions are inaccurate and belie a much greater complexity in the relationship between Iraqi foreign policy, domestic ethno-sectarian cleavages, and foreign influence. This study draws on documentary sources and over 70 in-depth interviews with Iraqi, Arab, and Western politicians and diplomats conducted in Iraq, Jordan, Egypt, the UK and the US to conduct a thorough analysis of how Iraqi state weakness has affected its foreign policy making in the ten years since the invasion.

This thesis seeks primarily to fill an empirical gap in the academic literature on contemporary Iraq. The difficulty of conducting research in Iraq, especially since the withdrawal of coalition forces and the closure of international organisations and NGOs in the country, has deterred research on contemporary Iraqi politics and foreign policy. As a result very little in-depth work has been published on post-invasion Iraqi politics, and there has been virtually no academic analysis of Iraqi foreign policy. This is a grave oversight which I seek to redress in this thesis. The literature that there is on post-invasion Iraq is overwhelmingly dominated by works written from an American perspective. Such works tend to focus on analysing the US decision to go to war,<sup>2</sup> describing the conduct of the US-led Coalition

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<sup>1</sup> Iraq has the fifth largest proven oil reserves in the world, and in 2012 Iraq overtook Iran to become the biggest producer of crude oil in OPEC. US Energy Information Administration, 'Iraq Overview', <<http://www.eia.gov/countries/country-data.cfm?fips=iz>>, accessed 12th December 2013.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Peter W. Galbraith, *Unintended Consequences: How War in Iraq Strengthened America's Enemies* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008). Thomas Cushman, *A Matter of Principle: Humanitarian Arguments for War in Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Jane K. Cramer and Trevor Thrall, *Why Did the US Invade Iraq?* (Oxford: Routledge, 2011). Douglas Feith,

Provisional Authority,<sup>3</sup> and assessing the efficacy of US military strategy.<sup>4</sup> There is also a surfeit of works written by embedded journalists, CPA staffers, and US soldiers – many of them united by a common ignorance of the Iraqi perspective.<sup>5</sup>

There are only a handful of monographs that offer a serious, in-depth account of post-invasion Iraqi politics. In 2012 New York Times journalist Michael R. Gordon and retired Marine Corps general Bernard E. Trainor published a 780 page history of the Iraq war from invasion to US withdrawal.<sup>6</sup> Though it documents rather than analyses the events of those years, the book is an incredibly detailed and well-researched resource that has been the single most important addition to the field since 2003. Former Iraqi Minister of Trade Ali Allawi's *The Occupation of Iraq* provides a valuable insight into the Iraqi perspective on the Coalition Provisional Authority, but sadly the narrative ends in 2006.<sup>7</sup> Military analyst Anthony Cordesman's highly informative two-volume monograph documenting the Iraqi insurgency ends in 2007.<sup>8</sup> Journalist Nir Rosen's two books on post-war Iraq are extremely valuable contributions to the field of Iraqi studies.<sup>9</sup> Rosen travelled throughout Iraq, living amongst and coming to know scores of Iraqi civilians, local government officials, police officers and bureaucrats, and his accounts offer an unparalleled insight into how ordinary Iraqis experienced the US invasion, Iraqi government dysfunction, and the civil war. Of the few academic works that have

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*War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism* (New York: Harper, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> See for example Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007). Larry Diamond, *Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq* (New York: Owl Books, 2005). John Agresto, *Mugged by Reality: The Liberation of Iraq and the Failure of Good Intentions* (New York: Encounter Books, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> See for example Walter J. Boyne, *Operation Iraqi Freedom: What Went Right, What Went Wrong, and Why* (New York: Forge Books, 2003). Fred Kaplan, *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013). Thomas E. Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq 2006-2008* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> See for example Bing West and Maj. Gen. Ray L. Smith, *The March Up: Taking Baghdad with the 1st Marine Division*. (New York: Bantam, 2003). Gy. Sgt. Patrick Tracy, *Street Fight in Iraq: The Private Journal of a U.S. Marine Warrior* (Leatherneck Publishing: Oceanside, CA, 2006). Rick Atkinson, *In the Company of Soldiers: A Chronicle of Combat* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Ali Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Anthony Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2008b).

<sup>9</sup> Nir Rosen, *In the Belly of the Green Bird: The Triumph of the Martyrs in Iraq* (New York: Free Press, 2006). Nir Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World* (New York: Nation Books, 2010).

been written about post-war Iraq politics, one of the most important is Fanar Haddad's monograph *Sectarianism in Iraq*, which analyses the competing myth-symbol complexes at the heart of Iraqi sectarianism.<sup>10</sup> In 2010 Amnon Cohen and Noga Efrati produced a scholarly volume that deals with the major themes in post-war Iraqi domestic politics,<sup>11</sup> and in 2012 Toby Dodge published a persuasive account of Iraqi politics, arguing that the Maliki government is returning the country to a form of authoritarian rule.<sup>12</sup> The only book that has been written about post-war Iraqi foreign relations is *Iraq, Its Neighbors and the US*.<sup>13</sup> Edited by leading Iraq scholars Henri J. Barkey, Scott Lasensky, and Phebe Marr in 2011, the book offers a strong account of Iraq's major bilateral relations but has very different aims to this thesis. This thesis is focused on delineating the impact of Iraqi state weakness on foreign policy production, and as such makes a significant, original contribution to the empirical work on post-invasion Iraqi politics and foreign policy.

Beyond its empirical contribution, this thesis also expands on the nascent conceptual literature on foreign policy making in developing states. Traditional international relations theory is heavily focused on foreign policy making in strong states, and many of the assumptions it makes simply do not hold true in weak state contexts. A small literature has emerged that seeks to theorise foreign policy making in the developing world. The literature observes that states in the developing world tend to be preoccupied with internal threats, they are more likely to have heavily personalised foreign policy making processes, and their foreign policy decisions are usually motivated by regime security, rather than national security, considerations. A problem with this literature however, is the highly unspecific units of analysis it chooses to deploy; the ill-defined terms 'developing state,' 'third world state,' and 'African state' are most readily used. This thesis adopts the 'weak state' as its unit of analysis, and grounds its definition of the weak state in social contract theory. The basic function of the state is to deliver the basic public goods demanded by the citizenry and to articulate a vision of the state that resonates with all major sections

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<sup>10</sup> Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Amnon Cohen and Noga Efrati (eds.), *Post-Saddam Iraq: New Realities, Old Identities, Changing Patterns* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Toby Dodge, *Iraq: From War to a New Authoritarianism* (Oxford: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Henri J. Barkey, Scott B. Lasensky, and Phebe Marr (eds.), *Iraq, Its Neighbors, and the United States: Competition, Crisis and the Reordering of Power* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2011).

of the population. A strong state is, therefore, a state that enjoys both functional legitimacy (based on its ability to deliver basic public goods) and normative legitimacy (based on its ability to articulate a successful narrative of state), whilst a weak state is a state that is deficient in normative and functional legitimacy.

Drawing on the observations made in the literature on foreign policy in developing states, this thesis is guided by three working hypotheses. Firstly, that in a weak state, the central government is unable to monopolise authority over foreign policy, including in the setting of foreign policy goals and in the exercising of effective control over interaction with foreign actors. Secondly, that in a weak state, foreign policy is driven by a primary concern for the security and authority of the foreign policy actor, which can result in foreign policy choices being made that are detrimental to the interests of the population as a whole. Thirdly, that in a weak state, the capacity of the central government to effectively implement its foreign policy agenda is diminished. The weak state is likely to suffer from limited functional capacity, which is compounded by a legitimacy deficit which renders the state more cautious about pursuing policies that could elicit negative responses from the populace.

This thesis traces the relationship between Iraqi state weakness and foreign policy making in the ten years after the invasion of Iraq. It limits itself to the post-war period because to posit a worthwhile analysis of the incredibly complex relationship between state weakness and foreign policy making in Ba'athist Iraq would require a monograph in itself. Ba'athist Iraq was characterised by a highly centralised, totalitarian system of government that maintained its power through the extensive use of extreme coercion and through an elaborate intelligence infrastructure that co-opted much of the population.<sup>14</sup> Dominated by the highly personalised leadership of its President, Saddam Hussein, Ba'athist Iraq haemorrhaged billions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of lives in the course of its eight year war with Iran. Iraq had initially invaded Iran in a bid to quash the

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<sup>14</sup> For more information about the nature of the Ba'athist state and its foreign policies see Joseph Sassoon, *Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Kevin Woods, David Palkki, and Mark Stout, *The Saddam Tapes: The Inner Workings of a Tyrant's Regime 1978-2001* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Derek Hopwood, Habib Ishow, and Thomas Koszinowski (eds.), *Iraq: Power and Society* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1993). Kanan Makiya, *Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). John Bulloch, *Saddam's War: The Origins of the Kuwait Conflict and the International Response* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991). Saïd K. Aburish, *Saddam Hussein: The Politics of Revenge* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000).

Islamic revolution that had taken hold, and was extensively supported in its efforts by the US, Saudi Arabia, and much of the Arab World. Keen to re-coup some of the resources lost in the Iran-Iraq war, Saddam Hussein launched the ill-fated invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The invasion divided the Middle East, and prompted the US to launch a military attack that drove the Iraqi army out of Kuwait. As Iraqi soldiers flooded across the Kuwaiti border back into southern Iraq, an enormous rebellion gathered force in Iraq's southern and Kurdish provinces. The US, however, was reluctant to support the nascent revolution, and stood by as Saddam killed hundreds of thousands of Iraqi civilians and suppressed the rebellion. The US instead marshalled the international community to institute against Iraq the most comprehensive system of sanctions that the world has ever seen. The twelve years that Iraq suffered under sanctions fundamentally altered Iraqi society; living standards were decimated and the Iraqi middle class virtually disappeared under the weight of its own impoverishment.<sup>15</sup> In some ways the authority of the Ba'athist state was strengthened as the sanctions regimen gave the state control over access to all the basic goods required by the Iraqi population. It also sought to recapture an element of legitimacy by empowering Iraq's tribal confederations and by adopting a religious discourse completely at odds with its defunct Ba'athist ideology. A fascinating study could be conducted on the relationship between the changing functional and normative legitimacy of the Ba'athist regime and the foreign policy choices that it made, but the scale of such a project means that it must remain outside the scope of this thesis.

## Chapter Outline

This study seeks to explore the extent to which conditions of state weakness influenced foreign policy making in Iraq in the ten years after it was invaded by coalition forces. Chapter one elaborates on the conceptual framework outlined above. Chapter two sets out the methodology employed by this thesis, and discusses the methods used to gather and assess the empirical material that is at the heart of this dissertation. The following chapters explore, in chronological order, the impact of changing levels of Iraqi state weakness on foreign policy making in the country.

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<sup>15</sup> In the 1990s Iraq's GNP plummeted from \$75 billion to \$20 billion. Zaki Laïdi, *Limited Achievements: Obama's Foreign Policy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 75.

Chapter three depicts Iraq under the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) as effectively an occupied state, and describes how US foreign policy beyond Iraq came to directly undermine the strength of both the CPA and of subsequent Iraqi governments. Rather than state weakness affecting foreign policy, in this case the foreign policy of the occupying power undermined both the normative and functional legitimacy of state authorities in Iraq. The chapter argues that poor US diplomacy in the lead up to the invasion had alienated the wider Arab World, whilst US threats to Iran, Syria and Hezbollah fuelled an influx of support for internal violence in Iraq. The chapter also demonstrates that although transitional, unelected Iraqi governments were able to conduct diplomacy, they had neither the normative nor the functional legitimacy they would have needed to be able to make substantial foreign policy decisions.

Chapter four deals with the relationship between Iran and Iraq during the 2005 Ja'fari administration. Ibrahim al-Ja'fari headed the first elected government in post-invasion Iraq, but struggled to achieve either functional or normative legitimacy. His government had been elected despite much of Iraq's Sunni population boycotting the vote; he was heavily dependent on support from the US armed forces and civilian diplomats; and his government struggled to articulate an authentic and resonant narrative of the Iraqi state. The Ja'fari government also failed to deliver security to the Iraqi people. The Iraqi security forces not only failed to stem the escalating violence rapidly, but in many cases they were complicit in it. Lacking both functional and normative legitimacy, the Ja'fari government saw the Iraqi state reach its weakest point. This state weakness had a direct impact on Iraqi relations with Iran. The central government failed to establish its authority over foreign policy, as multiple sub-state actors including the Sadrists, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, and the Kurdish political parties all conducted independent relations with Iran. In the face of such internal instability the Iraqi central government was also prepared to prioritise the pursuit of its regime security over national security. The Ja'fari government allowed Iran to continue to play a role in sponsoring internal violence in Iraq in the hope that it would provide the Ja'fari regime with the political support it needed to stay in power.

Chapter five looks at Prime Minister Maliki's tumultuous first term in office. The Maliki administration inherited much of the normative and functional illegitimacy of the Ja'fari government. The weakness of the Iraqi state in the early



days of the Maliki regime enabled tribal sub-state actors to conduct an independent military relationship with the US. This military co-operation led to the strategic defeat of al-Qaeda in Iraq which, when combined with Maliki's decision to work with the US against Shi'ite militias, resulted in a dramatic reduction of violence in Iraq. The fall in violence, and Maliki's adoption of a new Iraqi nationalist rhetoric, enhanced both the functional and normative legitimacy of the Iraqi government and enabled it to pursue positive economic and political relations with foreign countries. Iraq's strengthening relationship with Turkey is given as an example. But the continued deficiencies in Iraqi state capacity prevented Iraq from fully achieving its foreign policy goals. The Iraqi government's lack of control over its own airspace meant that it could not prevent Turkey from conducting cross-border raids on PKK positions in Iraqi territory. Meanwhile, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) had built up a level of institutional strength that made it an attractive foreign policy partner to Turkey, despite the strengthening of the Iraqi government. The KRG's ability to conduct foreign policy in a context of growing Iraqi state strength challenges my conceptual framework. Possible explanations for this relate to the nature of federal institutions, and are more thoroughly discussed in the thesis conclusion.

Chapter six contrasts Iraq's relative effectiveness in negotiating a Status of the Forces Agreement in 2008, during a period in which the Iraqi government was more functionally and normatively legitimate than at any point since the invasion, with its inability to successfully negotiate an extension of that agreement in 2011. In the intervening years the growing authoritarianism of the Maliki government reduced its legitimacy and therefore its ability to successfully pursue its own foreign policy goals. The chapter also continues the observations noted in chapter five with regard to the KRG's ability to pursue an independent foreign policy regardless of growing Iraqi state strength. In this period the KRG is successfully able to negotiate oil contracts with super-major oil companies despite the legality of such moves being disputed by the central government.

Chapter seven deals with the disintegration of the normative and functional legitimacy of the Iraqi state precipitated by Prime Minister Maliki's pursuit of his political rivals. By targeting senior Sunni politicians, the Prime Minister contributed to a widespread collapse of Sunni confidence in the political process. This withdrawal of confidence led to the re-empowerment of violent sub-state actors in

Sunni dominated areas, which in turn fuelled a resurgence of violent civil conflict in Iraq. In this context, a weakened Iraqi government has lost much of its authority over foreign policy. Iraqi sub-state actors, empowered by the dissipation of central government authority in Iraq, have intervened on both sides of the Syrian conflict. The central government, meanwhile, has been unable to pursue the policy of non-intervention that it has declared to be in Iraq's best interests because regime survival considerations have rendered it vulnerable to Iranian influence.

The conclusion of the thesis assesses the extent to which my observed outcomes in the Iraqi case meet the expectations set forth by my conceptual framework, focusing in some detail on the anomalous case of KRG foreign policy making, and closes by suggesting directions for further research.

# CHAPTER ONE: CONCEPTUALISING WEAK STATE FOREIGN POLICY

## Introduction

This thesis asks the question ‘How have conditions of state weakness influenced Iraqi foreign policy production?’ In order to address this question I begin by clarifying the terms of the enquiry and by setting out the literatures in which it is grounded. This chapter begins by exploring the controversial term ‘weak state’ and argues that this is a useful way of identifying a state that has lost either its functional or its normative legitimacy, or both. Locating the source of state strength in an implicit social contract between the government and the governed, this thesis argues that a weak state is one in which the government fails to provide the citizenry with basic public goods – the most important of which is security – and hence is functionally illegitimate. Or the weak state is one in which the state is unable to articulate a narrative of purpose that resonates with all major parts of the population – and hence is normatively illegitimate.

The second half of this chapter explores the theorising of scholars of the developing world who have exposed the failure of international relations theory to account for the way in which foreign policy is produced in non-Western states. Drawing on the findings of these scholars, this thesis develops three working hypotheses that guide the remainder of this study.

## Conceptualising the Weak State

The first half of my discussion focuses on the fundamentals of state weakness. I ground my conceptualisation of the weak state in the liberal social contract tradition, before fleshing out the concept using Seymour Martin Lipset’s theories of effective democracy. The existing literature on weak states is also briefly explored, and I make a case for advancing a definition of state weakness that is based on functional and normative legitimacy, rather than on a host of governance indicators. Finally, criticisms of the weak state term are addressed, and a case is made for using this label as opposed to pursuing possible alternative conceptualisations.

## Social Contract Theory and the Basis of State Strength

Before I can define the weak state, I must ascertain the sources of state strength.<sup>1</sup> Although state strength is sometimes conceived of simply as the ability of the state to execute its will,<sup>2</sup> this study contends that genuine strength is located in the functional and normative legitimacy, rather than in the coercive capacity, of the state. The social contract concept espoused by a number of political theorists, though contentious, offers a useful tool for the conceptualisation of state strength.

Political theorists including Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant and John Rawls have all advanced theories of political legitimacy (though they differ substantially) based in part on the notion that there exists some kind of explicit or implicit contract between the government and the governed. For the purpose of this study, the Lockean conception of the social contract is particularly useful. Locke begins by defining the pre-political ‘state of nature’<sup>3</sup> as a ‘state of perfect freedom’<sup>4</sup> in which humans are capable both of respecting and disrespecting the ‘life, health, liberty, or possessions’ of the other.<sup>5</sup> When human beings inflict force on each other in the state of nature there is no ‘common superior on earth to appeal to for relief,’<sup>6</sup> and thus emerges a state of war. In order ‘to avoid this state of war,’<sup>7</sup> Locke continues, man ‘seeks out, and is willing to join society with others’<sup>8</sup> and to subject himself to a government. The purpose of that government is to arbitrate between men so as to prevent the outbreak of

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<sup>1</sup> This study does not seek to advance a theory of state strength, and as a result my examinations of the strong state will only serve to establish an idealized counterpoint against which I can begin my discussions of state weakness.

<sup>2</sup> A more comprehensive discussion of the characteristics and level of strength enjoyed by the ‘coercive state’ will take place later in this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Locke understands the state of nature as a historical reality, which is dubious and unhelpful to the overall conceptualization of the social contract. This study, therefore, adopts a notion of the state of nature – as conceived by Hobbes, Rousseau and Kant – as a ‘logical device’ that simply helps us to conceptualize of mankind in the absence of the political society. Vicente Medina, *Social Contract Theories: Political Obligation or Anarchy?* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1990) 29, 13.

<sup>4</sup> John Locke, ‘The Second Treatise of Government: An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent, and End of Civil Government’, in Peter Laslett (ed.), *Two Treatises of Government: Edited With an Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 269.

<sup>5</sup> John Locke, ‘The Second Treatise of Government: An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent, and End of Civil Government’, in Peter Laslett (ed.), *Two Treatises of Government: Edited With an Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 271.

<sup>6</sup> Locke, ‘The Second Treatise of Government: An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent, and End of Civil Government’, 280.

<sup>7</sup> Locke, ‘The Second Treatise of Government: An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent, and End of Civil Government’, 282.

<sup>8</sup> Locke, ‘The Second Treatise of Government: An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent, and End of Civil Government’, 350.

violence, and to preserve life, liberty and property. For Locke, the government is legitimate because man has consented, either implicitly or explicitly, to be subjected to it, and only to the extent that it fulfils its purpose in preserving the rights of man.<sup>9</sup> Should the government fail in this purpose, Locke follows, subjects would have an automatic right to remove the government.<sup>10</sup> Locke contends that such a government would lose its legitimacy even if the governed continue to consent to its rule out of fear of the repercussions, a matter I will come back to in my discussion of the coercive state.

A number of criticisms are levelled against the Lockean conception of the social contract, and indeed against the contractarian approach in general. The Kantian and Hobbesian approaches to the social contract, though they differ on a vast array of points, both contend that the social contract is permanent and that power cannot be removed from the sovereign – no matter how tyrannical he may be.<sup>11</sup> Tyranny is considered preferable to anarchy because it would not be beneficial to the human condition to return to the state of nature.<sup>12</sup> This study, however, locates the utility of the social contract concept precisely in its recognition of the conditional nature of the political legitimacy of the sovereign. If political legitimacy is derived from a contract, it follows that when the sovereign fails to uphold his side of the contract he forfeits his political legitimacy, and when the citizen contravenes her side of the contract she forfeits a portion of her rights. This study, therefore, concurs with Locke that a tyrannical state which contravenes the expectations established by the social contract must be characterised as one which has lost its

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<sup>9</sup> Locke contends that the state cannot be legitimate if it contravenes the ‘natural rights’ of its citizens, which include the right to life, liberty and property.

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 7, ‘Of the Dissolution of Government’ in the Second Treatise of Government for more detail. Locke, ‘The Second Treatise of Government: An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent, and End of Civil Government’, pp. 406-28.

<sup>11</sup> Hobbes writes that the social contract, once entered into, is irreversible: ‘there can happen no breach of Covenant on the part of the Sovereigne; and consequently none of his Subjects, by any pretence of forfeiture, can be freed from his Subjection.’ Thomas Hobbes, ‘Leviathan or the Matter, Formes and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil’, in Richard Tuck (ed.), *Leviathan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 122. For his part, Kant writes that there can be ‘no legitimate resistance of the people to the legislative chief of the state.’ Immanuel Kant, ‘The Metaphysics of Morals, Part 1’, in John Ladd (ed.), *Metaphysical Elements of Justice: The Complete Text of the Metaphysics of Morals, Part 1* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 1999) 125.

<sup>12</sup> Kant considers that human beings can only fulfil their moral duties by obeying the law and upholding the political system, whilst Hobbes believes that withdrawing support from the sovereign would unleash anarchy, which is ‘the greatest evil of all.’ Medina, *Social Contract Theories: Political Obligation or Anarchy?*, 78, 19.

political legitimacy, whether or not overthrowing the government will constitute a net gain to society.

One of the major criticisms of the social contract tradition comes from David Hume, who asserts that the concept fails to elucidate the reasons why citizens obey their governments. According to Hume, most governments in history came about by illegitimate conquest, and citizens obeyed these governments because it was in their individual best interests to do so.<sup>13</sup> This argument, however, fails to account for why some governments are considered more legitimate than others. No matter how a government comes about historically, it is supported in the long term if citizens consider that they are getting something out of the arrangement. If a government is instituted by force, but nonetheless maintains internal security and fulfils the basic expectations of its citizens it can be said to enjoy a measure of political legitimacy that contributes to insuring it against overthrow in the medium to long term.

Georg Hegel further attacks the concept of the social contract because it assumes that citizens have consented to be governed, when in actuality citizens are born into a state and very few, if any, have the option of leaving that state.<sup>14</sup> For Hegel, citizens only have responsibilities to the state to the extent that the state protects their rights.<sup>15</sup> This study contends that Hegel takes too circumscribed an approach to the social contract. The contract is useful merely as a trope that helps us to conceive of a two-way relationship between the government and the governed that involves rights and expectations on both sides. Indeed the Hegelian approach also implies a contract by asserting that citizens only have duties to the state in proportion to its rights against the state. Therefore if the state fails in its implicit promise to protect the rights of the citizens, the citizens are no longer obliged to obey the laws of the state.

In sum, conceiving of the social contract as the basis for political legitimacy is considered useful to this study because it characterises the relationship between

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<sup>13</sup> Hume writes that obedience to the ruler is in the interests of the citizens, and that the ‘observation of these general and obvious interests is the source of all allegiance, and of that moral obligation which we attribute to it.’ David Hume, ‘Of the Original Contract’, <<http://www.constitution.org/dh/origcont.htm>>, accessed 2nd December 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Hegel writes that the ‘popular view’ that the ‘state is a contract of all with all’ is false because ‘an individual cannot enter or leave the social condition at his option, since everyone is by his very nature a citizen of a state.’ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001) 78.

<sup>15</sup> Hegel writes that ‘just so far as people have duties to fulfil towards it [the state], they have also rights.’ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001) 199.

the government and the governed as one that is based on a number of implicit expectations. When those expectations are not met, political legitimacy is withdrawn from the government.

### The Substance of the Social Contract

Since the social contract is an abstraction, rather than a historical reality, it is necessary for us to further theorise what the core expectations are that a modern state is generally expected to fulfil if it is to be considered legitimate. A great variety of expectations are posited by the social contract philosophers. For Hobbes the obligation of the sovereign to protect the citizenry is its only duty,<sup>16</sup> whereas Rawls defines a far more expansive list of expectations for the just government. For Rawls the citizenry is only obliged to obey a just government, and justice requires that citizens have equal access to ‘social primary goods’ including ‘liberty and opportunity, income and wealth and the basis of self-respect.’<sup>17</sup> This study recognises that there is variation between states in terms of the expectations that the state would need to fulfil in order for it to be considered legitimate. So instead of trying to enumerate the characteristics that must be present in a legitimate state, I will try to identify some of the key principles that indicate that a state is fulfilling its social contract.

In order to generate these principles, this study draws on the work of Seymour Martin Lipset on state legitimacy and democracy, and on Max Weber’s work on the sources of political authority. Lipset contends that ‘the stability of any given democracy depends’ on the ‘effectiveness and the legitimacy of its political system.’<sup>18</sup> For the sake of clarity, this study labels effectiveness as functional legitimacy, that is the legitimacy conferred onto the state through its provision of expected public goods, and Lipset’s understanding of the term legitimacy is referred to as normative legitimacy. This study argues that Lipset’s identifying of functional and normative legitimacy as central to political stability is applicable to both democracies and non-democracies, and suggests that it is helpful to bring these principles to bear on the social contract state. At its broadest, the state that is

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<sup>16</sup> Medina, *Social Contract Theories: Political Obligation or Anarchy?*, 19.

<sup>17</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971) 303.

<sup>18</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, ‘Social Conflict, Legitimacy, and Democracy’, in William Connolly (ed.), *Legitimacy and the State* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 88-103, 88.

fulfilling its social contract can be characterised as one that is both functionally and normatively legitimate.

Lipset defines functional legitimacy as ‘the extent to which the system satisfies the basic functions of government as most of the population...see them.’ The core function of government, as is recognised by much of the social contract literature, is to provide security to its citizens. Max Weber, a theorist outside of the social contract tradition, also recognises the centrality of coercion to the state. Weber defines the state as a ‘human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.’<sup>19</sup> From the perspective of social contractarians such as Hobbes and Locke, the primary reason that man sacrifices his natural freedom is in order to secure safety under the arbitration of a sovereign. Thus a functionally legitimate government must first and foremost secure the physical safety of its citizens. Beyond the provision of security, in most contemporary states there is an expectation that the state will provide a range of public goods and will encourage economic growth in a bid to help secure the economic wellbeing of its citizens.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, theorists recognise that the very process of delivering public goods helps to institutionalise the state, and strengthen state-society relations.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, a state best attains functional legitimacy, as Max Weber argues, when it provides these public goods through a professional and depersonalised bureaucracy – thereby shielding itself from the inefficiencies inherent in a partisan, corrupt or patrimonial system of service delivery.<sup>22</sup> Thus, a state is functionally legitimate if it professionally provides the public goods expected by the citizenry, with the provision of security being overwhelmingly the most important public good.

Lipset contends that a state is normatively legitimate if it can ‘engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for society.’ This definition is an unhelpful one because the state needs to do

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<sup>19</sup> Max Weber, ‘Legitimacy, Politics and the State’, in William Connolly (ed.), *Legitimacy and the State* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 32-62, 33.

<sup>20</sup> A number of theorists of authoritarianism note that, in regimes that do not enjoy popular legitimacy, retaining political power is highly dependent on economic performance. Nancy Bermeo, ‘Review Article: Rethinking Regime Change’, *Comparative Politics*, 223 (1990), 359-77. Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late 20th Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

<sup>21</sup> Mehran Kamrava, *Politics and Society in the Developing World* (London: Routledge, 1993) 2.

<sup>22</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978) 998.



more than simply convince the citizenry that the particular political system is appropriate. It needs, more broadly, to articulate a narrative of state that is resonant with all major sections of the populations. This includes narratives of history, mythologies of nationhood, and the investment of meaning into symbols that can engender trust in and loyalty to the state. This study, therefore, contends that a normatively legitimate state is one that can stir a sense of belonging in most sections of the citizenry. Of course it is impossible for the state to create a narrative that resonates with every single citizen, which is why I am focusing on major sections of the community.<sup>23</sup> What is key here is that the state does not exclude a particular community that is united in some other way, perhaps through regional, linguistic, ethnic or religious ties, because doing so would undermine the stability of the polity.

This study argues that it is not useful to try to measure functional or normative legitimacy in any absolute sense, because the expectations that the citizenry have of the state differ between states. Expectations are shaped by the specific history and local context of the state in question, and this study considers that attempting to measure functional or normative legitimacy by creating lists of indicators would inevitably mean missing important case-specific nuance. To understand the level of normative legitimacy achieved by a state, for instance, requires a detailed appreciation of the local history, particularly of past conflicts and social cleavages, and a sensitivity to the way in which certain memories can be evoked to either unite or to tear apart communities. The Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security, and Ethnicity, for instance, does attempt to establish indicators to measure the level of normative legitimacy in a country.<sup>24</sup> The indicators chosen to establish the lack of normative legitimacy included: lack of democracy, strong governmental role for the military, acquisition of power by force, suppression of opposition, control of media, exclusion of significant groups of the population from power, absence of civil and political liberties, with arbitrary arrest, and absence of free speech. This long list does little to explain, for instance, the impact on Iraq's Sunni population of the Iraqi government's heavy use of Shi'ite

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<sup>23</sup> Seth Kaplan defines the fragile state as one in which 'the state in some form...is not recognized as legitimate by a significant proportion of the population because of the mismatch between the state and traditional group identities.' Seth Kaplan, *Fixing Fragile States: A New Paradigm for Development* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2008) 10.

<sup>24</sup> Frances Stewart and Graham Brown, 'Fragile States', (Oxford: Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, 2009).

symbolism in public places, and the consequent impact on the legitimacy of the Iraqi state.

I have established that functional and normative legitimacy are important components of state strength, and that the levels of each must be ascertained through a close reading of the local political context, but what is the relationship between functional and normative legitimacy? Is a state stronger overall if it is functionally legitimate, or is it more important that it be normatively legitimate? It is relevant at this point to note that I conceive of state weakness on a spectrum, with the idealised strong state on one side, and the collapsed state on the other, with most actual states positioned somewhere along this spectrum. Although the social contract trope encourages a binary view of the state as either fulfilling or failing to fulfil its contract, in actuality almost all states are to some extent fulfilling their social contracts – and are thus positioned at various positions on the spectrum. Lipset argues that a state is obviously most stable when it possesses both functional and normative legitimacy, but that if a state were only to possess one it would be more stable if it were normatively legitimate rather than functionally legitimate. Lipset argues that although functional legitimacy can engender normative legitimacy over a long period of time, in the short-term a normatively legitimate but functionally illegitimate government is less prone to unrest than a functionally legitimate but normatively illegitimate one.<sup>25</sup> Lipset does not suggest an overly deterministic relationship between functional and normative legitimacy, but rather uses examples of some of the possible combinations of the two to suggest that normative legitimacy is more important than functional legitimacy in ensuring stability in the short-term. ‘The social stability of a nation like Thailand,’ Lipset writes, ‘stands out in sharp contrast to the situation in neighbouring former colonial nations.’<sup>26</sup> Thailand’s normative legitimacy renders it stable in the short-term despite its functional illegitimacy, whereas the deficit in normative legitimacy in some post-colonial countries makes them more vulnerable to instability even if they are relatively functionally legitimate. This is perhaps because organising an effective opposition to state authority requires that citizens coalesce around some form of shared oppositional identity, and that this is easier to create when there is a deficiency in the normative legitimacy of the state.

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<sup>25</sup> Lipset, ‘Social Conflict, Legitimacy, and Democracy’, 92.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

## The Coercive State

Though it is the case that most successful social contract states are likely to be democracies, a state does not have to be democratic in order to be functionally and normatively legitimate. Non-democratic states can in some cases fulfil the implicit social contracts with their citizenries, and, conversely, being democratic does not guarantee that a state will be able to achieve functional and normative legitimacy. A number of democracies, including Iraq, are weak states because they are unable to fulfil the basic expectations of their populations despite operating in ostensibly democratic structures.

This study includes in its definition of the weak state those states that are widely considered to be illegitimate by their societies, but that maintain power predominantly through their use of coercion. Such states fail to fulfil their social contracts and as such cannot be considered to be strong. By failing to deliver on the expectations of their citizens, and by abusing their monopoly over violence, such states may be able to endure in the medium term, but are likely to engender deep-seated resentment and resistance in the long term. I do not consider, therefore, Iraq prior to 2003 to have been a strong state. Ba'athist Iraq was a coercive state that was able to maintain control through the use of extreme violence, but that suffered from a fundamental, underlying weakness that would have ultimately led to the collapse of that particular state structure.

Nazih Ayubi writes compellingly about coercive states, which he labels 'fierce' states, arguing that 'A strong state should also be distinguished from the 'fierce' state, which is so opposed to society that it can only deal with it via coercion and raw force.'<sup>27</sup> That the fierce state has to subjugate its population through coercion is evidence of its fundamental weakness. For Ayubi, the foundation of a strong state is the ability to be 'complementary, not contradictory, to society,' and the success of the strong state is 'not demonstrated by its subjugation of the society but by its ability to work with and through other centres of power in society.'<sup>28</sup>

It is important to be nuanced in the characterisation of coercive states, however, as the differences between states are usually a matter of degree rather than of hard and fast fundamentals. All states are to some extent founded on their ability

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<sup>27</sup> Nazih N. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 1995) 449.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

to monopolise violence, and most states are required to occasionally use coercion to enforce their laws or protect the government or the citizenry. The difference, therefore, between a coercive and a social contract state is the level and frequency of force it is required to use in order to govern on a day to day basis. The coercive state category is, however, a fluid one – with states moving between higher and lower levels of reliance on coercion. The literature on authoritarian upgrading persuasively points out that coercive regimes rarely rely solely on force to maintain their governments, but they also deploy a range of other tactics in order to try to enhance the legitimacy of their regimes.<sup>29</sup> The Ba’athist regime in Syria, for example, deployed various tactics in order to bolster its legitimacy – including deploying a ubiquitous Arab nationalist narrative of state,<sup>30</sup> establishing an elaborate judicial structure,<sup>31</sup> and by extending government control over religious institutions.<sup>32</sup> Coercive states often realise the danger of relying substantially on force to maintain power, and experiment with an array of methods designed to enhance the state’s functional and normative legitimacy. As a consequence the relative strength of these types of regimes fluctuates depending on the success or otherwise of their attempts to enhance the legitimacy associated with their governance.

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<sup>29</sup> Steven Heydemann and Reinoud Leenders define the behaviour of such regimes as ‘recombinant authoritarianism’ which they define as ‘systems of rule that possess the capacity to reorder and reconfigure instruments and strategies of governance to reshape and recombine existing institutional, discursive, and regulatory arrangements to create recognizable but nonetheless distinctive solutions to shifting configurations of challenges.’ Reinoud Steven Heydemann and Reinoud Leenders, ‘Authoritarian Governance in Syria and Iran: Challenged, Reconfiguring, and Resilient’, in Steven Heydemann and Reinoud Leenders (eds.), *Middle East Authoritarianisms: Governance, Contestation, and Regime Resilience in Syria and Iran* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013), 1-34, 7.

<sup>30</sup> Lisa Wedeen’s work documents the lengths to which the Assad regime went to inculcate its narrative of state into the Syrian population. She writes about how ‘Youth are ritualistically enlisted to assemble at “spontaneous” rallies orchestrated by “popular” organizations; individual poets, university professors, artists, and playwrights are periodically called upon to deploy their talents in the production of public spectacles; the federations of peasants and workers, as well as the professional syndicates of journalists, lawyers, teachers, and doctors, among others, are all compelled at one time or another to conjure up slogans and imagery representing their idealized connection to Party and President.’ Lisa Wedeen, ‘Acting “As If”’: Symbolic Politics and Social Control in Syria’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 403 (1998), 503-23, 504.

<sup>31</sup> Reinoud Leenders, ‘Prosecuting Political Dissent: Courts and the Resilience of Authoritarianism in Syria’, in Steven Heydemann and Reinoud Leenders (eds.), *Middle East Authoritarianisms: Governance, Contestation, and Regime Resilience in Syria and Iran* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013), 169-99.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Pierret, ‘The State Management of Religion in Syria: The End of ‘Indirect Rule’?’, in Steven Heydemann and Reinoud Leenders (eds.), *Middle East Authoritarianisms: Governance, Contestation, and Regime Resilience in Syria and Iran* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013), 83-106.

## Defining the Weak State

Building on the discussions to this point, the weak state can be defined as a state that fails to fulfil the implicit social contract with its citizenry because it is unable to achieve functional or normative legitimacy. To unpack this statement further, a weak state is one that fails to deliver the most important public goods demanded by society, security being the most important of those goods, and that fails to articulate a narrative of state that resonates with all major sections of the population. How does this characterisation of the weak state tie in to the existing literature on weak states?

There has been a tendency in the literature to define weak states in terms of lists of indicators, rather than seeking out a definition – as this study has – that locates the fundamental source of weakness in the state. In his classic text on state weakness, Robert Rotberg defines the weak state with reference to an extraordinary host of characteristics including ‘geographical, physical, or fundamental economic constraints;’ ‘internal antagonisms, management flaws, greed, despotism, or external attacks;’ ‘ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other intercommunal tensions;’ high or rising ‘urban crime rates;’ falling ‘critical economic indicators;’ very high ‘levels of venal corruption;’ deteriorating ‘physical infrastructural networks’ and neglected ‘schools and hospitals.’<sup>33</sup> Although Rotberg recognises that states fail when they are ‘convulsed by internal violence,’ when they ‘lose legitimacy,’ and when they can ‘no longer deliver positive political goods to their inhabitants,’<sup>34</sup> he is unable to build a definition of the weak state around these core principles that speak to the heart of state weakness and instead focuses excessively on enumerating the characteristics that may or may not be found in a weak state.

In his study of weak state foreign policy, Michael Handel<sup>35</sup> much more arbitrarily defines weak states as states with ‘very small populations and surface

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Rotberg, ‘Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States: Causes and Indicators’, in Robert Rotberg (ed.), *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror* (Washington D.C. : Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 1-25, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Rotberg, ‘Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States: Causes and Indicators’, in Robert Rotberg (ed.), *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror* (Washington D.C. : Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 1-25, 1.

<sup>35</sup> Handel’s book draws heavily on David Vital’s study of small powers in international relations, in which he defines small powers as states with a ‘population of 10-15 million in the case of economically advanced countries’ and ‘a population of 20-30 million in the case of underdeveloped countries.’ David Vital, *The Inequality of States: A Study of the Small Power in International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

areas, low GNPs with little heavy industry, a high degree of specialisation, small domestic markets, high levels of dependency on foreign markets and capital and low levels of investment in research and development.’<sup>36</sup> Defining the weak state in this way makes little sense. For instance, one could describe states with very small populations, such as Gulf emirates, as strong because of their unique ability to meet the expectations of their very small citizenries. This study contends that dividing up state types into categories based on such arbitrary characteristics offers little by way of helping us to understand the important dynamics at play in weak states.

Barry Buzan and Caroline Thomas offer more comprehensive definitions of state weakness. Buzan describes the weak state as one with a ‘high level of concern with domestically generated threats to the security of the government’ and as a state that has ‘failed to create a domestic and social consensus of sufficient strength to eliminate the large-scale use of force as a major and continuing element in the domestic political life of the nation.’<sup>37</sup> I believe that the presence of domestic threats to government security is better understood as an outcome of state weakness, and is not a useful way of defining state weakness. Buzan’s second point, however, goes to the heart of what makes a state weak, and points to the importance of a state fulfilling the social and political expectations of society so that it can largely govern without resorting to force. Caroline Thomas takes a different approach, *excluding* the coercive state from her definition of the weak state. Thomas sees a weak state as one in which the state is deficient in either or both coercive power and infrastructural power.<sup>38</sup> This study argues that although coercive power may enable a state to survive in the short-term, a state’s reliance on force is an indication of its underlying weakness. Deficiency in infrastructural power, however, is a useful part of the definition of state weakness and can be approximated with my use of the term functional legitimacy.

This study adopts the following definition of state weakness that draws on the core principles touched on by Buzan, Rotberg and Thomas. The weak state is one that fails to articulate a narrative of state that resonates with all major sections of

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Handel, *Weak States in the International System* (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1981) 52.

<sup>37</sup> Barry Buzan, *Peoples, States, and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1983) 67.

<sup>38</sup> Caroline Thomas, ‘Southern Instability, Security and Western Concepts: On an Unhappy Marriage and the Need for a Divorce’, in Caroline Thomas and Sarvanamuttu Paikiasothy (eds.), *State and Instability in the South* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1989), 174-92, 182.

the population, and/ or is unable to provide the basic security, social and economic services expected of a state. There is a great deal of variation between weak states, with the weakest lacking both normative and functional legitimacy.<sup>39</sup> Of the states that either have functional or normative legitimacy, I would suggest that the possession of normative legitimacy makes a state stronger than the possession of functional legitimacy. Rather than, at this point, defining lists of indicators that would label states as belonging to a discrete 'level of weakness,' this study propose to engage in a close reading of a specific country in order to understand a great deal more about the level and character of state weakness in that state. I believe that a close-reading approach better positions this thesis to understand the implications of state weakness on policy making.

This thesis is chiefly concerned with foreign policy making rather than with international relations theory, however, it is useful here to point out the ways in which my approach complements and differs from mainstream approaches to the analysis of international affairs. My approach to defining the weak state follows a broadly constructivist position; I question the utility of objective lists of criteria for defining the weak state, I recognise that state legitimacy is differentiated between the functional and the normative, I believe that state weakness is contextual and defined by the varied expectations of different societies, and I accept that states are structurally constrained by the rules and norms of statehood. This thesis does not, however, find the Wendtian depiction of the state as a unitary actor a useful way of approaching foreign policy analysis, and in this sense positions itself alongside recent works in foreign policy analysis that criticize the 'black box' approach. My work is part of a movement in foreign policy analysis that seek to understand foreign policy making in different ways, drawing on some of the insights that constructivist international relations theory has brought into the field, whilst also drawing on alternative literatures in order to resist some of the more restrictive and euro-centric aspects of existing constructivist models. For example, constructivism has come be an important tool in helping foreign policy analysts to frame and assess the impact of identity and state self-understanding on international relations. While foreign policy analysis continues to grapple with these new approaches, for the purposes of

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<sup>39</sup> It is important here to note that a number of states are established with federal structures that are designed to weaken the central government. In such states that have a weak central government by design, we would evaluate state weakness based on the relative effectiveness of both the central government and the regional government to deliver the public goods expected by the citizenry.

this project I have found it most beneficial to primarily ground my conceptual point of departure in the literature on the social contract, and the literature on foreign policy making in the developing world.

### Alternative Conceptualisations

This study has deliberately chosen to characterise its unit of analysis as the ‘weak state’ as opposed to a number of possible alternatives, and in this section I discuss the advantages of this label as well as the criticisms levelled against it.

The term ‘small power’ which tends to be used in the literature on international relations is inappropriate for the purposes of this study because it defines the state according to the level of power it wields in the international system. This study is primarily focused on the dynamics of domestic foreign policy making, and although an internally weak state is also usually weak in terms of its position in the international system – its external weakness is only of a secondary concern to this study.

‘Quasi-state’ is a term most associated with Robert Jackson’s *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Third World*. The central argument of Jackson’s work is that the post-colonial international normative framework has led to the premature recognition of states that ‘lack many of the marks and merits of empirical statehood postulated by positive sovereignty.’<sup>40</sup> The term quasi-state reflects the inability of such states to perform the full range of state functions. The problem with this term is that it focuses excessively on the role that international institutions play in facilitating the endurance of such states. This study would assert that the act of external recognition is not a sufficient condition of state survival; internal factors must also coalesce in order for a state to be formed and to endure. When the international community turns away from a state, like it did with Iraq after the invasion of Kuwait, the act of withdrawing support and recognition is not enough to precipitate the collapse of the state. Conversely, international support for the continuation of the Somali state did not prevent its collapse in 1991.

The term ‘deeply divided society’ is a controversial one. A number of weak states fail to articulate a narrative of state that resonates with all major sections of the population because strong sub-state identities have coalesced around particular

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<sup>40</sup> Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 1.



religious or ethnic groups that are at odds with the state's attempts to articulate a shared national identity. The conflicting demands of each community can make it impossible for the state to fulfil the social contract as defined by any single community, and the threat of civil war can lead to the militarisation of society in a way that prevents the state from exercising a monopoly over violence. Nevertheless, the term deeply divided society implies that some societies are essentially 'divided' whilst others are not.<sup>41</sup> This study would contend that every society possess within it divisions that could be politicised in the right circumstances, whether they are racial, religious, class or regional differences. It is not the existence of difference that is important, but rather it is the process by which difference can be transformed into a source of threat in society that is significant. The term deeply divided society is therefore problematic because it implies that particular types of difference – particularly ethnic and religious difference – are essentially predisposed to conflict, and because it focuses on the existence of difference rather than on the process by which differences acquire meaning. The term 'weak state' does not locate state weakness in the existence of particular groups within a polity. It rather looks to the ability of the state to control violence within its territory – whether this is communal violence, class based violence or criminal violence – and it asks whether or not the state's performance is deemed satisfactory by the many different groups that may constitute its citizenry.

The term 'failed state' also comes with a fair amount of baggage. In policy terms it has been linked to the foreign interventionism of the administration of President George W. Bush. The 2002 National Security Strategy placed failed states at the heart of Bush's new foreign policy approach when it declared that, 'America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones.'<sup>42</sup> Partly because of its instrumentalisation by the Bush administration, the term 'failed state' has been widely criticised for signalling that states labelled as such ought not be

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<sup>41</sup> One of the arguments, for instance, against [Arend Lijphart](#)'s work on constitutional design in divided societies is that he assumes that societies either have the characteristic of being divided or they do not. As a result, I would argue, Lijphart devises a political system for such societies that entrenches divisions and leads to incompetent government. For more detail see Nussaibah Younis, 'Set up to Fail: Consociational Political Structures in Post War Iraq', *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 41 (2011), 1-18.

<sup>42</sup> The White House, 'The National Security Strategy of the United States of America', (Washington D.C., 2002b). The White House, 'The National Security Strategy of the United States of America', (2002a).

treated as sovereign and by extension for justifying pre-emptive military strikes against them.<sup>43</sup>

Many of the criticisms levelled against the failed state label are also applicable to the term 'weak state.' It has been argued that the 'European model of the nation-state is simply the wrong institution' for many post-colonial states.<sup>44</sup> If this is the case, to constantly measure such states against the unachievable ideal of the essentially European nation-state is to condemn them to being constantly labelled as 'weak' or as 'failed.'<sup>45</sup> Drawing on Foucauldian discourse analysis, Mary Manjikian further attacks the deployment of the terms 'strong,' 'weak' and 'failed' with reference to states. Manjikian suggests that the use of such language sets up an unequal power relationship between the strong and the weak state, whereby the strong 'doctor' state is empowered to dictate the treatment of the 'weak,' 'irresponsible' and 'incapable' 'patient' state with or without the consent of the inferior state.<sup>46</sup> The terms have also been criticised for identifying 'weakness' or 'failure' as part of the essential characters of particular states, which can be construed as an extension of colonial discourses that depicted certain racial groups as more or less capable of governing.<sup>47</sup> It has further been argued that the terms imply that weakness derives solely from the internal deficiencies of the state, thereby implicitly belittling the role that colonialism, global trade inequality, and other historical processes have played in constructing the 'failure' or 'weakness' of those states.<sup>48</sup>

Responding to these many valid criticisms, the next section seeks to tease out the subtle differences between the terms 'failed state' and 'weak state' in order to explain why this study has chosen to deploy the fraught term. Because of its

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<sup>43</sup> Branwen Gruffydd Jones, 'The Global Political Economy of Social Crisis: Towards a Critique of the 'Failed State' Ideology', *Review of International Political Economy* 152 (2008), 180-205. Pinar Bilgin and Adam David Morton, 'Historicising Representations of 'Failed States': Beyond the Cold-War Annexation of the Social Sciences', *Third World Quarterly*, 231 (2002), 55-80. Ralph Wilde, 'The Skewed Responsibility Narrative of the "Failed States" Concept', *The ILSA Journal of International and Comparative Law* 9 (2002-2003), 425-29.

<sup>44</sup> Sebastian Von Einsiedel, 'Policy Responses to State Failure', in Simon Chesterman, Michael Ignatieff, and Ramesh Thakur (eds.), *Making States Work: State Failure and the Crisis of Governance* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2005), 13-35, 17.

<sup>45</sup> Charles T. Call, 'The Fallacy of the 'Failed State'', *Third World Quarterly*, 298 (2008), 1491-507, 1499.

<sup>46</sup> Mary Manjikian, 'Diagnosis, Intervention, and Cure: The Illness Narrative in the Discourse of the Failed State', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 33 (2008), 335-57, 32.

<sup>47</sup> Jones, 'The Global Political Economy of Social Crisis: Towards a Critique of the 'Failed State' Ideology', 182.

<sup>48</sup> Wilde, 'The Skewed Responsibility Narrative of the "Failed States" Concept', 425.

association with a particular era of misdirected foreign policy interventionism, the term 'failed state' possesses more immediately negative connotations than the term 'weak state.' It is therefore easier to use the term 'weak state' without having assumptions about your ideological position read into your work. Furthermore, the word 'failed' refers to a definitive state of being and as such a failed state could be construed as having irreversibly lost its sovereignty. Weakness, on the other hand, is located on a spectrum and offers more fluidity. The term weakness does not depict a static condition of being; rather it indicates the evolving nature of state strength and is therefore somewhat more defensible than the failed state label.

As for the contention that describing a state as weak implies a continuation of colonial discourses, this study simply does not link state weakness to any particular ethnicity or culture. Whilst it is the case that colonial discourses describing particular ethnic groups as weak implied an inability for self governance that legitimised colonial structures of domination, in this study the term refers to the ability of the state to achieve normative and functional legitimacy. In all states it is possible for legitimacy to be linked to the ability of the state to articulate a narrative of nation that is based on certain racial or cultural attributes. But this is completely divorced from the allegation that to use the term state weakness implies that certain states are inherently weak due to their ethnic or cultural characteristics. It is the case that weak states tend to be found in the global south or in formerly colonised regions, but this is because particular conditions, such as de-colonisation and the structuring of the global economy, have had disproportionately detrimental effects on the development of state structures in these particular regions.

The assertion that the nation state structure is essentially European and sets too difficult a standard for poorer states is a crude criticism that ignores the fact that most of the developing world is now divided into nation-states that are not on the brink of collapse. One cannot characterise a huge diversity of people as unsuited to a particular form of political system. Indeed, the remarkable feature of the introduction of the nation-state structure beyond Europe has been its durability, with the vast majority of nation-states having survived despite the often very difficult circumstances surrounding their inception.<sup>49</sup> Many of the national liberation movements that fought against colonialism referenced the nation-state as the ideal

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<sup>49</sup> William Zartman, *International Relations in the New Africa* (Lanham: University Press of America 1987) Preface.

form of political organisation. And a number of post-colonial states, perhaps in part because of their internal weakness, have since become vocal defenders of the nation-state and of the principles of non-intervention, territorial integrity and the sanctity of state borders.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, this study is interested in how conditions of internal state weakness affect internal foreign policy making processes, and is not focused on power relationships *between* states. I am not, therefore, at risk of perpetuating oppressive ways of understanding inter-state power relationships. On the contrary, this study attributes agency to the weak state by recognising its ability to formulate and conduct its own internally generated foreign policy – whereas most studies tend to cast weak states as merely the objects of the foreign policies of more powerful states or as helpless passengers in the game of international politics.

## Foreign Policy of Weak States

Scholars of the Third World<sup>51</sup> have long argued that the core tenets of mainstream international relations theory are wholly inapplicable to the majority of non-Western states. The preoccupation with states as actors, the focus on hegemony, balance of power and territoriality, the elevating of external threats and the separation of foreign and domestic policy fails to ‘address the contemporary nature of the Third World’ and as such is ‘inadequate.’<sup>52</sup> One of the core problems is that much of traditional international relations theory is built on assumptions that simply do not hold for many developing states. For instance it tends to be assumed that the state is an effective, legitimate, and sovereign entity. Many developing states, meanwhile, encompass numerous competing identity groups, are governed by regimes that are not considered legitimate by significant sectors of the population, and are unable to

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<sup>50</sup> Christian Reus-Smit writes, for instance, that the principle of sovereignty became a ‘universal organizing principle’ through the ‘struggles for individual rights waged by subject peoples within particular colonies, and by newly independent postcolonial states.’ Christian Reus-Smit, ‘Struggles for Individual Rights and the Expansion of the International System’, *International Organization*, 652 (2011), 207 - 42, 211-2.

<sup>51</sup> This is an anachronistic term that I am not especially comfortable with, but since it was widely in use during the period of scholarship that I am referring to it makes sense to refer to the term. I am also taking my cue for capitalizing the term from the existing literature. For an argument against the use of the term see Vicky Randall, ‘Using and Abusing the Concept of the Third World: Geopolitics and the Comparative Political Study of Development and Underdevelopment’, *Third World Quarterly*, 251 (2004), 41-53.

<sup>52</sup> Brian Job, ‘The Insecurity Dilemma: Theory and Practice’, in Brian Job (ed.), *The Insecurity Dilemma: National Security of Third World States* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1992) 3, 12.

provide peace and stability for their citizens.<sup>53</sup> States which face such a myriad of internal problems cannot possibly interact with the international system in the same way as legitimate, effective and internally coherent states. Scholars of the Third World have, therefore, advocated for taking into account state type when theorising foreign policy behaviour. In his comprehensive study of African international relations, for instance, Christopher Clapham concluded that ‘The foreign policies of African states were, in short, most basically determined by the kind of states that they were.’<sup>54</sup>

Much of the literature that I discuss in this chapter is based on African, rather than on Middle Eastern, case studies. This study contends that many of the features of the African states discussed in this literature are highly relevant to the Iraqi case, and does not accept that the cultural or historical specificities of the Middle East as a region render the comparison with Africa problematic. In many ways Iraq is a unique case that bears little relation to states either in the Middle East or in Africa. As a deeply totalitarian state that was demolished from the inside during a decade of crippling sanctions, Ba’athist Iraq came to a dramatic end after a unique US invasion and attempt at state-building. If we look to the characteristics of post-invasion Iraqi governments, however, there are plenty of similarities between them and the governments described in the developing states literature. This thesis does not suggest that there is anything specifically ‘Middle Eastern’ about the Iraqi experience that would render a region-specific frame of reference more analytically useful than the one deployed in this study. After all, this study is focused primarily on the internal relationship between the government and the governed and on the impact this relationship has on internal foreign policy making processes. The specific conflict dynamics in the Middle East do not, therefore, have any particular bearing on the conceptual framing of this study.

There is an important tangential literature to that on the foreign policies of developing states that seeks to mount a broad-based challenge to international relations theory as a whole on the basis of the Third World or developing state

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<sup>53</sup> Brian Job, 'The Insecurity Dilemma: Theory and Practice', in Brian Job (ed.), *The Insecurity Dilemma: National Security of Third World States* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1992) 17.

<sup>54</sup> Christopher Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of Survival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 55.

experience.<sup>55</sup> This literature contends that, rather than balancing against threats as traditional international theory would expect, states in the Third World tend not to engage in alliances, and that the maximisation of state power is not the primary goal of the Third World state.<sup>56</sup> This study is focused much more narrowly on the domestic foreign policy making process, so I do not want to become unduly distracted by this wider literature but simply to acknowledge that the sub-literature with which I am engaging exists within a broader context. This study will concentrate on what scholars of the developing world have observed about how internal foreign policy making processes differ in the non-Western world. This will provide the basis on which I can develop working hypotheses, more specifically, about the way in which state weakness affects foreign policy making. Although this study's focus is on the weak state, the existing literature considers a range of much broader categories including Third World states, developing states and African states. For the purposes of explaining the extant literature I will use all these terms, before bringing the discussion back to weak states later in the chapter.

### Internal Threats Prevail

One of the key observations made in the literature on the foreign policy of developing states is that such states are primarily faced with internal rather than external threats. International relations theory focuses to such an extraordinary extent on the threats levelled against states by external powers that we would expect weak states to be even more vulnerable to – and therefore preoccupied with – external threats. In actuality, an international normative system has emerged that places enormous value on the sanctity of state boundaries and which confers external sovereignty on states whether or not they successfully achieve internal sovereignty.<sup>57</sup> Many regimes in the developing world, therefore, do not feel

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<sup>55</sup> See Kevin Dunn and Timothy Shaw, *Africa's Challenge to International Relations Theory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Scarlett Conelissen, Fantu Cheru, and Timothy Shaw, *Africa and International Relations in the 21st Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Neuman, *International Relations Theory and the Third World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

<sup>56</sup> Douglas Lemke, 'African Lessons for International Relations Research', *World Politics*, 561 (2003), 114-38, 115.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Jackson refers to such states as 'Quasi-States' and writes that they have 'negative sovereignty' conferred upon them by international society as a 'formal-legal entitlement' regardless of whether or not such states 'possesses the wherewithal to provide political goods for its citizens.' Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Third World*, 26, 29.

especially worried about the prospect of being invaded – they instead worry about the myriad threats emanating from domestic actors that could lead to their downfall.

The problem for many African states, Christopher Clapham argues, is that they fail to articulate and pursue an inclusive vision of the state, leading to a proliferation of threats by internal actors who feel underrepresented or victimised by the state. Clapham writes that, ‘In cases where the idea of the state is almost universally shared, any threat to the security of the incumbent government, by other than legitimate constitutional means, can only come from outside.’<sup>58</sup> But when the idea of the state is contested by internal actors, the state is much more likely to be focused on securing itself from internal threats. The proliferation of internal threats leads to a general feeling of insecurity, which is labelled by Brian Job as ‘the insecurity dilemma.’<sup>59</sup> According to Job, the inability of many Third World states to garner ‘popular legitimacy’ renders them vulnerable to the ‘insecurity dilemma,’ whereby ‘each component of society [is] competing to preserve and protect its own well-being.’<sup>60</sup>

In such a context, protecting the security of the regime becomes the primary task of the ruling elite. For many leaders in internally unstable states, traditional national interest considerations pale in significance when ‘their own regimes and even their own lives’ are threatened by internal discord.<sup>61</sup> Clapham writes of African leaders that they begin any foreign policy decision making process with ‘an assessment of the domestic situation, since their security was usually much more directly threatened by domestic than by external considerations.’<sup>62</sup> Regimes that feel constantly under threat by internal actors tend to respond with repression, although they sometimes also attempt to upgrade their legitimacy. Repression, however, often further exacerbates the internal security dilemma and undermines state-society relations, and indeed intra-society relations. Local actors may even turn to the international community to support them against their heavily repressive regimes.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of Survival*, 45.

<sup>59</sup> This is an inversion of the traditional concept of the ‘security dilemma,’ which is at the heart of much of international relations theory.

<sup>60</sup> Job, ‘The Insecurity Dilemma: Theory and Practice’, 18.

<sup>61</sup> Christopher Clapham points out that the price of failure is high for politicians in many African states, where ‘well over half of leading African politicians between independence and 1991 were assassinated, executed, imprisoned, or forced into exile.’ Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of Survival*, 58.

<sup>62</sup> Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of Survival*, 63.

<sup>63</sup> Job, ‘The Insecurity Dilemma: Theory and Practice’, 12.

Traditional ways of understanding the nature of the state in the international system are upended when we consider that citizens in such states do not turn to their states for protection from external threats, but ask the international community for protection from their own governments.

### ‘National Interests’ Do Not Direct Foreign Policy

The idea that there are a set of policies that can be objectively defined as being ‘in the national interest’ is somewhat outdated, and it tends to be recognised now that states struggle to define foreign policy according to a range of criteria, taking into account domestic politics, the capability of the state, the nature of external threats and the international environment. Realist conceptions of the national interest as the ‘perennial standard by which political action must be judged’ have been thoroughly interrogated and discredited by foreign policy analysis.<sup>64</sup> Scholars of foreign policy analysis have taken issue with the ‘ambiguous nature of the nation and the difficulty of specifying whose interests it encompasses,’ and have pointed out that ‘a description of the national interest can never be more than a set of conclusions derived from the analytic and evaluative framework of the describer.’<sup>65</sup> Nonetheless, states continue to refer to the national interest with remarkable frequency when describing and justifying their foreign policy choices. It is worth noting at this juncture that the rhetorical power of the notion of a national interest is a very important part of its utility to foreign policy actors in strong states and perhaps even more so in weak states. Claiming to act in the national interest offers a foreign policy actor a claim to legitimacy, and is a way of suggesting that one’s opponents are not acting in the interests of the nation. In a weak state setting where there may be an existential battle for legitimacy between political actors, access to this tool of legitimization is extremely important and offers us a way to analyse how the term is deployed and how its meaning is understood in a weak state setting.

Beyond its appropriation as a tool in the competition over power and legitimacy, the literature on developing state foreign policy making identifies an interesting dynamic in consideration over interests in a weak state setting. Namely, in developing states, the pursuit of regime survival trumps any consideration of the

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<sup>64</sup> Hans. J Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: Knopf, 1948) 9.

<sup>65</sup> James Rosenau, ‘The National Interest’, in James Barber and Michael Smith (eds.), *The Nature of Foreign Policy: A Reader* (Edinburgh: The Open University Press, 1974), 186-94, 189, 91.



national interest. There is virtually no separation between foreign and domestic policy, and foreign policy is directed according to the narrow interests of the ruling elite. Regime survival is an imperative that motivates many regimes in the developing world who are often faced with existential threats posed by internal oppositional forces. The successful pursuit of particular foreign relationships can help to bolster a struggling regime with political and material resources that can be used to enhance its domestic support and/or suppress domestic opposition. Clapham writes that in many African states, foreign policy became ‘a means through which leaders attempted to gain access to the resources required to maintain the domestic political structure.’<sup>66</sup> Regimes may even go to the extent of actively compromising traditional notions of the ‘national interest’ in order to ensure the longevity of the regime. For example a state may invite a foreign power into its territory to suppress internal violence, thereby borrowing ‘power from outside to pursue their aims.’<sup>67</sup>

In many states preoccupied with regime survival, domestic political considerations become a fundamental, even leading part, of foreign policy – contravening the theoretical separation between the two that has long been imposed by currents in international relations theory. We can even go so far as to say that, ‘for many purposes systemic boundaries between internal and external environments simply do not exist.’<sup>68</sup> For when regimes are weak, pursuing foreign policies that can ‘help bolster the government against its domestic opponents,’ must take higher priority.<sup>69</sup>

It is also the case that many developing states pursue a foreign policy that fails to reflect the interests of the nation as a whole, because the regime itself is not a reflection of its own citizenry. In this case foreign policy interests can come to be defined by the narrow interests of the political faction in power. Clapham writes that ‘Insofar as the idea of the state is “owned” by particular sections of the population...its foreign (and also domestic) policies will correspondingly reflect the interests of its owners, and be directed against those members of the population who contest the idea of the state.’<sup>70</sup> In a country that is governed by a small,

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<sup>66</sup> Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of Survival*, 60.

<sup>67</sup> Zartman, *International Relations in the New Africa*, Preface to 1987 edition, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Christopher Clapham, *Foreign Policy Making in Developing States* (Westmead: Saxon House, 1977) 170.

<sup>69</sup> Christopher Clapham, *Foreign Policy Making in Developing States* (Westmead: Saxon House, 1977) 167.

<sup>70</sup> Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of Survival*, 45.

unrepresentative and illegitimate elite, the regime inevitably orients foreign policy towards the interests of the leader, party or regime rather than the interests of the nation as a whole. The narrower the governing elite, the more danger there is of foreign policy becoming simply an exercise in personal relationships and animosities. William Zartman writes that ‘ideology and personal interest are used more frequently than national interest as a criteria for foreign policy,’ meaning that foreign policy sometimes becomes ‘an exercise in pure politics – a struggle for external influence for its own sake – and at times has no other criterion than whim, emotion, or accident.’<sup>71</sup>

It is important not to overstate the differences between developed and developing states in this regard. The foreign policy decisions of many developed states are highly vulnerable to a range of internal political dynamics,<sup>72</sup> and indeed ‘Foreign policies are pursued to help in-groups stay in power in modernised states no less than elsewhere.’<sup>73</sup> Although the differences between developing and developed state foreign policy are important to theorise, it is the case that differences can often be a matter of degree rather than of fundamentals. Therefore tendencies that may be observable in economically advanced states are simply far more exaggerated in a developing state context because of the particular dynamics that such a state generates.

### Decision-Making is Highly Personalised

The literature on foreign policy making in developing states recognizes that the potential importance of foreign policy to regime survival, and the absence of established bureaucratic structures, often means that individual leaders have a great deal of personal control over foreign policy. Gilbert Khadiagala and Terrance Lyons write that ‘African foreign policy decision making has always been the province of leading personalities’ because bureaucratic structures are ‘Weak and manipulatable’ and because it can be used as a tool to ‘disarm their domestic opponents.’<sup>74</sup> Although in some states uncontentious foreign policy matters are delegated to the

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<sup>71</sup> Zartman, *International Relations in the New Africa*, 47, 53.

<sup>72</sup> Graham Allison theorizes the impact of organizational processes and bureaucratic politics on decision-making in highly developed states. Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (USA: Harper Collins Publishers, 1971).

<sup>73</sup> Clapham, *Foreign Policy Making in Developing States*, 7.

<sup>74</sup> Gilbert Khadiagala and Terrence Lyons, 'Foreign Policy Making in Africa: An Introduction', in Gilbert Khadiagala and Terrence Lyons (eds.), *African Foreign Policies: Power and Process* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2001), 1-14.

bureaucracy, when the stakes are high leaders almost always directly oversee the policy-making process.<sup>75</sup>

Part of the problem is that in many underdeveloped states the regime heavily dominates the government machinery because it is an important source of power and patronage for the regime. Ministries are often used as a conduit through which politicians can extract resources from the state, that they in turn can distribute to their supporters. The development of regularised bureaucratic processes is either not prioritised or actively sabotaged by ruling elites who want to prevent constraints on their freedom of action. The result is that very few individuals participate in the foreign policy making process, and policy risks being excessively influenced by the ‘anger,’ ‘ardour,’ ‘whims,’ ‘convictions,’ and ‘friendships’ of the leader.<sup>76</sup> Though parliament and the cabinet may engage in discussion about foreign policy options, their input is rarely influential, and the diplomatic infrastructure is more often than not excluded from the real business of foreign policy.<sup>77</sup>

It is important to note that in many economically developed countries foreign policy is also the closely guarded prerogative of the leader, and that there are often tensions between the Foreign Ministry and the executive office.<sup>78</sup> Again, this is a matter of degree; developing states face far fewer bureaucratic constraints on their policy-making processes, which affords individual leaders enormous discretion over policy choices.

Though leaders in many developing states may not have to compete with a bureaucracy to define their foreign policies, they do have to contend with powerful sub-state actors who conduct ‘traditional international relations activities even though they are not official states.’<sup>79</sup> Such actors go so far as to wage wars independently of the government, and can shape the character of their country’s foreign policy without the input of the government. There is an extremely wide range of such actors, from private business interests, to militia groups, to political

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<sup>75</sup> Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of Survival*, 58.

<sup>76</sup> Zartman writes that ‘specific, even minute decisions are made by the president’ and that his emotions ‘become the mood of his country’s policies.’ Zartman, *International Relations in the New Africa*, 65.

<sup>77</sup> Zartman asserts that ‘ambassadorial relations are frequently regarded more as a sign of prestige and friendship than as an institution serving a positive function.’ Zartman, *International Relations in the New Africa*, 70, 66-73.

<sup>78</sup> As Clapham writes, ‘It is generally accepted that even in pluralist societies, foreign policy is an area of great executive freedom for Presidents, Prime Ministers and Foreign Secretaries.’ Clapham, *Foreign Policy Making in Developing States*, 6.

<sup>79</sup> Lemke, ‘African Lessons for International Relations Research’, 129.

parties, all who are able to take advantage of the weakness of the state in order to pursue audacious policies of their own.

### Capacity and Foreign Policy Making

The ability of developing states to conduct foreign policy is also severely hampered by a host of domestic constraints. When a regime is facing severe internal threats, its energy and resources must be directed to countering that threat, leaving its ability to effectively conduct foreign policy greatly reduced. Writing about the foreign policies of African leaders, Clapham observes that ‘When leaders faced appreciable domestic threats...their scope for independent action was correspondingly reduced.’<sup>80</sup> Internal weakness can render a state vulnerable to foreign intervention, and can weaken its bargaining position when it comes to international affairs. And the pressures of managing a volatile domestic situation can detract a great deal from the ability of a leader to effectively manage foreign policy, often leading to short-termism and desperation in foreign policy strategy.

Moreover, a dependent position in the international system means that developing states are often unable to extract favourable agreements with stronger states.<sup>81</sup> Some theorists argue that the Third World should always be analysed in light of its subordinate position in the international system<sup>82</sup> because foreign policy outcomes for such states are inevitably shaped by the ‘pervasive influence of global economic and military asymmetries.’<sup>83</sup> There exists a vast literature that assesses the impact on such states of their position in the international system, but this is outside of the scope of this study. Nevertheless, it is fitting to recognise that foreign policy decisions are often made against a backdrop of enormous inequality that severely constrains the range of possible courses of action that it is possible for developing states to pursue.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of Survival*, 65.

<sup>81</sup> There is a vast literature on the nature and impact of Africa’s position of dependency in the global economic system which is outside the scope of this study. This study concurs with Christopher Clapham when he says that it is much too crude to characterize developing countries as ‘ultimately shaped by the external environment,’ and therefore argues that there is value in dedicating a study to understanding the impact of internal dynamics on decision-making in weak state. Clapham, *Foreign Policy Making in Developing States*, 11.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Khadiagala and Lyons, ‘Foreign Policy Making in Africa: An Introduction’, 3.

<sup>84</sup> It is also argued, however, that state weakness can sometimes be used as a bargaining chip in negotiations between weak and strong states, with strong states often being extremely reluctant to allow states to collapse. In this situation a weak state can threaten that it will collapse unless offered

It would also have been possible to take an approach to this study that emphasises the federal nature of the post-2003 Iraqi state. The Iraqi constitution is a radically federalist document, and the Iraqi Kurdish region exercises a great deal of power independently of Baghdad, which is bound to have an impact on the foreign policy making dynamics in the Iraqi state. However, the existing literature on federalism in weak states tends to focus on its viability as a conflict management tool, and to date there has not been any academic work conducted on the impact of federalism on weak state foreign policy. Theorising the relationship between federalism, state weakness and foreign policy is a complex task that requires a stand-alone study and it therefore cannot be incorporated into this thesis. I do think that such a study would make a valuable contribution to the field, and in my conclusion I expand further on this possible future research agenda.

## Hypothesising Weak State Foreign Policy

The existing literature on foreign policy production in developing states offers a very useful point of departure for my enquiry into weak states. The extant work, however, is somewhat limited by its use of very broad ranging terms such as ‘Third World,’ ‘developing state,’ and ‘African state.’ There is extraordinary diversity amongst states in Africa, and it is difficult to argue that they should all be treated as comparable units in foreign policy analysis. Particular experiences of decolonisation, the subsequent evolution of types of governance, differences in resource wealth, and ethnic and religious makeup are just some of the things that account for the wide variation in experience across African states. In order to try to understand how domestic governance structures affect foreign policy, therefore, it makes sense to differentiate states by their political characteristics, rather than by their geographical location. When we take a narrower look at those African states which are struggling to impose their authority over their territories and populations, it quickly becomes clear that they have much in common with states beyond Africa that are experiencing similar legitimacy deficits.

The terms ‘developing state’ and ‘Third World’ are similarly inappropriate for the purposes of this study. The large swathe of states encompassed by these terms have little in common beyond a broadly low level of economic development.

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political, economic and/or military support by the strong state. Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The Politics of Survival*, 64.

Grouping states by level of economic development may be instructive in a study of international relations that focuses on the relative position of states in a global hierarchy of powers, but it offers little value for studies which are focused on internal foreign policy production. This study contends that focusing attention on how a state relates to authority and legitimacy better helps us to delineate types of states and better enables us to theorise the relationship between state type and foreign policy production than the categories used in the extant literature. The term ‘weak state,’ which we have defined throughout this chapter as a state that lacks functional and normative legitimacy, brings together states that face similar fundamental challenges and as such allows us to construct an analytically powerful point of departure.

This chapter has extensively discussed social contract theory and the literature on foreign policy making in developing states, and from these literatures I will now extrapolate a set of expectations or hypotheses that can be used to guide this study.

The exploration of social contract theory conducted earlier in this chapter concluded that one of the fundamental purposes of the state is to provide public goods to its population, chief amongst them being security. When a state cannot achieve the public goods provision that is central to its legitimacy, it provides non-state actors with the opportunity to take on part of this important public role. Especially when it comes to security, local actors often take control of securing neighbourhoods or towns in the event of a breakdown in the central government’s ability to keep the peace. By taking over the provision of public goods where the government has failed, sub-state actors may gain local legitimacy and may reach a position where they can contest the sovereignty claims of the central government. This is even more likely to be the case if the central government propagates an exclusionary narrative of state. When the central government generates the impression that it exists for the benefit of only part of the population, or that it is concerned only with securing itself, sub-state actors are given the opportunity to compete with the government’s claim to legitimacy by articulating narratives that resonate with those who feel normatively neglected by the central government. A weak state, therefore, is liable to be confronted by actors with competing claims to legitimacy, and such a dynamic is likely to be reflected in the foreign policy sphere. The literature on developing states, explored earlier in this chapter, points to the fact

that in such states we often find a range of governmental and non-governmental actors competing over foreign policy, and this thesis will focus in large part on seeking to understand in greater depth how state weakness relates to the proliferation of competing foreign policy actors within the state.

This thesis hypothesises that the fragility of the weak state's narrative, in addition to its inability to sufficiently furnish the population with public goods, renders it vulnerable to competing claims to legitimacy mounted by sub-state actors who can provide public goods and robust narratives of purpose at a sub-state level. Such actors are able to challenge the state's authority in a number of areas, including its jurisdiction over foreign policy. I would therefore expect a weak state to be unable to exercise control over both the setting of foreign policy goals and the modes of foreign policy interaction, including the entering into of agreements with foreign powers, the engagement in diplomatic activity, and giving or receiving of material or political support. The first hypothesis, therefore, is: *In a weak state, the central government is unable to monopolise authority over foreign policy, including in the setting of foreign policy goals and in the exercising of effective control over interaction with foreign actors.*

This chapter's discussions of social contract theory lead to the conclusion that the weak state is by definition vulnerable. Its inability to effectively perform the functions of state diminish its legitimacy and lay it open to contestation from alternative claimants to authority. Since the weak state is constantly vulnerable to challenges from domestic rivals, it follows that such a state is preoccupied with the pursuit of regime security. The literature on foreign policy production in developing states characterises such states as being fixated on the task of securing the regime in the face of challenges mounted by domestic political rivals. The literature also indicates that threats posed by domestic actors are considered more dangerous to regime security than those posed by foreign powers. Indeed, the literature points to instances of regimes allowing foreign militaries to access their territory in the hope that they will help to protect the regime from its domestic political rivals. This study seeks to understand the extent to which the domestic vulnerability of the weak state leads it to pursue foreign policies that promise to secure the security of the regime even if such policies are detrimental to the population as a whole. It also seeks to understand whether or not the security imperative drives the foreign policy goals of the sub-state actors who conduct foreign policy in competition with the central

government. Such sub-state actors are also operating in an insecure environment in which legitimacy and authority are under contestation, and may similarly deploy foreign policy so as to bolster their own claims to authority.

I, therefore, hypothesise that the foreign policies of actors within a weak state reflect the wider competition for legitimacy in the body politic. The state is likely to construct its foreign policies with a view to retaining and enhancing its current claim to sovereign authority, whilst sub-state actors will tend to pursue foreign policies that they believe will protect and augment their ability to make authority claims. This preoccupation with the preservation and expansion of domestic authority means that foreign policy choices are likely to be made that fail to take into account the interests of the wider population. The second hypothesis, therefore, is: *In a weak state, foreign policy is driven by a primary concern for the security and authority of the foreign policy actor, which can result in foreign policy choices being made that are detrimental to the interests of the population as a whole.*

Severe functional limitations in a state are a core, contributing part of what makes a state weak because a state's inability to perform the tasks that are expected of it undermines its legitimacy. The reasons for the functional ineptitude may be manifold: it could have low institutional capacity, it may be resource poor, or it may have recently emerged from civil conflict, indeed there is a vast literature on the causes of and possible remedies for the limited functional capacity of developing states. In any case poor functional performance contributes both to diminishing the legitimacy of the state and to reducing its capacity to effectively pursue its foreign policy goals. The reduction of state legitimacy further compounds the already limited functional capability of the state because it renders the state vulnerable to contestation and reduces its ability to absorb the resistance and opposition that may be generated in the pursuit of policy goals. This study hypothesises that weak states struggle to effectively pursue and enact their foreign policies. Such states face sustained challenges from sub-state actors who seek to use the state's declared policies and priorities to further undermine the legitimacy of the state. By successfully undermining the ability of the state to effectively execute its policies, sub-state actors may seek to enhance their own authority over foreign policy by engaging with foreign governments and actors through alternative channels. In establishing these competing relationships with foreign powers, sub-state actors



further reduce the ability of the central government to effectively deliver its policy agenda. The third hypothesis, therefore, is: *In a weak state, the capacity of the central government to effectively implement its foreign policy agenda is diminished. The weak state is likely to suffer from limited functional capacity, which is compounded by a legitimacy deficit which renders the state more cautious about pursuing policies that could elicit negative responses from the populace.*

This study does not try to separate out dependent from independent variables. It contends that social relations are mutually constructed, and that it is therefore neither feasible nor instructive to try to delineate clear casual links. The weakness of a state is a fluid and changing condition that is affected by the realisation of the hypotheses even as it creates the circumstances in which the hypotheses take place. Moreover, the three hypotheses that I have laid out here are clearly interrelated. When sub-state actors conduct foreign policy in competition with the government, as the first hypothesis expects, this increases the regime's insecurity and makes it more likely that the regime will deploy foreign policy in the pursuit of regime security goals, as per the second hypothesis. Similarly the proliferation of competing sub-state foreign policy actors makes it more difficult for the central government to effectively pursue its own foreign policy goals, as hypothesis three anticipates. The realisation of any of the three hypotheses further reduces the legitimacy and functional effectiveness of the regime, thereby compounding state weakness, and making it more likely that the conditions anticipated by the remaining hypotheses will come about. For instance, the citizenry is likely to withdraw further legitimacy from the weak state when it becomes apparent that the state is unable to successfully execute its foreign policies. This withdrawal of confidence in the government is likely to better enable sub-state actors to compete with the government in the foreign policy arena, which in turn will increase the likelihood of the state using foreign policy as a tool for enhancing their domestic security. As each hypothesis comes into effect, the regime becomes increasingly vulnerable, and therefore increasingly focused on protecting itself against threats to its authority. The energy of the regime is consumed by the need to secure itself, and is likely to mean that little attention is given to improving the institutional capacity of the state's foreign policy systems. This neglect of functional ability is likely to further compound state weakness, whilst the clear focus of the

regime on self-preservation, rather than on the national interest, further contributes to the tapering of public confidence in the central government.

Whilst each of these hypotheses has an important impact on weak state foreign policy production, I would venture that the proliferation of sub-state foreign policy actors is the most important anticipated outcome of state weakness. The multiplying of foreign policy actors opens up the space for foreign powers to become deeply involved in the domestic politics of the state, and enables foreign powers to play domestic actors against each other in order to best secure their own goals. A divided foreign policy landscape makes it much more difficult for the state to achieve its own foreign policy goals abroad, partly because it renders them vulnerable to foreign influence domestically and partly because the proliferation of actors reduces the functional capacity of the state by raising the political costs of pursuing controversial policies. The empowering of sub-state actors in foreign policy also increases the threat perceptions of the central government and makes it more likely that regime security becomes a driving factor in foreign policy. I would suggest that the poor functional capacity of the state and its limited ability to execute foreign policy is the second most important hypothesis. The state's inability to achieve its own goals reduces its legitimacy, and increases its vulnerability to sub-state competitors. The pursuit of regime security rather than national security interests I believe is the least consequential of the three hypotheses, partly because it is possible that there is a very high interrelation between the national interest and the regime interest. It is rarely in the interests of the regime to conduct a policy that is thoroughly at odds with the national interest. For instance a regime is unlikely to allow a foreign power to annex part of its territory because the public backlash against the regime is likely to pose an even greater threat to regime security. In addition, the pursuit of regime security is clearly a consideration in the foreign policy making calculations of all states, not just weak ones, and perhaps more than with the other two hypotheses the difference here between a strong and a weak state is matter of degree. I do think, however, that the focus on regime security is an important dynamic to trace in the weak state context, but perhaps its outcomes will be more nuanced than with the other two hypotheses.

This study focuses on several distinct phases in Iraqi political history since 2003. In each period I trace the level of state weakness, discussing the relative functional effectiveness of the state and the discursive power of the narratives being

propagated by the state using the extensive evidence I have collected through my fieldwork. I then scrutinize in detail the most significant foreign policy activities occurring at that time, again using the original material that I have compiled, and I use my three hypotheses to guide the questions I ask and the themes I look for in my data. I then conclude my analysis of each period by assessing the utility and limitations of the hypotheses and the extent of their ability to make sense of the period in question. A more detailed discussion of the methodology that underpins this process of data analysis follows in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter begins with a discussion of interpretive research methodologies, and explains the particularities of the constructivist approach. Thereafter I assess the specific research methods that have been deployed in gathering, sorting, and analysing the evidence that forms the bedrock of this thesis with reference to the constructivist framework.

### Methodology

The nature of this study lends itself to the adoption of an interpretive methodology. It is fundamentally concerned with how citizens confer legitimacy on, and withdraw it from, a range of actors and how this influences a state's interactions with foreign powers. The concepts with which I am dealing are invested with meaning through social construction, and the best way to meaningfully understand them is by adopting a sensitive and person-oriented approach such as that offered by interpretive methodology. This project also seeks to understand in detail the dynamics present in one particular case study, rather than attempting to produce findings that are generalisable but that do not satisfactorily explain any particular case. Interpretivists tend to believe that meaning cannot be found without a deep understanding of context, and that achieving a rich understanding of a research subject is preferable to reaching shallow but ostensibly generalisable results.

Adopting an interpretive perspective requires the recognition that reality is socially constructed and that investigating how individuals interpret the world is a basic part of coming to understand social phenomena.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the basic goal of interpretive research is to 'understand the fundamental, emergent nature of the social world at the subjective, experiential level.'<sup>2</sup> Another important element of the interpretive approach is its recognition that it is not possible to identify clear causal

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas A. Schwandt, 'Three Epistemological Stances for Qualitative Inquiry: Interpretivism, Hermeneutics, and Social Constructionism', in Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Second edn.; Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2000), 189-214, 191.

<sup>2</sup> Mary K. Rodwell, *Social Work Constructivist Research* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1998) 17.

linkages in social research. In the previous chapter I discussed the mutual constructedness of state weakness, deficient legitimacy, and the hypothetical influences on foreign policy production. For interpretivists, such entanglement is part of the natural character of the social world, and the best we can hope to achieve in research is the identification of broad patterns and suggested directions in the travel of influence from one phenomenon to the next.

Grappling with social research requires that the researcher recognise her fundamental subjectivity. Because all sensory perception is filtered through the human mind, which is steeped in its own social context, there is no way of differentiating in absolute terms between the subjective and the objective.<sup>3</sup> The researcher can never totally transcend her socialisation, and cannot isolate her research design, data collection, and analytical processes from elements of subjectivity.<sup>4</sup> It is only by recognising the inevitability of subjectivity, and by engaging in a conscious process of reflexivity that the researcher can understand how it has inevitably influenced the outcomes of her research. The interpretive acknowledgment of the subjectivity of research encourages the conducting of qualitatively driven investigations that are deeply grounded in the specificity of a particular context. Indeed, interpretivism would contend that such research practice offers the best route to obtaining an insight into the uniqueness and individuality that constitute the social situation at hand.

Interpretivism is a very broad, over-arching methodological approach. This study more specifically adopts a constructivist standpoint, which is within the family of interpretivism but differs from other interpretive approaches such as constructionism. Methodological constructivism is distinct from constructivism as a theoretical school within international relations, therefore the differences that I described between my work and constructivist international relations theory do not prevent me from adopting a constructivist methodology. Constructivism focuses on the constructedness of experience and the schemas through which experience is assigned meaning.<sup>5</sup> It tends to encourage the recognition of multiple narratives, and an acceptance of contextual relativity. And it promotes data collection processes that

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<sup>3</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, *Selected Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) 184.

<sup>4</sup> William Whewell, *Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1996) x.

<sup>5</sup> Cynthia Franklin, 'Expanding the Vision of the Social Constructionist Debate', *Families in Society*, 54 (1995) 396.

focus on experiencing and directly questioning the subject, rather than relying on the more removed method of discourse analysis.

The adoption of a constructivist methodology dictates that research must be conducted and results analysed in a way that is consistent with constructivist principles. One of the key approaches that constructivist researchers adopt is the empathic method. Max Weber writes that ‘empathic or appreciative accuracy is attained when, through sympathetic participation, we can adequately grasp the emotional context in which the action took place.’<sup>6</sup> A similar argument was advanced by William Dilthey, who believed that profound understanding was attained by imagining oneself in the ‘social location’ of the subject.<sup>7</sup> This method is so deeply subjective, however, that the evidence it produces must be cross-checked against that obtained using alternative methodological tools.

The hermeneutic strategy is another important tool used in constructivist analyses. Hermeneutics, which is the practice of iteratively interpreting parts of the data in relation to the data as whole, and the whole in relation to its parts, can be applied to social analysis. The researcher would thereby interpret social action with repeated reference to the social context, whilst simultaneously analysing the social context in terms of individual social acts. Moreover, whilst engaging in this activity the researcher ought to assess her own relation to the social world that she is analysing (the double hermeneutic).<sup>8</sup>

The constructivist researcher also recognises that there is no distance between herself and the research. Particularly in situations in which there is a direct interaction between the researcher and the subject, the researcher must appreciate that the outcome of the interaction is constructed by the subjectivities and schemas brought by both the researcher and the participant. Constructivist research practice is built on the notion that ‘research with humans is inherently dialectical,’<sup>9</sup> and that meaning is found through the reflexive engagement with this imperfect process of human interaction. Although in the course of this thesis I often refer to corporate subjects, such as the Kurdistan Regional Government, rather than to individuals, I

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<sup>6</sup> Max Weber, 'The Interpretive Understanding of Social Action', in May Brodbeck (ed.), *Readings in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), 19-33, 22.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathon W. Moses and Torbjorn L. Knutsen, *Ways of Knowing: Competing Methodologies in Social and Political Research* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 4.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony Giddens, 'Hermeneutics and Social Theory', in Anthony Giddens (ed.), *Profiles and Critiques in Social Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 1-17.

<sup>9</sup> Rodwell, *Social Work Constructivist Research*, 30.

do so as a shorthand whilst nevertheless recognising the complexity of individual relationships that make up these groups. The interview subjects I chose to interact with were selected on the basis of their roles within these corporate agents, and part of the interview findings reflect their socialisation as participants within these institutions and as such offer insights into the narratives, structures and priorities of these institutions.

## Research Methods

Constructivism asserts that social meaning can best be garnered through the use of human led and human focused research methods. Qualitative methods enable the researcher to be present in instances where relevant meaning is being produced, and offers the researcher the opportunity to appreciate the nuances and multiplicity of perspectives held by respondents. This study is primarily based on a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews because these encounters offered me the opportunity to hear the nuances in the perspectives of respondents and gave me access to a quality and range of data that I would not have been able to obtain using any alternative method. In particular, this study is based on over 70 such interviews with elite figures who have directly experienced the foreign policy dynamics that are being analysed in this study.

The interview process begins with sampling, or deciding who to interview. The constructivist approach requires that sampling be done purposively, so as to increase the range of divergent data and to thereby increase the researcher's access to multiple perspectives. The researcher can achieve this by mapping out the figures who are important to interview, and by ensuring that a range of different ethnic, tribal, religious or political perspectives will be reflected by the chosen respondents. It is also important that the researcher attempts to interview widely, so as to capture variation both within and between identity groups. Securing interviews can be challenging, but a successful tactic often involves starting with more junior figures within the establishments you are interested in and then eliciting contact with their seniors. This has the benefit of achieving the constructivist requirement of obtaining a wide range of perspectives, in addition to offering a path to interviewing more senior figures. For instance, I interviewed a staffer in Washington DC who offered a

unique and insightful perspective to this study and who was also able to connect me to the Head of the Kurdistan Region's Department of Foreign Affairs.

My sampling for this study was extremely successful, and I was able to access many of the key figures who have been at the heart of Iraqi foreign policy production since 2003. Amongst many others, I interviewed the Iraqi Foreign Minister, Former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, and close advisors to Prime Minister Ja'fari and Prime Minister Maliki. I interviewed numerous Foreign Ministry officials and ambassadors, senior political party figures from across the political spectrum and members of the parliamentary foreign relations committee. It was also very interesting to interview senior British and American diplomats who had worked with Iraqi politicians and civil servants, and who held very different narratives about Iraq's political development over the relevant time period.

When it comes to interview design, the constructivist approach encourages a negotiation of the content of the discussion between the researcher and the interview subject. The subject is considered to own their perspective, their time and to have rights over the interview. I therefore chose to use semi-structured interviews so as to allow myself to gently guide the discussion whilst allowing plenty of room for the respondent to reframe the terms of the dialogue according to their perspective. The constructivist tradition also points to the value of all the incidental information that emerges from an interview; the tangents, the jokes, the small talk about family and travelling are all an important source of meaning and in my interviews I both allowed the space for this kind of material and I included it in my analysis.

The questions I did bring to each interview differed considerably according to the particular knowledge, expertise and experience of the respondent. Although some scholars recommend consistency of questions for the purpose of the easy codification of results,<sup>10</sup> the constructivist perspective sees interviews as reflecting the unique and individual perspectives of the subjects and questions their comparability. Constructivists also advocate the use of 'emergent design' whereby part of the 'research process emerges from the experience rather than being totally developed beforehand,' as this responsiveness allows for more authentic findings to emerge.<sup>11</sup> Adopting this approach meant that my interview style and the types of

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<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey M. Berry, 'Validity and Reliability Issues in Elite Interviewing', *Political Science and Politics*, 354 (2002), 679-82, 681.

<sup>11</sup> Rodwell, *Social Work Constructivist Research*.



questions that I asked evolved throughout the interview process, as I learnt how to garner the best data from different types of interview settings. Each interview is analysed and integrated into this study in its own right, based on the particular circumstances in which the interview was conducted and taking into account the precise questions asked to that respondent.

In my interview guides I avoid excessively leading the subject, and I tried to use open-ended questions so as to allow the respondent to deploy his or her own frame of reference. I have found, however, that the richness of data achieved from an interview is much more a reflection of the rapport the researcher builds with the interview subject rather than a reflection of the specific phrasing of questions. Creating a friendly, relaxed and non-confrontational atmosphere and being a thoughtful and empathic listener is the best way that a researcher can come to understand the perspective of the interview subject. Such an approach is also consistent with constructivist principles which emphasise the power that the interview subject should have over the interview and their right to a positive experience.

### Data Collection

Recording an interview on a digital recording device is the best method of capturing the data produced in an interview, but it can also change the atmosphere of the interview and can reduce the quality of the discussion. I made an assessment on a case by case basis regarding whether or not the value of having a recording supersedes the value of having written notes of a less inhibited conversation. This assessment was made on the basis of a variety of information, including how willing the interview subject was to agree to the interview, how sensitive they were to anonymity, and how likely they were to have access to privileged information. For example when I met with US officials who were extremely worried about being identifiable I did not attempt to record the encounter. For Iraqi officials who easily agreed to an interview I would usually ask to record at the start of the interview. For Iraqi officials who had been reluctant to meet, or with whom there was an uneasy rapport upon meeting I usually held off asking permission to record. In some instances where the subject subsequently relaxed into the interview, I then would say something along the lines of ‘this is all so interesting, do you mind if I record this?’ and I was usually given a positive answer.

The purpose of the qualitative interview is not simply to uncover facts, but also to discover what meanings are invested in those facts by the interview subjects. It is therefore critical to note down observations beyond the simple words that are being spoken; where is the interview taking place and why are you meeting there, what is the respondent like, how did they greet you, how have they responded to the situation, what mood are they in, how have they reacted to you and to what you have told them about yourself, what is the atmosphere like, how does the respondent react to particular questions – do any make them laugh or grimace, do they provoke anger, and do they talk louder and faster at particular points? This information gives context to and confers wider meaning upon the words that are actually spoken in an interview setting. With this in mind, writing up the interview immediately after it is completed vastly enhances the quality of the record produced. I start with a simple description of the context of the interview, where it took place, what time, how it came about and so on. Next I write up a description of my personal impressions of the interview and of the respondent, and think about how my experience may have affected my judgment of the interview.<sup>12</sup> Only then do I write up a full transcript of the interview.

### A Two-Way Street: Some Ethical Considerations

The rights of the interview subject are central to constructivist perspectives on research ethics. It is important for the researcher to recognise the humanity of the subject involved, and to appreciate what the interview subject may seek from the interview encounter. Usually the interview subject wants little more than to have their perspective attentively and respectfully listened to. Constructivism dismisses the notion that the interviewer should be an objective and detached observer of the interview subject.<sup>13</sup> From a constructivist perspective such detachment is not possible, and any attempt at achieving it renders the interview an alienating and dehumanising experience for the interview subject. Rather the interviewer should deeply engage with, and seek to appreciate the perspective of the interview subject and should react with empathy and understanding where appropriate. The richest

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<sup>12</sup> Lisa J. McIntyre, *Need to Know: Social Science Research Methods* (New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 2005) 226.

<sup>13</sup> Carol Jones, 'Qualitative Interviewing', in Graham Allan and Chris Skinner (eds.), *Handbook for Research Students in the Social Sciences* (Oxford: RoutledgeFalmer, 1991), 203-14, 203.

interviews are deeply engaging conversations, lightly steered by the researcher and otherwise guided by the thought processes and knowledge of the respondent.

Constructivist interviews are a two way process, and interview subjects can be empowered and put at ease if the interviewer is prepared to also share information about herself. This works best if the information shared is not directly relevant to the subject of the interview, so as to avoid excessively guiding the responses of the interview subject. For example, I will often discuss my experiences of learning Arabic, or discuss university life in the UK in order to put the respondent at ease and to prevent the interview process from feeling exploitative or exclusively one-way.

Eliciting the informed consent of the interview subject is a crucial prelude to every interview, especially from a constructivist perspective. With each respondent I offer a clear summary of my research, and ask for their consent, and I ask if they would prefer their interview to be anonymous. I do not automatically assume anonymity is required because a number of my interview subjects are public figures who engage in the interview because they wish to publicly divulge their views on Iraqi politics. I therefore leave the matter to the discretion of the respondents, and make a clear note of their choice both during and after the interview. All of my interview transcripts are kept in password protected documents that only I have access to. I transported the data between sensitive locations by uploading them to the university servers, where they were protected behind an encrypted firewall, and then wiping them from my laptop. Twelve months after the submission of my PhD this information will be destroyed to protect the privacy of the respondents. I have not been given, in the course of my interviews, any information that is particularly sensitive, controversial or dangerous – so I do not need to put into place any special procedures to manage that information beyond those which I have described.

### Analysing Semi-Structured Interviews

Constructivist analysis occurs iteratively: as data is collected the researcher reflects on it and allows the lessons that emerge from it to guide and reform the continued process of research. When the data collection phase is over, however, a more formal process of data analysis must begin. Constructivist data analysis methods propose that the researcher should allow the data to authentically suggest its own conclusions. This is done through a process of iterative categorisation. The

researcher reads and re-reads the research material noting down themes that emerge from the material. As themes multiply, the researcher begins to group them into sets of over-arching themes. Once a set and sub-set of themes are identified, the researcher codes every piece of data, assigning it to either one or several thematic groups. Every thought, sentiment, sentence, or even expression emergent from an interview can be assessed as an individual piece of data and can be assigned a theme.

My commitment to allowing the data to speak for itself led me to use the sophisticated qualitative research analysis software NVIVO. Confronted with a vast amount of data collected in the course of dozens of interviews, I was afraid of inadvertently imposing pre-conceived patterns or sets of conclusions onto the data in the process of trying to make sense of it. NVIVO allowed me to avoid this trap by giving me a process by which I could categorise the layers of data before me. I began by reading through all of my transcripts and tagging every sentence by analytical theme and by content. By the end of this process I had uncovered the wide range of themes, foreign policies, time periods and issues that had been embedded in this data, but had also been able to ascertain what themes most consistently came up and which issues were most repeatedly talked about. This thesis is divided up according to those themes and issues identified by the data as being most important. For example, when talking about Iraqi foreign policy in 2005 people most consistently talked about the role of Iran's Quds Force in the Iraqi civil war and how it related to the weakness of the Ja'fari government, so that became the focal point for Chapter 4. NVIVO also offered my data versatility. Because I was able to code every sentence with multiple codes, and I was able to search and cross-reference my data by code, I have been able to thoroughly integrate my data into the bedrock of this thesis – as I hope will become apparent to the reader throughout. I can search NVIVO, for example, for every instance in my data in which a Sunni political figure referred to Iraq's official policy towards Syria. This ability to cross-reference data from different sources has enabled me to gather together data from disparate interviews and, in comparing these pieces of data, has enabled me to uncover new patterns and insights.

This process of inductive data analysis allowed me to choose which foreign policy issues to deal with in this thesis. The most salient foreign relationships and foreign policy moments clearly emerged from the data and allowed me to direct my

enquiry such that it would resonate with the original interview subjects from whom my data has come. I used the codified data, along with some secondary literature, to build narratives of the foreign policy case studies that relate to each particular period of Iraqi political history since 2003. Once these narratives were constructed out of the data, I then compared the narrative to the working hypotheses that I developed in the conceptual chapter of this thesis and reflected on the extent to which these hypotheses offer explanatory value and how they might be modified to better reflect the meaning offered by the data.

Of course there is no single, straightforward narrative that emerges from the data, and assessments have to be made about which interpretations to privilege. As a constructivist I recognise that we each encounter the world steeped in our own subjectivity, and that perspectives are shaped by a variety of factors that deserve to be understood rather than dismissed. Whilst recognising the validity of this difference, however, at many points I need to make an assessment for the sake of providing a coherent narrative about which perspectives most closely represent the turn of events. At such moments I turn to triangulation, the method by which uncertain facts are verified with reference to three separate sources, in order to determine which narrative to privilege. The process of triangulation enables me to avoid falling into the trap of privileging accounts given by people whom I particularly identified with or liked; as Jeffrey Berry warns, it is easy to give disproportionate credence to the accounts of respondents who were likable, who shared the same political position as the researcher, who seemed to offer a lot of detail in their accounts and who appeared to go out of their way ‘not to give you the party-line.’<sup>14</sup> I also keep note of a range of information about an interview subject, such as their political, religious, geographic or class-based affiliations, that may have influenced their particular perspective, and try to take those into account without distorting or belittling their point of view.

Lastly, I am constantly aware of my own subjectivity and try to control for the biases that inevitably emerge from being situated in a particular social and cultural context. As Brian Fay writes, ‘Don’t hide behind an illusory facade of neutrality to convince yourself or others that you are objective.’<sup>15</sup> I have had to

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<sup>14</sup> Berry, 'Validity and Reliability Issues in Elite Interviewing', 680.

<sup>15</sup> Brian Fay, *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science: A Multicultural Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996) 224.

guard, for instance, against privileging the data generated by respondents who happen to speak good English, who have strong links with the UK and who are very easy to establish a rapport with. But by being reflexive and aware of these influences, I go some way to reducing their impact on my data analysis process.

## Conclusion

This study takes as its starting position the notion that human interpretation is at the heart of knowledge about social realities, and that it is only by bringing humanity to the research process that we can begin to understand the truths that we seek. The constructivist methodology grounds this study in an appreciation of the multiplicity of narratives, the importance of social construction and the inevitability of subjectivity. The research methods based on this approach include sensitive, responsive and ethical qualitative interviews which produce data that the researcher allows to speak for itself. Categories iteratively emerge from the data, and it is only then that the tentative working hypotheses that guide this study enter into dialogue with the data, and conclusions about their utility are reached.

## CHAPTER THREE: IRAQ OCCUPIED

### Introduction

This chapter defines Iraq as effectively occupied during 2003 and 2004, when virtually all political and military power lay in the hands of the American led administration. In the context of this occupation, this chapter explores Iraq's relationships with neighbouring countries, Iran and Syria, and with the wider Arab world and argues that the antipathy towards Iraq was a way in which disgruntled regional countries could punish the US. The fact of the invasion and the manner in which it was conducted was widely seen as threatening in the region, and by refusing to accept the new status quo in Iraq regional countries registered their disapproval and sought to prevent further US adventurism in the region. This dynamic leads me to conclude that the weak state framework is not ideal for assessing the foreign policies of an occupied state, because of the level of influence that the occupying country has over these relations and because of the need to take into account internal dynamics in the occupying country. This chapter concludes by looking at the activities of Iraq's non-elected transitional government and argues that, although this government was active in reaching out to establish relationships with neighbouring countries, their efforts were undercut by continued US dominance in Iraq.

Part of the social contract tradition asserts that normative legitimacy must be grounded in states having acquired power 'in conformity with either custom or law,'<sup>1</sup> and the literature on state legitimacy in Africa concurs that a state is only normatively legitimate when 'its structures evolved endogenously to its own society and there is some level of historical continuity to its institutions.'<sup>2</sup> The sudden invasion of Iraq by coalition forces, the total demolition of Iraqi state structures, and the establishment of an entirely foreign-run, and barely Arabic-speaking administration in Baghdad offered Iraqis little by way of 'continuity' with existing modes of governance. The fact of the invasion was regarded with deep suspicion by many Iraqis who had little reason to trust the Americans after a decade of US-led

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Swanson, *The Social Contract Tradition and the Question of Political Legitimacy* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001) 11.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre Englebert, *State Legitimacy and Development in Africa* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2000) 4.

sanctions had devastated the Iraqi economy and public infrastructure. Many suspected that the Americans were in Iraq in pursuit of their own economic or political interests, and both Sunnis and Shi'ites tended to view the coalition forces 'as occupiers, although Shi'ites also saw the intervention as an opportunity to seize power in Baghdad.'<sup>3</sup>

The manner in which the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) was established, and its character as a foreign administration, prevented it from establishing normative legitimacy amongst the Iraqi population. The CPA's inability to operate effectively also meant that it failed to establish the functional legitimacy that it could have achieved had it fulfilled the needs and expectations of the Iraqi public. Iraqis had extremely high expectations of what the CPA would be able to achieve in its first few months, but, as extensive accounts demonstrate,<sup>4</sup> the CPA was a model of bureaucratic incompetence and few improvements were seen in public goods provisions during its tenure. A May 2004 poll found just 24% of Iraqis had confidence in US/UK occupation forces, and over half said that life was better under Saddam.<sup>5</sup>

Although it is a loaded term, it is useful to characterise Iraq as effectively occupied in this period because it was governed and administered almost exclusively by foreign forces.<sup>6</sup> Iraq temporarily became an extension of the US,<sup>7</sup> and non-Iraq focused US foreign policy would begin to have a direct impact on Iraqi domestic life. In something of an inversion of the working hypothesis that framed this thesis

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<sup>3</sup> Laïdi, *Limited Achievements: Obama's Foreign Policy*, 81.

<sup>4</sup> See Chandrasekaran, *Imperial Life in the Emerald City: Inside Iraq's Green Zone*. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*. Diamond, *Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq*.

<sup>5</sup> Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, 115.

<sup>6</sup> Although there is a strong argument for defining Iraq as an occupied state in 2003 and 2004, it is very difficult to ascertain at what point Iraq ceased to be occupied. Even when formal-legal sovereignty was handed over to the Iraqis, the US maintained an inordinate amount of control and influence over the Iraqi state, particularly in the realm of security and defense. In formal-legal terms Iraq regained its sovereignty in June 2004 when Paul Bremer, head of the CPA, handed over to an unelected Iraqi transitional government led by Ayad Allawi, in accordance with UN resolution 1546. This thesis would argue that a real shift in Iraqi sovereignty occurred in January 2005, when the Iraqis elected their first post-invasion government. At this point, despite continued US domination of the security sector, elected Iraqis were in the position of governing the country. Although this does not mean that Iraq was fully sovereign at this point, I would argue that it could no longer be considered 'occupied' either.

<sup>7</sup> A number of commentators referred, usually mockingly, to Iraq as the 51<sup>st</sup> State in a bid to point out the level of responsibility for Iraq's reconstruction that the US had taken on by invading the country. Thomas Friedman, 'Our New Baby', *The New York Times*, 4th May 2003. Matthew Engel, 'Iraq, the 51st State', *The Guardian*, 19th March 2003. James Fallows, 'The Fifty-first State?', *The Atlantic*, (1st November 2002).



(that state weakness undermines foreign policy), US foreign policy undermined the normative and functional legitimacy of the Iraqi state. Threats issued by the US to Iraq's neighbours led regional states to support growing internal violence in Iraq, which in turn further undermined the normative and functional legitimacy of the CPA and subsequent Iraqi governments. The first part of this chapter, therefore, focuses on the impact that US threats towards Iran, Syria and Hezbollah had on these states' financing, equipping, and supporting of the early violent 'resistance' movement in Iraq. It goes on to discuss how the bullish approach of America's neoconservative government alienated governments in the wider Arab world, leading to a normative environment that strongly rejected the invasion and supported the 'resistance.'

The second part of this chapter will examine foreign policy making following the disbandment of the CPA and the appointment of an Iraqi caretaker government led by Prime Minister Ayad Allawi. Though the formal governing institutions of the foreign powers had been dismantled, the Iraqi government could not act independently, and its foreign policy on controversial issues was heavily constrained by the continued presence of foreign forces. A top-level comparison could be ventured here with the recently decolonised states in 1960s Africa, where 'African elites had only tenuous control over the postcolonial states, [whilst] external actors, particularly the former colonial powers, retained considerable influence over most facets of African life.'<sup>8</sup> Though Iraqis had been given formal control of state institutions, they had no armed forces at their disposal, and so were unable to perform the most fundamental function of the state, which is to provide security to its citizens. For this they were wholly dependent on foreign forces, in addition to being dependent on them for the resources and expertise that they needed to re-establish the ministries and institutions that had been devastated by sanctions and subsequent war. The caretaker government, therefore, had little normative or functional legitimacy and was extremely limited in its ability to project foreign policy.

## Provoking Regional Enmity towards the New Iraq

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<sup>8</sup> Khadiagala and Lyons, 'Foreign Policy Making in Africa: An Introduction', 3.

The proposed invasion of Iraq was not popular with the region's elites. It was the American rhetoric surrounding the build-up to war, however, that led regional powers to perceive the invasion as a potential threat to their own security. The war in Iraq was characterised as part of the ill-defined and ever-expanding 'war on terror,' and was cast as part of a grand scheme to re-make the Middle East.<sup>9</sup> The pronouncements of President George W. Bush and his neoconservative coterie were unpleasant listening for many of the autocratic powers in the Middle East, but for America's declared enemies, Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah, it constituted a credible and imminent threat to their national security.

This threat was heightened by the enshrining of the principle of pre-emptive war in US foreign policy. The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, published in June 2002, stated: 'Given the goals of rogue states and terrorists, the United States can no longer solely rely on a reactive posture as we have in the past.'<sup>10</sup> The US had already declared Syria and Iran to be rogue states<sup>11</sup> and Hezbollah to be a terrorist organisation,<sup>12</sup> and was now publicly stating that such actors would be considered fair game for a pre-emptive strike.

For Iran, Syria and Hezbollah, therefore, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq marked a re-orientation of American national security goals and tactics in a way that directly threatened their survival.<sup>13</sup> These actors would go on to be at the root of

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<sup>9</sup> That President George W. Bush saw the invasion of Iraq as a harbinger of further democratic change in the Middle East was clear in many of his speeches. In a speech to the National Endowment for Democracy in November 2003, President Bush said: 'Are the peoples of the Middle East beyond the reach of liberty?...I, for one, do not believe it...The establishment of a free Iraq at the heart of the Middle East will be a watershed event in the global democratic revolution.' George W. Bush, 'Remarks by President George W. Bush at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy', <<http://www.ned.org/george-w-bush/remarks-by-president-george-w-bush-at-the-20th-anniversary>>, accessed 31st July 2013.

In a speech to the United Nations in 2004 President Bush said: 'For too long, many nations, including my own, tolerated, even excused, oppression in the Middle East in the name of stability... We must take a different approach.' George W. Bush, 'Address to the United Nations', <<http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/09.21.04.html>>, accessed 31st July 2013.

<sup>10</sup> The White House, 'The National Security Strategy of the United States of America'.

<sup>11</sup> Iran was labelled part of the 'axis of evil' along with Iraq and North Korea in President Bush's State of the Union address in January 2002. George W. Bush, 'State of the Union Address', <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/onpolitics/transcripts/sou012902.htm>>, accessed 31st July 2013. The administration expanded the membership of the 'axis of evil' later that year, adding Syria, Libya and Cuba. *BBC*, 'U.S. Expands "Axis of Evil"' (6th May 2002).

<sup>12</sup> Hezbollah was designated a terrorist organization by the US Secretary of State on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1997. US Department of State, 'Foreign Terrorist Organizations', <<http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>>, accessed 31st July 2013.

<sup>13</sup> The Commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard cautioned that unless Iran and the Islamic World took on the US, 'one after another we will fall prey to U.S. aggression.' Cited in Mohsen M. Milani, 'Iran's Strategic Objectives in Post-Saddam Iraq', in Henri J. Barkey, Scott B. Lasensky, and

some of the earliest security challenges faced by the post-Saddam Iraqi state, challenges which would seriously damage the domestic legitimacy of the CPA and subsequent Iraqi governments. For Syria, Iran and Hezbollah, deterring future American adventures in the region by making the occupation of Iraq as difficult, demoralizing and costly as possible became an essential part of ensuring their own national security.

## Syria

Syria was shaken by the US invasion of Iraq, and for the next few years geared its foreign policy towards undermining the US position in Iraq and forestalling the possibility of the US invading Syria. Fearful of the consequences of openly defying US authority in Iraq, Syria pursued a twin track approach, periodically co-operating with the Americans to raid terrorist cells in Syria, yet subsequently easing restrictions on the movement of such fighters.<sup>14</sup> But there was little doubt that Syria's policy was to bring about the failure of the US project in Iraq. On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2003 Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq al-Sharra stated that, 'Syria's interest is to see the invaders defeated in Iraq,' and went on to commend Iraqis for their 'heroic resistance to the US-British occupation of their country.'<sup>15</sup> In an interview with the Lebanese news website al-Safir, President Bashar al-Assad went further and insinuated that the Syrians were preparing to respond to any US aggression towards Syria. President Assad answered the question: 'Does Syria feel threatened by this war [in Iraq]?' by saying; 'as long as there is aggression against an Arab country and as long as there is war on our border, the danger exists...But worry does not mean fear, it means preparing for the confrontation.'<sup>16</sup>

For the Syrian government the primary weapon in 'preparing for confrontation' was ensuring that the US became so mired in the conflict in Iraq that it would not be able to countenance further offensive action against neighbouring states. To this end the Syrian government allowed the operation of extensive militant jihadist networks across the Syrian-Iraqi border and enabled the smuggling of military equipment across the border. A Department of Defense Report to Congress

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Phebe Marr (eds.), *Iraq, Its Neighbors, and the United States: Competition, Crisis and the Reordering of Power* (Washington D.C., 2011), 73-97, 80.

<sup>14</sup> Raymond A. Hinnebusch, 'Syria: Defying the Hegemon', in Rick Fawn and Raymond A. Hinnebusch (eds.), *The Iraq War: Causes and Consequences* (2006) 133.

<sup>15</sup> Liz Sly, 'Syria Stands with Iraq against United States', *Chicago Tribune*, 1st April 2003.

<sup>16</sup> *Al-Safir*, 'Interview with President Bashar al-Assad' (31st March 2003).

summarised the Syrian position thus: ‘Syria continues to provide safe haven, border transit, and limited logistical support to some Iraqi insurgents...Syria remains the primary foreign fighter gateway into Iraq.’<sup>17</sup> The report went on to acknowledge that the Syrian government supported such groups because they ‘share Syria’s desire to undermine coalition efforts in Iraq.’<sup>18</sup> Syria wasted no time in implementing this policy, beginning before the war started, and quickly escalating in the early days of the conflict. In testimony before the House Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia, Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security John Bolton said that ‘Syria allowed military equipment to flow into Iraq on the eve of and during the war. Syria permitted volunteers to pass into Iraq to attack and kill our service members during the war and is still doing so.’<sup>19</sup> Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld further declared that ‘busloads’ of Syrian fighters had crossed into Iraq with ‘hundreds of thousands of dollars,’ offering rewards for the killing of American soldiers.<sup>20</sup> It was even alleged that President Assad tried to incite a full-scale rebellion in Iraq, passing a secret message to Iraq’s Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Husyani al-Sistani asking him to ‘issue a fatwa calling for a jihad against the Coalition.’<sup>21</sup> Caution must be exercised when it comes to some of these claims. It was, after all, in the interests of the Coalition to depict the Iraqi insurgency as a problem of foreign imposed terror, rather than as an indigenous rejection of the US occupation. It is also difficult to ascertain the extent to which the Syrian government was directly involved in the activities of militants crossing its border; for example, allegations that its secret service passed equipment directly to anti-coalition fighters cannot be conclusively substantiated,<sup>22</sup> but what is clear is that at the very least the Syrian government allowed such groups to operate in its territory and over the border.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Department of Defense, 'Report to Congress: Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq', (March 2007) 17.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> John Bolton, 'Syria: Implications for U.S. Security and Regional Stability', *Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives* (First Session: 108th Congress, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> 'Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act', (2003). Sect. 2:32.

<sup>21</sup> L. Paul Bremer, *My Year in Iraq* (New York: Simon & Schuster) 198.

<sup>22</sup> Loretta Napoleoni, *Insurgent Iraq: Al Zarqawi and the New Generation* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005) 131.

<sup>23</sup> Anthony Cordesman, *Iraqi Security Forces: A Strategy for Success* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2006) 291.

The US was furious about allegations of Syrian complicity in the transfer of fighters and military equipment into Iraq, but its harsh response served only to harden the Syrian position. On 29<sup>th</sup> March 2003, only 9 days after the start of the US invasion, Secretary Rumsfeld lashed out at the Syrians for shipping military supplies into Iraq and warned that the US considered such activity to constitute ‘hostile acts’ and that it would ‘hold the Syrian government responsible.’<sup>24</sup> The charges were hotly denied by the Syrians as ‘unfounded’ and ‘irresponsible.’<sup>25</sup> Almost immediately after securing military victory in Iraq, the US administration moved to penalise Syria by cutting off an oil pipeline from Iraq to Syria,<sup>26</sup> reducing Syria’s oil exports by 20-30%<sup>27</sup> and depriving the country of crucial revenue. The US Congress turned its fury at Syrian defiance into law, introducing the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Restoration Bill on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2003. The Act, which was signed into law in December 2003, lambasted Syria as a state sponsor of terrorism, occupier of Lebanese land, and supporter of aggression against Israel. Echoing the claims that led the US to war against Iraq, the Act further warned that the Syrian government was ‘pursuing the development and production of biological and chemical weapons and has a nuclear research and development program.’<sup>28</sup> The Act declared that it was the policy of the US to prevent Syria’s acquisition of such weapons, and promised to hold it accountable for any harm that should come to coalition troops as a consequence of Syrian facilitation.<sup>29</sup> On the basis of this law, President Bush enacted new sanctions against Syria in May 2004, banning the export of US products apart from medicine and food to Syria, cutting ties with the Syrian Commercial Bank, and freezing the assets of those suspected of having links with terrorists.<sup>30</sup>

The escalating rhetoric from the US in the early days of the invasion served only to substantiate President Assad’s fears that American success in Iraq would be fatal for Syria, and the Syrian government began to lobby for an early American

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<sup>24</sup> Peter Spiegel, 'U.S. issues a warning to Syria', *Financial Times*, 29th March 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> David Sanger and Thom Shanker, 'Bush Says Regime in Iraq is No More; Syria is Penalized', *The New York Times*, 16 April 2003.

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Lloyd, 'Syria - Syrian Crude Exports for May Down at 280,000 bpd ', *WMRC Daily Analysis*, 30th April 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Congress, 'Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act'. Sect. 2:19.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Sect. 4:2,8.

<sup>30</sup> CNN, 'U.S. Hits Syria With Sanctions',

<<http://edition.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/meast/05/11/us.syria/>>, accessed 1st August 2013.

withdrawal and UN takeover of the Iraqi transitional process. In September 2003 Syria declared that it would even be willing to send peacekeeping troops to Iraq if the UN took control of the situation and US forces were given a timetable for withdrawal.<sup>31</sup> As fears grew of an intensification of the animosity between Syria and the US, the UN and the UK began to weigh in to try to dampen the rhetoric. British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw insisted that Syria was not being considered for pre-emptive military action and that ‘there is no plan for Syria to be on the list.’<sup>32</sup> Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the UN, meanwhile chastised the US for its careering war of words, saying that he was ‘concerned that recent statements directed at Syria should not contribute to a wider destabilisation in a region already heavily affected by the war in Iraq.’<sup>33</sup>

## Iran

The US relationship with the Islamic Republic of Iran has long been mediated through a ‘wall of mistrust.’<sup>34</sup> The US has had no formal diplomatic relations with Iran since they were severed in the aftermath of the hostage crisis in 1980,<sup>35</sup> sanctions on US-Iranian activity have been in place since 1979 (although they have been recently eased due to the early successes of the P5+1 Joint Plan of Action with Iran)<sup>36</sup> and Iran is often considered one of the countries that poses the greatest threat to American national security. Despite the election of reformist Mohammad Khatami to the Iranian Presidency in 1997, overtures made by both the Iranians and the Americans failed to overcome the deep-rooted bias against rapprochement in both political systems and little progress was made in transforming the relationship.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Nicholas Blanford, 'Syria Offers to Help Police Iraq - But Only if the U.N. Runs the Show', *Daily Star*, 22nd September 2003.

<sup>32</sup> Marc Burleigh, 'Britain joins US in accusing Syria of cooperating with Saddam', *Agence France-Presse*, 14th April 2003.

<sup>33</sup> Tony Walker, 'U.S Threats Whip Up Arab Fury', *The Australian Financial Review*, 16th April 2003.

<sup>34</sup> Iranian President Mohammed Khatami famously referred to there being a ‘crack in the wall of mistrust’ between the US and the Iranians in a historic interview with CNN’s Christiane Amanpour. CNN, 'Khatami suggests warmer relations with U.S.', <<http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9801/07/iran/>>, accessed 5th August 2013.

<sup>35</sup> US State Department, 'US Relations With Iran', <<http://www.state.gov/t/pa/ei/bgn/5314.htm>>, accessed 3rd August 2013.

<sup>36</sup> US Department of State, 'Iran Sanctions', <<http://www.state.gov/e/eb/tfs/spi/iran/index.htm>>, accessed 27th January 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) 206.

Everything changed after the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001. The Iranians, who had been supporting anti-Taliban groups in Afghanistan for much of the previous decade, were keen to remove the Taliban and to restart a dialogue with the US. Iran offered the Americans extraordinary strategic value in Afghanistan, supplying them with intelligence, connecting them with local partners, and brokering a new political settlement in the country.<sup>38</sup> US-Iranian collaboration in Afghanistan, however, caused more than a little consternation on the part of the Israeli government and neo-conservative elements of the US administration. Furious lobbying ensued not only to prevent further Iranian-US dialogue but also to label Iran as a state sponsor of terror and as such a legitimate target in the ongoing 'war on terror.'<sup>39</sup> In his State of the Union address in January 2002, President Bush signalled the shift of his administration away from tacit co-operation with Iran towards outright hostility. The speech declared that the US knew Iran's 'true nature' as an unelected and repressive regime, aggressive pursuer of weapons of mass destruction and exporter of terror, and declared its intention to prevent Iran and the other members of the 'axis of evil' from threatening the US and its allies.<sup>40</sup>

The Iranians were shocked by this turnaround, and President Khatami's conciliatory approach was widely discredited – yielding political ground to hard-liners who would eventually win Iran's next parliamentary election. As momentum towards the invasion of Iraq gathered, neoconservative influencers and the Israeli government urged the Bush administration to make Iran its next target. In an interview with *The Times* newspaper in November 2002, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said that Iran, as the 'centre of world terror,' should be targeted 'the day after' the culmination of the war in Iraq.<sup>41</sup> The bombastic rhetoric around the invasion of Iraq convinced the Iranians that they were facing a real risk of invasion, and as coalition forces raced to victory in just three weeks the Iranians scrambled to save themselves. In May 2003 the Iranians offered to give up all strategic assets – Hezbollah, Hamas, its nuclear programme, its opposition to the Arab League Peace

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<sup>38</sup>Barnett R. Rubin, 'The U.S. and Iran in Afghanistan: Policy Gone Awry', *The Audit of Conventional Wisdom*, (2008). Milani, 'Iran's Strategic Objectives in Post-Saddam Iraq', 7. Barton Gellman and Dafna Linzer, 'Afghanistan, Iraq: Two Wars Collide', *The Washington Post*, 22nd October 2004. James Dobbins, 'The Washington Post', *Time to Deal With Iran*, 6th May 2004.

<sup>39</sup>Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy: Resisting the New International Order* (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2010) 58-59. Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 231-32.

<sup>40</sup> Bush, 'State of the Union Address'.

<sup>41</sup> Stephen Farrell, Danielle Haas, and Robert Thomson, 'Target Iran the Day Iraq War Ends, Demands Israel', *The Times*, 5th November 2002.

Plan – in return for an end to US hostile action towards Iran.<sup>42</sup> It was an unprecedented peace deal, but the Americans, intoxicated with their apparent success in Iraq, rebuffed the advance.<sup>43</sup>

The US had well and truly set the stage for the Iranian belligerence that was to cripple Iraq in the years ahead. Iran had been convinced that it was to be imminently targeted in a military operation aimed at regime change and simultaneously told that no peace offer – no matter how comprehensive – could halt a US offensive. The Iranians realised that undermining the US inside Iraq was the best and perhaps only option for ensuring its own national security. Iran would go on to play a crucial role in fuelling the Iraqi civil war between 2005 and 2007, and this will be dealt with in chapter five, but in 2003 the Iranians were more cautious.<sup>44</sup> Fearful of US retaliation, Iran started by strengthening its already impressive array of allies, both within and outside of Iraq's formal political and religious structures, and by laying the groundwork for violent action against the US.<sup>45</sup> Gradually as the Iranians gained confidence, they began funnelling significant financial aid and military equipment to Iraqi insurgents. Evidence emerged that the deadly improvised explosive devices, which were fast becoming a hallmark of the anti-US insurgency,<sup>46</sup> were manufactured in Iran, and as anti-coalition violence increased, evidence of Iranian sponsorship snowballed. As for co-operating with the US in Iraq, as it had in Afghanistan, it seemed Iran had no intention of 'making the same mistake twice.'<sup>47</sup>

## Hezbollah

Hezbollah has long had pariah status in the US, and in the aftermath of 9/11 a cacophony of voices called for its destruction. Associated with the 1983 bombing of a US marine corps barracks in Lebanon that killed 241 Americans and precipitated

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<sup>42</sup> Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy: Resisting the New International Order*, 61-62.

<sup>43</sup> Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 248.

<sup>44</sup> It was reported that Iran was actually preventing Hezbollah from attacking US forces inside Iraq in the early days after the invasion. James Risen, 'A Region Inflamed: The Hand of Tehran; Hezbollah in Iraq; Refrains from Attacks on Americans', *The New York Times*, 24th November 2003. Daniel Byman, 'Should Hezbollah Be Next?', *Foreign Affairs*, 826 (2003), 54-66, 62.

<sup>45</sup> Milani, 'Iran's Strategic Objectives in Post-Saddam Iraq', 81, 90.

<sup>46</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 153.

<sup>47</sup> Words used by former Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mahmoud Vaezi in an interview on this subject with the International Crisis Group in October 2004. International Crisis Group, 'Iran in Iraq: How Much Influence', (Middle East Report No. 38, March 2005) 9.



the withdrawal of US forces from Lebanon, Hezbollah's meteoric rise as principal resister to the Israeli occupation of Lebanon was bitterly watched by the US. On 20<sup>th</sup> September 2001, 41 leading conservatives published an open letter to President George W. Bush labelling Hezbollah 'one of the leading terrorist organisations in the world' and stating that 'any war against terrorism must target Hezbollah',<sup>48</sup> whilst Secretary of State Colin Powell declared Hezbollah 'a threat to the region.'<sup>49</sup> By November 2001 Hezbollah had been put on the list of terrorist organisations subject to a stringent executive order that authorised the US to freeze, block and disrupt their financial assets and transactions.<sup>50</sup>

Much of the anger directed at Syria and Iran in the months after 9/11 focused on the financial, military and logistical support they offered Hezbollah. Hezbollah was often depicted as little more than a proxy, and its actions were read as a barometer of the attitudes of their two powerful backers.<sup>51</sup> Most of the pressure that Hezbollah faced, therefore, was indirect and took the form of US demands on Syria, Iran and the Lebanese government to desist supporting them and to deny them sanctuary.<sup>52</sup> In 2002, for example, US officials declared that, after al-Qaeda, Hezbollah was next on its list and demanded that the Lebanese government hand over three Hezbollah members accused of terrorist acts against the US.<sup>53</sup>

For Hezbollah the invasion of Iraq was both an affront to its anti-Western liberationist ideology<sup>54</sup> and represented an existential threat to the militant group. If the US found easy success in Iraq there was a very real risk that Hezbollah would either be directly targeted, or that its sources of financial, military, and political

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<sup>48</sup> Project for the New American Century, 'Letter to President Bush on the War on Terrorism', <<http://www.newamericancentury.org/Bushletter.htm>>, accessed 7th August 2013.

<sup>49</sup> CNN, 'C.N.N Late Edition with Wolf Blitzer', <<http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0109/16/le.00.html>>7th August 2012.

<sup>50</sup> *Associated Press*, 'More Terrorist Organizations Subject to Having Financial Assets Blocked' (2nd November 2001).

<sup>51</sup> This is a shallow interpretation of Hezbollah which, though it is certainly a beneficiary of extensive Iranian and Syrian support, has a strong local constituency and substantial amount of autonomy.

<sup>52</sup> The Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act which was passed by the US Congress in December 2003 referred to Hezbollah with the prefix 'Syria and Iranian backed' and exhorted Iran and Syria to abandon support for the group on penalty of US sanctions. Congress, 'Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act'.

<sup>53</sup> *Al-Bawa News*, 'Nasrallah Says Hizbollah Not Afraid of the U.S.' (16th January 2002).

<sup>54</sup> In a speech on al-Manar, Nasrallah depicted the bombing of the US marine barracks in 1983 as part of a policy continuum with its forthcoming struggle against the Americans in Iraq. In a provocative statement referring to the 1983 bombings, he said: 'In the past when the Marines were in Beirut, we screamed, 'Death to America!.' 'Today, when the region is being filled with hundreds of thousands of American soldiers, 'Death to America!' was, is, and will stay our slogan.' Josh Meyer, 'Hezbollah Saber-Rattling Gets Administration's Attention', *Los Angeles Times*, 20th April 2003.

support in Syria and Iran would be cut off. As mentioned above, Iran was so nervous about being subjected to an attack after the fall of Baghdad that it even offered the US a peace deal that included abandoning its support for Hezbollah.<sup>55</sup> Thus Hezbollah became yet another regional actor invested in the failure of the coalition efforts in Iraq. During the invasion, Hezbollah's Secretary General gave an incendiary speech on the party's TV channel al-Manar declaring that 'the people of the region will receive [America] with rifles, blood, arms, martyrdom and martyrdom operations.'<sup>56</sup> Reports surfaced in 2004 and 2005 that Hezbollah had opened offices in Iraq<sup>57</sup> and had begun funnelling Iranian funds and military equipment to Shi'ite militant groups inside Iraq.<sup>58</sup> It was soon clear that Hezbollah had been training Shi'ite militants in camps both in Lebanon and in Iran,<sup>59</sup> and that the Mahdi Army, the most dangerous Shi'ite opponents of the coalition forces in Iraq, had largely modelled themselves on Hezbollah.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 248.

<sup>56</sup> Meyer, 'Hezbollah Saber-Rattling Gets Administration's Attention'.

<sup>57</sup> *The Washington Times*, 'Hezbollah, Hamas Offices Reported in Iraq' (30th March 2004), Risen, 'A Region Inflamed: The Hand of Tehran; Hezbollah in Iraq; Refrains from Attacks on Americans'.

<sup>58</sup> Peter Goodspeed, 'Iranians have been meddling' in Iraq: Suspicions Grow that Hezbollah is behind Shiite insurgency', *National Post*, 2004. Milani, 'Iran's Strategic Objectives in Post-Saddam Iraq', 91. Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 155.

<sup>59</sup> Michael R. Gordon and Dexter Filkins, 'Hezbollah Said to Help Shiite Army', *The New York Times*, 2006. Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 154.

<sup>60</sup> James A. Baker and Lee H. Hamilton, 'The Iraq Study Group Report', (2006) 17.

## The Arab World

Even for those countries long considered friends and allies of the US, the unilateral and jingoistic lead-up to the invasion was a deeply alienating experience that gave regimes little incentive to squander political capital by backing the endeavour. Much of the rhetoric that preceded the invasion celebrated the start of a new era of American interventionism that would bring freedom to the people of the Middle East. In one particularly undiplomatic speech, former CIA director James Woolsey said that by invading Iraq the US would 'scare' the 'Mubarak regime, or the Saudi royal family' and that such regimes were right to be scared, because the US is 'on the march' and planned to be 'on the side' not of its allies but rather on the 'side' of the oppressed people of such countries.<sup>61</sup> Needless to say, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, two of America's strongest partners in the region, were outraged by such direct attacks on their regimes. Even at the highest levels of government, officials were constantly insinuating that Iraq was only the first piece of the puzzle, and that the Iraq project was an opportunity for the US to transform the region. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, for example, confidently stated that the war in Iraq would 'cast a very large shadow...across the whole Arab world,'<sup>62</sup> whilst President Bush said that a free Iraq would 'show the power of freedom to transform that vital region.'<sup>63</sup>

The idea that invading Iraq would embolden the US in its dealings with its autocratic allies in the region, or that it might abandon its support for them altogether, was profoundly troubling and caused a great deal of consternation in regional capitals.<sup>64</sup> There was also a concern that the US had no idea what it was getting itself into, and resentment – particularly on the part of Iraq's neighbours – that they had not been consulted or that their advice was not being taken into account in America's hasty build up to war.<sup>65</sup> Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud

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<sup>61</sup> James Woolsey, 'America, Iraq and the War on Terrorism', <<http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/175909-1>>, accessed 10th August 2013.

<sup>62</sup> Bill Keller, 'The Sunshine Warrior', *New York Times Magazine*, 22nd September 2002.

<sup>63</sup> *The Guardian*, 'Full text: George Bush's speech to the American Enterprise Institute' (2003).

<sup>64</sup> As Jon Alterman notes, US rhetoric ensured that the war would be considered threatening by both US foes and allies alike. Jon B. Alterman, 'Not in My Backyard: Iraq's Neighbor's Interests', *The Washington Quarterly*, 263 (2003), 149-60, 149.

<sup>65</sup> Qatar's foreign minister, for example, regularly complained that the US failed to consult its regional allies about its plans in Iraq. Jon B. Alterman, 'Iraq and the Gulf States: The Balance of Fear', *Iraq and Its Neighbors* (Special Report 189; Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2007) 8.

al-Faisal cautioned against the war in Iraq, arguing that the US would simply be ‘solving one problem and creating five more,’<sup>66</sup> and King Abdullah of Jordan declared the proposed war to be a ‘tremendous mistake’ that would ‘throw the whole area into turmoil.’<sup>67</sup> Iraq’s neighbours were not necessarily opposed to the removal of Saddam Hussein; the Saudis were long keen on a covert operation to remove him in a military coup.<sup>68</sup> But the idea of a unilateral invasion, unsanctioned by the UN, as part of the neoconservative narrative to ‘fix’ the region felt a very uncomfortable solution.

Once it became absolutely certain that the US was going to invade regardless of regional opinion, calculations had to be made about how best to avoid alienating the US at the same time as appeasing Arab public opinion, which was furiously anti-war. Most of America’s regional allies walked the ‘tightrope’<sup>69</sup> by discreetly allowing the US access to the facilities they needed whilst at the same time loudly denouncing the war. In Saudi Arabia, where the vast majority of the population opposed any association with the US invasion,<sup>70</sup> the government allowed US special forces to launch into Iraq from Saudi airstrips,<sup>71</sup> but in public Crown Prince Abdullah referred to the ‘illegal occupation of Iraq’<sup>72</sup> as a ‘reckless’ mistake. Hosni Mubarak, President of Egypt, declared his government had done ‘all we could to avoid war’ which he believed would ‘unleash a hundred Osama Bin Ladens,’ but nevertheless allowed coalition ships to use the Suez Canal.<sup>73</sup> Jordan, Qatar and the

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<sup>66</sup> Nawaf Obaid, 'Stepping into Iraq', *The Washington Post*, 2006.

<sup>67</sup> Glenn Kessler and Peter Slevin, 'Abdullah: Foreign Leaders Oppose Attack; Jordanian King to Urge Bush to Focus on Peace in Mideast, Not Invasion of Iraq', *The Washington Post*, 1st August 2002.

<sup>68</sup> Days before the US invasion Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Abdullah was still trying to convince the US that overthrowing Saddam Hussein covertly was preferable to all out war. Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004) 347.

<sup>69</sup> Jordanian Prime Minister Abdul Raghed said that Jordan would not allow the US to use Jordan as a base from which to conduct attacks against Iraq, stating that ‘The U.S. knows we are walking a very tight rope here.’ The US did launch attacks against Iraq from Jordan in the end. Neil Quilliam, 'Jordan: Appeasing the Hegemon', in Rick Fawn and Raymond A. Hinnebusch (eds.), *The Iraq War: Causes and Consequences* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2006), 143-51, 144.

<sup>70</sup> David Aufhauser et al., 'Saudi Arabia: Enemy or Friend?', *Thirty-Fifth Conference Convened by the Middle East Policy Council, Capitol Hill* (2004) 19.

<sup>71</sup> Simon Henderson, 'Saudi Arabia: The Nightmare of Iraq', in David Pollock (ed.), *With Neighbors Like These: Iraq and the Arab States on Its Borders* (Washington D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2007), 33-40, 34. Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 381.

<sup>72</sup> Madawi al-Rasheed, 'Saudi Arabia: The Challenge of the US Invasion of Iraq', in Rick Fawn and Raymond A. Hinnebusch (eds.), *The Iraq War: Causes and Consequences* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2006), 153-61, 156. Henderson, 'Saudi Arabia: The Nightmare of Iraq', 34.

<sup>73</sup> Alison Pargeter, 'Symbols and Slogans, Arab Responses to the War Against Iraq', in Paul Cornish (ed.), *The Conflict in Iraq 2003* (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2004), 214-31, 218-9.

UAE all similarly offered the US at least some of the access it demanded despite being officially against the war.<sup>74</sup>

Although the Arab world was largely quiescent when it came to US military demands, this did not translate into them embracing America's political vision for the new Iraq.<sup>75</sup> In many of the region's governments there was at best a sullen indifference towards the US political project in Iraq, and at worst a desire to see the experiment fail. A number of religious figures throughout the Arab world, but particularly in Saudi Arabia, called on the Iraqi people to wage jihad against the occupying forces, and some even began to incite anti-Shi'ite violence. In an open letter twenty-six Saudi clerics declared that 'jihad against the occupation was mandatory for those who were able,'<sup>76</sup> and Syria's pre-eminent religious figure, Sheikh Ahmad Kafaro, called 'on Muslims everywhere to use all means possible to thwart the aggression, including martyr operations against the belligerent American, British and Zionist invaders.'<sup>77</sup> Abdullah bin Jibrin, a former member of Saudi Arabia's Council of Senior Ulama, declared war on Iraq's Shi'ites, whilst senior scholar Abd al-Rahman al-Barrak pronounced that Shi'ites had left the Islamic faith.<sup>78</sup> Regional governments did very little to prevent such incitements to violence in Iraq; Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak even joined the fray proclaiming on satellite TV that Shi'ites were 'mostly loyal to Iran and not to the countries where they live.'<sup>79</sup> Even more troubling, regional countries failed to prevent their citizens from joining the insurgency in Iraq; an estimated 1,500 Saudi citizens travelled to Iraq to fight,<sup>80</sup> many of them supported by wealthy benefactors back home,<sup>81</sup> whilst Jordanian radical Abu Musab al-Zarqawi introduced the incitement of civil war in

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<sup>74</sup> Qatar hosted the US Central Command and Combined Air Operations Center, UAE offered the US 'good quiet co-operation' and Jordan allowed the secret use of Jordanian territory by US forces. Alterman, 'Iraq and the Gulf States: The Balance of Fear', 8, 10. Quilliam, 'Jordan: Appeasing the Hegemon', 144.

<sup>75</sup> Alterman, 'Iraq and the Gulf States: The Balance of Fear', 3.

<sup>76</sup> Toby C. Jones, 'The Clerics, the Sahwa, and the Saudi State', *Strategic Insights*, 43 (2005) 5.

<sup>77</sup> Neil MacFarquhar, 'For Arabs, New Jihad Is in Iraq', *The New York Times*, 2nd April 2003.

<sup>78</sup> Toby C. Jones, 'Saudi-Iraq Relations: Devolving Chaos or Acrimonious Stability?', in Henri J. Barkey, Scott B. Lasensky, and Phebe Marr (eds.), *Iraq, Its Neighbors, and the United States: Competition, Crisis and the Reordering of Power* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2011), 99-118, 114.

<sup>79</sup> Elie Podeh, 'Iraq and the Arab System since the 2003 War', in Amnon Cohen and Noga Efrati (eds.), *Post-Saddam Iraq: New Realities, Old Identities, Changing Patterns* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2011), 266-94, 283.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, 'Saudis in Iraq: Patterns of Radicalization and Recruitment', *Cultures & Conflicts*, (2008) 4.

<sup>81</sup> Jones, 'Saudi-Iraq Relations: Devolving Chaos or Acrimonious Stability?', 113.

Iraq into al-Qaeda policy.<sup>82</sup> Although the total number of foreign fighters in Iraq has been exaggerated in an attempt to discredit the indigenous Iraqi ‘resistance,’ those fighters that did come to Iraq tended to be experienced, brutally violent, hardcore ideologues who wreaked havoc in the areas they arrived in.<sup>83</sup>

### Arab Reporting of the War

The invasion of Iraq was almost unequivocally rejected by all Arab populations, with the exception of Kuwait.<sup>84</sup> Having been deeply engaged in the level of suffering faced by the Iraqi people during a decade of devastating sanctions organised by the West, many Arabs scoffed at the idea of Americans invading Iraq for humanitarian reasons.<sup>85</sup> The Arab experience of the US as a persistently partisan actor in the Israel-Palestine conflict and supporter of dictatorships throughout the region further reinforced perceptions of the American government as a hypocritical, self-serving, and ultimately malevolent force in the region.<sup>86</sup>

The popular pan-Arab satellite TV stations, such as al-Jazeera, al-Arabiya and Abu Dhabi TV, widely reflected the mood on the Arab street when it came to reporting the war in Iraq. The war was framed as an invasion, rather than a liberation; early signs of stubborn ‘resistance’ to the US invasion in places like Nasiriya were met with pride and delight; and those who were killed fighting coalition forces were referred to as martyrs rather than insurgents.<sup>87</sup> In contrast to much Western media, journalists for the pan-Arab stations had un-embedded reporters on the ground, interacting with local people, and witnessing the violence inflicted on ordinary Iraqis. Partly as a result of this access, and partly as a reflection of the hostility of the Arab populace towards the Iraq war, satellite channels ‘ran

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<sup>82</sup> In a famous letter to Osama Bin Laden, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi calls the Shi’ites ‘the most evil of mankind’ and suggested that ‘open sectarian war’ between the Sunnis and Shi’ites would provoke Islamic nations into rising ‘to defend the Sunnis in Iraq.’ Abu Musab Zarqawi, ‘Letter From Abu Musab al Zarqawi to Osama Bin Laden’, in John Ehrenberg et al. (eds.), *The Iraq Papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005 ), 252-58.

<sup>83</sup> Journalist Nir Rosen describes how the behaviour of foreign fighters alienated the Iraqis they had ostensibly come to support. Rosen, *In the Belly of the Green Bird: The Triumph of the Martyrs in Iraq*, 157, 72, 93-94.

<sup>84</sup> According to a Zogby Poll in 2003, 74% of Lebanese, 95% of Saudis and 58% of Jordanians believed that the war would actually reduce democracy in Iraq. Marc Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006) 14.

<sup>85</sup> Marc Lynch, *State interests and public spheres: The international politics of Jordan's identity* (New York: Columbia University Press 1990) 11.

<sup>86</sup> Steve Tatham, *Losing Arab Hearts and Minds: The Coalition, Al Jazeera and Muslim Public Opinion* (London: Hurst & Company, 2006) 24-25.

<sup>87</sup> Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*, 192.

endless footage of grieving, wounded, screaming Iraqis.<sup>88</sup> Faisal Bodi, senior editor for al-Jazeera's website, frankly stated that al-Jazeera's coverage of the war starts from 'the premise that this war should be viewed as an illegal enterprise' and as such it was considered the duty of the channel to broadcast the horrors wreaked by the conflict, including graphic images and footage of 'the blown-out brains, the blood-spattered pavements, the screaming infants and the corpses...'<sup>89</sup>

The relentless focus of Arab satellite stations on the carnage in Iraq was extremely controversial and was met with heavy criticism on the part of coalition politicians. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz accused al-Jazeera of 'false reporting and very biased reporting that has the effect of inciting violence against our troops. The minute they get something they can use to spread hatred and violence in Iraq, they are broadcasting it around.'<sup>90</sup> Defending the choices of the broadcaster, al-Jazeera's editor-in-chief argued, 'What we are doing is showing the reality. We didn't invent the bodies, we didn't make them in the graphics unit. They are shots coming in from the field. This is the war.'<sup>91</sup> The Arab stations further argued that, unlike the many American stations that had fallen into a patriotic stupor over the war, it was not their job to transmit coalition propaganda around the Arab World.<sup>92</sup>

Coalition hostility to the Arab stations ran deep, and reports abounded of their maltreatment. In April 2003 two separate raids attacked the al-Jazeera Bureau in Baghdad and a hotel in Basra being used as a base by al-Jazeera correspondents.<sup>93</sup> al-Jazeera complained to the US State Department that their offices and journalists had been subjected to 'strafing by gunfire, death threats, confiscation of news material and multiple detentions and arrests.'<sup>94</sup> Though the coalition found their

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<sup>88</sup> Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*, 188.

<sup>89</sup> Faisal Bodi, 'al-Jazeera Tells the Truth About War', *The Guardian*, 28th March 2003.

<sup>90</sup> CNN, 'Q & A With Jim Clancy',

<[http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0308/01/i\\_qaa.01.html](http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0308/01/i_qaa.01.html)>, accessed 9th August 2013.

Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld also accused the station of being 'violently anti-coalition' and suggested that it was actively collaborating with the insurgents. *Chicago Tribune*, 'Rumsfeld: Arab TV Working with Insurgents' (26th November 2003).

<sup>91</sup> *BBC*, 'Al-Jazeera Defends War Reports' (24th May 2003).

<sup>92</sup> Biased media coverage of the Iraq War would subsequently become a huge source of controversy in the US, with false government claims about intelligence relating to weapons of mass destructions being exposed, and poor journalism being questioned. In May 2004 *The New York Times* famously apologized for the poor quality of some of its coverage of the intelligence assertions around the Iraq War. *The New York Times*, 'The Times and Iraq' (26th May 2004).

<sup>93</sup> Faisal Bodi, 'al-Jazeera's War', in David Miller (ed.), *Tell Me Lies: Propaganda and Media Distortion in the Attack on Iraq* (London: Pluto Press, 2004) 249.

<sup>94</sup> EA Torriero, 'U.S., Media at Odds over Iraq Coverage', *Chicago Tribune*, 1st August 2003.

coverage of the ugly side of the Iraq war to be highly damaging, it is difficult to disentangle how much of this aggression towards the station was intentional. Many in the Arab world, however, saw it as a sustained campaign of intimidation against the ‘truth telling station,’<sup>95</sup> and perceptions of coalition forces plummeted further.

Criticisms of the Arab networks became much more serious as the anti-coalition insurgency began to intensify, and as Iraqi politicians began to express their anger towards the stations for further inflaming an already very fragile situation. The coverage of the vicious battle for Fallujah, which had fallen under the control of radical groups including a foreign militant contingent, was particularly contentious as al-Jazeera was accused of mounting a ‘rallying cry’ for the insurgents.<sup>96</sup> One Fallujah resident who was mildly sympathetic to the insurgents described al-Jazeera as a ‘sports commentator...encouraging people to support one team against the other’ and said the coverage had ‘led people inside and outside Iraq to sympathise with Falluja’ and ‘raised the spirits of fighters.’<sup>97</sup> Some foreign fighters even cited al-Jazeera’s coverage as a motivating factor in their decision to travel to Iraq to join the insurgency.<sup>98</sup> Iraq’s interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi decided that the impact of the station’s broadcasts was too damaging, and, declaring that ‘the terrorists feed on the oxygen of propaganda,’ he shut al-Jazeera’s Iraq bureau down.<sup>99</sup>

It was not only Iraq’s political elites who tired of the reporting of the Pan-Arab stations. Many Iraqis, particularly those from the Shi’ite community, were personally offended by the Arab rejection of the new Iraq, by their failure to sufficiently recognise the horrors perpetrated by Saddam Hussein, and by their role in fomenting further violence in Iraq.<sup>100</sup> Prominent Sunni scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi’s call for jihad in defence of Iraq, on his show on al-Jazeera,<sup>101</sup> was met

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<sup>95</sup> Director of the Al Jazeera network famously described the station’s philosophy by saying, ‘All we do is tell the truth, and nothing but the truth.’ Naomi Sakr, *Satellite Realms: Transnational TV, Globalization and the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001) 119-20.

<sup>96</sup> Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 276.

<sup>97</sup> Rosen, *In the Belly of the Green Bird: The Triumph of the Martyrs in Iraq*, 153.

<sup>98</sup> Ahmed S. Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006) 144.

<sup>99</sup> Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*, 233.

<sup>100</sup> A poem written by Sadrist poet Jawad al-Hamrani fiercely condemned the Arab world lamenting that ‘their satellite channels til now are killing me.’ Cited in Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity* 171.

<sup>101</sup> Tatham, *Losing Arab Hearts and Minds: The Coalition, Al Jazeera and Muslim Public Opinion*, 126. Al-Qaradawi did also severely criticise the targeting of any civilians by the insurgents and was



with disgust by many Iraqis, and in an open letter to the station some Iraqis accused it of being ‘the station of Zarqawi and kidnapping and terror’ and of concealing ‘every crime of Saddam against Iraq.’<sup>102</sup>

The first half of this chapter has argued that US foreign policy choices directly fuelled a culture of antagonism towards the US project in Iraq on the part of influential neighbouring and regional powers. The fact that Iraq was effectively occupied by the US whilst it was administered by the CPA rendered it vulnerable to foreign actors seeking to defend themselves against threats they perceived to be emanating from the US. Iran, Syria and Hezbollah felt directly threatened by the invasion of Iraq, and they provided manpower, smuggling routes, weapons and resources to the nascent Iraqi ‘resistance.’ The wider Arab World established a normative environment that strongly encouraged and celebrated Iraqi ‘resistance’ and undermined the normative legitimacy of the CPA. The violence inflicted by militant groups inside Iraq weakened the functional legitimacy of the CPA and successive Iraqi administrations because it demonstrated that these governments could not perform the basic function of the state – which is to provide security for its citizens. In the next chapter I will show that, as internal violence continued to escalate, citizens began to confer legitimacy on local armed groups who claimed to protect their neighbourhoods from violence. These armed groups would go on to challenge the Iraqi government’s authority over foreign policy by conducting independent relationships with foreign powers.

## Transitional Iraqi Government Foreign Policy

Both the Iraqi Governing Council, which operated as an advisory board to the CPA, and the transitional government led by Ayad Allawi, enjoyed some scope to conduct diplomacy, but, deprived of control over the means of coercion and highly deficient in normative legitimacy, they were also effectively powerless. The Governing Council and the Allawi government both prioritised improving relations with their neighbours, and restoring Iraq’s position in the Arab League and status as an Arab power. Though the Arab League initially resisted reinstating Iraq – pointing to its

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denounced by Iraq’s most famous militant leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi for betraying the insurgency. Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*, 234.

<sup>102</sup>Cited in Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*, 223.

inability to operate as a state without US assistance – it eventually conceded but with little positive impact on Iraq’s position in the Arab World. The Governing Council and the Allawi government engaged in relentless diplomatic efforts, but their ability to reduce the hostility of neighbouring governments towards Iraq was hampered by the clear threat that the US presence in Iraq posed. When it came to the most serious foreign policy success of this period, the cancellation of much of Iraq’s sovereign debt, it was US rather than Iraqi diplomats who took the lead. Nonetheless, the individual talent of appointed Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari led to the establishment of a Foreign Ministry that is amongst the best-performing in the Iraqi public sector. The lone success of the Foreign Minister reflects the observation made by the literature on foreign policy making in the developing world that the efficacy of such ministries is highly dependent on the individuals who lead them.

### Outreach to the Arab and Muslim World

It was against a backdrop of immense hostility that the new Iraq had to make tentative steps towards re-establishing itself in the Arab world. Within months of the invasion, appointed Iraqis were shaping the diplomatic agenda, albeit under the ultimate authority of the Coalition Provisional Authority.<sup>103</sup> The Iraqi Governing Council (IGC), which was established on 13<sup>th</sup> July 2003, saw itself as Iraq’s provisional government, and by 1<sup>st</sup> September 2003 it had appointed a cabinet which named Hoshiyar Zebari as Foreign Minister. Although the Iraqi Governing Council was essentially toothless, having no resources or legal authority distinct from the Coalition Provisional Authority,<sup>104</sup> it was nonetheless able to conduct diplomacy and its priority was to re-integrate Iraq into the region. Zebari launched a charm offensive in the Arab world,<sup>105</sup> making a particular effort to soften the hostile stance

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<sup>103</sup> The CPA did not have the capacity or inclination to focus on Iraq’s diplomatic relations in the chaotic aftermath of the War, ceding the ground to Iraqi figures. As one US government official who worked with the CPA in Iraq quipped, ‘US ultimate control over Iraq ended almost as soon as it began.’ US Government Official, ‘Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity’, (Washington D.C., 1st February 2013). Kanan Makiya, advisor to the Iraqi Governing Council and prominent exiled Iraqi academic, said that ‘Iraqis were shaping foreign policy after the first 9 months.’ Kanan Makiya, ‘Interview with the author’, (Cambridge, MA, 19th January 2013).

<sup>104</sup> Although Security Council Resolution 1511 determined that the Iraqi Governing Council would embody ‘the sovereignty of the State of Iraq during the transitional period,’ the resolution also reaffirmed the existing role of the CPA, simply exhorting the Authority to co-operate ‘as appropriate with the Governing Council.’ United Nations, ‘UN Security Council Resolution 1511’, (2003).

<sup>105</sup> Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 295.

of Saudi Arabia,<sup>106</sup> but struggled to raise much enthusiasm or support for the Iraqi Council. Attempts made by the IGC to join the Arab League, for instance, were stonewalled. Prior to the war, the Arab League stated its ‘categorical rejection’ of the invasion of Iraq, saying that such a move would be considered ‘a threat to the national security of all the Arab states.’<sup>107</sup> So it came as little surprise when the League prevented the IGC from becoming Iraq’s representative in the pan-Arab forum. The League declared that as an unelected body, the Council represented not the will of the Iraqi people but the will of the American occupiers,<sup>108</sup> and as such could not represent Iraq in the Arab League. After some intense behind-the-scenes lobbying by the Iraqis and the Americans, the Arab League relented and reluctantly announced that, as a matter of logistical necessity, Iraqi Foreign Minister Zebari would represent the IGC at the Arab League.<sup>109</sup> The concession was resented in some quarters, however, with various Arab states refusing to accept Iraqi Shi’ites as ambassadors to their countries,<sup>110</sup> and one senior Jordanian diplomat commented that just because ‘the US wanted Iraq back in the Arab fold, Iraq thought it could bully its way back in.’<sup>111</sup>

On 30<sup>th</sup> June 2004 the CPA was dissolved and sovereignty was handed over to a new Iraqi interim government, headed by Ayad Allawi, that was to govern Iraq until parliamentary elections could be organised. Allawi, a secularist Shi’ite and leader of the Iraqi opposition movement, was a figure with some stature and with already well-established relationships in the Arab world. For Allawi the foreign policy priorities for his government were clear; he wanted to ‘rebuild Iraq’s relationship with the neighbours,’ to ‘secure the relief of debts from Iraq,’ and to

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<sup>106</sup> According to Ambassador Samir al-Sumaida’ie, who was a deputy member of the Iraqi Governing Council and would later be appointed as Iraq’s Ambassador to the US, Hoshyar ‘spent a lot of effort’ trying to ‘persuade not only Saudi Arabia, but other Arab countries’ to engage in a more positive way with the new Iraq, but ‘they remained reluctant.’ For Ambassador Sumaida’ie, ‘the main responsibility’ for poor relations between Iraq and the Arab world lays with Iraq’s Arab neighbours for ‘not showing a positive attitude to the new Iraq.’ Samir Sumaida’ie, ‘Speech at Harvard Kennedy School. A Decade in Iraq: Lessons and the Landscape Ahead.’, <<https://forum.iop.harvard.edu/content/decade-iraq-lessons-and-landscape-ahead>>, accessed 13th August 2013.

<sup>107</sup> Neil MacFarquhar, ‘Mideast Turmoil: Baghdad-Kuwait Accord Support is Rebuff to Bushs Efforts’, *The New York Times*, 29th March 2002.

<sup>108</sup> Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 301.

<sup>109</sup> Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public*, 228.

<sup>110</sup> Hoshyar Zebari, ‘Interview with author’, (Suleymaniyah, 12th March 2013).

<sup>111</sup> Senior Jordanian Diplomat, ‘Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity’, (Amman, 2011).

‘get both political help and military help to Iraq.’<sup>112</sup> In pursuit of his first objective Allawi embarked on a regional tour immediately on taking office, visiting almost all of the Arab world, and building on his pre-existing relationships, particularly in the Gulf. One senior British diplomat remarked that Allawi’s diplomacy merely involved ‘looking to his friends: the Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Jordan,’<sup>113</sup> and fears were raised about the length of his absences from Iraq, and about the content of his discussions with foreign leaders.<sup>114</sup> In September 2004 US National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice put her concerns about Allawi to a National Security Council meeting chaired by President Bush, asking: ‘are we worried that Allawi is spending ten to eleven days [a month] outside the country?’<sup>115</sup>

One initiative that Prime Minister Allawi pursued with some persistence was the attempt to assemble a multi-lateral, Muslim peacekeeping force to replace coalition troops in some Iraqi urban areas. Allawi was convinced that US military ignorance of ‘the culture, the habits, the customs’ of the Iraqi people was directly fuelling the growing insurgency in the country.<sup>116</sup> To illustrate this point Allawi tells a story of an elderly Iraqi man who told the Prime Minister to his face that he had instructed his clan to ‘work for the insurgents’ because American soldiers had broken into his home, thrown him to the ground and put a boot on his head ‘in front of the women.’<sup>117</sup> For Allawi it was clear that a multi-national force composed of Muslim soldiers would avoid antagonizing the local population and make a huge contribution to stabilizing Iraq. The Prime Minister was neither legally nor effectively Iraq’s commander in chief, and therefore did not have the power to bring this force about without the full support of the US.<sup>118</sup>

Overall, Allawi was unable to prevent neighbouring countries from supporting internal violence in Iraq, because he had no ability to prevent US forces in Iraq from being considered a threat to its neighbours. As an appointed, rather than

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<sup>112</sup> Ayad Allawi, ‘Interview with author’, (London, 11th June 2013).

<sup>113</sup> Senior British Diplomat, ‘Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity’, (2013).

<sup>114</sup> Allawi was seen as ‘conferring with foreign leaders on the sly,’ not least when he attempted to procure military equipment for the nascent Iraqi military from neighbouring Arab countries. Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 107.

<sup>115</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 109.

<sup>116</sup> Allawi, ‘Interview with author’.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 94. Allawi, ‘Interview with author’.

elected, Prime Minister who was still entirely dependent on the US military for security, much of Allawi's diplomacy suffered from a credibility deficit despite him being relatively well-liked in neighbouring countries. Allawi was also Prime Minister for a very short time, and many of the positive initiatives that Allawi did bring about, such as the Sharm al-Sheikh Conference in November 2004, failed to be honoured by signatories or successfully pursued by subsequent premiers.<sup>119</sup> The Sharm al-Sheikh conference, which Allawi cites as a 'breakthrough' meeting,<sup>120</sup> brought together Iraq's neighbours, members of the G8 and China, and in its final communiqué the conference affirmed Iraq's 'sovereignty, political independence,' accepted the principle of 'non-interference' in Iraq's internal affairs, and committed participants to help the Iraqis achieve a 'democratic,' 'secure and stable' state.<sup>121</sup> The Arab states, however, did very little to honour that agreement, and subsequent Iraqi governments have struggled to achieve even the level of positivity that Allawi enjoyed in his regional relations.

## Debt Forgiveness

While the forgiveness and restructuring of Saddam-era Iraqi debt was considered 'one of the great success stories'<sup>122</sup> of the transition period, there is little evidence that Allawi's transitional government played any role in the process. Effectively managing the massive \$130 billion external debt owed by Iraq<sup>123</sup> in 2003 was a priority for the US government. The US Congress urged the Bush administration a month before the invasion to 'organise debtor and donor conferences in order to restructure Iraq's debt...and accumulate sufficient resources to fund the needs of an interim government.'<sup>124</sup> For Congress and for the US treasury, if Iraq reduced its debt repayment obligations it would be able to contribute more towards the cost of

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<sup>119</sup> Allawi complains that his successors 'never followed what achievements we did especially in the Sharm al-Sheikh.' Certainly the principles agreed at Sharm al-Sheikh were fast forgotten as tensions rose between the Arab world and subsequent Iraqi governments over the lack of Sunni participation in the political process. Allawi, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 'Final Communiqué of International Ministerial Meeting of the Neighboring Countries of Iraq, the G8 and China' (2004).

<sup>122</sup> Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 265.

<sup>123</sup> This figure is an estimate. It is comprised of \$42.5 billion bilateral debt to Paris Club countries, \$67.4 billion bilateral debt to non-Paris club countries, \$20 billion in commercial debt and \$0.5 billion in multilateral debt. Martin A. Weiss, 'Iraq's Debt Relief: Procedure and Potential Implications for International Debt Relief', (Congressional Research Service, 2011) i.

<sup>124</sup> Congress United States, 'S.J. Resolution 6 IS: Expressing the Sense of Congress with Respect to Planning the Reconstruction of Iraq.', (Washington DC, 2003). Sect. 8.

reconstruction, thereby lowering the burden for US taxpayers. Debt relief was therefore seen as a ‘coalition of the wallet,’<sup>125</sup> a way in which the US could share the cost of Iraq’s reconstruction with donor countries. Senior US statesman James Baker was appointed as President Bush’s special envoy on Iraqi debt relief and the US exerted significant pressure on the Paris Club countries, which had been reluctant to reduce Iraq’s debt burden beyond the 50% mark.<sup>126</sup> Eventually it was agreed that, subject to Iraq’s co-operation with IMF mandated structural reform, the debt burden would be reduced by 80%. The US also ensured that the UN protected Iraq’s resources from debt-collectors until settlements could be worked out.<sup>127</sup> Whilst the US achieved a great deal by taking on the responsibility for this task, views of relevant Iraqi officials were not taken into account. Sinan al-Shabibi, Governor of Iraq’s Central Bank, for example, took a position that has gained considerable currency in the international arena – namely that Iraq’s debt should be considered ‘odious’ because it was incurred in the pursuit of warfare and terror, and as such ought not to be honoured.<sup>128</sup> This perspective was rejected by the US negotiators, and it appears that binding agreements were entered into on Iraq’s behalf without significant Iraqi input.

As for the Arab countries with which Allawi claimed to have so much currency, they refused to make any significant concessions on the issue of debt forgiveness. Between them, Arab countries including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE and Kuwait held over \$40 billion of Iraqi debt.<sup>129</sup> Despite significant pressure from the US and from successive Iraqi governments, little has been able to move these countries to forgive this debt. It appears that they consider the debt a form of

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<sup>125</sup> Bessma Momani and Aidan Garrib, ‘Iraq’s Tangled Web of Debt Restructuring’, in Mokhtar Lamani and Bessma Momani (eds.), *From Desolation to Reconstruction: Iraq’s Troubled Journey* (Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010) 159.

<sup>126</sup> It has been said that the US offered reluctant Paris Club members ‘undisclosed concessions’ in return for signing onto favourable debt cancellation terms. Bessma Momani and Aidan Garrib, ‘Iraq’s Tangled Web of Debt Restructuring’, in Mokhtar Lamani and Bessma Momani (eds.), *From Desolation to Reconstruction: Iraq’s Troubled Journey* (Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2010) 156.

<sup>127</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 1546, acting under Chapter VII of the UN charter, reasserted ‘the continuing obligations of Member States to freeze and transfer certain funds, assets, and economic resources to the Development Fund for Iraq.’ United Nations, ‘United Nations Security Council Resolution 1546’, (2004).

<sup>128</sup> Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 201.

<sup>129</sup> Weiss, ‘Iraq’s Debt Relief: Procedure and Potential Implications for International Debt Relief’, 3.

leverage, and there has been little by way of political developments in Iraq to induce them to give this up.<sup>130</sup>

## Rebuilding a Foreign Ministry

Establishing a Foreign Ministry from scratch in a post-war environment was an enormous task. Hamid al-Bayati, who was deputy Foreign Minister in the interim government, described how the new team not only had to ‘open embassies all over the world’ but also had to deal with some strange situations in the bid to resurrect its foreign service. An envoy sent by the Iraqi Foreign Ministry to Libya, for instance, found the Ba’athist representative still in place whilst the country observed a mourning period for the loss of Saddam’s regime. And when Iraq’s new representation arrived at the UN, they found that Iraq’s Ba’athist ambassador to the UN had never formally closed his office, so the new Iraqi team was forced to pay fees owed by the previous representation before they could establish their office.<sup>131</sup>

During the interim government the almost universally admired Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari<sup>132</sup> was mainly preoccupied with building the Foreign Ministry,<sup>133</sup> and he took a mature and far-sighted approach to the task. Zebari claims that he instituted Iraq’s first reconciliation process within the Foreign Ministry,<sup>134</sup> and indeed evidence abounds that Zebari did reach out to skilled and talented people throughout Iraq and within exile communities regardless of their political, ethnic and sectarian backgrounds.<sup>135</sup> Notably Zebari reached out to ex-Ba’athists, particularly accomplished and well-educated diplomats who had served under Saddam.<sup>136</sup> Sadoun al-Zubaydi, Saddam Hussein’s former personal translator and architect of the Ba’athist Foreign Ministry’s diplomat training school, was approached on numerous occasions to join the new Iraqi Foreign Ministry – and though he declined

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<sup>130</sup> Momani and Garrib, 'Iraq's Tangled Web of Debt Restructuring', 167.

<sup>131</sup> Hamid al-Bayati, 'Interview with author', (New York, 31st January 2013).

<sup>132</sup> In the over 70 interviews I conducted for this project, almost everyone expressed their admiration for the Foreign Minister, no matter what their sectarian or political hue, and whether they were Iraqi or from a foreign country dealing with Iraq. His success is borne out by the fact that he is Iraq’s longest serving Minister, having remained in the post of Foreign Minister since 2003.

<sup>133</sup> Interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi said that during 2004 Zebari was mainly tasked with rebuilding the foreign ministry, while he conducted foreign policy himself with the aid of deputy Prime Minister and accomplished statesman Barham Salih. Allawi, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>134</sup> Zebari, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>135</sup> Interviews with a number of diplomats from different backgrounds, both based in Iraq and posted abroad, cited Zebari’s interest in their talents and disinterest in their political or sectarian affiliations.

<sup>136</sup> Mudhaffar al-Amin, Saddam Hussein’s last Ambassador to the United Kingdom, for instance, said that Zebari sent him three delegations asking him to come back to work for the ministry. Mudhaffar al-Amin, 'Interview with the author', (Amman, 31st October 2011).

he offered Zebari advice about structuring and managing the Ministry.<sup>137</sup> Zubaydi clearly appreciated and respected the effort that Zebari made to seek out advice and expertise from the former Ba'athists despite the sweeping de-Ba'athification laws that had been imposed on the Iraqi civil service.<sup>138</sup> The Iraqi Foreign Minister also took advantage of the wealth of technical advice and expertise that was offered by both coalition and non-coalition countries in order to better go about building capacity at the Foreign Ministry.<sup>139</sup> According to Foreign Minister Zebari, approximately 1200 diplomats were sent abroad for training as far afield as Japan, Canada and the US.<sup>140</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Iraq's foreign relationships in the period before Iraq held its first democratic elections were largely defined by the US occupation of the country. Iran, Syria and Hezbollah were keen to undermine the US presence in Iraq and to strongly disincentivise the US from expanding the scope of its democratizing mission. The wider Arab world, meanwhile, presided over media stations that valorised and celebrated the violent Iraqi 'resistance,' turned a blind eye to the flow of jihadist fighters to Iraq from their own countries, and watched the growing violence of Iraq with some self-satisfaction. Although formal-legal sovereignty was passed to the unelected Iraqi transitional government in June 2005, attempts by this administration to establish productive foreign relationships continued to be undercut by extent of US power in Iraq. Because of the degree to which the US presence defined Iraq's foreign relationships in this period, I have concluded that the weak state framework is not sufficient for analysing the occupied state because of its inability to take into account the dynamics produced by the occupying country.

During the period of CPA rule Iraq was effectively occupied, in that all coercive and administrative authority ultimately derived from the US government.

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<sup>137</sup> Sadoun al-Zubaydi, 'Interview with author', (Amman, 26th September 2011).

<sup>138</sup> In CPA Order Number One, 'full members of the Ba'ath Party' were 'removed from their positions and banned from future employment in the public sector.' Coalition Provisional Authority, 'Order Number One: De-Ba'athification of Iraqi Society', (16th May 2003). Sect. 2. Zebari lobbied for the former Ba'athists he wanted to be allowed back into the ministry, though for security reasons this was rarely possible. Sadoun al-Zubaydi described Zebari as 'efficient' 'straightforward' and 'approachable' and commended him for his foresight in reaching out to the Ba'athists. Zubaydi, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>139</sup> Senior British Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>140</sup> Zebari, 'Interview with author'.



Ambassador Paul Bremer was appointed by President Bush as his envoy to Iraq and as the administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority with total power over 'all executive, legislative, and judicial functions' in Iraq.<sup>141</sup> With CPA Orders One and Two,<sup>142</sup> Bremer sacked thirty thousand civil servants and four hundred thousand Iraqi soldiers, leaving the CPA – which was ultimately answerable to the American President and to the US Congress – as the only incarnation of an Iraqi administration.<sup>143</sup> Occupied Iraq suffered the consequences of America's threatening behaviour towards Iraq's neighbours and its alienation of the Arab world. US foreign policy towards the wider Arab World undermined the functional and normative legitimacy of both the CPA and subsequent Iraqi governments. The fact of its occupation complicates the relationship between the legitimacy of the Iraqi government and Iraqi state foreign policy. Whilst it was occupied, the US was responsible for Iraqi foreign policy, and the US derived its functional and normative legitimacy primarily from the American, not the Iraqi, public. Of course the US also needed an element of legitimacy in Iraq in order to be able to govern effectively, but it was empowered to conduct foreign policy with little regard for the domestic political situation in Iraq. I would suggest, given these complexities, that the relationship between foreign policy and domestic legitimacy in an occupation setting could benefit from further theorising.

Occupied Iraq became an imminent and credible security threat for America's adversaries, including Iran, Syria and Hezbollah. For these actors, undermining US power in Iraq was key to ensuring their own security. US foreign policy choices had led directly to the fuelling of instability in Iraq, which highlighted the inability of the CPA to deliver security to the Iraqi people – thereby further damaging its functional legitimacy. The CPA's normative legitimacy in Iraq was also diminished by the relentless attack mounted against the US project in Iraq by the Arab media.

Legitimacy was rapidly transferred from the CPA to other social actors who could perform at a local level. The Sadrist movement, led by the controversial Shi'ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, provided electricity, food and armed 'protection' for

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<sup>141</sup> Bremer, *My Year in Iraq*, 12.

<sup>142</sup> Coalition Provisional Authority, 'Order Number One: De-Ba'athification of Iraqi Society'. Coalition Provisional Authority, 'Order Number Two: Dissolution of Entities', (23rd May 2003).

<sup>143</sup> Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 150, 57.

local communities.<sup>144</sup> On the basis of their developing stature and local legitimacy, the Sadrists captured the attention of Iran and in May 2003 Muqtada al-Sadr was invited to meet with senior members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard.<sup>145</sup> This relationship would soon flourish, threatening the stability of the Iraqi state. As for the many Iraqi Sunnis<sup>146</sup> who had rejected the invasion, the mass ejections from the civil service and from the army in the wake of de-Ba'athification did nothing to convince them that the coalition had their interests at heart. Many Iraqi Sunnis retreated into tribal groups and into locally organised 'resistance' militias, and received some financial but mostly moral support from their many fellow rejectionists throughout the Arab world.

The ability of the Iraqi Governing Council and the Allawi transitional government to conduct foreign policy suffered because of their lack of normative legitimacy and their inability to exercise a monopoly over violence. Foreign Minister Zebari said, 'it was really the most difficult thing to represent your country in the face of the international community' when 'your country is occupied, you don't have full sovereignty, so how to lead a foreign policy?'<sup>147</sup> For many countries, dealing with Iraq was in fact a route to punish the US, and so much of the negativity in Iraq's early foreign relations was bound up in the US involvement. And ultimately, although the Iraqis had some scope to conduct diplomacy,<sup>148</sup> they had absolutely no military power, and as such were utterly dependent on the US – a point not lost on Iraq's neighbours. Even after the transfer of sovereignty to interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, the Americans expected to continue to play a major

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<sup>144</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 69.

<sup>145</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 101.

<sup>146</sup> This thesis refers in relatively broad terms to the different perspectives held by Iraq's Sunni Arab and Shi'ite Arab populations. This is simply because the period with which this thesis is concerned has witnessed the heavy politicisation of sectarian identities, and it is therefore possible to talk in broad terms about the different perspectives held by these communities. In many other periods of Iraqi history it would not make sense to refer so broadly to the political differences between Sunnis and Shi'ites because these identities were not politicised in the same way. For a more detailed argument against primordial views of sectarian identity see: Younis, 'Set up to Fail: Consociational Political Structures in Post War Iraq', 3.

<sup>147</sup> Zebari, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>148</sup> Interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi cites his ability to meet with the Russians despite US opposition to the plan as evidence of his foreign policy independence. Allawi, 'Interview with author'. Hoshyar Zebari points to Iraq voting with the Arab consensus rather than with the US on issues related to Israel and Palestine at the UN. Zebari, 'Interview with author'.

political and military role in the country.<sup>149</sup> Allawi poignantly wondered: ‘Can you imagine, I am Prime Minister of Iraq, and I do not even have a battalion.’<sup>150</sup> The result was that Iraqi politicians were able to conduct diplomacy, but were unable to significantly enhance their standing in the Arab World, and were powerless in the face of the US-related hostility directed toward Iraq by the region. Though Prime Minister Allawi conducted endless regional tours, he was unable to bring about the multi-national force that he believed would have made the biggest difference to security in Iraq. As for the most important foreign policy priorities, such as stabilizing the Iraqi economy by securing the forgiveness of sovereign debt, it was the US ‘parent-state’ which took the lead. The transitional Iraqi government’s lack of control over the coercive apparatus of government and its clear dependence on US forces starved it of both the functional and normative legitimacy it needed to effectively pursue its foreign policy priorities.

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<sup>149</sup> As President Bush said in a National Security meeting planning the transition to the Allawi government, ‘We have to have sovereignty with limits.’ Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 48.

<sup>150</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 85.

## CHAPTER FOUR: IRAN IN THE IRAQI CIVIL WAR

### Introduction

This chapter argues that Iraqi foreign policy entered a new phase once an elected Iraqi government was in place. From this point, although US influence continued to be strong, Iraqi politics began to overtake US politics as the defining factor in Iraq's foreign relationships. The weak state framework helps us to understand the extent to which Iran was able to penetrate Iraqi politics and its extraordinary ability to sponsor violent actors in Iraq in this period. The first elected Iraqi government suffered from a serious deficit in both normative and functional legitimacy, and this led to a proliferation of Iraqi foreign policy actors. In their competition over domestic political power, Iraqi political actors sought support from Iran – and in doing so undermined Iraq's ability to protect its national security.

The level of control that the US had over Iraq in 2003 and 2004 justifies its being labelled as an 'occupied' state, but it is more difficult to ascertain the moment at which Iraq ceased to be occupied. Although responsibility for governance gradually began to be shifted to Iraqis, in the transitional government for instance, the US continued to overwhelmingly dominate the security sector in the country in addition to wielding significant political influence. I would argue that a shift in Iraqi sovereignty occurred in January 2005, when Iraqis elected their first post-invasion government. These elections did not fully restore Iraqi sovereignty, but offered a significant transfer of power and legitimacy to an Iraqi government such that the country could no longer be characterised as occupied.

The January 2005 elections posed a number of challenges. Plans to hold these elections, which were the first since the invasion of Iraq, were rapidly brought forward, partly in the hope that an elected government would be able to rebuild the normative legitimacy of the Iraqi state. Violent 'resistance' to coalition forces had escalated sharply throughout the two years since the invasion, as the Americans were accused of stalling the inauguration of an elected and authentically Iraqi government. Although it meant that the timelines for drafting an electoral law were tragically truncated, the Americans decided that bringing the elections forward

would restore some normative legitimacy to the new Iraqi state and could temper the violence.

For one section of the Iraqi population, however, the elections were not considered legitimate. Many Iraqi Sunnis believed that the elections were an attempt by the Americans to sanction their continued presence in the country, and they declared that elections held whilst the country was under occupation could never be valid. This is a clear example of a government failing to articulate a narrative of the state that resonates with all major sections of the population. The Iraqi state characterised elections as the means by which agency could be returned to the Iraqi people, but much of the Sunni population believed that the agency of the Iraqi people was compromised so long as there was a foreign troop presence in Iraq. From the start, therefore, the elected government of Prime Minister Ja'fari failed to articulate an inclusive narrative of state, which rendered it deficient in normative legitimacy before it was even inaugurated. Throughout its tenure, the Ja'fari government failed to provide the basic public goods demanded by its citizenry and presided over a rapid escalation in violence that quickly transformed from armed 'resistance' into sectarian civil war. Not only did the Ja'fari government fail to prevent this descent into civil war, elements of the government bureaucracy participated in sectarian killings using government resources and wearing government uniforms. Whilst the plummeting levels of security were the main concern of the Iraqi populace, the Ja'fari government also failed to provide a range of additional public goods, including vital electricity supplies, sewage management systems and properly functioning health and education systems.

In the Ja'fari government we see state weakness in one of its most extreme forms. At this moment, therefore, it is instructive to examine Iraq's interaction with one of its most important foreign policy partners, Iran. The Iran-Iraq relationship is a highly controversial one that is subject to much misinformation, so this chapter deals with it at some length. The chapter draws two major conclusions about the impact of Iraqi state weakness on its foreign policy towards Iran. Firstly, the breakdown of the Iraqi state empowered sub-state actors who were able to build their legitimacy by assuming some of the functions of the state at a local level. These sub-state actors were able to conduct independent foreign relationships with Iran, thereby challenging the authority of the central government over foreign policy. Indeed some of these actors, such as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in

Iraq, were part of the coalition government but pursued relations with Iran independently of the executive. Secondly, the Ja'fari government prioritised its pursuit of regime security over traditional national security considerations, such as maintaining Iraqi independence from foreign intervention. Despite being acutely aware of the role that Iran was playing in fuelling the violence in Iraq, the Ja'fari government pursued affable relations with Iran and made little attempt to prevent Iranian intervention in Iraq. Fearful that Iran would empower the domestic rivals of the governing Da'wah Party, Prime Minister Ja'fari's priority was to maintain the favour of the Iranian political elite regardless of the cost to Iraq. Both conclusions correspond with the expectations set out by my conceptual framing of the thesis; namely, that in a weak state the central government is unable to monopolise authority over foreign policy, and that foreign policy is driven by a primary concern for the security and authority of the actor.

## Dismal Performance of Iraq's First Elected Government

On 30<sup>th</sup> January 2005 Iraqis took to the polls for the first time since the invasion, electing a caretaker government to oversee the drafting of Iraq's new constitution. In an inauspicious start, the newly elected Iraqi politicians spent the first three months of their eleven month term wrangling over positions – with Ibrahim al-Ja'fari finally being sworn in as Prime Minister on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2005. Ja'fari was a spokesman and leading member of the Da'wah Party, Iraq's oldest Shi'ite political party,<sup>1</sup> and emerged as a compromise candidate in the grand Shi'ite coalition that had won the elections.<sup>2</sup> The Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), which dominated the coalition alongside the Da'wah party, focused its efforts on gaining

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<sup>1</sup> The actual date on which the Da'wah party was founded is a contentious issue. Party documents indicate that the party was founded on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1957, but it appears more likely that the party effectively came into being after the revolution of July 1958 partly in reaction to an upsurge in the popularity of the Iraqi Communist Party. Abdul-Halim al-Ruhaimi, 'The Da'wa Islamic Party: Origins, Actors and Ideology', in Faleh Abdul-Jabar (ed.), *Ayatollahs, Sufis and Ideologues: State, Religion and Social Movements in Iraq* (London: Saqi Books 2002), 149-61, 152. In any case the Da'wah party is Iraq's oldest Shi'ite Islamist political party, and it inspired the founding of a number of other Shi'ite political parties across the Middle East. Laurence Louër, 'Transnational Shia Politics: Religious and Political Networks in the Gulf', (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> The United Iraqi Alliance represented the joint forces of Iraq's major Shi'ite parties, in particular the Supreme Islamic Council for the Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), the Da'wah party, and some supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr (despite Sadr's formal rejection of the election). The Da'wah party, unlike SCIRI and the Sadrist, did not have their own militia and had limited popular support - so Ja'fari was considered a relatively safe compromise candidate for the Premiership. Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 142.

control over the state's security apparatus – and succeeded in having senior SCIRI member Bayan Jabr appointed as Interior Minister.

As the new government struggled to allocate cabinet posts, Iraq's violent insurgency was intensifying. The January 2005 elections had been overwhelmingly boycotted by Sunni provinces, in response to the heavy-handedness of the coalition in assaults against Fallujah,<sup>3</sup> and as a result Sunni representation was largely excluded from political power. The lack of meaningful Sunni participation in government further compounded the alienation of much of the Sunni community and allowed extremist elements to consolidate their increasing dominance over the insurgency. The end of 2004 witnessed an escalation of extremist violence, and a broadening of targets away from a focus on coalition forces towards softer targets – such as Iraqi police recruits and increasingly Shi'ite places of worship.<sup>4</sup>

Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian extremist who led a hard-line Sunni militant group in Iraq, gathered destructive momentum during this period and the indiscriminate violence unleashed by his affiliates propelled Iraq towards civil war. Whereas previous 'resistance' activity had focused on coalition troops or Iraqi 'collaborators,' violence became progressively more sectarian as militant Sunni groups began to characterise Shi'ites as traitors en masse. In October, Zarqawi announced that his group had joined al-Qaeda, and mass casualty attacks on Shi'ite funeral processions, religious gatherings and even simply in Shi'ite neighbourhoods became increasingly common.<sup>5</sup>

It was in the midst of this precarious security situation that the Ja'fari administration came into office with a completely unrealistic set of goals. The administration promised to improve governance, though state institutions were barely functioning; to enhance security, though the election itself had polarised Iraqi society more than ever before; to develop public services and the economy, despite constant sabotage by militant groups; and to oversee the process of writing a new

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<sup>3</sup> The Association of Muslim Scholars, a group of leading Sunni clerics who claimed to direct some 6,000 Iraqi Sunni mosques, said in October 2004 that if the coalition attacked Fallujah for a second time the Sunnis would boycott the election. Both came to pass. The battles of Fallujah became part of Sunni resistance folklore because of the scale of the destruction and the number of casualties. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 340. In the second battle of Fallujah in November 2004 it was reported that around 70% of all buildings in the city had been damaged or destroyed. Dhar Jamail and Ali Fadhil, 'Fallujah: A City Ctil Under Siege', *Asia Times*, 27th June 2006.

<sup>4</sup> By the end of 2004 Baghdad was sustaining between twenty and forty insurgent attacks a week. Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, 110, 18.

<sup>5</sup> Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, 117.

constitution in the face of a major Sunni boycott.<sup>6</sup> Though success in such circumstances was near impossible, the Ja'fari government was an abysmal failure, even underperforming the lowest expectations.

Prime Minister Ja'fari himself was widely perceived as an inappropriate leader for such a critical time. Though the Prime Minister claimed to understand that his was a 'government of war,'<sup>7</sup> he behaved as though there was no crisis in the country. Dubbed 'Papa Ja'fari' by a senior US diplomat,<sup>8</sup> the premier loved long meandering conversations about history, literature and the classics and had a tendency to talk at length around a subject whilst avoiding core matters of substance.<sup>9</sup> One senior British diplomat summed up the attitudes of many when he described Ja'fari as 'charming' but 'completely incompetent.'<sup>10</sup>

The Prime Minister's failure to effectively oversee the government was to prove extremely serious as state institutions were transformed into violent fiefdoms heavily engaged in the escalating Iraqi civil war. SCIRI, the Da'wah party's primary partner in government, was an Iraqi opposition group formed in Iran, and heavily supported by the Iranian government, that returned to Iraq in 2003 with an estimated 10,000 man militia known as the Badr Brigades.<sup>11</sup> Following the January 2005 elections, SCIRI took over the Interior Ministry and flooded police and security services with militiamen from the Badr Brigades and from the Mahdi Army, the militia loyal to Shi'ite militant cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. By July 2005 some 50,000 men had joined the police, undergoing minimal vetting, whilst de-Ba'athification edicts were used to remove some Sunni officers.<sup>12</sup> The new police and security forces were accused of running death squads targeting Sunnis and former Ba'athists and of interning prisoners without charge or due process. The prison population rocketed from just 4,300 in October 2004, to an estimated 25,000 in November

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<sup>6</sup> Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 397.

<sup>7</sup> Ibrahim al-Jaafari, *Ibrahim al-Jaafari: A Governmental Experience* (Beirut: Arabic Oriental Studies Center, 2009) 150.

<sup>8</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 143.

<sup>9</sup> Bob Woodward, *State of Denial* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006) 392.

<sup>10</sup> Senior British Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. A senior aid of Ja'fari admitted that though the premier had his 'heart in the right place,' he was 'weak on the executive side.' Former Senior Adviser to Prime Minister Ja'fari, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', (2013). Ja'fari has also been described as 'hopelessly disorganized' and 'stunningly ill-equipped,' Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 143-4.

<sup>11</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, 'Iraq's Militia Groups', <<http://www.cfr.org/iraq/iraqs-militia-groups/p11824#p6>>, accessed 12th September 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, 197.



2005.<sup>13</sup> 12,000 of these prisoners were held by Iraqi authorities, the remainder were in American custody. The Badr dominated ‘Wolf Brigade’ tortured prisoners and confined them underground in rooms full of human waste; men dressed as commandos of the Interior Ministry kidnapped and murdered predominantly Sunni men; and in November 2005 American soldiers discovered a secret bunker hosting 168 detainees, many bearing signs of torture, in gruesome surroundings.<sup>14</sup> There was evidence that Interior Ministry personnel were systematically targeting people for revenge. Many of those discovered in the bunker for example had been pilots during Saddam’s regime, and it soon came to light that a number of Sunnis were being mistreated in the Interior Ministry building itself – where different floors of the building were run ‘like fiefdoms’ by the various factions.<sup>15</sup> All the while, Prime Minister Ja’fari appeared ‘oblivious’ to his government’s role in fuelling an escalating civil war,<sup>16</sup> and in June 2005 he even found it appropriate to celebrate the paramilitary Badr Organisation as a ‘shield’ for Iraq.<sup>17</sup>

Ja’fari’s noncommittal leadership style gave ministries an incredible amount of autonomy,<sup>18</sup> and the Interior Ministry was not the only one to abuse this latitude. Figures loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr took key positions in the Health Ministry and transformed many of the nation’s hospitals into death traps for those who could be identified as Sunnis, and used the Ministry’s infrastructure for murder, abductions and weapons transfers.<sup>19</sup> In February 2007 Prime Minister Maliki arrested the

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<sup>13</sup> Michael E. O’Hanlon and Nina Kamp, ‘Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq’, (The Brookings Institution, December 2005) 16.

<sup>14</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 147, 86. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 422.

<sup>15</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 185-6.

<sup>16</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 147. The discovery of the abuse of Sunnis at the hands of the Interior Ministry compounded Sunni disillusionment with the post-invasion government. One senior financier of Sunni political parties described the security forces as ‘100% Shi’a and criminals,’ and claimed that ‘thousands’ were tortured at their hands. International Iraqi Businessman and Former Iraqiya Financier, ‘Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity’, (2013). Another prominent financier of Sunni political parties cited similar motivations for his munificence, declaring that ‘There are over 100,000 detainees, rooms designed for 10 house 100 or more, torture is systematic and the rape of men in front of women is filmed and documented...’ Senior Iraqiya Financier, ‘Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity’, (2011).

<sup>17</sup> Cordesman, *Iraq’s Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, 197.

<sup>18</sup> Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 400.

<sup>19</sup> That the Sadrists chose to prioritise control over the health ministry could be a reflection of their desire to model themselves on the Lebanese Shi’ite Islamist group Hezbollah, which bases its legitimacy on its ability to provide social services to its community. Gordon and Trainor, *The*

Sadrists Deputy Health Minister, charging him with embezzling Ministry resources for the Mahdi Army, and accusing him of allowing hospitals and ambulances to be used to carry out kidnappings and killings.<sup>20</sup> According to an embassy cable sent by US Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad in September 2005, 'Ja'fari strongly disagreed' that the Mahdi Army's behaviour presented a serious problem, instead viewing the Sadrists as partners in government.<sup>21</sup>

Poor ministerial performance together with heightening violence and constant sabotage of public infrastructure led to an 'unprecedented crisis in the public services sector.'<sup>22</sup> Ministries were packed with talentless political appointees, electricity production remained completely inadequate and important rations failed to reach the Iraqi public.<sup>23</sup> Iraqis still had to wait an average of one hour in lines for petrol, supplies of which had only slightly improved since 2004, and the nation struggled to function with just 12 hours of electricity a day.<sup>24</sup> Though public optimism had improved with the January 2005 election, it quickly started to tail off as evidence of governmental incompetence abounded in people's everyday lives<sup>25</sup>. A senior Ja'fari adviser described how ministries became consumed with petty fights over resources, and admitted that, though he adored Prime Minister Ja'fari, 'Iraq needed a Prime Minister with strong execution to cut the nonsense and get the ministries to work.'<sup>26</sup>

By late 2005 sectarian tension pervaded Iraqi society as the brutality of the insurgency and rising casualties prompted increasingly indiscriminate retaliation from government affiliated militias, in turn fuelling further insurgent activity. In one particularly haunting tragedy, 953 Shi'ite pilgrims died on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2005 when rumours of a suicide bomber prompted a stampede over the al-Aima bridge. A

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*Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 222-3, 507.

<sup>20</sup> Kim Gamel, 'U.S.-Backed Iraqi Forces Arrest Health Ministry Official Linked to Shiite Death Squads', *Associated Press*, 9th February 2007.

<sup>21</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 185.

<sup>22</sup> Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 419.

<sup>23</sup> Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 420, 25-6.

<sup>24</sup> O'Hanlon and Kamp, 'Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq', 26, 28, 33.

<sup>25</sup> According to a poll conducted by the International Republican Institute, when asked 'Do you think Iraq is generally headed in the right or wrong direction?', 67% answered that it was going in the right direction in February/March 2005. This figure had fallen to just 43% by September 2005. O'Hanlon and Kamp, 'Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq', 35.

<sup>26</sup> Former Senior Adviser to Prime Minister Ja'fari, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

furious Muqtada al-Sadr promised to avenge the deaths, announcing that a sectarian war had begun, and 14 days later, on an audiotape produced by al-Qaeda in Iraq, al-Zarqawi declared war against the Shi'ites.<sup>27</sup> By February 2006 the floodgates were open, as the massive destruction of the religiously significant al-Askariya shrine prompted a frenzy of violent revenge killings, abductions and mutilations of civilians identified as Sunnis.

The potential consequences of the destruction of the shrine were quickly recognised by the US Ambassador who recommended that Prime Minister Ja'fari immediately enforce martial law. But Ja'fari was determined that the people 'needed to let off some steam,' and that his government was not prepared to stand in their way.<sup>28</sup> Just hours later, Shi'ite militias took to the streets and an estimated 1,300 civilians, mostly Sunni, were murdered in a display of violence that would mark a turning point in post-invasion Iraq.<sup>29</sup> Iraq's national police were increasingly drawn into the vicious sectarian violence, setting up checkpoints by routes that the local populace had to take to procure necessities in order to 'intimidate and dominate the Sunni population' and support militias who were murdering by identity card.<sup>30</sup> In one massacre uncovered by the Americans, the National Police arrested Sunni workers from a meatpacking plant, executed them and dumped their bodies, setting off a wave of retaliatory violence against the police.<sup>31</sup>

The Ja'fari government failed either to articulate an inclusive vision of the state or to effectively provide security and public services, and as a result was highly deficient in both normative and functional legitimacy. The government compounded the already extensive alienation of the Iraqi Sunni community from the narrative of the new Iraqi state by allowing state institutions to be used violently and disproportionately to target the Sunni community. The government thereby heavily reinforced the sense of Sunni alienation from the state which hastened the descent into civil war.

## The Foreign Ministry in a Time of Crisis

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<sup>27</sup> Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, 153, 91.

<sup>28</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq*, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama, 192.

<sup>29</sup> Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 444.

<sup>30</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq*, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama, 224.

<sup>31</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq*, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama, 227.

The previous chapter described how, despite having little authority, the Iraqi Foreign Ministry was able to build a relatively functional and professional bureaucracy that could at least be involved in day-to-day diplomacy. As sectarian killing became more and more prevalent, however, the work of the Foreign Ministry almost ground to a halt. Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari remembers how the ‘sectarian war’ sent the country ‘to hell’ and back, and describes how they ‘used to count daily dozens of bodies in the street of Baghdad killed or shot in the head purely on identity or sometimes on whether his name is Omar or Abd al-Zahra.’<sup>32</sup> In such circumstances it was difficult for the Ministry to operate effectively, people could not come to work for fear of being stopped by militiamen en route at fake checkpoints and being shot; others were afraid to leave the Ministry to go home and were sleeping in the office.<sup>33</sup> According to Deputy Foreign Minister Labeed Abbawi, the civil war was affecting ‘morale, performance and productivity.’<sup>34</sup>

Iraq was being consumed by internal war, and the Foreign Ministry’s priorities – when it was able to operate – reflected that. For Foreign Minister Zebari, beseeching the international community to try to put an end to the violence in Iraq became a crucial part of his work. He pleaded with the Arab League and Organisation of the Islamic Conference to fulfil ‘their responsibility’ towards Iraq and take the initiative to ‘bring all the Iraqi leaders’ from the various sects and parties together and to ‘let them talk.’<sup>35</sup> Zebari succeeded in convening two conferences at ‘the peak of sectarian strife,’ bringing together Iraqi representatives from the ‘resistance,’ from the opposition and from the government.<sup>36</sup> As for the pursuit of long-term foreign policy objectives, they were put on the back burner. As Zebari admits: ‘if you have instability, if you have insecurity, if you have terrorist attacks, if you have civil strife, if you have poverty’ the task of presenting your country in a favourable light to the world becomes nigh impossible and the best you can hope to achieve is to leverage your contacts with the outside world to try to bring about some internal stability.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> I.e. whether they had a Sunni or a Shi’ite name. Zebari, ‘Interview with author’.

<sup>33</sup> Labeed Abbawi, ‘Interview with author’, (London, 21st February 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Zebari, ‘Interview with author’.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

This characterisation of the Iraqi Foreign Ministry at the height of civil war echoes some of the findings of the literature on foreign policy in the developing world. The literature points out that the prevalence of internal threats means that foreign policy often becomes a tool through which states seek to address internal threats with the help of foreign powers or international bodies. In the Iraqi case, the Foreign Ministry reoriented itself towards seeking help from the international community to bring an end to the violent internal conflict that was threatening the collapse of the Iraqi state.

## Iran in Iraq's Civil War

### Iranian Interests

The government was a shambles as ministries either struggled to function or were overrun by militias jockeying for power, resources and influence against a backdrop of mounting civil violence. For interested foreign powers, Iraq became a very permissive environment in which to operate. Foreign Minister Zebari himself warned that the absence of a unified, coherent and functional government was enabling 'interventions by regional countries in the internal affairs of Iraq' who wanted to 'install themselves as patrons of its future.'<sup>38</sup> Iran was one country that was extremely interested in becoming a 'patron' of Iraq's future. The eight year long Iran-Iraq war between 1980 and 1988, which had cost Iran \$627 billion and 262,000 lives,<sup>39</sup> traumatised the young Islamic Republic and strengthened Persian narratives of a centuries-long rivalry between the two territories.<sup>40</sup> Since then, ensuring that such devastation could never again be wreaked on Iran by its western neighbour has been a core tenet of Iranian foreign policy. Though the US invasion removed Iran's long-time foe, Saddam Hussein, from power, it also established a vast US military presence on Iran's western border that was decidedly hostile. Iran's key strategic priorities in post-invasion Iraq, therefore, were a) to ensure that Iraq would never

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<sup>38</sup> Cited in Sean Kane, 'The Coming Turkish-Iranian Competition in Iraq', (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2011) 7.

<sup>39</sup> Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict* (Oxford: Routledge, 1990) 250-1.

<sup>40</sup> As Ray Takeyh writes, 'Iranians are struggling with the wounds of a controversial conflict. In many ways, the war continues to define the parameters of Iran's political culture and international orientation.' Ray Takeyh, 'Iran's New Iraq', *The Middle East Journal*, 621 (2008), 13-30, 19.

again be in a position where it could mount a successful attack on its neighbour, and b) to deter any possible future attack by the US on Iran.<sup>41</sup>

Iran was keen to ensure that the new Iraq would emerge as a militarily weak nation that was politically and economically dependent on the Islamic Republic and therefore unlikely to pose a threat.<sup>42</sup> It was also deemed crucial for Iranian regime survival that the US should be defeated in Iraq; in the words of one senior British diplomat, Iran determined to ‘make life hell for the coalition’ to ward off the risk of Iraq becoming ‘a US protectorate.’<sup>43</sup>

Though much attention is given to Iran’s revolutionary Islamist ideology,<sup>44</sup> there is little evidence that its policies in Iraq have been driven by any desire to export Iran’s religio-political philosophy.<sup>45</sup> Rather, Iran sees itself as primarily on the defensive and its Iraq policy is a reflection of its assessment of the threats posed by Iraq and by the US.<sup>46</sup> Even anti-Iranian politician Ayad Allawi, who often decries Iran’s pernicious role in Iraq, recognises that Iran is motivated primarily by a desire to ‘build defences to protect Iran,’ a need that has been made more acute by America’s ‘statements and threatening gestures’ which have fuelled Iranian perceptions that ‘everybody is conspiring against them.’<sup>47</sup>

In addition to diminishing the threats to its national security, Iran was also interested in securing a powerful position in mediating internal Iraqi power politics; shutting down the Iraq-based Iranian opposition group Mujahedin-e Khalq; gaining preferential agreements on land and water borders; developing a lucrative economic relationship with Iraq; and strengthening its influence over the clerical establishment in Najaf.

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<sup>41</sup> Milani, 'Iran's Strategic Objectives in Post-Saddam Iraq', 74. Iran commentator Trita Parsi made the point that Iraq has long been central to Iranian strategic calculations because ‘over the past three thousand years, Iran has almost exclusively been invaded from the west.’ Trita Parsi, 'Interview with author', (Washington D.C., 28th January 2013).

<sup>42</sup> A cable dispatched from the US embassy in Baghdad concluded that, according to its analysis, ‘An economically dependent and politically subservient Iraq would foster greater strategic depth for Iran.’ *The Guardian*, 'US Embassy Cables: Iran Attempts to Manipulate Iraq Elections' (2010).

<sup>43</sup> Senior British Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>44</sup> Ali-Reza Jarazadeh, for instance, depicts Iran’s foreign policy agenda in Iraq as being driven by a desire to export ‘its extremist brand of Islamic rule to the rest of the Middle East and the world.’ Ali-Reza Jafarzadeh, *The Iran Threat: President Ahmadinejad and the Coming Nuclear Crisis* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 84.

<sup>45</sup> Takeyh, 'Iran's New Iraq', 25.

<sup>46</sup> Senior British Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. Kayhan Barzegar, 'Iran's Foreign Policy in Post-Invasion Iraq', *Middle East Policy*, XV4 (2008), 47-58, 47.

<sup>47</sup> Allawi, 'Interview with author'.

## Patronising Iraqi Political Parties

Iran has long supported Iraqi Shi'ite political parties, building strong and lasting ties with these parties years before they were in contact with the US. The Shi'ite Islamist Iraqi Da'wah Party sought refuge in Iran after the Iranian revolution in 1979, and although they disagreed with Iran's system of government by clerics, *vilayat-e faqih*, they nonetheless maintained open relations with the Iranian leadership. The Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) was established by offshoots of the Da'wah party, together with the Iranian government, as a party more sympathetic to Iran's revolutionary vision. Iran also sponsored the Badr Brigades, a military wing of SCIRI, which controversially fought alongside Iran in the Iran-Iraq war.<sup>48</sup> These relationships between Iran and Iraq's Shi'ite political parties gave Iran a head start in the post-2003 era. As one former American diplomat commented, 'Iraqi Shi'a politicians had long-standing relations with Iran, they knew each other,' whereas the US was coming into Iraq with a relatively poor understanding of the nuances of intra-Shi'ite politics.<sup>49</sup> Attitudes towards Iran on the part of those politicians who were exiled there are mixed, however. Though some publicly declare their gratitude to the country for hosting them,<sup>50</sup> others bitterly recall the humiliations and frustrations of dealing with the Iranian government whilst in exile.<sup>51</sup>

Whether or not pre-existing relationship between Shi'ite politicians and the Iranian government lubricated relations, Iran was the only regional country willing to engage with the new Iraqi government immediately after the invasion. Unlike many of Iraq's Arab neighbours, who displayed their dissatisfaction with the invasion by shunning Iraq's new leaders, Iran was open for business with the new

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<sup>48</sup> The Badr Brigades was even subordinated to the leadership of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard; and as Ali A. Allawi notes, 'SCIRI's connections with Iran bedevilled it from the outset.' Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 44.

<sup>49</sup> Former American Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', (Washington D.C., 2013).

<sup>50</sup> Prime Minister Ja'fari himself described Iran as a 'friendly state which stood by Iraq's side in a time of crisis: It harboured Iraqis when Saddam Hussein killed, displaced, and harmed many of them.' Cited in Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 157.

<sup>51</sup> Prime Minister Maliki recalled the many times that he perceived the Iranian government as betraying the Da'wah party and concluded that he did not 'trust the Iranians for a minute.' Ned Parker and Raheem Salman, 'Notes From the Underground: The Rise of Nouri al-Maliki', *World Policy Journal*, (Spring 2013).

political elite from the earliest days of the Iraqi Governing Council.<sup>52</sup> As one senior member of the Da'wah party commented, 'when all the Arab doors are closed in front of the Shi'a they find only the Iranian door opened.'<sup>53</sup> Iran quickly surmised that making a 'sympathetic ally'<sup>54</sup> of Iraq could best be achieved by becoming deeply involved in Iraq's electoral politics, and by supporting the political ascendance of Iraqi Shi'ite political parties. Iran was under no illusion about Iraqi Shi'ites having fealty to the Islamic Republic, but they did believe that Shi'ite politicians might make for 'more amenable interlocutors'<sup>55</sup> and as such were keen to ensure their political dominance in Iraq.<sup>56</sup> This did not mean that Iran focused exclusively on patronising Shi'ite groups; in fact, 'they sought to have influence across the spectrum, including Sunni and Kurdish [political groups],'<sup>57</sup> but Iran was committed to seeing Shi'ite parties in pole position.<sup>58</sup>

To the Americans' surprise, Iran was an avid supporter of elections in Iraq,<sup>59</sup> partly because it was desperate to see sovereignty pass from the Americans to the Iraqis, and partly because democratic elections were bound to usher the numerically dominant Shi'ite community into power.<sup>60</sup> When elections did take place, the chairman of Iran's commanding Guardian Council declared Iran to be happy with

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<sup>52</sup> One deputy member of the Iraqi Governing Council explained that, 'Iran was one of the first countries that tried to reach out to us post-invasion. They sent a delegation to the Iraqi Central Government, they reached out, whereas most Arab countries were in denial, they refused to contemplate to deal with us.' Former Senior Iraqi Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', (Washington D.C., 28th January 2013).

<sup>53</sup> Senior Da'wah Party Member and Former Adviser to Prime Minister Maliki, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', (2013).

<sup>54</sup> Kamrava convincingly argues that Iran sought to advance its interests in Iraq not by transforming the country into a copy of the Islamic Republic, but simply by ensuring that the politicians who would succeed in Iraq's electoral politics would be sympathetic to Iran. Mehran Kamrava, 'Iranian Foreign and Security Policies in the Persian Gulf', in Mehran Kamrava (ed.), *International Politics of the Persian Gulf* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 184-206.

<sup>55</sup> Takeyh, 'Iran's New Iraq', 14.

<sup>56</sup> Iraqi commentator Yahya al-Kubaisi characterizes the Iranian strategy in Iraq as one that is focused on keeping 'the Shi'ites in power, no matter who the Shi'ites are,' an analysis that is widely shared across the political and sectarian spectrum. Yahya al-Kubaisi, 'Interview with author', (Amman, 24th October 2011). Milani, 'Iran's Strategic Objectives in Post-Saddam Iraq', 74.

<sup>57</sup> Former American Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. And Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 306.

<sup>58</sup> Eldad J. Pardo, 'Iran in Iraq: Between Opportunity and Threat', in Amnon Cohen and Noga Efrati (eds.), *Post-Saddam Iraq: New Realities, Old Identities, Changing Patterns* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2011), 212-42, 221.

<sup>59</sup> Takeyh writes that, contrary to Washington's expectations, 'The Iranian hardliners who have been so adamant about suppressing the reform movement [at home] have emerged as forceful advocates of democratic pluralism in Iraq. Indeed, a democratic Iraq offers Iran political and strategic advantages.' Takeyh, 'Iran's New Iraq', 27.

<sup>60</sup> Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 306. and Michael Eisenstadt, Michael Knights, and Ahmed Ali, 'Iran's Influence in Iraq', (Washington D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2011) ix.



‘the elections and the victory of the...Islamist alliance,’ adding that ‘a stable Islamic rule is being established’ in Iraq<sup>61</sup>. The Iranian strategy was to back a wide variety of Shi’ite Islamist political parties,<sup>62</sup> thereby assuring influence within the Iraqi government regardless of the outcome of elections.<sup>63</sup> By ‘betting on a variety of horses’<sup>64</sup> the Iranians also positioned themselves as effective power brokers in post-election skirmishes over the distribution of posts in the new government. Whether it was by persuasion, intimidation or bribery, the Iranians were ‘very active’ when it came to influencing government formation processes to their advantage.<sup>65</sup> A cable sent from the US embassy in Baghdad reported that ‘unchecked IRGC-QF [Iranian Revolutionary Guard Command-Quds Force] and other Iranian patronage ensures that the Shia political spectrum is conclusively dominated by political parties that are at least sympathetic, if not entirely beholden, to their financial benefactors.’<sup>66</sup> One senior Iraqi diplomat, when comparing the relative effectiveness of Iran and the US on the political scene, quipped that the US has ‘no carrots or sticks’ and that Iran at least ‘has carrots.’<sup>67</sup> He wanted to wait until a more private meeting before discussing Iran’s ‘sticks.’ Maintaining their focus on the relative advantage of dealing with Shi’ite, rather than Sunni, politicians, the Iranians also levelled strong pressure on Iraqi Shi’ites to run together on a unified Shi’ite list - so as to avoid splitting the Shi’ite vote.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Cited in Jafarzadeh, *The Iran Threat: President Ahmadinejad and the Coming Nuclear Crisis*, 81.

<sup>62</sup> Iran would support its ‘preferred candidates’ by ‘funding and advising’ them. Eisenstadt, Knights, and Ali, ‘Iran’s Influence in Iraq’, ix.

<sup>63</sup> Again the Iranian patronage of a wide variety of Shi’ite political actors is universally accepted to be the case. Kubaisi, ‘Interview with author’. One senior SCIRI political figure complained in an interview that SCIRI was ‘damaged by association with Iran’ despite the fact that Iran had been ‘very smart’ and funded a number of Shi’ite political parties. Senior Member of Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, ‘Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity’, (2013).

<sup>64</sup> A senior British diplomat described the Iranians’ tactic of ‘betting on a variety of horses’ as a ‘really good strategy’ that had afforded them a lot of power and influence over the political process in Iraq. Senior British Diplomat, ‘Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity’.

<sup>65</sup> A former senior adviser to the Obama administration complained that despite the US having ‘140,000 troops in the country’ the Iranians were having more of an impact by ‘doing it through intimidation and spreading a lot of money around.’ Former Senior Adviser to Obama Administration, ‘Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity’, (Washington D.C., 2013).

<sup>66</sup> Cited in Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 156.

<sup>67</sup> Former Senior Iraqi Diplomat, ‘Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity’, (January 2013).

<sup>68</sup> Foreign minister Hoshyar Zebari admits that the Iranians have ‘good relations [and] influence over’ all Iraq’s Shi’ite political parties, and that they have used this position to force ‘them to unify to maintain Shi’a solidarity, irrespective of whatever differences they have.’ Zebari, ‘Interview with author’. Numerous studies of Iraqi politics have pointed to Iran ‘encouraging its Shi’ite allies to run in a unified list.’ Eisenstadt, Knights, and Ali, ‘Iran’s Influence in Iraq’, ix.

By supporting various Iraqi political actors, the Iranians were not seeking to govern Iraq by proxy, but simply to ensure that they had a hand in the big decisions that would affect their interests.<sup>69</sup> As one senior Iraqi diplomat put it, Iran was not dictating Iraqi policy ‘at a micro level,’ but was ensuring that ‘the major parties’ in Iraq avoided making decisions that would be considered ‘objectionable for Iran.’<sup>70</sup> It was, therefore, getting the right people into power that was key to safeguarding Iran’s interests. Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari warned that ‘regional countries’ were trying to influence ‘the form of the next government, and who will head the government,’<sup>71</sup> and believed that Qasim Suleimani, commander of Iran’s elite Quds Force, had virtually a final say on who could emerge as Prime Minister in Iraq.<sup>72</sup>

Backing competing actors in Iraq insured Iran against most electoral eventualities, but it also played into a policy of keeping Iraq weak and fractious.<sup>73</sup> The logic was that an internally divided and weak Iraq would be unlikely to pose a threat to Iran. The idea of an Iraq with strong regions and a weak central government was particularly attractive to Iran, because without a strong federal government Iraq was unlikely to wage war, whilst a strong Shi’ite southern region close to the border with Iran could prove a lucrative source of revenue and a realm of enhanced influence. It was widely suspected that the SCIRI plan to create a federal Shi’ite super-region in southern Iraq, for instance, was backed by Iran.<sup>74</sup> In an interview with CBS, US General John Abizaid said that he believed ‘people within the Iranian government’ were pursuing a ‘Lebanon-like solution to Iraq’ that would be characterised by a ‘weak central government.’<sup>75</sup> The pursuit of this policy goal was tricky, however, because although Iran benefited from a weak Iraq, it recognised that preventing a wholesale breakdown of Iraq was also critical to Iranian security.<sup>76</sup> The last thing Iran wanted was an independent Kurdistan emboldening Kurdish

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<sup>69</sup> A former American diplomat I interviewed said that to ‘maintain a lot of influence with the Iraqi government’ was the core aim of Iran’s Iraq policy. Former American Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>70</sup> Former Senior Iraqi Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>71</sup> Cited in Kane, 'The Coming Turkish-Iranian Competition in Iraq', 7.

<sup>72</sup> According to cable sent by US Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, cited in Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 188.

<sup>73</sup> Takeyh, 'Iran's New Iraq', 14. Eisenstadt, Knights, and Ali, 'Iran's Influence in Iraq'.

<sup>74</sup> Reider Visser notes that ‘Following a series of meetings with Iranian authorities...propaganda in favour of a single Shi’ite region...virtually exploded in SCIRI’s mouthpiece al-Adala.’ Reider Visser, 'Basra Crude: The Great Game of Iraq’s “Southern” Oil', (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2007) 2.

<sup>75</sup> CBS News, 'Interview with General John Abizaid: Abizaid Discusses Iraq' (26th November 2006).

<sup>76</sup> Takeyh, 'Iran's New Iraq', 23.

separatists in Iran, and a radicalised Sunni political entity threatening to wreak violence on the Shi'ite theocracy. So a balance had to be found between encouraging a level of internal Iraqi political division whilst nevertheless preventing an all out disintegration of the Iraqi state. As one former American diplomat put it, Iran wanted to 'ensure Iraq didn't become powerful' but that it 'neither disintegrated into chaos or civil [war].'<sup>77</sup> Iran has got that balance wrong on a few occasions, and has tended to recalibrate its activities accordingly.<sup>78</sup>

Iran was a big supporter of Prime Minister Ja'fari, and reportedly lavished millions of dollars in political funding on him in the lead-up to Iraq's January 2005 parliamentary elections.<sup>79</sup> Ja'fari had spent time as a political exile in Iran before moving on to London, and was quick to rebuild relations with the country as his political star ascended in post-invasion Iraq. In July 2005 Ja'fari announced that Iraq's 'Iranian brothers'<sup>80</sup> would be donating \$1 billion to Iraq to promote religious tourism, and to build schools, hospitals and libraries,<sup>81</sup> and he turned a blind eye to Iran's role in fomenting violence in the country. Prime Minister Ja'fari also moved to strengthen intelligence ties with the Iranians, establishing a new unofficial intelligence agency headed by a pro-Iranian figure who allegedly shared information about American positions with Iranian-backed Sadrist fighters.<sup>82</sup> For the Iranians the partnership with Ja'fari worked well, and they threw their support behind him for a second term as Prime Minister.<sup>83</sup> Although one advisor to Prime Minister Ja'fari described Iran's strategy as simply predicated on the mantra: 'the Shi'a must not lose control of Baghdad come what may,' it seemed Prime Minister Ja'fari had been a good bet and the Iranians would be sorry to see him go.<sup>84</sup>

A wide range of Iraqi political parties conducted independent relationships with the Iranians, including parties who were in the coalition government but

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<sup>77</sup> Former American Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>78</sup> For example after intra-Shi'ite political violence got out of hand, Quds Force leader Qasim Suleimani forced leaders to reconcile at a meeting in Tehran. Eisenstadt, Knights, and Ali, 'Iran's Influence in Iraq', 4.

<sup>79</sup> According to American intelligence reports, cited in Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 142.

<sup>80</sup> Cited in Jafarzadeh, *The Iran Threat: President Ahmadinejad and the Coming Nuclear Crisis*, 94.

<sup>81</sup> Edward Wong, 'Iraq Dances With Iran While American Seethes', *The New York times*, 31st July 2005.

<sup>82</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 221.

<sup>83</sup> Woodward, *State of Denial*, 446.

<sup>84</sup> Former Senior Adviser to Prime Minister Ja'fari, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

outside of the executive. The weakness of the Iraqi executive created an environment in which different corners of the government were able to conduct their own independent relationships with the Iranian government, often outbidding each other to prove their utility to this foreign power. Fully aware of these competing relationships with Iran, Prime Minister Ja'fari privileged the security of his own regime over national security considerations in pursuing his own relationship with Iran. Despite being conscious of the highly damaging role that Iran was playing in his country, Prime Minister Ja'fari did not seek to do anything to temper Iran's support for violent actors inside Iraq. Rather, the Prime Minister assiduously sought out Iranian support for his own regime, in an attempt to ward off challenges to his power by domestic political rivals. This meets the expectations set out in my conceptual chapter; by virtue of its weakness the central government both lost its authority over foreign policy and allowed considerations of regime security rather than national security to drive its foreign policy choices.

### Fuelling Iraq's Militias

In a somewhat essentializing analogy, a former senior member of Prime Minister Maliki's government said that 'Iranians could sit [for] twenty years weaving a small piece of carpet,' and that their patience, persistence and hard work paid dividends.<sup>85</sup> When it came to building intelligence networks in Iraq, the Iranians had indeed been diligent and thorough, establishing a base of informants and operatives across southern Iraq over the twenty years prior to the US invasion.<sup>86</sup> These networks would stand the Iranians in good stead when it came to leveraging their influence in Iraq's increasingly violent political landscape. In addition to supporting the political process, the Iranians were also committed to aiding the violent activities of Iraq's burgeoning militias. Though the primary aim of Iranian-backed violence was to 'bleed the US into leaving'<sup>87</sup> and to deter any future attacks on Iranian soil, it also afforded the Iranians an additional lever of influence it could bring to bear on Iraq's political process. The scale and intensity of Iranian operations in Iraq underwent a significant shift in 2005. This is partly a reflection of the increasingly permissive

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<sup>85</sup> Former Senior Member of Prime Minister Maliki's Government, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', (2013).

<sup>86</sup> Cordesman, *Iraqi Security Forces: A Strategy for Success*, 297. Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 153.

<sup>87</sup> Former American Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

environment on offer in Iraq – with the coming to power of a pro-Iranian political elite, and an increasingly volatile domestic scene with which the US coalition was struggling to cope – and partly a response to changes in Iranian domestic politics. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2005 a neo-conservative former member of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, assumed the Iranian Presidency, and soon afterwards Iran began to pursue a much more ‘pro-active’ policy in Iraq.<sup>88</sup> The election of Ahmadinejad shifted the balance of power in the Iranian government away from ‘accommodationists,’ who wanted rapprochement with the Western powers, towards hawks committed to maximising Iran’s strategic advantage in the face of faltering US power in Iraq.<sup>89</sup> Iran’s Iraq policy was not directly managed by the presidency; in fact, Quds Force commander Qasim Suleimani was arguably more influential than the President when it came to Iraq,<sup>90</sup> but the accession of Ahmadinejad nonetheless extended the parameters within which the IRGC was allowed to act, and in the following years the IRGC would take full advantage of this latitude.<sup>91</sup>

The IRGC, or more specifically the Quds Force, worked with a number of Iraqi Shi’ite militias including Muqtada al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army, SCIRI’s Badr Brigades, as well as with sections of the Fadhila and Da’wah parties. Of course the Badr Brigades, having been founded in Iran, were continuing a long-standing co-operation with the IRGC. Muqtada al-Sadr, on the other hand, was a young cleric who was relatively unknown until he was accused of orchestrating the murder of pro-American cleric Abdul Majid al-Khoei in Najaf in April 2003.<sup>92</sup> Muqtada’s father, Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, was a populist leader of the Iraqi *Hawza*, which is one of the two major centres of Shi’ite clerical learning in the world, who was elevated by Saddam for his Iraqi nationalist credentials. As Mohammad al-Sadr grew in popularity, however, he became less and less willing to endorse Saddam’s regime and was eventually assassinated along with two of his

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<sup>88</sup> Ali M. Ansari, *Iran Under Ahmadinejad: The Politics of Confrontation* (Oxford: Routledge, 2007) 60.

<sup>89</sup> Milani, 'Iran's Strategic Objectives in Post-Saddam Iraq', 82.

<sup>90</sup> Former Senior Member of Prime Minister Maliki's Government, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>91</sup> In June 2006 General George Casey, America’s top commander in Iraq, said, ‘since January we have seen an upsurge in their [Iranian] support, particularly to the Shia extremist groups. They are providing weapons, training and equipment to Shia insurgents, and that equipment is being used against us and Iraqis.’ Thomas E. Ricks, 'General Reports Spike in Iranian Activity in Iraq', *The Washington Post*, 23rd June 2006

<sup>92</sup> Mehrdad Balali, 'Muslim Radicals Blamed for Iraqi Cleric's Murder', *Reuters*, 12th April 2003.

sons in 1999.<sup>93</sup> Muqtada was also the nephew and son-in-law of renowned Shi'ite thinker Ayatollah Baqir al-Sadr. An iconic figure in modern Shi'ism, Baqir al-Sadr was an early leader of the Da'wah party and an accomplished writer and philosopher who was brutally murdered by the Ba'athist regime in 1980.<sup>94</sup> Combining his skills as an orator and drawing on the credibility afforded by his impressive family connections, Muqtada was quick to activate a vast network of support within lower-class Shi'ite communities.<sup>95</sup> As the Iraqi government failed to provide local services, Muqtada and his supporters stepped in, offering 'their own municipal, educational, medical and social services.'<sup>96</sup> In April 2003, for example, the Mahdi Army commandeered power stations in Sadr city from the CPA and started providing electricity to the locality twenty-four hours a day, lending the Sadrist movement credibility and popular support.<sup>97</sup> Restoring law and order was also a priority for the Sadrists; Muqtada's deputy for Baghdad, Sheikh Muhammad Fartusi, described how the Sadrists addressed the suffering of the people: 'The first thing we did was to reassure people that the area is secure and stable, then restore social services, traffic, power, then restore law and prevent people from looting and stealing.'<sup>98</sup> The lack of access to state-administered justice also led Muqtada's movement to appoint its own judges to preside over local disputes, and in October 2003 Muqtada even formed an alternative government 'comprising the ministries of justice, finance, information, interior, and foreign affairs.'<sup>99</sup>

Iran was very attracted to Muqtada's social provision formula for wooing disenfranchised Shi'ites, it being highly reminiscent of the approach of Iranian-backed Lebanese Hezbollah. And despite Muqtada's archly anti-Iranian rhetoric,<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Patrick Cockburn, *Muqtada: Muqtada al-Sadr, the Shia Revival, and the Struggle for Iraq* (New York: Scribner, 2008) 104-6.

<sup>94</sup> Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 27-31.

<sup>95</sup> Muqtada particularly captured the support of 'the younger generation of immigrants from the Shi'i countryside to the slums of Sadr city...' Liora Lukitz, 'The Shi'is in Post-Saddam Iraq: A Common Political Front, but Different Tactics?', in Amnon Cohen and Noga Efrati (eds.), *Post-Saddam Iraq: New Realities, Old Identities, Changing Patterns* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2011), 53-103, 69.

<sup>96</sup> Nimrod Raphaeli, 'Understanding Muqtada al-Sadr', *Middle East Quarterly*, XI4 (2004), 33-42.

<sup>97</sup> 'The move would be unsustainable in the long-run since it would merely drain power from other parts of the Iraqi electrical grid.' Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 69.

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Nir Rosen, cited in: Rosen, *In the Belly of the Green Bird: The Triumph of the Martyrs in Iraq*, 31.

<sup>99</sup> Cited in Raphaeli, 'Understanding Muqtada al-Sadr'.

<sup>100</sup> 'Muqtada denounced his Shia opponents in SCIRI and the Marji'iyah as being Iranian stooges.' Cockburn, *Muqtada: Muqtada al-Sadr, the Shia Revival, and the Struggle for Iraq*, 202. Iraqi commentators believe that Iran's support of Muqtada, despite him being 'anti-Iranian,' is a testament

they keenly sought out a partnership with their ‘Hezbollah of Iraq.’<sup>101</sup> Because Muqtada himself did not have the educational stature necessary to pass religious judgements, he needed the backing of a more senior cleric, and for that he turned to Grand Ayatollah Ha’iri. A student of Muqtada’s father, and an Ayatollah whose ‘radical positions’ challenged ‘the hegemony of the four other Grand Ayatollahs living in Najaf,’ Iran-based Ha’iri was a natural choice for Muqtada. In May 2003 Muqtada travelled to Iran to meet with Ayatollah Ha’iri, and the trip gave Qasim Suleimani, commander of the Iranian Quds Force, an opportunity to meet and establish relations with the young Iraqi cleric.<sup>102</sup> Iran would quickly become a substantial backer of the Sadrist movement, as Muqtada realised that he could not afford to go without Iranian weapons and military expertise in his escalating fight against occupying US forces.<sup>103</sup> Iranian funding was soon flooding into the arm of the Mahdi Army that focused on targeting US troops,<sup>104</sup> with one source in April 2004 estimating that over \$80 million had been channelled to the group in the preceding months.<sup>105</sup> Iran also provided Sadr supporters with military training at camps established on the Iran-Iraq border, teaching them how to conduct guerrilla warfare, produce bombs and conduct espionage.<sup>106</sup> In 2004, when the Sadrists overran Najaf, occupying the Imam Ali shrine and facing off US troops reluctant to damage the holy city, the Iranians directly supported the Sadrists with weapons and personnel.<sup>107</sup> The Iranians were, however, constantly in pursuit of new avenues of influence in Iraq. Despite their material backing of the Sadrist occupation of the Shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf, they also reached out to the Allawi government offering to ‘resolve the issue within 6 hours’ if the go-ahead was given.<sup>108</sup> Prime

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to Iran’s political skill and hard-nosed focus on achieving their interests in Iraq. Kubaisi, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>101</sup> In an interview with the author, a prolific Iraqi commentator described the Sadrists as ‘Hezbollah of Iraq.’ Haydar Said, 'Interview with author', (Amman, 2011).

<sup>102</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 101. It is possible that Grand Ayatollah Ha’iri himself could have become a tool by which Iran applies pressure on Muqtada al-Sadr: on a number of occasions Ha’iri has criticised the actions of Sadr and withdrawn his backing from the Iraqi cleric. Eisenstadt, 'Knights, and Ali, Iran's Influence in Iraq', 6. and Lukitz, 'The Shi'is in Post-Saddam Iraq: A Common Political Front, but Different Tactics?', 74.

<sup>103</sup> Cockburn, *Muqtada: Muqtada al-Sadr, the Shia Revival, and the Struggle for Iraq*, 203.

<sup>104</sup> Lukitz, 'The Shi'is in Post-Saddam Iraq: A Common Political Front, but Different Tactics?', 70.

<sup>105</sup> MEMRI, 'Special Dispatch No. 692: Iran's Role in the Recent Uprising in Iraq',

<<http://www.memri.org/report/en/print1104.htm>> citing *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London) 9<sup>th</sup> April 2004.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 321.

<sup>108</sup> Allawi, 'Interview with author'.

Minister Allawi was outraged by the Iranian attempt to become interlocutors in a conflict partly of their own making and rejected the offer, but the incident demonstrates the multiplicity of Iranian tactics in Iraq. In addition to supporting Sadr's violent activity in Iraq, the Iranians also mediated a path for Sadr into mainstream Iraqi politics. They encouraged Sadr to participate in Iraq's parliamentary elections, coached Sadrist candidates, and pressured the Iraqi government to integrate the Mahdi Army into the military and state police forces.<sup>109</sup> Indeed it would be Sadrist support for Iran-backed Ibrahim al-Ja'fari that would enable the latter to emerge as premier after the January 2005 elections,<sup>110</sup> despite the supposed Sadrist rejection of politics under occupation.

Whether it was in support of Sadr's Mahdi Army or one of its other Iraqi clients, Iran devoted vast resources to its operation in Iraq. Estimates of Iran's spending on its activities in Iraq vary considerably; one Iranian defector claimed that Iran was spending \$70 million a month on its activities in Iraq,<sup>111</sup> whilst the US embassy put this figure at a much lower \$100-200 million a year.<sup>112</sup> In a press conference on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2007, US Brigadier General Kevin Begner said that Iran's Quds Force had been channelling up to \$3 million a month to Iraqi militias, and that Iran had been using Lebanese Hezbollah to train these militias and to facilitate weapons transfers to them.<sup>113</sup> Some cells were paid for their successes, between \$4,000 and \$13,000 was on offer for the successful targeting of US forces with roadside bombs and rockets.<sup>114</sup> And with the increasing representation of Shi'ite Islamists in the Iraqi government, the line between Iranian patronage for politics and for violent 'resistance' was increasingly blurred. One American intelligence report in 2005 complained that SCIRI, the dominant party in the new Iraqi government, had received over \$100 million from Iran of which \$45 million was allocated to its

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<sup>109</sup> Eisenstadt, Knights, and Ali, 'Iran's Influence in Iraq', 6. Allawi, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>110</sup> Michael Eppel, 'Kurdish Politics and the Shaping of Post-Saddam Iraq', in Amnon Cohen and Noga Efrati (eds.), *Post-Saddam Iraq: New Realities, Old Identities, Changing Patterns* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2011), 104-28, 121.

<sup>111</sup> MEMRI, 'Special Dispatch No. 692: Iran's Role in the Recent Uprising in Iraq'.based on claims of an Iranian defector, cites *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London) 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2004.

<sup>112</sup> *The Guardian*, 'US Embassy Cables: Iran Attempts to Manipulate Iraq Elections' (2010).

<sup>113</sup> Lee Leath, 'U.S. Implicates Iran in January Attack', *Associated Press*, 3rd July 2007.

<sup>114</sup> Michael Knights, 'The Evolution of Iran's Special Groups in Iraq', <<http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-evolution-of-iran%E2%80%99s-special-groups-in-iraq>>, accessed 23rd September 2013.



militant arm, the Badr Brigades.<sup>115</sup> SCIRI, it seemed, had two very different faces: the one it presented to Iran and the one it presented to America. The US dealt with SCIRI's articulate and suave Adel Abdul-Mahdi and Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim, whilst Iran dealt with Badr Brigades chief and tough man Hadi al-Ameri.<sup>116</sup>

Weapons were available, and could be produced, inside Iraq, but Iran was to prove vital in enabling the spread of deadly EFPs (explosively formed penetrators) in the Iraq conflict. EFPs, which were manufactured in Iran and smuggled to Iraq, were four times more lethal than regular IEDs<sup>117</sup> (improvised explosive devices) because of their ability to slice through heavy armour and to explode inside the military vehicle.<sup>118</sup> EFPs began to make their way into Iraq in 2004 and 2005, and by 2006 around fifteen EFPs were detonated or found and dismantled every month.<sup>119</sup> In addition to the EFPs, which were responsible for deaths of hundreds of US soldiers in Iraq,<sup>120</sup> Iran was also smuggling 122 millimetre mortars and C-4 explosives across the border which were being used in assaults against coalition forces.<sup>121</sup> In one particularly dramatic press briefing, US military personnel presented physical evidence of Iranian-made weaponry, including EFP launchers, mortar shells and rocket-propelled grenades, on a table in the briefing room.<sup>122</sup>

From 2005 Iran began training Iraqi militias in the use of EFPs, mortars and the tactics of guerrilla warfare, including how to carry out targeted assassinations.<sup>123</sup> Apparently in order to give their Iraqi presence an Arab face, Iran deployed

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<sup>115</sup> Cited in Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 156.

<sup>116</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 140.

<sup>117</sup> Woodward, *State of Denial*, 474.

<sup>118</sup> The EFP is described as a bomb that 'looks like a large coffee can with a wide and precisely milled copper disc at one end. When activated by a passive infrared sensor, explosives in the can went off, propelling the disc forward and turning it into a slug of molten copper than lanced through the heavy armour with ease.' Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 151.

<sup>119</sup> Woodward, *State of Denial*, 474.

<sup>120</sup> Eisenstadt, Knights, and Ali, 'Iran's Influence in Iraq', 11.

<sup>121</sup> Kenneth Katzman, 'Iran's Activities and Influence in Iraq', (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2007) 3.

<sup>122</sup> James Glanz, 'U.S. Says Arms Link Iranians to Iraqi Shiites', *The New York Times*, 12th February 2007.

<sup>123</sup> Pardo, 'Iran in Iraq: Between Opportunity and Threat', 223. Woodward, *State of Denial*, 474. Senior British Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

Hezbollah to run much of its ‘sophisticated’ and ‘well-organized training program,’ which usually took place in Iranian territory.<sup>124</sup>

Iran’s success in smuggling weapons and personnel in and out of Iraq was partly down to its extensive intelligence network inside Iraq and its well-developed ‘underground military infrastructure’ in the country.<sup>125</sup> With an embassy in Baghdad and consulates in Basra, Karbala, Erbil and Suleymaniyah, Iran uses its formal diplomatic structure in Iraq to facilitate its intelligence presence in the country. Both Iranian Ambassadors posted to Iraq since 2003 were former operatives in the Quds Force;<sup>126</sup> Hassan Kazemi Qomi presided over the Iranian embassy until 2010, when Hassan Danaifar took over. Hassan Danaifar’s trajectory is a particularly interesting one. He was actually born in Iraq, but exiled to Iran in Saddam Hussein’s campaign to rid Iraq of ‘ethnic Persians.’ Once in Iran he joined the Quds Force, an elite arm of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, and assumed responsibility for operation of the IRGC forces during the Iran-Iraq war. Aware of the intimate links between the Iranian diplomats in Iraq and Iranian intelligence, the US attempted to declare several Iranian diplomats *persona non grata* in Iraq, but backtracked fearing Iranian retaliation.<sup>127</sup> Through their association with Badr members assigned to Iraqi intelligence agencies, many of whom have dual Iraqi-Iranian citizenship, the Iranians have also been able to infiltrate Iraqi state intelligence.<sup>128</sup> A former Badr intelligence officer, known as Engineer Ahmed, became notorious when it was discovered that in his new assignment in the Ministry of the Interior’s Intelligence Department he was running a secret underground prison in which many former pilots who had participated in the Iran-Iraq war were being held.<sup>129</sup> The incident raised questions about whether Iran was using Iraq’s security and intelligence

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<sup>124</sup> Matthew Levitt, 'Testimony of Dr. Matthew Levitt', (U.S. Senate Relations Committee on Foreign Relations. Subcommittee on Near Eastern and Central Asian Affairs, 2012).

<sup>125</sup> Pardo, 'Iran in Iraq: Between Opportunity and Threat', 221. US intelligence concluded that EFPs were being smuggled into Iraq using ‘the same covert arms distribution network that the Quds Force had relied on before 2003 against Saddam, only now the arms were going to units of the Mahdi Army and other Iran-backed militias...’ Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 152-3.

<sup>126</sup> Eisenstadt, Knights, and Ali, 'Iran's Influence in Iraq', 6. Bill Roggio, 'General Petraeus: Iran's Ambassador to Iraq "is a Qods Force Member"', <[http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/10/general\\_petraeus\\_ira.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2007/10/general_petraeus_ira.php)>, accessed 23rd September 2013.

<sup>127</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 155-6.

<sup>128</sup> Eisenstadt, Knights, and Ali, 'Iran's Influence in Iraq', 7.

<sup>129</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 186-7.

apparatus to pursue a 'revenge agenda' inside Iraq for its previous suffering at the hands of its neighbour.<sup>130</sup> Meanwhile, a diplomatic cable dispatched by the US embassy in Baghdad recorded the Ja'fari government's 'close, co-operative relationship' with Iranian intelligence and a follow up cable reported that Ja'fari was floating plans to set up a new intelligence agency headed by a close associate of Iran.<sup>131</sup> Iran also used a number of alternative methods to strengthen its intelligence apparatus in Iraq. A generous financier of religious students, it is reported that up to one third of the two thousand Iranian religious students in Iraq's holy cities have links with Iranian intelligence.<sup>132</sup> And where sympathy for the Iranian cause has been lacking in Iraq, Iran has thrown money at the problem, lubricating its work with an ample supply of payoffs for local facilitators.<sup>133</sup>

More controversially, Iran has also been accused of supporting Sunni militant groups including al-Qaeda affiliates, despite their targeting of Shi'ite civilians.<sup>134</sup> The radical Sunni group Ansar al-Islam, based in Iraqi Kurdistan, fled to Iran on the eve of the US invasion and appears to have been given refuge there. Many are later believed to have returned to Iraq to participate in the post-war violence.<sup>135</sup> Iran also seems to have 'tolerated an al-Qaida presence in Iran,'<sup>136</sup> and allowed its Syrian ally to enable the transit of extremist Sunni fighters over the border into Iraq.<sup>137</sup> Some Sunni politicians are convinced that Iran uses radical

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<sup>130</sup> One Iraqi commentator described Iran as engaged in a 'revenge agenda' inside Iraq. Iraqi Commentator, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', (2013). An aide to Ja'fari said that he thought Iran was behind not only the systematic killing of Iraqi pilots, but also possibly behind the murder of an incredibly large population of Iraq's academic and professional class. Former Senior Adviser to Prime Minister Ja'fari, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. A number of other sources have alleged Iranian involvement in the killing of Iraqi academics. Max Fuller and Dirk Adriaensens, 'Wiping the Slate Clean', in Raymond W. Baker, Shereen T. Ismael, and Tareq Y. Ismael (eds.), *Cultural Cleansing in Iraq: Why Museums were Looted, Libraries Burned and Academics were Murdered* (New York: Pluto Press, 2010) 166.

<sup>131</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 156-7.

<sup>132</sup> Lionel Beehner and Greg Bruno, 'Iran's Involvement in Iraq', (Washington D.C.: Council on Foreign Relations, 2008).

<sup>133</sup> Eisenstadt, Knights, and Ali, 'Iran's Influence in Iraq', 7.

<sup>134</sup> Most diplomats and commentators I interviewed referred to Iran's support of both Sunni and Shi'ite militias. Senior British Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. Former American Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. Kanan Makiya said that as far as he was aware Iran funded many different groups and had relations with Al Qaeda. Makiya, 'Interview with the author'.

<sup>135</sup> McKiernan, *The Kurds: A People in Search of Their Homeland* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006) 291.

<sup>136</sup> Cordesman, *Iraqi Security Forces: A Strategy for Success*, 299.

<sup>137</sup> Iraqi National Security Adviser Mowaffak al-Rubaie asked the Iranians to stop Damascus from allowing jihadist fighters to cross into Iraq. Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei blamed the

Sunni groups, who target those involved in the political process, to assassinate Sunni rivals to Iranian-backed politicians.<sup>138</sup> It is widely believed amongst parts of the Sunni population that Iranian operatives were behind the fateful destruction of the al-Askari mosque in Samarra, because it was a ‘sophisticated operation’ that required the systematic ‘planting [of] some 400 pounds of explosives’ which would have taken twenty men four hours to complete.<sup>139</sup> Of course it is extremely difficult when it comes to these allegations to distinguish between fact and the expression of anti-Iranian prejudices, which are prevalent in Iraq. It is, however, possible that Iran did use its clients in Iraq to ‘stoke sectarian tensions;’ indeed some Mahdi Army militiamen claimed that Iran had paid them to attack other Shi’ite groups ‘in the hope that al-Qaeda would be blamed, thereby reigniting flagging sectarian violence.’<sup>140</sup> Indeed, whether or not Iran wanted to be involved in Iraq’s sectarian war, when its Shi’ite clients turned their arms on Iraqi Sunnis, Iran became a player nonetheless.<sup>141</sup>

Iraqi state weakness allowed a host of sub-state actors to conduct independent relationships with Iran in competition with the Iraqi executive. The Iraqi state’s inability to provide security and other public goods at a local level empowered sub-state actors who sought material and financial support from neighbouring Iran. The violence engaged in by these actors further de-legitimised the Iraqi state, which was clearly unable to deliver security to its citizens, in addition to spurring on the creation of ever more local militias. This cycle of internal violence in Iraq was fuelled in part by Iranian intervention and was allowed to continue because many Iraqi politicians were incentivised to maintain favourable individual relationships with Iran. Foreign policy making had become diffuse in Iraq, and the failure of the Iraqis to form a single foreign policy front rendered them extremely vulnerable to Iranian intervention that was ultimately detrimental to Iraq’s national security.

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violence on the presence of US troops and said ‘the US and Britain will eventually have to leave Iraq with a bitter experience.’ Cited in Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, 214.

<sup>138</sup> Iraqi MP Abdulla al-Jabori, who has survived several assassination attempts, claims that although those who tried to kill him were Sunnis they were being paid by Iran. Such a claim clearly fits into this MP’s political agenda, so should be treated with healthy scepticism, but there is no evidence one way or the other. Abdulla al- Jabori, ‘Interview with author’, (Amman, 2013).

<sup>139</sup> Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, 251-2.

<sup>140</sup> Eisenstadt, Knights, and Ali, ‘Iran's Influence in Iraq’, 11.

<sup>141</sup> The Iranian-backed Mahdi Army would become one of the main protagonists in the sectarian violence against the Sunni community during the civil war.

## Shutting Down Mujahedin-e Khalq

Iranian influence in Iraq has had its limits, however, particularly because during this period the US was still deeply involved in Iraqi politics and held a lot of its own leverage over the heads of Iraqi politicians. Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) is an Iraq-based Iranian opposition group renowned for its internally abusive and cult-like practices,<sup>142</sup> and for its violent attacks against the Iranian regime. It was founded as a Marxist-Islamist movement that participated in the overthrow of the Shah of Iran, but in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution it was shut out of power. Its violent activities led to it being expelled from Iran, and its alleged assassinations of American citizens resulted in its designation as a terrorist organisation. Initially they took refuge in France and then in 1986 the core membership moved to Iraq. Saddam Hussein sponsored the organisation and they fought alongside Iraq in the Iran-Iraq war, thereby losing most of their domestic Iranian support. Suspected of helping Saddam to suppress popular uprisings in Iraq in 1991, the MEK is also widely despised in Iraq.<sup>143</sup> In the aftermath of the US invasion, the MEK were, therefore, in a very vulnerable position. In May 2003 coalition forces made the controversial decision to accept a ceasefire with the MEK, and its 3,800 members were moved to an 'assigned residence' at Camp Ashraf where they were protected by coalition troops.<sup>144</sup>

Dismantling the MEK is one of Iran's core foreign policy aims, and its continued protected status in post-war Iraq has been 'a source of persistent anxiety for Tehran.'<sup>145</sup> Weeks before the US invasion, Iran had offered to put all its strategic assets on the table – its nuclear programme, its support of Hezbollah, its al-Qaeda prisoners and its opposition to the Arab league peace deal – in return for the handover of the MEK and an end to hostile US behaviour towards Iran.<sup>146</sup> For the relinquishing of the MEK to be included in such a high level deal indicates just how seriously Iran takes the threat presented by the organisation.

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<sup>142</sup> Research conducted by Human Rights Watch documented many of the MEK's abusive practices including forced divorces, solitary confinement, mental and physical abuse, torture and preventing members from leaving the organization. Human Rights Watch, 'No Exit: Human Rights Abuses Inside the MKO Camps', (2005).

<sup>143</sup> Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 304.

<sup>144</sup> Jeremiah Goulka et al., *The Mujahedin-e Khalq: A Policy Conundrum* (Washington D.C.: RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2009) xiii.

<sup>145</sup> Milani, 'Iran's Strategic Objectives in Post-Saddam Iraq', 92.

<sup>146</sup> Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance*, 245-6.

Perhaps because of its strategic value to Iran, the US has completely refused to allow the MEK to be forcibly returned to Iran despite the latter's promise that rank and file MEK members will not be prosecuted and in spite of evidence that the 273 MEK members who have voluntarily returned have not been mistreated.<sup>147</sup> In June 2003 MEK leader Maryam Rajivi was arrested in France, triggering a furious response from US Senator Sam Brownback who accused France of doing 'the Iranian government's dirty work.'<sup>148</sup> The arrested members were subsequently released.

The Iranians have tried every which way to pressure Iraqi governments into shutting down the MEK camps but, despite Iraqi sympathy with the Iranians,<sup>149</sup> the US has been unmovable on the issue and the Iranians were unable to move against the MEK until the US handed over control of internal Iraqi security to Iraqi forces in 2009.<sup>150</sup> The MEK affair has been a test of wills between the Iranian and the American governments, with each using their respective influence over the Iraqi state against each other. The weakness of the Iraqi state gave both the US and Iran enormous leverage over the Iraqi political system, but ultimately Iran's inability to pressurise a receptive Iraqi government into acting against the MEK demonstrates that the US was still by some distance the most powerful of the foreign actors in Iraq at the time.<sup>151</sup>

### Iran and the Iraqi Foreign Ministry

The close relationship between the Iraqi government and Iran has led the Iraqi Foreign Ministry to pursue a close and affable relationship with Iran. At the UN, for instance, Iran and Iraq have a very close working relationship, especially since senior SCIRI member Hamid al-Bayati was installed as Iraq's representative to the

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<sup>147</sup> Of course there is a legacy of Iranian mistreatment of MEK fighters, including a summary execution of thousands of political prisoners including many MKO members in 1988. Human Rights Watch, 'No Exit: Human Rights Abuses Inside the MKO Camps', 2, 5.

<sup>148</sup> Elizabeth Rubin, 'The Cult of Rajavi', *The New York Times*, 13th July 2003.

<sup>149</sup> Prime Minister Ayad Allawi had little sympathy for MEK, and said that he did not 'want to interfere in their [Iran's] internal affairs' and so 'withdrew the heavy weapons of Mujahedin al-Khalq' and 'prevented them from activities against Iran.' Allawi, 'Interview with author'. In December 2003 the Iraqi Governing Council unanimously called for the MEK to be expelled from Iraq. Goulka et al., *The Mujahedin-e Khalq: A Policy Conundrum*, 18.

<sup>150</sup> Milani, 'Iran's Strategic Objectives in Post-Saddam Iraq', 93-4. Since 2009 there have been numerous attacks against MEK camps, often by Iraqi security forces, with considerable loss of life.

<sup>151</sup> Indeed one official in the US administration used the continued presence of the MEK in Iraq as evidence of the US continuing to wield more influence than Iran in Iraq. This argument is much less convincing in the light of several massacres at MEK camps since 2009. US Government Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', (Washington D.C., 2013).

UN in 2006. Iraq cannot always vote with its neighbour at the UN, usually because of US or Arab League pressure, but where it cannot support Iran it will tend to abstain rather than voting against the country.<sup>152</sup> Iraq's representation at the UN appears to share all its notes from bi-lateral meetings with other countries with the Iranian representative, and on occasion the Iranians have been accused of using underhand tactics to trick the Iraqi representation to the UN into voting with Iran despite clear instructions from the Iraqi Foreign Ministry to abstain from the vote.<sup>153</sup> Such unusual diplomatic behaviour has gone unchastised, however, because of the depth of the relationship between Baghdad and Tehran. Where outstanding diplomatic issues between the two countries have been resolved, they have tended to come down slightly in favour of the Iranians. From the earliest days of the post-invasion Iraqi government, Iran pushed Iraq to recognise the 1975 Algiers Agreement which demarcated Iran and Iraq's land and river borders.<sup>154</sup> The agreement, which was first signed between the Iranian Shah and a pre-Presidential Saddam Hussein, had been broken by both countries before being reinstated in 1990 by Saddam, who was desperate for Iranian passivity in the face of his invasion of Kuwait.<sup>155</sup> Iraq's interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi said that the Iranians had pressured him to 're-implement the 1975 agreement signed between Saddam Hussein and the Shah of Iran,' but that he did not believe the agreement as it stood was in Iraq's best interests, and so refused.<sup>156</sup> A senior aide to Ja'fari told how the Prime Minister almost affirmed the 1975 accords by accident on a visit to Iran. The aide said that he was not comfortable with re-invoking the 1975 agreement as the Iranians had requested because it 'accepted what the Shah had forced on us,' but that the Prime Minister told him to go with whatever Foreign Minister Zebari thought. In the end Prime Minister Ja'fari saw the communiqué 'endorsing whatever had been agreed between the Shah and Saddam' and refused to read it out, declaring that 'the Iraqi Parliament should approve this.'<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Zebari, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>153</sup> Former Diplomat at the Iraqi Representation to UN, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', (2013).

<sup>154</sup> Wikimedia Commons, 'Algiers Agreement', <[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1975\\_Algers\\_Agreement.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1975_Algers_Agreement.jpg)>, accessed 24th September 2013.

<sup>155</sup> Kamrava, 'Iranian Foreign and Security Policies in the Persian Gulf', 200.

<sup>156</sup> Allawi, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>157</sup> Former Senior Adviser to Prime Minister Ja'fari, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

Though there now appears to be a recognition of the 1975 accord by the Iraqi government,<sup>158</sup> the demarcation of borders is still one of the most important issues in the Iran-Iraq diplomatic relationship and continues to be a matter for negotiation between the two countries.<sup>159</sup> Foreign Minister Zebari described continuing negotiations over borders as one of the ‘main tenets’ of his relationship with Iran’s foreign service, detailing how environmental changes were affecting river borders and ‘depriving me [Iraq] of many, many rights.’ The issue also sparks furious debates in the Iraqi parliament between those who want to resolve the issue amicably and those who see Iraq’s willingness to compromise on its interests as evidence of nefarious Iranian influence in Iraq. One parliamentarian from an anti-Iranian Sunni bloc complained that some of Iraq’s political parties had an ‘alliance’ and ‘relations with the Tehran government’ and that they ‘sympathized with...Iranian aggression against Iraq’ and were willing to support Iran even by undermining Iraqi sovereignty.<sup>160</sup> For Foreign Minister Zebari, emphasizing his role in matters pertaining to the ‘national interest’ is one way in which he highlights his legitimacy, professionalism and credibility as a foreign policy actor, especially in contrast to alternative foreign policy actors, including the Prime Minister and parliamentarians. Zebari declares that Iraqi members of parliament try to interfere with foreign policy matters in order to ‘show off’ and to give themselves a ‘false sense of outreach’, and accuses them of being ‘extremely unhelpful to the interests of their country’.<sup>161</sup> Zebari similarly depicts Prime Minister Maliki as emotional, paranoid and somewhat sectarian in his approach to foreign policy, and describes himself as patiently guiding the Prime Minister towards making choices that better reflect Iraq’s national interest. In this way Zebari seeks to present himself as the pre-eminent Iraqi foreign policy actor; in his own words Zebari says ‘you should not be entrapped [into thinking] there are many actors...the one who is in charge is the foreign ministry.’<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Michael Eisenstadt, ‘Iran and Iraq’, in Robin Wright (ed.), *The Iran Primer: Power, Politics and U.S. Policy* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace), 151-4, 154.

<sup>159</sup> A document setting out Iraq’s foreign policy priorities recognizes the ‘physical demarcation of the border’ and agreement on the ‘river frontiers in the Shatt al-Arab’ as the most important elements of its relationship with Iran. Iraqi Foreign Ministry, ‘Draft Document: Iraq’s Foreign Policy. Translated from Arabic’, (Baghdad, 2013).

<sup>160</sup> *Al-Jazeera*, ‘Talk Show Discusses Iraq-Iran “Crisis” Over Al-Fakkah Oil Field’ (29th December 2009).

<sup>161</sup> Zebari, ‘Interview with author’.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*



Another very controversial aspect of the Iran-Iraq diplomatic relationship deals with the aftermath of the astoundingly destructive eight-year Iran-Iraq war. Because Saddam was the initial aggressor in this war, the Iranian government has sought an apology, recognition of responsibility and the payment of war reparations from the Iraqis, a principle that is fiercely resisted by much of the Iraqi population.<sup>163</sup> This has not, however, stopped some Iraqi politicians from attempting to endear themselves to Iran by accepting responsibility for the war. In 2005, Sunni Defence Minister Sadoun al-Dulaymi said, 'I have come to Iran to ask for forgiveness for what Saddam Hussein has done,'<sup>164</sup> and the late leader of SCIRI, Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim 'went so far as to state that Iraq should accept the principle of paying reparations to Iran.'<sup>165</sup>

The extent of the political ties between Iran and a range of Iraqi politicians has compromised the ability of the Iraqi Foreign Ministry to identify and act according to the Iraqi national interest. Diplomats are subjected to pressure on the part of pro-Iranian politicians, and some make calculations based not on the Iraqi national interest, but on the basis of the material and career-enhancing rewards that may come from supporting a pro-Iranian politician. The level of Iraqi state weakness has, therefore, not only made it possible for diplomats to work intimately with a foreign country without being penalised, but has also rewarded them for doing so.

## Soft Power

Iran has been less successful in its exercising of soft power in Iraq. The 2003 invasion liberated the Iraqi *Hawza*, and there has been an eruption of activity in Najaf with billions of dollars and tens of thousands of students flooding into the city ever since.<sup>166</sup> Najaf is fast returning to its traditional position as the pre-eminent seat of Shi'ite scholarship in the world, after Qom in Iran had been able to usurp that position during the Ba'athist years. Iran's brand of active clericalism has been firmly overtaken by the quietist approach exemplified by Iraq's Grand Ayatollah Sistani, who has proven to be the world's most popular Shi'ite religious authority. Although

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<sup>163</sup> Interim Prime Minister Ayad Allawi says that he 'rejected' the Iranian demand for 'compensation for the [Iran-Iraq] war' in 2004. Allawi, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>164</sup> *BBC*, 'Former Enemies Iran and Iraq Say They Will Launch Broad Military Co-Operation Including Training Iraqi Armed Forces' (7th July 2005).

<sup>165</sup> Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 304.

<sup>166</sup> Abbas Kadhim, 'The Hawza and Its Role in Post-War Iraq', *Iraq Studies Workshop* (Boston University, 30th November 2012).

Iran has 'spent prodigious sums of state monies to fund the activities of politicized clerics associated with Qom,'<sup>167</sup> Iran is unlikely to be able to make much progress until the death of Ayatollah Sistani, at which point it is suspected they will try to influence the process of selecting the next Iraqi *marja* '.<sup>168</sup>

The antagonism of the Iraqi general public towards Iran has also been difficult for Iran to overcome, and its efforts to establish Arabic-speaking TV and radio channels in Iraq have also struggled to shift Iraqi perceptions of Iran.<sup>169</sup>

### Economic Ties

Iran has benefited an extraordinary amount economically from its strong relations with the post-war Iraqi political milieu. Iranian exports to Iraq, which are often subsidised, have provided a much-needed source of revenue for the Iranians whilst undercutting Iraqi producers and stymieing Iraq's own economic development.<sup>170</sup> Iran also manages an extensive oil smuggling operation between Iran and Iraq with the co-operation of local Iraqi officials.<sup>171</sup> In addition to the ubiquitous presence of Iranian traders in southern Iraq, 40 thousand Iranian pilgrims flood into Iraq each month, and Iranian currency is widely in use in southern Iraq.<sup>172</sup> Although the pilgrim trade is critical to the economy in towns like Najaf and Karbala, it is also the case that Iraqis are gaining only a fraction of the potential economic benefit because a massive Iranian-run service industry caters to the pilgrims in Iraqi territory and repatriates the profits back to Iran.<sup>173</sup> Iran is adept at distributing largesse through an extensive network of charities and NGOs including Iran's Red Crescent, The Imam Relief Committee and the Persian Green Relief Institute, but it has been accused of leveraging such funds for political benefit.<sup>174</sup> Similarly, Iran has been suspected of

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<sup>167</sup> Eisenstadt, Knights, and Ali, 'Iran's Influence in Iraq', 15.

<sup>168</sup> Former Senior Adviser to Obama Administration, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>169</sup> Knights, 'The Evolution of Iran's Special Groups in Iraq'.

<sup>170</sup> Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, 214.

<sup>171</sup> Former American Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. Makiya, 'Interview with the author'.

<sup>172</sup> Iraq is the only country in the world outside of Iran where the Iranian Rial is used. Beehner and Bruno, 'Iran's Involvement in Iraq'.

<sup>173</sup> Abbas Aziz, 'Iranian Invasion: Karbala's Hotel Owners Fighting for Their Livelihood', accessed 24th September 2013.

<sup>174</sup> Pardo, 'Iran in Iraq: Between Opportunity and Threat', 225.

cutting off its electricity supply to Iraqi provinces as a form of punishment for the political transgressions of local politicians.<sup>175</sup>

## Iranian Relations with Kurdistan

Iraq's Kurds have drawn on Iranian support at numerous points in their long struggle for independence from Baghdad. Although the Shah of Iran's betrayal of the Kurds in 1975 was one of the many great tragedies in Kurdish history, Kurds also remember positive moments in their relationship with Iran – including Iran's willingness to allow 1 million Kurdish refugees to enter Iran when Saddam Hussein was ruthlessly suppressing the 1991 uprisings.<sup>176</sup> But, of Kurdistan's two major political parties, it is the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) that has the stronger relationship with Iran. Perhaps it is merely down to the position of its headquarter, the city of Suleymaniyah, on Iran's border – but the PUK has both drawn on Iranian support more frequently and has been subject to greater Iranian pressure than the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). During the fractious civil war that took place between the PUK and KDP in the mid-1990s, Iran was invited in by the PUK to help push back KDP advances. The KDP meanwhile deployed Saddam Hussein's firepower against its fellow Iraqi Kurds in this little discussed period of Kurdish history.

Iraqi Kurdistan has experienced *de facto* independence since the internationally enforced no-fly zone came into effect in the aftermath of the first Gulf War, and the region was a great deal ahead of the rest of Iraq by 2005 in terms of its political and economic development. As Iraq began to descend into civil war, the Kurdish region was going from strength to strength. The Kurdish regional government was normatively strong, being the product of a decades long struggle for self-determination, and was considerably more successful than the Iraqi government in its delivery of basic public goods. The civil war in central Iraq enabled the Kurds to become increasingly independent in all aspects of governance, including in foreign affairs. In 2006 the KDP and PUK merged their previously separate administrations into a single, central Kurdish government and were far stronger for it. Also in 2006, as the Iraqi Foreign Ministry was paralysed by the

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<sup>175</sup> Eisenstadt, Knights, and Ali, 'Iran's Influence in Iraq', 13.

<sup>176</sup> Iran's willingness to throw open its borders to the Kurds contrasted with Turkey's hesitation to do so. Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 50.

fighting in Baghdad, the Kurds established a Department of Foreign Relations to develop a Kurdish foreign policy and to oversee Kurdistan's burgeoning collection of foreign representations.

Whilst Iran was able to throw its weight around in a very weak Iraqi capital in 2005 and 2006, Iraqi Kurdistan was able to conduct relations with Iran in a slightly more dignified way. Of course Iran is an extremely powerful player in Kurdish politics, not least because as a landlocked region, Kurdistan is entirely dependent on good relations with Iran and Turkey for its economic survival.<sup>177</sup> Nonetheless, the Kurdish government enjoyed higher levels of both functional and normative legitimacy as compared with Baghdad, and was thus able to stand a little taller in the face of Iran's might.

Political figures in Iraq like to say that 'Iran has more influence in Suleymaniyah than Najaf,'<sup>178</sup> but the vectors of possible influence in a rising Kurdistan were fewer than in a disintegrating Baghdad. For both Iran and for the Kurds the relationship has been about picking the right battles. The Kurds have been willing to turn a blind eye to Iranian bombing of the Iranian-Kurdish opposition group *Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê's* (PJAK) positions in rural Kurdistan, but have drawn a line when it comes to the targeting of peaceful Iranian Kurdish opposition groups operating in the region's cities.<sup>179</sup> Iran has, meanwhile, tolerated a far greater level of Kurdish independence than it is comfortable with, on condition that the Kurds do not support any moves to completely withdraw from the central Iraqi government. One Kurdish Minister said that when the PUK floated the idea of withdrawing support from an Iran-backed government in Baghdad, Iranian Quds Force Commander Qasim Suleimani responded that it would certainly be a shame if ten more groups like Ansar al-Islam were to show up in Kurdistan.<sup>180</sup> The

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<sup>177</sup> One Iraqi commentator remarked that 'there is no Kurdistan without Iran and Turkey.' Mouayad al-Windawi, 'Interview with author', (Amman, 12th November 2011).

<sup>178</sup> Former Senior Adviser to Prime Minister Ja'fari, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>179</sup> Senior Adviser to PUK, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', (London, 2013). One Kurdish activist noted somewhat bitterly that the Iraqi Kurds are 'more into protecting what they have' than into helping other Kurds to achieve their independence. Kani Xulum, 'Interview with author', (Washington D.C., 2nd February 2013).

<sup>180</sup> Senior Diplomat in the Kurdish Regional Government, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', (2013). Ansar al-Islam is the radical Sunni group that wreaked havoc in Kurdistan prior to 2003, and are widely suspected of being facilitated by Iran. Interim Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi said that Iran supported them with 'access to Iranian facilities, hospitals and so on' prior to 2003. Allawi, 'Interview with author'. Senior advisor to Prime Minister Maliki warned

insinuation was that Iran would allow or even enable extremist militants to strike at targets within the Kurdish region to punish the Kurds if they withdrew support from the Iraqi government.

Policing the border between Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan is, however, a two-way street, with effective border policing being valuable to both parties. After all, both have spoilers seeking to use the border lands to launch attacks.<sup>181</sup> Cross border trade with Iraqi Kurdistan has also become a source of goods for an Iran that is restricted by sanctions. The import of fuel and technological equipment across the border from Iraqi Kurdistan has been particularly important to Iran.<sup>182</sup>

Although the central Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) recognises its relationship with Iran to be one of its two most strategically valuable relationships,<sup>183</sup> there is evidence that the PUK administration in Suleymaniyah has a closer partnership with Iran than the KRG does as a whole. One prominent Sunni financier claimed that PUK leader Jalal Talabani was '100% with Iran' and enjoyed closer relations with Iran than the Iraqi Shi'ite politicians,<sup>184</sup> whilst Kurdish opposition group Goran complained that the PUK was merely 'an extension of Iran's foreign policy.'<sup>185</sup> Suleymaniyah shares 1,500km of border with Iran, much of its food is imported over it, and Iranian tourists offer Suleymaniyah an important source of revenue.<sup>186</sup> One PUK official also commented that the PUK was committed to 'tread carefully' in its relationship with Iran because although Iraqi Kurdistan could not be defeated by the Iraqi army, the Iranians could 'kill us, economically and militarily.'<sup>187</sup> Although PUK politicians do not admit to this, it is also possible that their relationship with Iran continues to be seen as a source of leverage for the PUK in its continuing low-level competition with the KDP, not least because of the very strong relations between the KDP and the Turkish government.

Iraqi state weakness enabled the federal Kurdish region to conduct its foreign relations almost entirely independently of Baghdad. The KRG even established an

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that the PUK took Qasim Suleimani's threats very seriously. Former Senior Member of Prime Minister Maliki's Government, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>181</sup> Senior Adviser to PUK, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>182</sup> Eisenstadt, Knights, and Ali, 'Iran's Influence in Iraq', 6.

<sup>183</sup> The other one being with Turkey. Fuad Hussein, 'Interview with author', (Erbil, 7th March 2013).

<sup>184</sup> International Iraqi Businessman and Former Iraqiya Financier, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>185</sup> Chia Nawshirwan Mustafa, 'Interview with author', (Suleymaniyah, 14th March 2013).

<sup>186</sup> Mala Bakhtiar, 'Interview with author', (Suleymaniyah, 12th March 2013).

<sup>187</sup> PUK Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity',

unconstitutional Department of Foreign Relations to manage its diplomatic affairs. The federal region, though part of the structure of the new Iraqi state, was empowered beyond its constitutional remit by the weakness in Baghdad and it took advantage of that to challenge the foreign policy authority of the central government. The KRG, and in particular the PUK, has provided Iran with yet another vector of influence in internal Iraqi affairs, and is further evidence that state weakness empowers sub-state actors in the field of foreign policy.

## The End of the Ja'fari Government

Once Prime Minister Ja'fari's transitional government had written a constitution and squeezed it past a public referendum, it was time for new parliamentary elections. After a disastrous year in which Iraq had fragmented faster and more dangerously than at any point before, the Americans were adamant that Ja'fari should not be returned to power. Ja'fari had not only been 'unready to take on the Shi'ite militias',<sup>188</sup> he had come to tie his political fortunes to their success. It is possible that Ja'fari in fact sympathised with the Sadrist cause. He had been opposed to the US invasion of Iraq, calling it an invasion that 'attacked all dignities'; he believed that the Sadrist trend had emerged from 'the heart of suffering' and was frustrated that the US refused to understand the roots of the Sadrist cause.<sup>189</sup> Whether it was out of ideological affinity or political expedience, Ja'fari secured the backing of both Iran and the Sadrists for a second term.<sup>190</sup> For their part, the Americans came to the decision that Muqtada al-Sadr had become a political 'crutch' for Prime Minister Ja'fari and they decisively withdrew their support from any political settlement that would return him to power.<sup>191</sup> US Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad told Shi'ite leaders that President Bush 'doesn't want, doesn't support, doesn't accept' the return of the 'weak' and 'sectarian' Ja'fari to power.<sup>192</sup> The Americans even indirectly

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<sup>188</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 188.

<sup>189</sup> Jaafari, *Ibrahim al-Jaafari: A Governmental Experience*, 39, 119.

<sup>190</sup> Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace*, 442.; Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, 241.; Woodward, *State of Denial*, 446.

<sup>191</sup> Woodward, *State of Denial*, 446. A senior aide to Prime Minister Ja'fari admitted that the government had allowed 'the Sadrists to run amok' and that this was probably the reason why the US withdrew its support from the Prime Minister. Former Senior Adviser to Prime Minister Ja'fari, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>192</sup> Edward Wong, 'Shiites Say U.S. Is Pressuring Iraqi Leader to Step Aside', *The New York Times*, 28th March 2006. David Ignatius, 'In Iraq's Choice, A Chance For Unity', *The Washington Post*, 26th April 2006.

involved Shi'ite clerical leader Grand Ayatollah Sistani in its operation to dump Ja'fari, sending him a presidential letter that articulated America's desire to 'work with someone who had the support of all Iraqis.'<sup>193</sup> In his reply, Ayatollah Sistani seemed on board with the US plan. Prime Minister Ja'fari dragged his feet in the government formation process, reluctant to let go of power. Finally, in early April 2006, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met with Ja'fari and frankly told him that it was 'time to step aside,' and by 20<sup>th</sup> April Ja'fari had indeed stepped aside, making way for a new Iraqi government.<sup>194</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the severe deficit of normative and functional legitimacy experienced by the Ja'fari government undermined its ability to monopolize foreign policy making in Iraq and to protect Iraqi national security.

Though some have questioned whether Iraq did in fact experience civil war, according to the scale and nature of violence in the country during this period Iraq can be said 'by any reasonable definition' to have been 'in the midst of a civil war.'<sup>195</sup> As the cycle of violence and revenge violence escalated, Iraq 'was imploding.'<sup>196</sup> The inability of the government to provide security and public goods – and its widespread participation in the sectarian violence – ceded legitimacy and power to local militias, parties and vigilante groups who could provide these things at a local level. The Sadrists were organising garbage collections, they were providing electricity and schooling and security patrols. When the Sadrists talked to Iran they were, therefore, empowered by their clear local support and *de facto* jurisdiction. In the absence of state control, sub-state actors were able to become purveyors of foreign policy. The Sadrists even set up their own alternative government, including a Ministry for Foreign Affairs.<sup>197</sup> Sunni groups reached out to the Arab world, imploring them to intervene to stop the decimation of Iraq's

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<sup>193</sup> Woodward, *State of Denial*, 447.

<sup>194</sup> Woodward, *State of Denial*, 452, 58, 61.

<sup>195</sup> James D. Fearon, 'Iraq: Democracy or Civil War?', *Committee on Government Reform, Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations* (Washington D.C., 15th September 2006).

<sup>196</sup> Comment made by Lieutenant Colonel Gian Gentile after deployment in Northwest Baghdad in July 2006, cited in Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 213.

<sup>197</sup> Pierre-Jean Luizard, 'The Sadrists in Iraq: Challenging the United States, the *Marja'iyah* and Iran', in Sabrina Mervin (ed.), *The Shi'a Worlds and Iran* (London: Saqi Books, 2010), 255-80, 261.

Sunni population, whilst factions running particular floors of the Ministry of Interior building could conduct their own independent relationships with Iran.

Not only were Iraq's sub-state actors empowered as foreign policy actors, but Iraq's security vacuum also yielded opportunities for foreign powers to pursue their own national interests in the country.<sup>198</sup> For Iran, Iraq had long been a country of immense strategic importance and as a result was worth a great deal of investment in this particularly opportune moment. To guarantee that its long-term interests in Iraq would be protected, the Iranians pursued multiple, often contradictory, strategies; creating a brand of guerrilla warfare 'that combines electioneering, smart information/media strategy, economic involvement and social services with a diplomatic, military and civil presence.'<sup>199</sup> Though Iran failed to persuade the Iraqi public that it was a positive force in the country, Iran did manage to co-opt an wide array of political actors in Iraq and was successfully able to secure its diplomatic interests.

At the height of Iraq's sectarian civil war it became clear that 'aggressive IRCG activity detrimental to US interests'<sup>200</sup> was achieving one of Iran's major goals, namely to unsettle the American 'occupation' of Iraq. When Iraqi politicians implored Iran to help them reduce the scale of the civil conflict, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamanei replied that it was the foreign troops who were to blame, declaring that 'the presence of foreign troops is damaging for the Iraqis, and the Iraqi government should ask for their departure by proposing a timetable.' Khamanei was confident that 'the US and Britain will eventually have to leave Iraq with a bitter experience.'<sup>201</sup> Indeed the Baker-Hamilton Report, which conducted a review of Coalition policy in Iraq, concluded that 'given the ability of Iran... to influence events within Iraq...the United States should try to engage them constructively.'<sup>202</sup>

The reality of Iranian influence in Iraq led some Sunni politicians to implore Arab states to interfere *more* in Iraqi politics, to provide a counterbalance to Iran. In

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<sup>198</sup> Iraq's deputy foreign minister until 2006, and later Iraq's Representative to the UN, Hamid al-Bayati, recognized that foreign countries 'tried to interfere because we had a vacuum when all security organizations collapsed,' but was confident that by restoring security Iraq could also limit external interference. Bayati, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>199</sup> Pardo, 'Iran in Iraq: Between Opportunity and Threat', 213.

<sup>200</sup> Fuller and Adriaensens, 'Wiping the Slate Clean', 156.

<sup>201</sup> Cited in Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, 214.

<sup>202</sup> Baker and Hamilton, 'The Iraq Study Group Report', 7.



an extraordinary approach to the conduct of foreign affairs, Iraq's Ambassador to the Arab League responded to complaints from the Gulf states about the level of Iranian influence in Iraqi politics saying, 'why leave it to Iran then? Why not come and influence also?'<sup>203</sup> With a collapse of the central government's capacity to secure the country and to provide public goods, Iraq was open for foreign interference.

This period demonstrates the clear relationship between Iraqi state weakness and the empowerment of sub-state actors in the foreign policy arena. A range of Iraqi political parties, militia groups, and the Kurdistan Regional Government all conducted their own, independent relations with Iran in a bid to use Iranian power to gain influence against their domestic political rivals. The result was a significant weakening of Iraq's ability to define and pursue its own national interest vis-à-vis Iran. Iraq, meanwhile, was vulnerable to Iran's vigorous and multi-pronged pursuit of its own interests in the country. It was only the deep-seated antagonism towards the Iranians on the part of the Iraqi public, and the presence of US forces and American political leverage on the Iraqi political scene, that was able to meaningfully limit the extent of Iranian gains in civil war Iraq.

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<sup>203</sup> Kais al- Azawi, 'Interview with author', (Cairo, 6th June 2013).

## CHAPTER FIVE: TURKEY AND A STABILISING IRAQ

### Introduction

This chapter argues that the poor functional and normative legitimacy enjoyed by the early government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki allowed the emergence of the Sunni tribal Awakening Councils as powerful sub-state actors who worked in conjunction with the US despite the objections of the Iraqi government. However, the success of these Councils, along with the increasing willingness of the Maliki government crackdown on Shi'ite militancy, led to a reduction of violence. This stabilization process prompted neighbouring Turkey to seek out a stronger economic relationship with Iraq. The weak state framework would expect that this rise in Iraqi government strength would lead to a concomitant weakening in the ability of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), as a sub-state actor, to conduct foreign policy. This period, however, witnesses a flourishing of the KRG's relationship with Turkey to the extent that Turkey seems prepared to jeopardize its relationship with the central government in Baghdad to maintain its relationship with the KRG. This calls into question the extent to which the weak state framework is able to make provisions for the unique ability of a regional government to build up long-term institutional strength that can become insensitive to changes in the central government.

The period between 2007 and 2009 was extraordinarily tumultuous. Iraq elected a new government, but the Premier himself was chosen in a relatively undemocratic backroom scuffle in which the Americans wielded a great deal of political influence. In his early days in power, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki failed to establish significant functional or normative legitimacy in the Sunni community as he continued his predecessor's policy of allowing Shi'ite militias free reign. Iraqi Sunni communities began to look to local tribal groups for security, because they felt increasingly threatened both by Iraqi government forces and by existing extremist Sunni militants. These tribal groups, many of whom had previously decried the illegitimacy of US forces in Iraq, turned to the US for support and

protection against Iraqi government forces. The so-called Awakening Councils can be seen as sub-state actors challenging the authority of the state over foreign policy. Empowered by their local communities and fearful of a government that not only failed to provide security but was itself a violent actor, these tribal councils worked directly with the Americans to protect Sunni populations as well as to protect and enrich themselves.

Afraid that his regime security was increasingly being challenged by other Shi'ite actors, Prime Minister Maliki chose to work with the US troop surge to crush the Shi'ite militias, which led to a dramatic fall in the level of violence. As the Iraqi state began to recapture a measure of normative and functional legitimacy, it became an increasingly attractive foreign policy partner and embarked on a new relationship with neighbouring Turkey. The relationship, however, did not stay positive for long. As the Kurdish region aggressively pursued a favourable relationship with Turkey, the latter was forced to effectively choose between dealing with the Iraqi state or the Kurdish region. Turkey chose to deal with the Kurdish region, raising questions about the relative functional capacity of the Kurdish Regional Government as compared with the Iraqi central government. It is possible that Turkey found the Kurdish region a more productive partner than the Iraqi state because, despite it lacking formal-legal sovereignty, it boasts a strong local government that is highly legitimate, and it can better deliver on its agreements with the Turkish state.

## Maliki Comes to Power

The interim government of Prime Minister Ja'fari oversaw the drafting and enactment of Iraq's new constitution and shortly afterwards came to the end of its mandate. Elections for a new Iraqi government were held on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2005 and, unlike the elections in January 2005, there was extensive participation from all Iraq's ethno-sectarian communities. The same grand Shi'ite coalition that had won the previous elections once again won a plurality of seats, coming in with 47% of parliamentary seats, whilst Sunni and Kurdish parties garnered 21% of the seats apiece.<sup>1</sup> The winning coalition was quickly bedevilled by internal machinations over who should emerge as the new Prime Minister, with Sunni and Kurdish politicians weighing in on behalf of their preferred candidates.

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<sup>1</sup> Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, 218.

The majority opinion in the US administration was that Ja'fari should not be allowed to return, but deciding on a figure with which to replace him was more difficult. The US wanted a partner in Iraq who would be stronger and more effective than Ja'fari had been, but was also adamant that the new Prime Minister should not be beholden to Iran, as Ja'fari was perceived to be. Senior SCIRI member Adel Abdul Mahdi was one possible contender, but fears were raised about his deference to the pro-Iranian SCIRI leadership,<sup>2</sup> and diplomatic opinion was split over his candidature.<sup>3</sup> It was also reported that Prime Minister Ja'fari had refused to step down unless the premiership remained within the Da'wah party, leaving SCIRI's Adel Abdul Mahdi out in the cold.<sup>4</sup> One favoured Da'wah party candidate, Ali al-Adeeb, was passed over for his 'suspected Iranian ties,'<sup>5</sup> after reportedly being humiliated at a Da'wah Party gathering for having an Iranian father.<sup>6</sup> The man who confronted Ali al-Adeeb was Nouri al-Maliki, a relatively unknown Da'wah Party functionary who would become America's favoured candidate for Prime Minister. In an embassy cable US Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad wrote that Maliki was one of the Iraqi government's 'most tireless operators' and that his militant anti-Ba'athist credentials and 'deep unease' about Iran's role in Iraq made him a good prospective Iraqi leader.<sup>7</sup> When he was approached by the Americans about taking on the premiership, Nouri al-Maliki eloquently talked about the need to reconcile Iraq's warring sectarian communities, about the importance of restoring the Iraqi government's ability to provide basic services and about the urgency of re-establishing control over the violence within the capital.<sup>8</sup> He quickly won the confidence of the US administration, and once Ambassador Khalilzad determined

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<sup>2</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 188.

<sup>3</sup> Senior British Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>4</sup> Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*, 99.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 196.

<sup>6</sup> Nir Rosen writes that Nouri al-Maliki, who would become Iraq's next Prime Minister, confronted Ali al-Adeeb at a 'Da'wah Party gathering to confirm Adib's nomination' asking him if he was prepared to 'withstand scrutiny and people saying that Iran was taking over.' Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*, 99.

<sup>7</sup> It was considered that Maliki's anti-Ba'athist track record would give him the credibility with Shi'ite constituencies that would be needed to reform the divisive de-Ba'athification strictures. Khalilzad wrote about his opinion of Maliki in an Embassy cable sent in February 2006, cited in Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 189.

<sup>8</sup> Woodward, *State of Denial*, 461-2.

that senior Kurdish and Sunni politicians were on board with the nomination, Nouri al-Maliki was on his way to being Iraq's next Prime Minister.<sup>9</sup>

The role that the US played in the selection of the Iraqi premier raises questions about the sovereignty of the Iraqi state, the power of the Iraqi electorate and the relative influence of the Iranians as compared with the Americans in Iraqi politics. The proportional representation electoral system instituted by the CPA in Iraq meant that elections would not return decisive victors,<sup>10</sup> and that in the inevitable post-election horse trading there was ample opportunity for foreign powers to influence negotiations. Despite Iran's extensive presence in Iraq during 2006, the US administration was able to insert its favoured candidate into the premiership because it was heavily and forcefully engaged with the post-election process, and was willing to expend political capital bringing together an administration that it believed would serve its interests. Arguably the Iraqi people had very little input into the political process at this point. Fearful of the violence being unleashed in their neighbourhoods, Iraqis voted overwhelmingly along sectarian lines in the belief that greater representation of their communities in parliament might afford them greater protection.<sup>11</sup> But Iraqis were voting for faceless lists of candidates in a closed list system, and were unable to judge the candidates based on their merits, reputation and local track record.<sup>12</sup> The notion that Nouri al-Maliki's route to the premiership began with a conversation with US Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad would be deeply uncomfortable for most Iraqis, and speaks to the level of US involvement in Iraqi politics in the years that President Bush was in office.<sup>13</sup> In the aftermath of the parliamentary elections in 2010 the Americans would famously lose out to the Iranians when it came to determining who would emerge as premier, which was partly a result of the Obama administration's relative disengagement from the Iraqi political process at that stage.

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<sup>9</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 197. Bob Woodward writes that 'Suddenly everyone, including Bush and Rice, was embracing him [Maliki]' much to the scepticism of former Secretary of State Colin Powell. Woodward, *State of Denial*, 468.

<sup>10</sup> For more detail on the impact of Iraq's electoral system on sectarianism and political effectiveness see Younis, 'Set up to Fail: Consociational Political Structures in Post War Iraq'.

<sup>11</sup> Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, 218.

<sup>12</sup> Younis, 'Set up to Fail: Consociational Political Structures in Post War Iraq', 13.

<sup>13</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 197.

The inauguration of Prime Minister Maliki on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2006 was not to be the panacea that the Americans hoped it would be. US political and military strategy rested on the assumption that a normalisation of the Iraqi political process would provide a basis for political reconciliation and an end to violence in the country, but Iraq's civil war only escalated in the months following Prime Minister Maliki's rise to power.<sup>14</sup> The new Prime Minister was cautious about taking any bold steps that might cost him political support. Although Maliki had told Condoleezza Rice before becoming prime minister that 'all will be lost if we can't demonstrate we can govern,'<sup>15</sup> in his first months in office he was 'diffident, quiet, nervous,' and deeply suspicious of those around him.<sup>16</sup> Deputy Foreign Minister Labeed Abbawi said that in terms of his level of control over the government, Maliki's first term was 'not different from Ja'fari.'<sup>17</sup> Just five months into his term in office, the US was already losing faith in Maliki. In October 2006 Condoleezza Rice returned from a trip to Iraq 'discouraged with Maliki and the other leaders' who seemed 'determined to fight a sectarian war.'<sup>18</sup> Maliki was hampering US military efforts to reduce militia violence by refusing to allow attacks against Shi'ite militias.<sup>19</sup> When one such raid against the Mahdi Army did occur, Maliki made a TV appearance denouncing the operation and promising that it would not 'happen again.'<sup>20</sup> National Security Adviser Stephen Hadley met with Maliki in October 2006 and concluded that the Prime Minister was either 'ignorant' and incompetent, or was actively 'misrepresenting his intentions' to the US.<sup>21</sup> Leading US military figures were convinced that Maliki was deliberately stymieing their success in pursuit of his own sectarian agenda.<sup>22</sup> Charges of Maliki's sectarianism are widespread across the Iraqi

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<sup>14</sup> Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq 2006-2008*, 82. In his biography former President George W. Bush wrote, 'I hoped the formation of the Maliki government would provide a break in the violence. It didn't.' George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2010) 362.

<sup>15</sup> Woodward, *State of Denial*, 463.

<sup>16</sup> For instance Maliki replaced Ja'fari's staff with his own 'close-knit circle of Dawa advisers' whom 'nobody knew' and made his decisions in an opaque way that infuriated his coalition partners. Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*, 100.

<sup>17</sup> Abbawi, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>18</sup> Woodward, *State of Denial*, 372.

<sup>19</sup> George W. Bush's biography recounts a meeting with Maliki in November 2007 in which the President told Maliki that he had to end his 'political interference in our joint military operations' and to stop 'forbidding us from going into Shia neighborhoods.' Bush, *Decision Points*, 374.

<sup>20</sup> Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq 2006-2008*, 51.

<sup>21</sup> Bush, *Decision Points*, 373.

<sup>22</sup> Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*, 223.

political spectrum and in diplomatic circles.<sup>23</sup> Though Maliki was not necessarily anti-Sunni in any ideological or theological sense, he often suspected Sunnis of being Ba'athists or as terrorists, and therefore as the primary threat to his government and to Iraqi national security.<sup>24</sup>

Of course Prime Minister Maliki was coming into an extremely difficult position; leading a country under foreign occupation and in the midst of a raging civil war was no easy task, and some American officials advocated giving him more than a few months in the job before declaring him a failure.

### Continuing Violence in Iraq

Sectarian violence was rapidly escalating in Iraq, and was increasingly overshadowing insurgent activity as the biggest threat to Iraq's survival.<sup>25</sup> In May and June 2006, as Prime Minister Maliki came to office, an estimated 5,818 Iraqi civilians were violently killed,<sup>26</sup> many of them surfacing in morgues with gunshot or drill wounds to the head, burns on their bodies, eyes gouged out or bearing other signs of torture.<sup>27</sup> The violence inflicted on civilians came in many forms, including kidnappings and executions as well as drive-by shootings, killings at check-points and indiscriminate bomb attacks.<sup>28</sup> Even after the killing of al-Qaeda in Iraq's leader, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and the subsequent capture of 759 suspected insurgents, violence continued unabated.<sup>29</sup> Internal displacement became an increasing problem as people fled areas in which their sect formed a minority, and a record number of refugees left Iraq for neighbouring Syria and Jordan.<sup>30</sup> Baghdad's

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<sup>23</sup> One senior British diplomat characterised Maliki as 'more sectarian than any other Shi'a I came across.' Senior British Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. One Iraqi commentator said that Maliki's sectarian outlook was 'his point of departure' and therefore fundamental to his politics. Iraqi Commentator, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. Numerous other interview subjects described Maliki as sectarian. Zebari, 'Interview with author'. International Iraqi Businessman and Former Iraqiya Financier, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. Hamid Halgurd Mala, 'Interview with author', (Erbil, 6th March 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*, 100.

<sup>25</sup> Department of Defense, 'Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq: Report to Congress', (August 2006) 26.

<sup>26</sup> UNAMI, 'Human Rights Report', (1st May - 30th June 2006) 1.

<sup>27</sup> Irwin Arieff, 'Torture Rampant in Iraqi Prisons, Streets, UN Says', *New Zealand Press Association*, 21st September 2006.

<sup>28</sup> UNAMI, 'Human Rights Report', 3.

<sup>29</sup> Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, 338.

<sup>30</sup> An estimated two million Iraqis were internally displaced and between one and two million fled to Jordan and Syria in 2006 and 2007. Dawn Chatty and Philip Marfleet, 'Iraq's Refugees: Beyond Tolerance', *Forced Migration Policy Briefing* (Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre, 2009) 1.

districts became increasingly homogenised sectarian enclaves defended by locally organised militias and vigilante groups.<sup>31</sup> The Iraqi economy, meanwhile reached 'its weakest point since the invasion' as food prices soared, fuel became even more scarce<sup>32</sup> and unemployment levels reached up to 60%.<sup>33</sup>

In June 2006 Prime Minister Maliki tried to launch a national reconciliation initiative which was quickly mired in controversy. In trying to make the initiative more politically palatable, Maliki watered down the amnesty provisions so much that active militants would most likely not qualify for amnesty – thereby somewhat defeating the purpose of the proposal.<sup>34</sup> An enormous joint troop deployment of US and Iraqi troops on the streets of Baghdad also did nothing to restrain the sectarian violence, as the average of almost twenty-four attacks a day in Baghdad remained unchanged after the operation.<sup>35</sup> The Mahdi Army, which was one of the main perpetrators of sectarian violence, was increasingly untouchable with thirty seats in parliament, control of six ministries and the tacit protection of the Prime Minister.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, US military commanders in Iraq pressed on with plans to 'handover' to Iraqi forces despite the escalating violence and clear evidence of the unsuitability of elements in the Iraqi military and police.<sup>37</sup>

## The 'Awakening'

Sunni tribal leaders had made efforts to reach out to American forces on a number of occasions before 2006, with little success. Back in October 2003, military intelligence officers established that local tribal sheikhs were open to the idea of working with the Americans to bring stability and prosperity to their localities. A

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<sup>31</sup> Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, 309.

<sup>32</sup> The availability of diesel, kerosene and benzene all fell in 2006 to significantly lower levels than in the previous year. Michael E. O'Hanlon and David Campbell, 'Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq', (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, December 2006).

<sup>33</sup> Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, 325.

<sup>34</sup> AFP, 'Iraq Reconciliation Plan "Will Offer Amnesty to Some Rebels"', (24th June 2006). Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, 320. Ibon Vilelabeitia, 'Iraq Reconciliation Plan Falls Short of Sunni Hopes', *Reuters*, 26th June 2006.

<sup>35</sup> Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, 353.

<sup>36</sup> Maliki for instance ordered the US army to lift checkpoints it had erected close to Sadr city in search of a missing US soldier, despite being warned that the order made Maliki look like he was supporting the Mahdi Army. Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq 2006-2008*, 56.

<sup>37</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 200. Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq 2006-2008*, 52. Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict*, 311.



plan was written up for eighteen tribal leaders to be given weapons, vehicles and money to police their own areas. But the proposal was rebuffed by the Coalition Provisional Authority, who did not see it as a necessary or important addition to existing US strategy.<sup>38</sup> In 2005 a group of tribal sheikhs, some of whom had previously participated in attacks against coalition forces, turned against al-Qaeda and encouraged their members to participate in the electoral process and to join the local police forces. Known as the Anbar People's Council, they established contact with the local American commander, but received no support after coming under sustained attack from al-Qaeda. A month later the council had been decimated, with fully half of its leadership murdered and the remainder fleeing for their lives.<sup>39</sup> A vicious cycle ensued whereby a lack of successful US engagement with Sunni provinces enabled militant groups to strengthen, pushing the Americans to retreat further into their heavily fortified bases. Periodic US raids on al-Qaeda positions in Anbar province would be fiercely counter-attacked and would exact high casualty rates on US soldiers without achieving lasting gains. Meanwhile towns lay in ruins, ravaged by the fighting, with barely any functioning services, and without even a working communications infrastructure.<sup>40</sup> The Intelligence Chief of the US Marines summed up the state of affairs saying, 'the political and military situation has deteriorated to a point that MNF [Multi-National Forces] and ISF [Iraqi Security Forces] are no longer capable of militarily defeating the insurgency.'<sup>41</sup>

In the early summer of 2006 Colonel Sean MacFarland arrived in Ramadi, the capital of the Anbar province, determined to take some risks in pursuit of success in the city.<sup>42</sup> A new relationship between McFarland's brigade and three tribes in the regions around Ramadi was cautiously forged, starting with co-operation in a recruitment drive for local police.<sup>43</sup> al-Qaeda responded viciously, bombing police stations and assassinating tribesmen, but the Americans stood by the

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<sup>38</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*.

<sup>39</sup> Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq 2006-2008*, 62. Kaplan, *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War*, 246.

<sup>40</sup> Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq 2006-2008*, 63.

<sup>41</sup> Cited in Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 248.

<sup>42</sup> Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq 2006-2008*, 51-2.

<sup>43</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 249-50.

tribesmen, offering solid military, financial and moral support and demonstrating their commitment to their new partners.<sup>44</sup> The al-Qaeda attacks backfired, strengthening the relationship between the Americans and their tribal partners, and driving new tribes to join the arrangement.<sup>45</sup> By September 2006, twenty-five of the thirty-one tribes in the Anbar region had joined the partnership with the coalition forces, with an estimated 30,000 armed men at their disposal.<sup>46</sup> According to Col. MacFarland the so-called 'Awakening' was 'incredibly effective' in that 'whenever a tribe flipped and joined the Awakening, all attacks on coalition forces in that area would stop,' and if an attack were to happen 'the sheikh would basically take responsibility for it and find whoever was responsible.'<sup>47</sup> The US military estimated that there was a 40% fall in attacks in the Anbar province by the end of 2006.<sup>48</sup> These successes in Anbar continued to build throughout 2007 as more and more tribes joined the Awakening movement, police recruits flooded in to protect their local areas and violence against Iraqi and coalition targets continued to fall. According to General Petraeus, 'monthly attack levels in Anbar...declined from some 1,350 in October 2006 to a bit over 200 in August [2007].'<sup>49</sup> The dramatic turnaround of Anbar made waves in the military and led to the formation of similar, neighbourhood watch type vigilante groups known collectively as the 'Sons of Iraq' in Amiriyah, a Sunni dominated district of Baghdad, and in the provinces of Diyala and Salah al-Din.

### The Awakening as Sub-State Foreign Policy

The US had a unique position in Iraq after the dismantling of the Coalition Provisional Authority, which is when it ceased to be an occupying power in Iraq. Although its extensive troop presence afforded the US a unique vector of influence

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<sup>44</sup> Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*, 226. Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*.

<sup>45</sup> On 25<sup>th</sup> November 2006 Al Qaeda militants attacked a tribe that had not yet joined the alliance with the US. The tribe managed to get in touch with the local US commanders who responded by sending in Marine F-18 warplanes to drive away the attackers. The incident transformed the American's fortunes in that local area with a new wave of co-operation and intelligence. Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq 2006-2008*, 69.

<sup>46</sup> Anthony Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict Volume 2* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2008a) 420.

<sup>47</sup> Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq 2006-2008*, 67.

<sup>48</sup> Sarah Childress, 'Retaking Ramadi: All The Sheik's Men', *Newsweek*, 18th December 2006.

<sup>49</sup> David Petraeus, 'Report to Congress on the Situation in Iraq', (10-11th December 2007).

in Iraq, it was the Iraqis rather than the US who were actually administering the country. By 2007, the elected Iraqi government was increasingly established with its own political agenda and set of interests that often conflicted with those being pursued by the Americans.<sup>50</sup> Fundamentally, US forces in Iraq were answerable to the US congress, which in turn was accountable to the American public – not to the Iraqi public. In a key brainstorming session on Iraq strategy, Pete Pace, Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, reminded participants that, ‘the immediate center of gravity is the US public.’<sup>51</sup> The US project in Iraq was hamstrung from the beginning by sensitivity to American election timetables, by its dogged focus on the arbitrary Congressional benchmarks measuring success in Iraq, and by its reluctance to consider policy directions that were politically unpalatable at home.<sup>52</sup> In one illustrative incident, Deputy Defence Secretary Gordon England told Iraqi National Security Adviser Mowaffak al-Rubaie, ‘If the Congress doesn’t see you as progressing, we don’t get the money, we can’t help you, and it’s over.’<sup>53</sup> US interests in Iraq were, at a fundamental level, different to those of Iraqis – even if they had the same short-term goals – and by 2007 the Iraqi government was beginning to establish a modicum of political and military independence from the Americans. It is, therefore, useful at this stage to think of US-Iraqi relations as a form of foreign relations – much as it is a unique relationship.

If this is our starting point, the Awakening/Sons of Iraq movement can be seen as a foreign policy relationship between the US and a series of sub-state actors in Iraq. The tribes that participated in the Awakening were so successful in bringing local violence under control because they enjoyed legitimacy in their areas in a way

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<sup>50</sup> The conflict became apparent when Prime Minister Maliki prevented the US army from attacking Sadrist militants when he first came to office. In once such incident the American military took down checkpoints around Sadr city at Maliki’s request, only to be chastised by Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld who said ‘You don’t work for the Prime Minister, you report through us...and we decide. He’s not your political leader.’ Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 290.

<sup>51</sup> Cited in Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 285.

<sup>52</sup> One senior British diplomat I interviewed said that the ‘uncomfortable political reality’ was that ‘we demanded things according to our timetables’ and not with reference to what Iraq needed. The diplomat describes how half-hearted the British effort in Iraq was because of the poisonous public debate about the Iraq war in the UK. He said the British were in the ‘peculiar’ situation of having a war driven by the Prime Minister and supported by the Ministry of Defence, but with no other ‘real government commitment to Iraq.’ Iraq had become ‘a dirty word’ in British politics. Senior British Diplomat, ‘Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity’.

<sup>53</sup> Cited in Bob Woodward, *The War Within: A Secret White House History 2006-2008* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008) 398.

that the central Iraqi government did not. The state's inability to provide security, to funnel public goods and services to these areas and its failure to speak about the Iraqi nation in a way that resonated with the locals meant that the Americans needed to work with local tribal power brokers in order to have an impact on the ground. There is evidence that ministries and local governments deliberately starved Sunni dominated areas of basic public goods and services including health and education services, fuel and cooking gas. One American captain who set up a local Awakening group said that the 'sectarian nature of the Shi'ite dominated local government structures...made it very difficult to build legitimacy in the eyes of the Sunnis who were being marginalized by their local government.'<sup>54</sup> It was also difficult for the nationally organised Iraqi army to operate effectively in the regions because of their lack of local capital. As Carter Malkasian writes, 'no matter how much advising, training, or equipping' the Americans offered the Iraqi army, it could not establish the local legitimacy it needed to avoid being seen as a hostile force of outsiders.<sup>55</sup>

Although the relative power and relevance of Iraq's tribes has waxed and waned in different periods of Iraqi history, they have been resurgent in the Iraqi social landscape since 1991. In the aftermath of the failed invasion of Kuwait and the huge domestic uprisings that followed, Saddam Hussein embarked on a re-tribalisation policy to better exert his authority across Iraq. The relevance of the tribe only increased after the fall of the Ba'athist regime in 2003 as state capability receded and people became increasingly reliant on local networks for the provision of security, employment and basic services.<sup>56</sup> Sunni dominated tribes in the Anbar region were initially opposed to the US occupation, and many of them lent tacit or active support to various militant groups who attacked coalition forces. As al-Qaeda became an increasingly dominant force in the Sunni insurgent landscape, however, things began to change. The viciousness of al-Qaeda affiliates, their trampling over local customs and their willingness to inflict extreme violence on innocent Iraqis alienated many of the tribes which began reaching out to the Americans.<sup>57</sup> Eventually, once American military strategy had spectacularly failed in Iraq, spaces

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<sup>54</sup> Cited in Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*, 245.

<sup>55</sup> Carter Malkasian, 'A Thin Blue Line in the Sand', *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*, 5 (2007).

<sup>56</sup> Montgomery McFate, 'The "Memory of War": Tribes and the Legitimate Use of Force in Iraq', in Jeffery Norwich (ed.), *Armed Groups: Studies in National Security, Counterterrorism, and Counterinsurgency* (Newport RI: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 291-310, 296.

<sup>57</sup> Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict Volume 2*, 515. Woodward, *The War Within: A Secret White House History 2006-2008*, 381.

opened up in military circles that were more receptive to exploring new options, and thus the Awakening began.

The Americans did not seek permission from Prime Minister Maliki for the Awakening or Sons of Iraq projects, and indeed there was a deep fear and scepticism of the project in the Shi'ite dominated government.<sup>58</sup> The Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, SCIRI, which was the biggest party in the coalition government, expressed unwillingness to reconcile with those Sunnis who had latterly been part of the insurgency and who they saw as 'Saddamists' in any case.<sup>59</sup> As for Prime Minister Maliki, his absolute priority was to regain control over Baghdad and then the periphery, preferably with Iraqi troops directly under his command.<sup>60</sup> As for dealing with insurgents, Maliki appeared to want to 'kill them all' using troops from the Shi'ite dominated Iraqi army – an approach that would have vastly inflamed the situation and prevented the Awakening movement from ever taking off.<sup>61</sup>

Of course the reluctance to support the Awakening experiment reflected the ongoing civil war between the two communities which had not reached a point of reconciliation. Indeed, the fact that Sunni tribes were prepared to work with the Americans did not mean that they embraced the Iraqi government. On the contrary, many Sunni tribesmen began to work with the Americans because they realised that it was the Iraqi government, rather than the Americans, who posed the biggest threat

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<sup>58</sup> One British diplomat described Maliki as being 'told' rather than 'consulted' about the Awakening, and said that he was 'deeply suspicious' of it. The diplomat, who disagreed with the Awakening, made the point that arming Anbari tribes who distrusted the government would serve only to deepen those divisions rather than reconciling them. Senior British Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>59</sup> In a meeting with James Baker and Lee Hamilton who were in Baghdad conducting research for the Iraq Study Group, SCIRI leader Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim said, 'we will never reconcile with the Saddamists. They were killing us for the last thirty-five years, and now we are paying them back.' Cited in Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 273.

<sup>60</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 293. Multi-national force commander General Peter Chiarelli was convinced that the strategy behind Shi'ite militia violence in Baghdad was to secure major parts of Baghdad and key routes to Najaf, Karbala and through Diyala to Iran. Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 297. Senior Counterinsurgency Advisor to General David Petraeus David Kilcullen, meanwhile, suspected that Maliki wanted to allow Shi'ite militias to finish the ethnic cleansing of mixed neighbourhoods in Baghdad before beginning the process of stabilization, thereby presenting the Americans 'with a fait accompli of a Shiia Baghdad.' Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq 2006-2008*, 93.

<sup>61</sup> According to the assessment of Major Andy Morgado, interviewed in Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*, 230-1. Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 296.

to their security.<sup>62</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Gian Gentile who was responsible for the Sunni dominated Amiriyah district of Baghdad, said the Sunnis he encountered were convinced that ‘this is a sectarian government out to crush them.’<sup>63</sup> Fears circulated that, by arming Sunni groups opposed to the government, the Americans were simply creating more militias that would go on to fuel the continuing civil war.<sup>64</sup> Counterinsurgency critic Douglas Porch argues that the US was arming the Sons of Iraq to defend themselves against the US-backed Shi’ite-dominated security forces, ‘in short, arming civil war, not nation building.’<sup>65</sup> A senior adviser to Prime Minister Maliki posed the question, ‘we have enough militias in Iraq that we are struggling now to solve the problem. Why are we creating new ones?’<sup>66</sup> The fact that many of these former insurgents were also being paid by the US army also infuriated a number of people in the Shi’ite political sphere, and raised questions about whether the Americans intended to reverse Iraq’s new political settlement.<sup>67</sup>

Prime Minister Maliki can be pragmatic, however, and is adept at seeing political opportunities in the most unfavourable environments. The defeat of al-Qaeda in Sunni areas was, after all, good news for the Maliki government<sup>68</sup> – as was the emergence of a new political class of Sunni tribal leaders who might be amenable to future partnerships in the power-sharing political system.<sup>69</sup> It was soon noticed that Maliki was making personal phone calls to Anbar Awakening leader

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<sup>62</sup> One Iraqi commentator described how Sunnis began to ‘trust the US as the protector for Sunnis’ because they realised that ‘no-one from the Iraqi government is willing to protect them.’ He claims that Sunnis turned against Al Qaeda because they were failing to target the ‘real enemy’ which was the Iraqi government. Kubaisi, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>63</sup> Cited in Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 289.

<sup>64</sup> Malkasian, 'A Thin Blue Line in the Sand'. Cordesman, *Iraq's Insurgency and the Road to Civil Conflict Volume 2*, 519.

<sup>65</sup> Douglas Porch, *Counterinsurgency: Exposing the Myths of the New Way of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 309-10.

<sup>66</sup> John Burns and Alissa Rubin, 'U.S. Arming Sunnis in Iraq to Battle Old Qaeda Allies', *The New York Times*, 11th June 2007.

<sup>67</sup> Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*, 237.

<sup>68</sup> Allegedly the Shi’ite government had been pressuring the Americans not to work with the Sunni tribes, and changed their tune only when one of the tribal leaders threatened to ‘push terrorists into their territory.’ After this threat National Security Adviser Mowaffak al-Rubaie promised to supply the Anbari tribes ‘with men and material.’ Gary W. Montgomery and Timothy McWilliams, 'Interview with Sheikh Wissam Abd al-Ibrahim al-Hardan al-Aeithawi', *Al-Anbar Awakening: Iraqi Perspectives. From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq 2004-2009* (II; Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University Press, 2009a).

<sup>69</sup> One senior American official said that although initially Maliki ‘was very distrusting of the Sahwa [Awakening],’ he eventually embraced it and ‘tried to recruit a lot of these guys.’ Former Senior National Security Council Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', (Washington D.C., 2013).

Abd al-Sattar al-Rishawi<sup>70</sup> and that a number of other leaders were declaring themselves to be very content with Maliki's co-operation.<sup>71</sup> The Prime Minister was also willing to integrate substantial numbers of Awakening members into local police and even military forces – albeit not to the extent that was desired – while Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih diverted some reconstruction resources to Anbar.<sup>72</sup> Of course as a Sunni dominated, resource poor, rural area, the Anbar region was a low-cost place for the Prime Minister to endorse the Awakening. The movement would become much more controversial as it expanded during the troop surge into Sunni areas in Baghdad and to confessionally mixed urban areas, and indeed even if support was forthcoming from the very top of government it was not easy to convince the rank and file of the Shi'ite militias that arming Sunnis was a good idea. In a striking vignette, one US captain noted in a letter to his father that one of the tricky things about engaging with the Sons of Iraq in Baghdad was that if one of them was injured they could not be taken to the hospital, because the health facilities were run by Sadrists who were still murdering Sunnis brought in for treatment.<sup>73</sup>

In sum, although the Maliki government made the best of the early Awakening movement, the Awakening itself was the product of a foreign policy relationship between the US and a set of sub-state actors in Iraq who had been empowered by the failure of the Iraqi government. By funding and arming this group without the consistent involvement and permission of the Iraqi government, the Americans were strengthening an actor in the Iraqi civil war that in 2006 had been definitively on the losing side. The Awakening movements, though they certainly saved lives in the short term, failed to address fundamental questions of

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<sup>70</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 252.

<sup>71</sup> One Awakening leader, Sheikh Ali Hatim Abd al-Razzaq Ali al-Sulayman al-Assafi said that the tribal leaders had asked Prime Minister Maliki 'for many things' including 'emergency response units, a police force, bring in the army' and the Prime Minister 'without hesitation he did it...they fulfilled all our demands.' Gary W. Montgomery and Timothy McWilliams, 'Interview with Sheikh Ali Hatim Abd al-Razzaq Ali al-Sulayman al-Assafi ', *Al-Anbar Awakening: Iraqi Perspectives. From Insurgency to Counterinsurgency in Iraq 2004-2009* (II; Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University, 2009b).

<sup>72</sup> Linda Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends: General Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008) 273-4.

<sup>73</sup> Cited in Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*, 312.

political and sectarian reconciliation and the division of power and resources between Iraq's warring communities.<sup>74</sup>

## The Surge, Crackdown on Shi'ite Militias and Stabilisation

The escalating civil war, particularly in Baghdad in 2006, forced President Bush to finally break with his top generals in Iraq and to try a new approach to stabilizing Iraq.<sup>75</sup> A small but influential school had been advocating for a troop surge. These included Stephen Hadley, Brett McGurk and Meghan O'Sullivan from the National Security Council, Chuck Robb from the Iraq Study Group, retired General Jack Keane and military historian Fred Kagan. The Surge would infuse five battalions worth of troops into Iraq on a temporary basis, to be used primarily to stabilise Baghdad. By December 2006 the Surge had been given the go ahead, and 20,000 troops were drafted into Iraq over the next six months to add to the existing 134,000 already in Iraq.<sup>76</sup> Once again the decision to go ahead with the Surge was made without input from Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. The Prime Minister was ambivalent about the plan.<sup>77</sup> On the one hand he was committed to crushing the ongoing violence in the country, but he was also keen to be at the helm of those efforts and was worried about the political costs of allowing a large increase in US troop numbers.<sup>78</sup> A core part of the Surge strategy was to go after Shi'ite militias that had hitherto been relatively protected by the Iraq government. It appears that Prime Minister Maliki signed onto this idea, perhaps because he was feeling increasingly under threat and alienated by the Shi'ite militias.<sup>79</sup> The Surge did lead

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<sup>74</sup> Steven Simon, 'The Price of the Surge: How U.S. Strategy Is Hastening Iraq's Demise', *Foreign Affairs*, 83 (2008).

<sup>75</sup> The US military in Iraq had long been convinced that their primary task was to handover responsibility for Iraqi security to Iraqi troops so that they could withdraw as soon as possible. Commander of the Multi-National Forces in Iraq General George Casey thought a troop surge was unnecessary and 'was very strongly opposed' to it. Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 274. President Bush had by the summer of 2006 become disillusioned with his military leadership in Iraq and no longer trusted them to find the US a path to victory. Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*, 223.

<sup>76</sup> David Cloud and Jeff Zeleny, 'Bush Considers Up to 20,000 More Troops for Iraq', *The New York Times*, 29th December 2006.

<sup>77</sup> Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq 2006-2008*, 93.

<sup>78</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 305.

<sup>79</sup> One senior British diplomat said that the Prime Minister became increasingly convinced that the Iranians were sponsoring the Sadrist as a political alternative to himself, and his turning against Sadr was an attempt to 'neutralize the competition.' Senior British Diplomat, 'Interview with the author



to a massive escalation of attacks against Shi'ite militias, with an average of one thousand members of the Mahdi Army being arrested every month between February and August 2007.<sup>80</sup> The weakened Mahdi Army was then attacked on the order of Prime Minister Maliki in March 2008 in a surprise assault that infuriated the US military<sup>81</sup> but enormously bolstered Maliki's popularity.<sup>82</sup>

By 2009 the number of civilian fatalities in Iraq had fallen to its lowest point since the invasion.<sup>83</sup> This was partly down to the completed ethnic cleansing of a number of mixed neighbourhoods, especially in Baghdad,<sup>84</sup> but also because of the government's willingness to attack Shi'ite militants, the Awakening's success against al-Qaeda and the activities of the additional American troops.<sup>85</sup> The increasing stability enabled the Iraqi government to engage in significantly more capital expenditure in 2008 and 2009 than it had been able to do in the preceding two years.<sup>86</sup> Although achieving satisfactory public services was some way off, there were impressive improvements in a short space of time. Between 2008 and 2009, public access to sewage sanitation increased from 8% to 20%; access to clean water increased from 22% to 45%; access to public health increased from 10% to

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conducted on condition of anonymity'. Maliki was also angered by Sadrist excesses directed against local politicians loyal to him, and by Sadrist attacks on his tribal constituency of Karbala. Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*, 235.

<sup>80</sup> Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*, 236.

<sup>81</sup> Maliki launched an attack against the Sadrists in March despite there being a plan to attack with US military support in June. The offensive was so badly managed that the Americans were forced to intervene in support of the Prime Minister to prevent him from losing the battle. Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends: General Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq*, 341.

<sup>82</sup> One Shi'ite political figure noted that 'attacking Sadrists gave Maliki a lot of credibility.' Senior Member of Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. Maliki's approval ratings bear this out: after the attacks his approval ratings soared from around 9% to 31% amongst Sunnis, and from 52% to 70% amongst Shi'ites. Michael E. O'Hanlon and Ian Livingston, 'Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq', (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, December 2009) 44.

<sup>83</sup> O'Hanlon and Livingston, 'Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq', 4.

<sup>84</sup> Nir Rosen comments that part of the reason for the dramatic fall in violence was that 'The Shi'ites had won the civil war.' With many Sunni communities depopulated there were also fewer places for Sunni militants to hide than ever before. Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*, 237-8.

<sup>85</sup> For instance US troops built concrete walls around neighbourhoods with heavy checkpoints at entrances. Permit systems were also started so only certain vehicles would be allowed into the neighbourhood. Though unpopular at first, these measures are widely acknowledged to have reduced urban sectarian violence. Robinson, *Tell Me How This Ends: General Petraeus and the Search for a Way Out of Iraq*.

<sup>86</sup> O'Hanlon and Livingston, 'Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq', 37.

30%; and access to trash services increased from 18% to 45%.<sup>87</sup> In March 2009, electricity provision in Baghdad reached its highest point since the invasion and there was growing public confidence that security gains had been made.<sup>88</sup> Although challenges remained, with corruption in the Iraqi public sector reaching an all time high,<sup>89</sup> the improvements attracted a rush of foreign direct investment into the country and buoyed the Iraqi public with a new optimism about starting the process of healing of the country.<sup>90</sup>

## Turkey

### Re-Engaging with Iraq

Turkey's interest in a stabilizing Iraq was piqued in 2008 and 2009, and the government pursued a series of initiatives to develop strong diplomatic and economic relations with its southern neighbour. In 2008 the High Level Strategic Cooperation Council was formed between the two countries in order to 'evaluate and enhance bilateral economic and trade relations.'<sup>91</sup> The following year Prime Minister Erdoğan visited Baghdad and stayed the night along with his wife and twelve ministers from his government. He signed off on forty-eight agreements with Iraq on a diverse range of issues, from energy and economic co-operation to trade and investment. In a sign of tense relations to come, a number of Turkish diplomats have commented that 'nothing came out of'<sup>92</sup> these agreements despite them reflecting solid and mutually beneficial 'technical work.'<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless economic relations between Turkey and Iraq quickly gathered speed, as Turkish companies

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<sup>87</sup> O'Hanlon and Livingston, 'Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq', 39.

<sup>88</sup> O'Hanlon and Livingston, 'Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq', 35, 42.

<sup>89</sup> In 2009 Iraq was ranked 176 out of 180 by Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, which was the lowest score it had received since the invasion. Transparency International, 'Corruption by Territory/ Country: Iraq', <[http://archive.transparency.org/policy\\_research/surveys\\_indices/cpi/2009/cpi\\_2009\\_table](http://archive.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2009/cpi_2009_table)>, accessed 7th October 2013.

<sup>90</sup> Between 2007 and 2008, FDI into Iraq increased by tenfold, from an estimated \$10 million per month to \$100 million per month. O'Hanlon and Livingston, 'Iraq Index: Tracking Variables of Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq', 39.

<sup>91</sup> Republic of Turkey Ministry of Economy, 'Iraq', <<http://www.economy.gov.tr/index.cfm?sayfa=countriesandregions&country=IQ&region=4>>, accessed 8th October 2013.

<sup>92</sup> Aydın Selcen, 'Interview with author', (Erbil, 4th March 2013).

<sup>93</sup> Turkish Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', (2013).

dominated Iraq's booming reconstruction industry and won tenders to undertake lucrative infrastructure projects.<sup>94</sup>

There had been little political engagement between the Turkish and the Iraqi governments up to this point.<sup>95</sup> Despite the significant strategic value of its relationship with Iraq, Turkish involvement with the country was hamstrung by its opposition to the Iraq war and particularly by its refusal to allow US troops to use Turkish soil during the invasion.<sup>96</sup> Turkish diplomats complain that they were frozen out of Iraq by the Coalition Provisional Authority,<sup>97</sup> and that US hostility to Turkey during this early period 'slowed our involvement.'<sup>98</sup> It is also possible that the Turkish government was reluctant to publicly engage with Iraq under occupation and during the civil war for fear of appearing to support the US project in Iraq. Once Iraq was stabilizing and had a government increasingly independent of the US, however, recalibrating its relationship with Iraq became more politically palatable in addition to being more economically attractive.<sup>99</sup>

### Cross-Border Raids and the Iraqi Government

Another reason for Turkey's increasing engagement with Iraq was the growing ferocity of anti-government PKK<sup>100</sup> violence emerging from Iraq's northern

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<sup>94</sup> '95% of Iraq's \$2.8 billion reconstruction market is controlled by Turkish companies.' Anat Lapidot-Firilla, 'Neighbor to the World's Superpower: Turkey's Challenge in Northern Iraq', in Amnon Cohen and Noga Efrati (eds.), *Post-Saddam Iraq: New Realities, Old Identities, Changing Patterns* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2011), 243-65, 259.

<sup>95</sup> A number of sources state that 'Turkey entered Iraqi politics in 2009.' Former Senior National Security Council Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. Iraq Analyst in US Administration, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', (Washington D.C., 2013).

<sup>96</sup> The new AKP government in Turkey was 'vehemently' opposed to the Iraq war and the Turkish parliament voted against allowing US troops to use Turkish territory in a move that shocked the US and created a 'cloud over US-Turkish relations' for some years. Relations were also strained by an incident soon after the invasion when Turkish special forces were arrested by American troops in Suleymaniya apparently for planning the assassination of a political figure in Kirkuk. Henri J. Barkey, 'A Transformed Relationship: Turkey and Iraq', in Henri J. Barkey, Scott B. Lasensky, and Phebe Marr (eds.), *Iraq, Its Neighbors, and the United States: Competition, Crisis and the Reordering of Power* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2011), 45-73.

<sup>97</sup> Turkish Foreign Ministry Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', (2013).

<sup>98</sup> Selcen, 'Interview with author'. US officials insist that they constantly encouraged Turkish involvement in Iraq but that the Turks were reluctant to be seen to endorse the occupation in any way.

<sup>99</sup> One Turkish diplomat asserts that by 2009 Turkey had simply 'come to terms with the new political reality in Iraq' and was no longer wedded to pursuing a policy of principled objection to the state that had been created by the American war. Turkish Foreign Ministry Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>100</sup> The PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) has fought the Turkish government since 1984 for greater Kurdish rights and autonomy in Turkey. In 2013 they entered into peace negotiations with the

territories. Although Turkey and the PKK have skirmished in the territories bordering northern Iraq and southern Turkey since the 1990s, there was an upsurge of violence in 2007 after a series of PKK attacks launched from border areas killed over 50 Turks.<sup>101</sup> The attacks were roundly condemned by the Americans, by the Iraqi government and by the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), and the Iraqi Defence Minister Abdel Qader Jassim al-Obeidi drafted a series of proposals to tackle PKK units based in Iraqi territory.<sup>102</sup> Prime Minister Erdoğan, however, declared that ‘Turkey has no patience left’ with time wasting mechanisms and appeared adamant that the attacks should be responded to with overwhelming force.<sup>103</sup> 100,000 Turkish troops were massed on the Iraqi border along with tanks, artillery and warplanes even as Iraqi lawmakers implored the Turks not to mount a cross-border military operation.<sup>104</sup> Over the next few months the Turkish army launched a series of offensives in Iraqi territory without informing or obtaining permission from the Iraqi government but with the tacit support of the American government. Even as the Iraqi parliament condemned the attacks as ‘outrageous,’ the Turkish military confirmed that the Americans had allowed access to the necessary Iraqi space for the Turks in addition to supplying them with intelligence.<sup>105</sup> Although the Bush administration had tried to encourage a diplomatic solution to the PKK crisis, ultimately it supported Turkish military action,<sup>106</sup> perhaps in the hope that supplying the Turkish military with more accurate intelligence on PKK positions would help to minimise civilian casualties and thereby mitigate tensions with the KRG.<sup>107</sup>

That the US army in Iraq was allowing a foreign country to conduct violent acts in Iraqi territory without the permission of the elected Iraqi government raises

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government. For more information about the group’s ideology and goals see Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, ‘PKK Official Website’, <[www.pkkonline.com/en/](http://www.pkkonline.com/en/)>, accessed 8th October 2013.

<sup>101</sup> Kerim Yildiz, *The Future of Kurdistan: The Iraqi Dilemma* (London: Pluto Press, 2012) 99. Susan Fraser, ‘US Generals in Turkey to Discuss Intelligence Sharing on Kurdish Rebels’, *Associated Press*, 20th November 2007.

<sup>102</sup> *Xinhua News Agency*, ‘Iraqi Delegation Leaves Ankara Without Reaching any Agreement’ (27th October 2007).

<sup>103</sup> Steven Lee Myers, ‘Bush Pledges to Help Turkey on Intelligence’, *The New York Times*, 6th November 2007.

<sup>104</sup> Gareth Jones, ‘Turkey urges Kurd rebels to disarm amid Iraq tension’, *Reuters*, 16th November 2007.

<sup>105</sup> Shwan Mohammed, ‘Iraq Condemns Turkish Airstrikes in Northern Iraq’, *USA Today*, 17th December 2007.

<sup>106</sup> Yildiz, *The Future of Kurdistan: The Iraqi Dilemma*, 114.

<sup>107</sup> Barkey, ‘A Transformed Relationship: Turkey and Iraq’, 56. *Reuters*, ‘Turkish Army Says They’ve Sent 10,000 Troops into Iraq’ (22nd February 2008).

some serious questions about Iraqi sovereignty in this period. In practical terms the Iraqi government had no air force and therefore little control over its own airspace, and was thus unable to physically prevent the attacks from taking place on its territory. Militarily, the US army still prevailed in Iraq, and whether it was working with the Awakening or co-ordinating airstrikes with the Turks, it seems that the US had ultimate control. Indeed one Turkish diplomat admitted that although 'Iraq was never happy' about the cross-border raids, ultimately 'Iraq was under occupation' so it did not hugely matter what they thought.<sup>108</sup> Although the strikes on the PKK did not represent a serious threat to Iraqi national security, the fact that they were allowed to happen without the consent of the Iraqi government publicly demonstrated and reinforced the weakness of the Iraqi state.

### Turkey and the Kurdistan Regional Government

The relationship between the Turkish government and the KRG was tense and unproductive for years after the 2003 invasion. The Turks were worried that the federalist structures laid out in the Iraqi constitution allowed the Iraqi Kurds far too much autonomy, and they were deeply fearful of the precedent it might provide for the PKK.<sup>109</sup> As late as April 2007, Turkey's military chief of staff stated that the KRG was the single biggest threat to Turkey's national security.<sup>110</sup> Turkey also accused the Iraqi Kurds of actively supporting PKK violence and sought to deny the KRG legitimacy by refusing to allow it any official contact with the Turkish government.<sup>111</sup> By 2008, however, a number of factors had collided to produce a complete turnaround in Turkish attitudes to the KRG. Turkish diplomats explain that Turkey discovered 'soft power'<sup>112</sup> after its failed military campaign against the PKK demonstrated once again that there was no military solution to the intractable conflict.<sup>113</sup> This recognition led the Turks to 'look into normalising relations with

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<sup>108</sup> Turkish Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>109</sup> An official in the Turkish Foreign Ministry explained that relations with the Iraqi Kurds were 'overshadowed by PKK attacks' which were the main focus of the foreign policy and military establishments. The Turkish political elites were 'very worried about the consequences' of the Iraqi constitution in terms of bolstering PKK demands and so the KRG was viewed primarily as a threat to Turkish national security.

<sup>110</sup> Cited in Kurdish Human Rights Project, 'Turkish Attacks on Kurdistan, Iraq. Background, Motives and Human Rights Impact', (2008).

<sup>111</sup> Barkey, 'A Transformed Relationship: Turkey and Iraq', 51-2.

<sup>112</sup> Selcen, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>113</sup> Turkish Foreign Ministry Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. This process of re-thinking approaches to the conflict with the PKK was aided by the

the Kurds.’ And as the KRG relationship with Turkey improved, the former became increasingly willing to turn a blind eye to the cross-border raids when they did occur.<sup>114</sup> The warming of Erbil-Ankara relations has in fact resulted in the KRG putting increased pressure on the PKK to desist from its violent acts and to pursue a negotiated settlement with the Turkish government.<sup>115</sup> For its part the KRG was also increasingly aware that good relations with Turkey and Iran could secure its economic and political future, particularly in the event of centralizing impulses returning to Baghdad. It has been commented that, because of the geography of northern Iraq, Iraqi Kurdistan simply could not exist without Iranian and Turkish acquiescence,<sup>116</sup> and that the two countries are the KRG’s most strategically important relationships.<sup>117</sup> The KRG has sought to use the lucrative economic opportunities on offer in its territory to draw Turkey into a strategic partnership; for instance the KRG awarded numerous infrastructure projects to Turkish companies, including the contracts to build Erbil and Suleymaniyah airports, and has offered Turkish companies tax breaks or tax exemptions.<sup>118</sup> For energy poor Turkey, access to Iraqi Kurdish oil and gas has also been a very attractive prospect that has lubricated the new relationship.<sup>119</sup> An official at one of Kurdistan’s foreign representations explained Turkey’s new interest in the region by pointing to Iraqi Kurdistan’s oil reserves and mineral wealth, all of which is ‘waiting to be tapped.’<sup>120</sup>

Since 2008, relations between Turkey and the KRG have flourished beyond the wildest expectations of Washington and Baghdad. Iraqi Kurdistan hosts five Turkish banks, over 1,000 Turkish companies, and Turkey has become the KRG’s main business partner.<sup>121</sup> In 2010 Turkey opened a consulate with a trade attaché in

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decline of Kemalism in Turkish politics and the rise of the Islamist AKP Party which emphasised pan-Islamism over ethnic separatism. Senior Adviser to PUK, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>114</sup> Turkish Foreign Ministry Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>115</sup> Barkey, 'A Transformed Relationship: Turkey and Iraq', 55. Jalal Talabani, leader of the Iraqi Kurdish party the PUK, has long acted as a mediator between the Turkish government and the PKK. PUK Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>116</sup> Windawi, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>117</sup> Hussein, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>118</sup> Soner Cagaptay and Tyle Evans, 'Turkey's Changing relations with Iraq: Kurdistan Up, Baghdad Down', (Washington D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2012) 1, 9.

<sup>119</sup> Barkey, 'A Transformed Relationship: Turkey and Iraq', 57.

<sup>120</sup> Kurdish Official at a Foreign Representation, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', (2013).

<sup>121</sup> Selcen, 'Interview with author'. Cagaptay and Evans, 'Turkey's Changing relations with Iraq: Kurdistan Up, Baghdad Down'.

the KRG capital Erbil, and political relations between the KRG and the Turkish government have become extraordinarily close.<sup>122</sup> As tensions have escalated between the KRG and the Iraqi central government over the extent of Kurdish autonomy and jurisdiction over territory and natural resources, Turkish support for the KRG has begun to damage its relationship with Baghdad.

Although Turkey continues to oppose Kurdish independence<sup>123</sup> and constantly reiterates its ‘mantra’ that Iraq must remain territorially integral, it has also chosen to ‘stick with Kurdistan’ when points of difference have emerged.<sup>124</sup> This has been infuriating for the US. After it doggedly encouraged a rapprochement between the KRG and the Turkish government, it has since been dismayed by the subsequent decline in relations between Turkey and Baghdad.<sup>125</sup> The question being asked by many an exasperated US official is: why is Turkey tying itself to Kurdistan when Iraq is the much bigger prize?<sup>126</sup> The answer partly lies in the relative institutional strength of the KRG as compared with the central Iraqi government. After pursuing a new partnership with Baghdad in 2008, Turkey was frustrated to discover that the Iraqi government seemed unable to follow up on and implement bilateral agreements.<sup>127</sup> Frustrated by the rate of progress in Iraq, Turkey quickly lost confidence in the good faith of Iraqi politicians and became increasingly reluctant to continue its diplomatic engagement with the government.<sup>128</sup> Iraqi state institutions were still wracked by corruption and instability, as the precarious coalition government was constantly teetering on the edge of collapse,<sup>129</sup> and Iraq simply did not have the institutional capacity nor the political coherence to deliver

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<sup>122</sup> There is some tension within the KRG over the increasing reliance of Iraqi Kurdistan on Turkey. The PKK in particular blames the KDP for getting carried away with the rapprochement with Turkey. One former PUK official described the Turks’ increasing role in Iraqi Kurdistan as ‘insidious.’ Former PUK Official, ‘Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity’, (Erbil, 2013).

<sup>123</sup> Head of the KRG Department of Foreign Relations Falah Mustafa Bakr, ‘Interview with author’, (Erbil, 5th March 2013).

<sup>124</sup> Selcen, ‘Interview with author’.

<sup>125</sup> Cagaptay and Evans, ‘Turkey’s Changing relations with Iraq: Kurdistan Up, Baghdad Down’, 1.

<sup>126</sup> Iraq Analyst in US Administration, ‘Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity’. American Official, ‘Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity’, (Washington D.C., 2013).

<sup>127</sup> Selcen, ‘Interview with author’.

<sup>128</sup> American Official, ‘Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity’.

<sup>129</sup> The Maliki government came the closest it has ever come to collapse in 2007 after almost all his coalition partners withdrew from government. The US decided to intervene to prevent the collapse of his government after it was decided the instability involved in selecting a new leader would derail Iraq’s stabilization process. Former Senior National Security Council Official, ‘Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity’.

on its commitments. Meanwhile Turkey was pleasantly surprised by the efficacy of the KRG. Keen to demonstrate its value to Turkey, the KRG offered a fast turnaround on its political commitments to Turkey and even established a directorate solely to deal with Turkish affairs at the KRG's Department for Foreign Relations.<sup>130</sup> Even apart from the responsiveness of the KRG, the economy of the Kurdish region was growing at an astonishing speed – unhampered by security concerns – making it highly attractive to investors and politicians in Turkey alike, especially when compared with the volatility of Baghdad.

Iraq's complete absorption in battling its civil war empowered the KRG, which became a sub-state actor that was capable of conducting high level foreign relations with a neighbouring power. Although the KRG also struggled with corruption and inefficiency in its institutions, and with disillusionment with its political system, it nevertheless maintained a level of public support incomparable to that enjoyed by the Iraqi government. Through the civil war years, when Iraq's public services were disintegrating, the KRG was improving electricity production, investing in infrastructure, and making itself attractive to foreign investors. For Turkey all the promises offered by Iraq had come to nothing, and, although the potential offered by the KRG was smaller, the KRG was delivering immediate political and economic returns.

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<sup>130</sup> The Directorate for Turkish Affairs is one of only two such directorates at the KRG's Department for Foreign Relations, the other deals with Iranian Affairs. KRG Foreign Policy Adviser, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', (Erbil, 2013).



## Turkey's Relationship with Iraq's Sunni Leaders

As part of its effort to pull Iraq back out of civil war, the US repeatedly asked Turkey to encourage Iraqi Sunni participation in the political process.<sup>131</sup> Turkey, along with a number of other regional Sunni powers, had watched the escalating sectarian violence in Iraq with trepidation and was increasingly willing to play a role in empowering the Iraqi Sunni political elite.<sup>132</sup> Turkey had cultivated strong relationships with individual Sunni politicians such as Osama al-Nujayfi, whose family connections with Turkey allegedly date back to Ottoman times,<sup>133</sup> and with the sitting Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, and would use its leverage with these leading Sunni figures to help facilitate the birth of a new political coalition. Together with support from Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Turkey helped to broker the Sunni-dominated Iraqiya coalition that would successfully contest the January 2010 Parliamentary election. Turkey likely offered Iraqiya financial support, and although Iraqiya's leader former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi denies that he received money from Turkey, he suspects that individual politicians in the coalition were being funded by Turkey.<sup>134</sup> Turkey's political support, however, was likely much more valuable than its financial support, given that a great deal of the funds used in prominent Iraqi political campaigns are the proceeds of corruption.<sup>135</sup> One senior Turkish diplomat boasted that, although Turkey supposedly practices a foreign policy based on the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of others, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmed Davutoğlu was 'instrumental in forming

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<sup>131</sup> One American official thinks the US pushed too hard to engage with Sunnis, including by asking the Turks to get involved. He said 'We saw Sunni engagement as vital. But we probably did it ten times harder than we had to, it was in Sunni interests to engage.' Iraq Analyst in US Administration, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. A number of Turkish diplomats also referred to the US efforts to involve Turkey in Sunni re-engagement; Turkish Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. Turkish Foreign Ministry Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', Iraq Analyst in US Administration, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>132</sup> Former Senior Member of Prime Minister Maliki's Government, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. Turkey's increasing interest in playing in role in Iraqi politics may be a product of the formation of a new AKP foreign policy outlook that strives to make Turkey a leading regional power with a Pan-Islamist centre of gravity. Barkey, 'A Transformed Relationship: Turkey and Iraq', 51, 53.

<sup>133</sup> Turkish Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>134</sup> When asked whether Turkey had funded his campaign he said they had not but that he had 'noticed that some of the sub-groups in Iraqiya had a lot of funding for their candidates.' Allawi, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>135</sup> This was openly admitted by a senior financial supporter of Iraqiya. International Iraqi Businessman and Former Iraqiya Financier, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

Iraqiya.’<sup>136</sup> A leading member of the US representation in Iraq agreed that Turkey’s support of Iraqiya was ‘aggressive’ and possibly played an integral part in its electoral success.<sup>137</sup>

Iraqiya won a plurality of seats, by a margin of two seats, in the 2010 parliamentary elections, and Turkey, along with a number of other regional countries, was ‘extremely jubilant’ at the prospect of the pro-Turkey moderate Ayad Allawi becoming Prime Minister.<sup>138</sup> The aftermath of the elections were, however, mired in controversy. Despite having more seats than any other coalition, Iraqiya was not given the first opportunity to form a government. Instead, Iraq’s Chief Justice ruled that the coalition with the most seats *after the election* would have the first opportunity to form a government. This meant that coalitions could expand to absorb MPs that had not run with them in the election, thereby becoming the biggest coalition. Months of desperate back-room dealing ensued as the incumbent Prime Minister desperately tried to cobble together a coalition large enough to have the first chance to form a government. Turkey was outraged and said that it was ‘Democracy 101’ that Iraqiya should have the first opportunity to form a government.<sup>139</sup> In the extended government formation negotiations, Turkey insisted that Ayad Allawi should be Prime Minister,<sup>140</sup> and strongly objected to allowing Prime Minister Maliki a second term in office.<sup>141</sup> In this coalition forming process Turkey was furiously and unsuccessfully trying to compete with Iranian influence.<sup>142</sup> Iran had a far better grip on the Iraqi political scene, however, with leverage over a wider range of more relevant political figures. Eventually Prime Minister Maliki emerged with the necessary support for a second term, and relations between Turkey and the Iraqi Prime Minister have been extremely hostile ever since.

The level of Turkish investment in this Iraqi political process has been attributed both to its newly ambitious foreign policy agenda and to its growing

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<sup>136</sup> Senior Turkish Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', (2013).

<sup>137</sup> Former Senior National Security Council Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>138</sup> Allawi, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>139</sup> Turkish Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>140</sup> Former Senior National Security Council Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>141</sup> Former Senior Member of Prime Minister Maliki's Government, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>142</sup> US Government Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

sectarian outlook. A number of politicians from different identity groups have complained that Turkey has articulated its objection to the Iraqi government in unnecessarily sectarian terms,<sup>143</sup> whilst Turkey's growing regional influence seems to have given it the false impression that it can determine political outcomes in Iraq. One American analyst quipped that 'Turkey has to go through a process like the US' of realizing that being important was not the same as being influential.<sup>144</sup>

Turkish relations with the Iraqi Sunni political community offer another example of the foreign relations of Iraqi sub-state actors. A sub-state actor in Iraq was able to receive financial and political support from a powerful foreign country to help it contest a domestic parliamentary election. It had access to that power in part because the relationship was brokered by the US, which was no longer governing Iraq but which was immensely influential in the country. In the aftermath of those elections, the race to form a governing coalition was in part a competition for political influence between three major powers, the US, Turkey and Iran, and was largely divorced from the Iraqi public.

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Sunni tribal Awakening Councils are an example of sub-state foreign policy actors building strength in the vacuum created by central government weakness. As sub-state militant actors, the Awakening Councils were able to build a relationship directly with the US, bypassing the Iraqi government, and in doing so were able to successfully deliver security – a key public good – in areas where Iraqi security forces had failed. Falling violence in Iraq led to new opportunities for foreign relationships focused on economic co-operation. Turkey began to take an interest in building a relationship with the Iraqi government with a view to taking advantage of the myriad opportunities for Turkish companies to help with Iraqi reconstruction and service provision. The strengthening of the Iraqi central government did not, however, prevent the KRG from building an independent and robust relationship with Turkey. This could perhaps be explained

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<sup>143</sup> Ayad Allawi said that he chastised the Turks after they made a comment about the 'oppression of Sunnis,' saying that their response should not have been 'a sectarian response.' Allawi, 'Interview with author'. A senior Sunni financier of Iraqiya also complained about growing Turkish sectarianism. International Iraqi Businessman and Former Iraqiya Financier, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>144</sup> Iraq Analyst in US Administration, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

by the continued strength of the KRG's normative and functional legitimacy as compared with that enjoyed by, even a strengthened, Iraq. But it also raises questions about whether federalism changes the nature of the weak state dynamic, because of the ability of the region to build up institutional strength over time such that it becomes increasingly difficult to prevent the region from conducting independent foreign relations regardless of the growing legitimacy of the central government.

The back-room political dealing in 2010 that led to Nouri al-Maliki's retention of the premiership was heavily influenced by the Americans, and raised questions about the extent of influence that the Iraqi electorate had over the political process. In the early days of the Maliki premiership, sectarian violence raged through Iraq unabated, as the Prime Minister was reluctant to allow US forces to target Shi'ite militias. The Maliki regime was heavily dependent on Shi'ite support, and feared that allowing the targeting of Shi'ite militias would undermine its political fortunes. Here we see that regime security considerations are not only driving foreign policy, but also drive crucial domestic policy decisions.

Many in Sunni constituencies identified the Maliki regime with the sectarian militias and police forces that were violently attacking their communities, and as such the regime had little normative or functional legitimacy in Sunni areas. The increasingly wanton and indiscriminate violence perpetrated by al-Qaeda in Sunni areas was also deeply alienating for many Sunnis, and legitimacy began to be transferred away from local militant groups to traditional tribal federations. These tribal groups reached out to US forces and began to work together to fight against al-Qaeda and its affiliates, who had become a scourge in Sunni areas in addition to being the key instigators of the wider Iraqi civil war. These Awakening Councils are evidence of the empowerment of sub-state actors that results from the state's inability to capture legitimacy amongst particular segments of the population. The tribal groups were credible local partners for US forces, and could make security gains in Sunni areas that the Iraqi Security Forces simply could not achieve. The US was, therefore, prepared to completely bypass the sovereign Iraqi government to fund and arm these new local militias. It is evidence of Iraq's extraordinary weakness at the time that the US was able to create a new class of armed actors outside of the security forces, amongst a sectarian group that was opposing the government, without the permission or input of the Maliki regime. The US also

decided to infuse tens of thousands of additional troops into Iraq based entirely on calculations made by Washington about the direction of the conflict. The Iraqi government had virtually no say in the fact of the surge, nor was it able to direct the additional troops as it saw fit.

The Prime Minister was, however, becoming increasingly convinced that Shi'ite militants posed a threat to his regime security, and so took advantage of the Surge to undermine his domestic political opponents. This use of foreign assistance corresponds with the expectations of the literature on developing states' foreign policy. States are expected to deploy foreign policy in pursuit of regime security, and, in particular, to seek resources from foreign powers in order to crush domestic political opponents. The Maliki regime engaged in a spectacular showdown with the Mahdi Army, and began to co-operate with the US targeting of Shi'ite militias. The result was a swell in popular support for the Prime Minister amongst both Sunni and Shi'ite populations. The regime was seen as privileging the pursuit of security above sectarian partisanship, and Iraqis desperately hoped that the Maliki regime would restore some stability and security to the country.

As Iraq's fortunes began to rise, so did its opportunities to engage positively with its neighbours. Turkey only developed a serious interest in post-invasion Baghdad once security began to return to the capital and possibilities opened up for economic and political cooperation. Having recaptured a measure of functional legitimacy by improving the internal security situation, Iraq was empowered to pursue positive foreign relations.

Iraq still had some way to go, however, before it could be considered a strong state. Its security remained dominated by US forces, and, in a startling indication of Iraq's continued weakness, Turkey was allowed by US air forces to bomb PKK targets in Iraqi territory without the permission of the Iraqi government. Moreover, the Kurdish region was able to build an extremely strong and productive independent relationship with Turkey without any input from Baghdad. Indeed, when the strength of Turkey's relationship with the KRG began to cause consternation in Baghdad, Turkey effectively chose the KRG over Baghdad. That Turkey was prepared to sacrifice its relationship with Baghdad, which is larger, potentially more powerful, and certainly more resource rich than the KRG, was a great vote of confidence in the Kurdish region. The region had managed to achieve a

level of institutional capability, based on its strong normative legitimacy and its impressive functional capacity, that made it a very attractive foreign policy partner.

As relations with Baghdad soured, Turkey was keen to exert its influence on domestic Iraqi politics to ensure that more favourable political partners came to the fore. The Iraqi state, however, was no longer as vulnerable as it had been in the dark days of the civil war and Turkey achieved little success in its attempt to secure leverage on the Iraqi political scene.

## CHAPTER SIX: NEGOTIATING WITH THE US IN A STRENGTHEND IRAQ

### Introduction

This chapter argues that the contrast between Iraq's two negotiations over Status of the Forces Agreements with the US, the first in 2008 and the second in 2011, demonstrates the importance of normative and functional legitimacy and institutional capacity in enabling the effective conduct of foreign policy. At the time of the first negotiation the Prime Minister was immensely popular because he had overseen a dramatic reduction in violence in the country and because he had embraced a narrative of Iraqi nationalism that gave people hope that the dark days of civil war were behind them. The Prime Minister had also exerted control over the increasingly centralised Iraqi state and had diminished both the legitimacy and the operating capacity of competing domestic foreign policy actors. As a result the Prime Minister was able to conduct highly effective negotiations over the 2008 SOFA Agreement. But the progress made by the Iraqi state was not to last. As endless infighting followed the 2010 parliamentary elections, the outbreak of renewed sectarian rhetoric, and the continued poor delivery of public services led to a growing disillusionment with the Iraqi political elite. In the 2011 negotiations, it was clear that the Prime Minister had lost much of his political capital and was unable to deliver the result he wanted.

Even at the height of his popularity, the Prime Minister was unable to effectively challenge the power of the KRG. In this period, the KRG was able to win landmark contracts with international oil companies that may have provided the region with a medium-term route to independence from Baghdad. This challenges the expectations laid out by the hypotheses that frame the thesis. I would have expected the stronger Iraqi state to be in a better position to limit the KRG's foreign policy activities. The KRG, however, had established a high degree of independence during the civil war, when the central Iraqi government was at its weakest, and it proved difficult to roll back the Kurdish overreach once the Iraqi government had strengthened. Although the Kurdish region is somewhat constrained in its international relations because it is not formally or legally a state, in effect it carries out most of the functions of a state. In fact the Kurdish region is in many ways more

effective and a better partner to international business than the Iraqi state is, which accounts for Iraq's failure to successfully prevent the KRG from taking control of oil resources in its regions and in the disputed areas.

## Iraqi State Strength and Maliki's Popularity

By 2009 it was clear that 'the civil war was over.'<sup>1</sup> Iraq's security forces, together with US troops, had finally achieved a near monopoly over violence in the country, as severely weakened militias were deprived of legitimacy, separated from their constituencies, and forced into retreat.<sup>2</sup> A semblance of normalcy returned to the streets of Baghdad, albeit in the shadow of blast walls and endless checkpoints, and Iraq's wealthy new elites brought flashy cars, high fashion, and fine dining to the capital.<sup>3</sup> The Iraqi public showed signs of confidence and optimism unimaginable in the dark days of the civil war, with 81% saying security was getting better, 51% declaring that Iraq was going in the right direction, and 46% expecting their personal economic situation to improve in the next year.<sup>4</sup>

Prime Minister Maliki was lauded for overseeing such a dramatic upturn in Iraq's fortunes.<sup>5</sup> His 'triumphant'<sup>6</sup> 2008 offensive against the Sadrist occupation of

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<sup>1</sup> Nir Rosen writes of a visit to Baghdad in the Spring of 2009 that 'things were changing in Iraq,' that there was no longer any 'group that could overthrow the government,' and that 'the Iraqi Security Forces had monopolised power.' Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*, 521.

<sup>2</sup> By 2008 Al Qaeda's capabilities had been substantially downgraded, such that 'only a fraction of its leaders, functional cells, and terroristic capabilities remained.' Jessica D. Lewis, 'Al Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent: The Breaking Walls Campaign, Part 1', (Washington D.C.: Institute for the Study of War, 2013b) 7. Meanwhile Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army had called an indefinite cease-fire after suffering a defeat in Basra in March 2008 at the hands government troops supported by US forces. Importantly, when the government's forces entered Sadrist strongholds, services actually improved – diminishing Sadr's legitimacy and leading 'even Sadrists' to vote for Maliki in the next elections. Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*, 536.

<sup>3</sup> Rosen describes Baghdad's roads as 'full of H3 Hummers and other expensive and large vehicles that cost tens of thousands of dollars in cash,' and observes Iraqi youth 'adopting the fashion trends of Lebanon' and the opening of 'new expensive restaurants that catered to a new elite.' Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*, 523.

<sup>4</sup> International Republican Institute, 'Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion', (Washington D.C., November/December 2009) 13, 15, 17.

<sup>5</sup> One senior American official says, 'you've got to remember how fucked Iraq was' in order to understand how popular Prime Minister Maliki has become since; 'Maliki gets the credit' for the stabilization of the country. Former Senior National Security Council Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>6</sup> In a 2010 interview with Ned Parker, Prime Minister Maliki described the 2008 offensive as a 'triumph' that 'gave credit to the rule of law.' Parker and Salman, 'Notes From the Underground: The Rise of Nouri al-Maliki', 10.



Basra transformed Maliki into a 'folk hero' with cross-sectarian support,<sup>7</sup> and the subsequent stabilisation and economic flourishing of Basra further fuelled Maliki's escalating popularity.<sup>8</sup> After debilitating civil war, the Iraqi public was desperate for security and stability<sup>9</sup> and the Prime Minister appeared capable of delivering it. The Prime Minister prioritised the build-up of Iraq's Security Forces, and by 2010 he had over 650,000 men in the army and police. In the years since the civil war these forces had made 'enormous strides,' with sustained training and equipment drives significantly increasing their capacity to mount effective operations.<sup>10</sup> Although there were still enormous problems posed by corruption in these forces,<sup>11</sup> the improvement was palpable. The Interior Ministry, under the stewardship of Jawad al-Bolani, had also made efforts to purge the Iraqi police force of its worst sectarian elements: over 60,000 men and seven of the nine National Police commanders were sacked.<sup>12</sup> Iraqi confidence in the army and police service was bolstered, and in 2009 the two institutions garnered 73% and 67% respectively in approval ratings.<sup>13</sup>

The Prime Minister built his political messages around these improvements in security, branding his new electoral coalition the 'State of Law' and talking robustly about strengthening the Iraqi state and continuing to capture and punish terrorists seeking to destroy Iraq. As Ned Parker writes, 'Iraqis wanted strength, and Maliki radiated it.'<sup>14</sup> The strategy was extraordinarily successful and Prime Minister

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<sup>7</sup> Maliki's willingness to attack a Shi'ite militia greatly improved his standing amongst Sunnis who had hitherto thought of Maliki as a Shi'ite sectarian politician. Mohammed Ahmed, *America Unravels Iraq: Kurds, Shiites and Sunni Arabs Compete for Supremacy* (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers Inc., 2010) 417-18.

<sup>8</sup> Ricks, *The Gamble: General David Petraeus and the American Military Adventure in Iraq 2006-2008*, 283. A senior American official described the 'transformation of Southern Iraq' since the end of the civil war as 'amazing.' Former Senior National Security Council Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>9</sup> A 2009 survey found that 72% of Iraqis polled listed security as the absolute top priority that they thought the government should be focused on. International Republican Institute, 'Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion'.

<sup>10</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Loose Ends: Iraq's Security Forces between U.S. Drawdown and Withdrawal', (Middle East Report No. 99, 2010) 3.

<sup>11</sup> For example an estimated 25% of the Ministry of Defence wage bills are spent on so-called ghost soldiers. These soldiers are on the payroll but do not actually turn up to work, instead paying a proportion of their wage to their seniors who turn a blind eye to the practice. Dodge, *Iraq: From War to a New Authoritarianism*, 123. International Crisis Group, 'Loose Ends: Iraq's Security Forces between U.S. Drawdown and Withdrawal', 34.

<sup>12</sup> Dodge, *Iraq: From War to a New Authoritarianism*, 125.

<sup>13</sup> International Republican Institute, 'Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion', 27.

<sup>14</sup> Parker and Salman, 'Notes From the Underground: The Rise of Nouri al-Maliki'.

Maliki's personal approval ratings rocketed from 25% in 2006 to 66% in 2009.<sup>15</sup> Maliki also sought to woo Sunni voters by branding himself increasingly as an Iraqi nationalist,<sup>16</sup> by seeking to push the Kurdish *Peshmerga* out of disputed territories,<sup>17</sup> and by distancing himself from his Shi'ite Islamist political roots.<sup>18</sup> He decided to go it alone in the 2010 elections, excluding his Shi'ite Islamist parliamentary coalition partners, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), from the new State of Law list.<sup>19</sup> His focus on 'bread-and-butter' issues resonated with the Iraqi electorate, especially in contrast to ISCI's continued use of sectarian rhetoric, and the coalition performed impressively in the 2009 vote.<sup>20</sup>

### 'Now He's Too Strong': Maliki and SOFA Negotiations

By 2008 the Iraqi state had more power over the country's foreign policy than at any time since the invasion. Militias were on the defensive and could no longer be the powerful interlocutors for foreign actors they had been during the civil war. The Prime Minister had established himself 'as the only game in town'<sup>21</sup> and foreign powers increasingly recognised that if they wanted anything done in Iraq – outside of the Kurdish region – going through the Prime Minister would be the most effective way to achieve it. Although Iraqi political parties and parliamentarians loudly sought to influence foreign policy, the Prime Minister and his loyalists were

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<sup>15</sup> The Prime Minister was directly credited with the improvements in security, while approval ratings for the Iraqi Parliament in the same year languished at 30%, which was a fall of 34% from 2006. International Republican Institute, 'Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion', 25.

<sup>16</sup> The Prime Minister also reached out to Sunni and Shi'ite tribal leaders in an explicit bid to bolster cross-sectarian support. Parker and Salman, 'Notes From the Underground: The Rise of Nouri al-Maliki', 10.

<sup>17</sup> In July 2008 the Iraqi Government ordered the Kurdish *Peshmerga* to withdraw from the disputed province of Diyala, sparking a stand-off in the Kurdish dominated city of Khanaqin. Jonathan Steele, 'Iraq: Iraqi Army Readies for Showdown with Kurds', *The Guardian*, 2nd September 2008. Faleh A. Jabar, Renad Mansour, and Abir Khaddaj, 'Maliki and the Rest: A Crisis within a Crisis', (Beirut: Iraq Institute for Strategic Studies, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Many Iraqis no longer considered Maliki to be a Shi'ite politician, believing that he had 'transcended his sect.' Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*.

<sup>19</sup> On 11<sup>th</sup> May 2007 the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (ISCI) changed its name to Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI).

<sup>20</sup> Reidar Visser, *A Responsible End? The United States and the Iraqi Transition 2005-2010* (Charlottesville: Just World Books, 2010a) 85. Maliki's State of Law coalition garnered 126 seats in the election, whilst the previously dominant ISCI came in with a mere 52.

<sup>21</sup> Iraq analyst Ahmed Ali argues that Prime Minister Maliki is now capable of imposing foreign policy, and that 'foreign countries have recognised that Maliki is the only game in town.' Ahmed Ali, 'Interview with author', (Washington D.C., 29th January 2011).

quickly and effectively expanding their control over it.<sup>22</sup> A former diplomat who worked in Iraq's representation to the United Nations in New York commented on the shift, saying that in 2008 there was 'a separation' between the Foreign Ministry and the Prime Minister's office, with the Prime Minister starting to impose policies that were at odds with the previous goals of the UN representation.<sup>23</sup> The head of Iraq's representation to the UN would allegedly take orders directly from the Prime Minister's office, bypassing the Foreign Ministry and contravening protocol, and would report back on 'everything to the Prime Minister's office.'<sup>24</sup> Interviews with diplomats in Iraq's neighbouring countries also reveal that the Prime Minister was widely recognised as Iraq's new power broker when it came to foreign policy; as one senior Jordanian diplomat put it, 'Maliki calls the shots.'<sup>25</sup> Indeed, in the months following Maliki's successful offensive against the Sadrists, foreign delegations began filtering in to pay homage to the Prime Minister's newfound grip over the country. In August 2008 King Abdullah of Jordan became the first Sunni Arab head of state to visit post-invasion Iraq,<sup>26</sup> in October Syria sent its first Ambassador to Iraq since 1979,<sup>27</sup> and in the same month the Egyptian Foreign Minister and Minister of Oil also visited the country.<sup>28</sup>

By demonstrating his ability to bring security to the Iraqi population Prime Minister Maliki had torn legitimacy away from the sub-state actors that had competed with him for power in Iraq. The Prime Minister was also able to articulate a narrative of the Iraqi state that resonated with a majority of Iraq's Shi'ites and a reasonable proportion of Iraq's Arab Sunnis, thereby further undermining the potential operating space for competitors to his power. His increasingly uncontested power and evident legitimacy in Iraq bolstered Maliki's credentials with foreign powers, and made him the pre-eminent Iraqi interlocutor when it came to negotiating foreign policy.

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<sup>22</sup> Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari dismisses the notion that parliamentarians have any influence over Iraq's foreign policy, asserting that they loudly comment on foreign policy issues to 'show off' and because it gives them 'a false sense of outreach.' Zebari, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>23</sup> Former Diplomat at the Iraqi Representation to UN, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Senior Jordanian Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>26</sup> Tina Susman, 'Jordan's King Breaks the Sunni Arab Ice with Iraq', *Los Angeles Times*, 12th August 2008.

<sup>27</sup> *Reuters*, 'Syria Sends First Ambassador to Iraq in Decades' (13th October 2008).

<sup>28</sup> *Al-Jazeera*, 'Egypt Envoy in Historic Iraq Visit' (6th October 2008).

The extent of Prime Minister Maliki's control over the negotiation of a Status of the Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the US in 2008 is one example of how the Prime Minister was able to effectively dominate Iraqi foreign policy. At the end of 2007 the Bush administration began looking into establishing a multi-year agreement to regulate Iraqi-US relations beyond the end of the Bush presidency. After a fierce battle in the US administration about how to handle the drafting of a SOFA with Iraq, it was decided that a SOFA negotiating team led by non-Iraq specialists would put together an extensive boilerplate SOFA asking the Iraqi government for a range of politically unpalatable concessions as a starting point for negotiations.<sup>29</sup> When parts of the proposed document were leaked to the press, the public was outraged and thousands of Sadrists took to the streets in protest against the agreement.<sup>30</sup> Prime Minister Maliki skilfully played the situation to his political advantage, publicly lambasting the agreement and declaring that he 'did not realise that the US demands would so deeply affect Iraqi sovereignty and this is something we can never accept.'<sup>31</sup> This public declaration burnished Maliki's Iraqi nationalist credentials and served his domestic political agenda but threw months of negotiations with the US into turmoil.

The Prime Minister wanted to negotiate a SOFA that would that would bolster rather than undermine his political power, that would give his government a high degree of control over the use of US troops in Iraq,<sup>32</sup> and that he could sell to the 71% of Iraqis who thought of the US primarily as occupiers of Iraq.<sup>33</sup> In pursuit of these goals he exerted a great deal of control over the SOFA negotiating process, installing a negotiating team without any authority to make decisions without

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<sup>29</sup> Iraq specialists in the Bush administration were extremely frustrated by the decision to take a maximalist approach to the Iraq SOFA not least because the document would be public, and therefore bound to cause deep controversy. All other SOFA agreements in the region are classified. Former Senior National Security Council Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. Former Senior Iraq Director in US Government, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', (Washington D.C., January 2013).

<sup>30</sup> On 30<sup>th</sup> May 2008 thousands of Sadrists protested against the proposed Iraq-US deal, with one protester declaring that the agreement 'gives 99 percent of the country to America.' *AFP*, 'Iraq's Sadrists Protest Against US Military Deal' (30th May 2008).

<sup>31</sup> *AFP*, 'Maliki Says Talks on Iraq-US Security Pact Deadlocked' (13th June 2008).

<sup>32</sup> The Prime Minister never completely trusted US intentions in Iraq, and often believed that the US was conspiring with his political opponents to unseat him. He was therefore keen to exert a high degree of control over US operations in the country. One senior US diplomat said of Maliki's approach to the US that, 'half the time he thinks we are part of the conspiracy, half the time sees us as protection from the conspiracy.' Former Senior Adviser to Obama Administration, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>33</sup> Gallup Poll, 'Most Iraqis See Coalition Forces as Occupiers', (2008).

explicit authorisation from Maliki's inner circle.<sup>34</sup> When negotiations were reaching an equilibrium that seemed unsatisfactory to the Prime Minister, he unceremoniously fired the negotiating team and replaced them with three of his close advisors, while distancing himself personally from the unpopular negotiations about US troop immunity.<sup>35</sup> As 2008 drew to a close and the US became increasingly anxious about securing an agreement, Maliki was able to extract more and more concessions from the US. President George Bush wryly admitted that Maliki 'proved a tough negotiator,'<sup>36</sup> and a former political insider characterised Maliki as a 'very hard negotiator' who was able to insist on conditions that 'the US never agreed to' in SOFA negotiations elsewhere.<sup>37</sup> Even once a final agreement had been reached, Maliki reneged on a number of key issues, infuriating the Americans and leading President Bush to observe, 'A year ago we complained Maliki was too weak, now he's too strong.'<sup>38</sup>

In the final agreement Maliki secured a date for the total withdrawal of US troops,<sup>39</sup> which the US had been extremely reluctant to concede, in addition to the loss of immunity for US contractors and for US government personnel under certain circumstances.<sup>40</sup> The agreement also stated that operations conducted by US troops 'shall not infringe upon the sovereignty of Iraq and its national interests, as defined by the Government of Iraq,' giving the Maliki government enormous leeway in controlling the extent of US activities in Iraqi territory.<sup>41</sup> One exasperated US official concluded that the US had been played 'like fiddles' and that despite all America's investment in Iraq, 'the Prime Minister's office got exactly what they

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<sup>34</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 527.

<sup>35</sup> Ahmed, *America Unravels Iraq: Kurds, Shiites and Sunni Arabs Compete for Supremacy*, 473.

<sup>36</sup> Bush, *Decision Points*, 390.

<sup>37</sup> Former Senior Member of Prime Minister Maliki's Government, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>38</sup> Cited in Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 541.

<sup>39</sup> The entire agreement was reframed as a treaty to regulate the withdrawal of US troops, almost entirely upending the original aim which was to regulate the presence of US troops in Iraq. The final document was entitled: 'Agreement Between the United States of America and the Republic of Iraq On the Withdrawal of United States Forces from Iraq and the Organization of Their Activities during Their Temporary Presence in Iraq.' Former Senior National Security Council Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>40</sup> Laidi, *Limited Achievements: Obama's Foreign Policy*, 80.

<sup>41</sup> Agreement Between the United States of America and the Republic of Iraq On the Withdrawal of United States Forces from Iraq and the Organization of Their Activities during Their Temporary Presence in Iraq, (14th December 2008).

wanted, a presence in the country that protects them and which they have oversight over and which they can use as a stick against opponents.<sup>42</sup>

The degree of influence that Prime Minister Maliki wielded over the SOFA negotiations exemplifies the extent to which his foreign policy power had been bolstered by the improving domestic security situation and the enhanced legitimacy that it had afforded him. Not only was the US dealing directly with the central Iraqi government, instead of with a series of sub-state actors as it had during the Surge, but Maliki was also able to a large extent to dictate the Iraqi government's position. Although numerous parliamentarians loudly criticised the agreement, it was soon clear that the Prime Minister had the final say and had the political leverage to secure the success of the agreement if it was what he wanted. The Iraqi government was now dominant in Iraqi society, and the Prime Minister had a high degree of control over the government – leading to an Iraqi foreign policy making process that was more centralised than at any time since 2003.

## Stronger Iraq, Weaker Kurdistan?

While Iraq was struggling through the ravages of civil war, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) had grown very powerful. The Kurdish military forces, the *Peshmerga*, controlled more territory than had been recognised as part of the Kurdish region by the Transitional Administrative Law (2004) and the Iraqi constitution (2005).<sup>43</sup> The Kurdish Department of Foreign Affairs had opened representations all over the world, and international investors were contributing to the rapid modernisation of the Kurdish region. Kurdistan became an important political and economic gateway to the rest of Iraq, and the Kurds were extremely valuable interlocutors with the Iraqi government at a time when Sunni and Shi'ite politicians were locked in battle. One senior KRG diplomat recalls that during that 'crazy period '05-'08 we had a more intense relationship' with the Americans 'trying to avert civil war' but that once Iraq stabilised in 2008 everything changed.<sup>44</sup> The KRG's relationship with the US became a 'normal diplomatic relationship,'

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<sup>42</sup> Interviewed by Nir Rosen, cited in Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*, 375.

<sup>43</sup> Larry Hanauer, Jeffrey Martini, and Omar Al-Shahery, 'Managing Arab-Kurd Tensions in Northern Iraq after the Withdrawal of US Troops', (Washington D.C.: RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2011) 3.

<sup>44</sup> Senior Diplomat in the Kurdish Regional Government, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

which represented a loss of access and influence that was ‘difficult to adjust to.’<sup>45</sup> The diplomat bitterly recalls that once violence in Iraq subsided, the US lost interest in Kurdistan, focusing on drawing up long term strategic agreements with Baghdad that excluded their erstwhile Kurdish partners. One scholar characterises the US treatment of the Kurdish region since 2008 as one of ‘benign neglect,’ that has taken the region’s stability for granted and has underinvested in ensuring its long term success.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, as the Iraqi state has regained strength it has increasingly begun to challenge what it sees as the overreach of the Kurdish regional administration. In the newly nationalist atmosphere that descended on Arab Iraq in the aftermath of the civil war, popular anti-Kurdish sentiments were heightened as politicians tried to outbid each other on their nationalist credentials.<sup>47</sup> Prime Minister Maliki’s popularity with Sunni voters started to rise when he was seen as standing ‘up to the Kurds in Kirkuk,’<sup>48</sup> and challenging their assertion of control over other disputed territories. In August 2008 the Kurdish and Iraqi militaries got involved in the first of a series of incidents in disputed territories that raised the spectre of possible armed confrontation. The Iraqi army had planned an assault on militants near the town of Khanaqin in the disputed Diyala province and ordered the *Peshmerga* to withdraw from the area. Khanaqin is a Kurdish majority town that is outside of the designated Kurdish-administered territory and the Kurdish government was afraid that the Iraqi army was trying to retake control of the town, so they refused to withdraw.<sup>49</sup> Tensions escalated, as the pro-Maliki Iraqi press published a deluge of anti-Kurdish articles, and fears were raised that an outbreak of violence was imminent.<sup>50</sup> In the end a last minute agreement between KRG President Masoud Barzani and Prime Minister Maliki averted violence, and both armed forces

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Dennis P. Chapman, *Security Forces of the Kurdistan Regional Government* (Costa Mesa, California: Mazda Publishers Inc., 2011) 292.

<sup>47</sup> Prime Minister Maliki calculated that whipping up anti-Kurdish sentiment and taking a strong nationalist position on Kurdish-Arab conflicts could win him Sunni support in the upcoming election. The issue is more pertinent in the Sunni community because most disputed territories are dominated by a mixture of Arab Sunni and Kurdish residents. Iraq Analyst in US Administration, ‘Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity’.

<sup>48</sup> International Iraqi Businessman and Former Iraqiya Financier, ‘Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity’.

<sup>49</sup> Brian Katulis, ‘Standoff in Khanaqin: Trouble Brews Between Arabs and Kurds in a Volatile Corner of Iraq’, (Washington D.C.: Center for American Progress, 29th August 2008).

<sup>50</sup> Reidar Visser, ‘The Kurdish Issue in Iraq: A View from Baghdad at the Close of the Maliki Premiership’, *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs*, 341 (2010b) 88.

withdrew from the area. As the drawdown of US troops began, politicians and commentators feared that similar incidents in the future may lead to armed confrontation, and that any outbreak of Arab-Kurdish violence would lead to full scale war. Indeed, on a number of occasions it was only US intervention that prevented a stand-off from descending into violence, for example when the Iraqi army tried to pass through the disputed Kurdish majority town of Makhmur in June 2009, they were prevented by *Peshmerga* in a heated confrontation that was dissipated by US intervention.<sup>51</sup> Similarly in February 2011, when the *Peshmerga* deployed to the highly sensitive outskirts of Kirkuk, it was the US who negotiated their withdrawal before violence broke out over control of the oil-rich city.<sup>52</sup>

The Prime Minister was slowly strengthening his position in the disputed areas, where the Kurds had previously had the upper hand. Maliki created a number of tribal support councils around the country which the Kurds interpreted as an effort to consolidate anti-Kurdish political blocs in disputed areas.<sup>53</sup> In the aftermath of the 2009 provincial elections the Prime Minister entered into a number of anti-Kurdish political coalitions in disputed areas and, as one Kurdish official complained, succeeded in turning ‘the [Arab] street against us.’<sup>54</sup>

Even as the Prime Minister’s hand was strengthening vis-à-vis the KRG, there remained an immense disparity between the Kurdish region and the rest of Iraq. Iraqi Kurdistan was a safe and hospitable business environment: great strides had been made in infrastructure development; the political elite was highly accommodating to investors; and, as five star hotels and shopping malls sprang up in the region, it bore greater resemblance to a Gulf emirate than to Arab Iraq. As Kurdish leverage over the Iraqi central government began to dissipate with the end of the civil war, the KRG began to focus more heavily on securing the sponsorship

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<sup>51</sup> Tensions were also high in March of 2009 when an Iraqi army general who was rotated into the disputed city of Kirkuk was rumoured to have participated in Saddam’s genocidal Anfal campaign against the Kurds. Ned Parker, 'Iraqi General's Presence in Kirkuk Stirs Dark Memories', *Los Angeles Times*, 26th March 2009.

<sup>52</sup> Hanauer, Martini, and Al-Shahery, 'Managing Arab-Kurd Tensions in Northern Iraq after the Withdrawal of US Troops', 6-7. International Crisis Group, 'Iraq and the Kurds: Confronting Withdrawal Fears', (Middle East Report No. 103) i.

<sup>53</sup> A number of Prime Minister Maliki’s other political competitors also complained about tribal support councils, including the Islamic Supreme Council for Iraq who complained that it was essentially Maliki bribing tribesmen to offer him their political support. Yildiz, *The Future of Kurdistan: The Iraqi Dilemma*, 63. Ahmed, *America Unravels Iraq: Kurds, Shiites and Sunni Arabs Compete for Supremacy*, 400-02.

<sup>54</sup> KRG Foreign Policy Adviser, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.



of international corporations as a means of ensuring its long term economic and political security. This strategy was most apparent in the oil sector.

## The Battle over Kurdish Oil

The Kurds have long recognised that Kurdish independence, which remains the long-term goal of almost every Kurdish politician,<sup>55</sup> was utterly dependent on achieving economic self-sufficiency. The Kurds, however, remain a net beneficiary of the Iraqi state budget, receiving 17% of the budget whilst they contribute far less than that into the federal coffers.<sup>56</sup> The region does, however, lie atop significant oil reserves – particularly if disputed territories are included – and exerting control over these resources has been a core part of the KRG's economic strategy since the invasion. In the early days of the American presence in Iraq, the Kurds were overrepresented in Baghdad, partly because of their close relations with the ruling Americans and partly because many Sunnis had boycotted the political system. As a result the Kurds exerted an enormous degree of influence over the writing of the constitution, a document which has set the stage for an immense amount of conflict between the region and the central Iraqi government.<sup>57</sup> The constitution specifies only that the *present* oilfields will be controlled by the federal government, but is silent on new oilfields, leading both the federal government and the regional government to assert their authority over the awarding of contracts for the exploration and exploitation of new oilfields.<sup>58</sup> In 2007, in the midst of protracted negotiations between all Iraq's political parties over the drafting of a federal oil and gas law, the KRG passed its own regional oil and gas law and unilaterally awarded

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<sup>55</sup> Almost every Kurdish politician I interviewed admitted that Kurdish independence was the ultimate dream, even though they did not see it as something that was achievable or necessarily desirable for the Kurdish people in the short to medium term. Even Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari said that he would not 'betray the feeling of my people' by saying that he did not want Kurdish independence, and indeed said that he had been working towards this goal 'all my life.' Zebari, 'Interview with author.'

<sup>56</sup> The KRG contributes 5% of Iraq's oil output and receives 17% of Iraq's state budget, most of which is derived from oil revenues. International Crisis Group, 'Iraq and the Kurds: The High-Stakes Hydrocarbon Gambit', (Middle East Report No. 120, 2012c) 7.

<sup>57</sup> The enormous power given to regional governments in the Iraqi constitution, despite popular preference for a strong central government, is evidence of the disproportionate role the Kurds had in defining the Iraqi constitution. Article 115 stated that 'All powers not stipulated in the exclusive powers of the federal government belong to the authorities of the regions and governorates that are not organized in a region,' leaving the door open for regions to claim a vast amount of authority. In a poll conducted by the International Republican Institute in 2005, however, only 22% of Iraqis thought 'the constitution should give significant powers to regional government,' and 69% believed that 'the new Iraqi constitution should establish a strong, central government.' Greg Muttitt, *Fuel on the Fire* (London: The Bodley Head, 2011) 164. The Iraqi Constitution, 'Article 115', (2005a).

<sup>58</sup> Article 112 of the Iraqi constitution states that 'the federal government, with the producing governorates and regional governments, shall undertake the management of oil and gas extracted from present fields...' The Iraqi Constitution, 'Article 112', (2005b). Daniel Kaysi and Marina Ottaway, 'The State of Iraq', (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012) 10.

contracts to several international firms – prompting the collapse of negotiations in Baghdad.<sup>59</sup> Iraqi Oil Minister Hussein Shahrستاني declared the move ‘illegal’ and was unceremoniously told to ‘shut up’ by Kurdish Oil Minister Ashti Hawrami.<sup>60</sup> Two issues were central to the intractability of negotiations between Baghdad and Erbil. Firstly the Kurds claimed an absolute right to sign contracts for the exploration, production and export of oil on their territory, even though they agreed on revenue sharing with Baghdad.<sup>61</sup> Secondly the Kurds wanted to enter into Production Sharing Agreements (PSAs) with international oil companies. PSAs are a type of contract whereby the oil company provides the upfront investment required to develop an oilfield, and once the field is productive the company is entitled to recoup its investment costs from the crude oil, and is thereafter entitled to a proportion of all oil produced within a defined timeframe.<sup>62</sup> PSAs are extremely controversial in Iraq; because of the high quality of oil and the relative ease of access, some analysts consider the contracts to be far too generous to international oil companies.<sup>63</sup> The contracts are also considered reminiscent of colonial-era oil concessions, and were unpopular with Iraqi nationalists for whom the contracts were seen as an extension of US occupation.<sup>64</sup> Iraqi Oil Minister Hussein Shahrستاني strengthened his nationalist image by aggressively pursuing the best possible deal for Iraqi oil, becoming very popular with Arab Iraqis in the process.<sup>65</sup> He denounced the KRG’s use of PSAs as ‘illegitimate’ because they failed to achieve ‘fairness for Iraq.’<sup>66</sup> The Iraqi Oil Ministry, which had yet to open bidding for its own fields,<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> The KRG signed an oil exploration contract with the American company Hunt Oil, and a gas exploitation contract with Dana Gas from the United Arab Emirates. Yaniv Voller, 'Kurdish Oil Politics in Iraq: Contested Sovereignty and Unilateralism', *Middle East Policy*, XX1 (2013) 72. James Glanz, 'Compromise on Oil Law in Iraq Seems to Be Collapsing', *The New York Times*, 13th September 2007.

<sup>60</sup> Muttitt, *Fuel on the Fire*, 271-2.

<sup>61</sup> Chief of Staff to the Kurdish Presidency Fuad Hussein, when asked about how the Kurdish government negotiates its oil policy with the federal government, said, ‘we don’t think about Iraq, we have a right to do this.’ Hussein, 'Interview with author'. Joost Hiltermann, 'Revenge of the Kurds', *Foreign Affairs*, 916 (2012).

<sup>62</sup> Fadhil Chalabi, *Oil Policies, Oil Myths: Analysis and Memoir of an OPEC 'Insider'* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010) 256.

<sup>63</sup> Muttitt, *Fuel on the Fire*, 56, 187.

<sup>64</sup> The Sunni *Tawafuq* coalition in March 2007 called for the Iraqi oil law to explicitly forbid PSAs. Muttitt, *Fuel on the Fire*, 259. Voller, 'Kurdish Oil Politics in Iraq: Contested Sovereignty and Unilateralism', 72.

<sup>65</sup> Denise Natali, 'The Politics of Kurdish Crude', *Middle East Policy*, XIX1 (2012), 110-18, 112. A survivor of eleven years of imprisonment at the notorious Abu Ghraib prison during Saddam’s regime, Shahrستاني was already a very popular politician in Iraq with a reputation as ‘one of the most honest of Iraq’s major political figures.’ Muttitt, *Fuel on the Fire*, 202.

<sup>66</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Iraq and the Kurds: The High-Stakes Hydrocarbon Gambit', 10-11.

also feared that the generous deals on offer in the Kurdish region would undermine its ability to achieve the best possible deals for Iraq's remaining oilfields.<sup>68</sup>

Despite signing over forty contracts with international oil companies in great haste,<sup>69</sup> the Kurds could not actually monetise their resources without the consent of the Iraqi government because there were no pipelines that could export from Kurdish territory to international markets. In 2009 a dramatic fall in global oil prices forced the Iraqi government to cut its budget by almost a third and led to a temporary agreement with the KRG, enabling the Kurds to export oil through the Iraqi pipeline.<sup>70</sup> Within a matter of months, however, the agreement broke down because Baghdad refused to pay the operating costs of the international companies as agreed by the KRG ratified contracts.<sup>71</sup> A new deal concluded in 2010 broke down again for similar reasons.<sup>72</sup>

This slow Kurdish war of attrition on oil and gas jurisdiction seemed to be having little concrete impact on the region's ability to advance towards economic independence. Everything changed, however, in 2011, when years of patient Kurdish lobbying of international oil companies finally paid off and the super-major oil company ExxonMobil signed an exploration deal with the KRG. The deal marked a watershed moment in Kurdish politics. The fact that a company of the wealth and international stature of ExxonMobil was willing to invest in Iraqi Kurdistan was a huge vote of confidence in the region. For its part, the KRG was convinced that a company with serious international prowess such as ExxonMobil would protect its investment by securing the support of Western governments should the region ever come under severe threat from Baghdad.<sup>73</sup> As the Turkish Consul General in Erbil Aydın Selcen remarked, the super-majors had now 'voted with their feet,' demonstrating the KRG's legitimacy as custodians of the region's natural

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<sup>67</sup> It was not until 2009 that bid rounds were launched for Iraq's oil fields. International Crisis Group, 'Iraq and the Kurds: The High-Stakes Hydrocarbon Gambit', 9.

<sup>68</sup> Muttitt, *Fuel on the Fire*, 206. Natali, 'The Politics of Kurdish Crude', 113.

<sup>69</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Iraq and the Kurds: The High-Stakes Hydrocarbon Gambit', ii.

<sup>70</sup> Muttitt, *Fuel on the Fire*, 309. Visser, 'The Kurdish Issue in Iraq: A View from Baghdad at the Close of the Maliki Premiership', 89.

<sup>71</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Iraq and the Kurds: The High-Stakes Hydrocarbon Gambit', 6.

<sup>72</sup> This time the Iraqi government agreed to pay 50% of the operating costs of the international oil companies, but arguments erupted over the levels of expenses claimed. Hiltermann, 'Revenge of the Kurds'.

<sup>73</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Iraq and the Kurds: The High-Stakes Hydrocarbon Gambit', 4.

resources.<sup>74</sup> The deal was a production sharing agreement, signed off without the consent of Baghdad, and, most controversially, two of the six oil fields awarded to the company were in disputed territories outside of the constitutionally mandated Kurdish region.<sup>75</sup> Baghdad's response was furious but impotent. The government blacklisted all companies dealing with oil and gas exploitation in the Kurdish region, preventing them from participating in any contracts in the rest of Iraq. But many oil companies were already losing patience with the Iraqi government, finding the contracts they had signed insufficiently lucrative, and the operating conditions extremely difficult.<sup>76</sup>

The importance of economic relationships with powerful international corporations underscores the power of economic relations as foreign policy. Though the KRG often claims not to have a foreign policy, but simply a strategy to encourage greater investment in the region, in reality the two have gone hand in hand. By encouraging large multi-nationals to commit to the region, and to bypass the central government and sign contracts with the regional government, the KRG's economic strategy has contributed directly to its political goals. Although the growing strength of the Iraqi government had started to impinge on the KRG's ability to assert its autonomy in northern Iraq, the KRG's years of investment in conducting independent foreign relations paid off when international oil companies invested in the region in defiance of Baghdad's interpretation of the Iraqi constitution. Though it remains to be seen whether or not investment by supermajors will protect the KRG against the possibility of Iraqi attempts to re-dominate the region, the development has certainly brought the region closer to its goal of economic independence and has bolstered its strength in relation to Baghdad.

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<sup>74</sup> The Consul General added 'imagine how many legal experts they have?' indicating that the question over the legality over the KRG's jurisdiction had well and truly been answered. Selcen, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>75</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 679.

<sup>76</sup> Voller, 'Kurdish Oil Politics in Iraq: Contested Sovereignty and Unilateralism', 74. Natali, 'The Politics of Kurdish Crude', 110. One Kurdish official urged me not to underestimate the appeal of 'the ease of work on the ground' in the Kurdish region and its influence on oil companies' deliberations over where to invest. KRG Foreign Policy Adviser, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

## Creeping Authoritarianism and Weakening Legitimacy

Although Prime Minister Maliki's strength, and to some extent his very image as a strongman, was the source of his popularity, his increasingly authoritarian approach to power started to undermine his legitimacy and to hamper Iraq's progress. The Prime Minister centralised power over Iraq's security forces and used them to settle political scores; he undermined the Awakening Councils that had had so successfully fought al-Qaeda; and he reacted badly to his narrow defeat in the 2010 elections. After months of negotiations Maliki secured a second term, but in the midst of these political battles the delivery of essential services was low on the priority list and the Iraqi public responded to the continued ineffectiveness of the state with protests in a 'Day of Rage.' Repression followed, and Maliki's legitimacy suffered as did his capacity to effectively conduct foreign policy.

### Iraq's Armed Forces

The improvement in Iraqi security was partly achieved through the massive centralisation of Iraq's security forces under the ultimate authority of the commander in chief, Prime Minister Maliki. Instead of having competing militias using government departments and police brigades to wreak revenge on their enemies, the country's security forces were now largely under the control of the Prime Minister – and if they were misused it was most likely at the behest of the Prime Minister's Office. In 2007 Maliki established the Office of the Commander in Chief, with authority overriding that of the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>77</sup> This office then directly subordinated Iraq's most elite forces to itself, including the Baghdad Brigade which is responsible for security in the heavily protected Green Zone, the Counter-Terrorism Command and the Iraqi Special Forces. Many of these elite soldiers were directly loyal to the Prime Minister,<sup>78</sup> and their brigades would be commanded via cell phone directly from his office.<sup>79</sup> Once US forces withdrew from Iraq's towns and cities in 2009, the Prime Minister and his son Ahmed quickly dominated the Green Zone, with Ahmed taking charge of his father's personal security in addition to requisitioning much of the prime property in

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<sup>77</sup> Marisa Sullivan, 'Maliki's Authoritarian Regime', (Washington D.C.: Institute for the Study of War, 2013) 11.

<sup>78</sup> Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*.

<sup>79</sup> Toby Dodge, 'State and Society in Iraq Ten Years after the Regime Change', *International Affairs*, 892 (2013), 241-57.

the Green Zone.<sup>80</sup> The Prime Minister soon began using the special brigades under the control of the Office of the Commander in Chief to target political rivals. In 2008 and 2009 Iraqi Special Forces arrested a series of Sunni members of the Diyala provincial council, threatening to undo the Sunni majority on the council, whilst Diyala's Sunni governor fled the country after being directly threatened by Maliki's staff.<sup>81</sup> The Baghdad Brigade, meanwhile, has been sent as far afield as Diyala and Ninewa to arrest Maliki's political opponents.<sup>82</sup> The Prime Minister's use of this extra-constitutional chain of command as a tool 'for repression and intimidation' troubled US Ambassador Ryan Crocker, who questioned 'whether the PM is becoming a non-democratic dictator bent on subordinating all authority to his hand' in a 2009 embassy cable.<sup>83</sup>

Maliki's forces also began targeting members of the Awakening Councils, those Sunni groups that had successfully battled al-Qaeda and had played a significant role in reducing internal violence in Iraq. Control over the Awakening Councils was handed over by the Americans to the Iraqi government in late 2008 and early 2009 on the understanding that 20% would be integrated into the Iraqi Security Forces and the rest would be given appropriate government jobs.<sup>84</sup> The Prime Minister was afraid, however, that these armed Sunni figures could represent a political threat to his government, and in 2009 forty Awakening leaders were arrested.<sup>85</sup> Targeted by the government and by al-Qaeda militants seeking revenge, the Awakening leaders were incredibly vulnerable and by 2010 'most Awakening

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<sup>80</sup> Ned Parker, 'The Iraq We Left Behind: Welcome to The World's Next Failed State', *Foreign Affairs*, (March/ April 2012) 100-01.

<sup>81</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 542, 92.

<sup>82</sup> Sullivan, 'Maliki's Authoritarian Regime', 11. International Crisis Group, 'Loose Ends: Iraq's Security Forces between U.S. Drawdown and Withdrawal', 7. Those arrested were often taken to the secret prisons Camp Justice and Camp Honor, which were overseen by the Baghdad Brigade and Counter-Terrorism Force, and held in appalling conditions. The Red Cross interviewed former detainees of Camp Honor who alleged widespread abuse in the prison including electric shock to the genitals, scalding, rape, and rape of female family members brought to the prison. Ned Parker, 'Elite Units Under an Office of Maliki's Linked to Secret Jail Where Detainees Face Torture, Iraq Officials Say', *Los Angeles Times*, 14th July 2011.

<sup>83</sup> Cited in Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 585-86.

<sup>84</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Loose Ends: Iraq's Security Forces between U.S. Drawdown and Withdrawal', 25.

<sup>85</sup> Parker and Salman, 'Notes From the Underground: The Rise of Nouri al-Maliki', 10. International Crisis Group, 'Loose Ends: Iraq's Security Forces between U.S. Drawdown and Withdrawal', 26.

leaders were either dead or arrested.’<sup>86</sup> Many rank and file Awakening members were left unemployed as the government failed to integrate them into government jobs in large enough numbers. In 2009, members of the Awakening Council in Salman Pak protested these government failures by resigning en masse.<sup>87</sup> By 2010 only 37,041 of the approximately 100,000 Awakening members had been integrated into Iraqi government jobs, and many of those jobs on offer were menial and poorly paid.<sup>88</sup>

## 2010 Parliamentary Elections

In the lead up to the March 2010 parliamentary elections, 511 candidates were disqualified by the Justice and Accountability Commission for their previous affiliations to the Ba’ath party. The dubious Commission was run by two Shi’ite political candidates, Ahmed Chalabi and Ali al-Lami, and although both Sunni and Shi’ite candidates were affected, the most prominent banned candidates were from the Sunni dominated Iraqiya list. Much to the disappointment of many Sunni voters, the Prime Minister and the Independent High Electoral Commission stood by the ban, and the acrimonious arguments about the decision dredged up sectarian sentiments and poisoned the atmosphere around the elections.<sup>89</sup>

The elections went ahead despite the uproar, and Prime Minister Maliki’s State of Law list came in second place, winning two seats fewer than Ayad Allawi’s Iraqiya coalition. The Prime Minister, who had not considered Iraqiya a threat and fully expected to receive the highest number of votes, was astounded.<sup>90</sup> He declared, explicitly in his capacity as commander in chief, that there was ‘No way we will accept the vote,’ and demanded that the Independent High Electoral Commission conduct a recount.<sup>91</sup> Maliki secured a ruling from the pliable Supreme Court that enabled him to create, post-election, the largest coalition and therefore to have the

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<sup>86</sup> At least 212 Awakening fighters were assassinated by Al Qaeda between 2007 and 2009. International Crisis Group, ‘Loose Ends: Iraq’s Security Forces between U.S. Drawdown and Withdrawal’, 26. Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America’s Wars in the Muslim World*, 545.

<sup>87</sup> Ahmed, *America Unravels Iraq: Kurds, Shiites and Sunni Arabs Compete for Supremacy*, 411.

<sup>88</sup> Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America’s Wars in the Muslim World*, 532, 43.

<sup>89</sup> Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America’s Wars in the Muslim World*, 550-51.

<sup>90</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 617.

<sup>91</sup> Ned Parker and Caesar Ahmed, ‘Maliki Seeks Recount in Iraq Elections’, *Los Angeles Times*, 22nd March 2013. Rod Nordland, ‘Maliki Contests the Result of Iraq Vote’, *The New York Times*, 27th March 2010.



first chance to create a government. After ten months of negotiations, with more than a little assistance from the Iranians who brokered a frosty rapprochement between Maliki and the Sadrists, Maliki managed to put together an agreement that brought him back to power. The so-called Erbil Agreement promised to install Ayad Allawi as the head of a National Council for Strategic Policy with oversight powers, to properly supply the Kurdish Peshmerga and to practise joint decision making. Much of what was agreed, however, never came to pass. Once Prime Minister Maliki had secured his second term in office his priority was to ensure that the humiliating electoral defeat that he had just suffered could never take place again. Maliki aggressively undermined and marginalised the already weak and divided Iraqiya coalition.<sup>92</sup> He sought to replace the commissioners on the Independent High Electoral Commission, which had confirmed the veracity of the election results, with his own political loyalists.<sup>93</sup> And he reactivated the sectarian rhetoric that he had abandoned in 2008 and 2009, warning his Shi'ite constituency of Ba'athist plots to topple his government.<sup>94</sup>

### Growing Disillusionment of the Iraqi Public

By 2011, there was a growing sense of disgust at Iraqi politics amongst the general public. Iraq's political elite had wasted almost an entire year on political infighting after the 2010 elections, levels of government corruption had reached endemic proportions, and despite Iraq's vast resource wealth, basic services including electricity provision, sewage, and water purification remained seriously underdeveloped. In February 2011 protests broke out across Iraq, culminating in a 'Day of Rage' in Baghdad's Tahrir Square on 25<sup>th</sup> February. Thousands protested

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<sup>92</sup> The Prime Minister lambasted Ayad Allawi as a Shi'ite Ba'athist figurehead for a Sunni party, contradicting Iraqiya's claims to be a secular coalition, and he secured the defection of a group of Shi'ite politicians from Iraqiya to State of Law in March 2011. Despite winning the plurality of seats in the election, Iraqiya politicians failed to secure any real power in government. Reneging on the agreement that had returned him to power, the Prime Minister refused to appoint a Minister of the Interior, instead overseeing the Ministry himself, and he appointed a loyalist as National Security Advisor, and a very weak Sunni politician as Defence Minister. International Crisis Group, 'Iraq's Secular Opposition: The Rise and Decline of Al-Iraqiya', (Middle East Report No. 127, 2012a).

<sup>93</sup> The Prime Minister claimed that IHEC had tampered with the vote to secure his defeat, and in July 2011 State of Law accused IHEC of sectarian and corrupt practices and tried to withdraw confidence from the institution through a parliamentary motion. When this failed, the IHEC chief was instead arrested, convicted of corruption and barred from public office. Sullivan, 'Maliki's Authoritarian Regime', 22. Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 678-9.

<sup>94</sup> Maliki's strategy has been to secure his Shi'ite base by 'fanning public fears of Iraq's Sunni minority,' and by re-emphasizing the horrors of Ba'athist (read: Sunni) rule. Parker, 'The Iraq We Left Behind: Welcome to The World's Next Failed State', 107.

against the government's failure 'to provide the services, jobs, and security promised during the elections.'<sup>95</sup> The Maliki government was deeply shaken by the events, and, fearful of the protests expanding, he announced a hundred day programme to improve services and declared that he would cut his salary in half and would not seek a third term in office.<sup>96</sup> The government also sought to discourage and discredit the protestors. The protestors' attempts to set up tents in the square, mimicking Cairo's protest encampment, were prevented by government supporters armed with 'clubs and knives;' a curfew prevented traffic from moving around Baghdad;<sup>97</sup> and the Prime Minister denounced the protestors as 'Ba'athists,' 'terrorists' and 'Al Qaeda.'<sup>98</sup>

By October 2011 public confidence had plummeted, with 85% of Iraqis reporting that job opportunities were shrinking, 82% complaining that corruption was continuing to worsen, and 67% saying that the central government was becoming less responsive to people's needs.<sup>99</sup> Indeed it became clear that the political elite actually benefited from Iraq's decrepit infrastructure, as all parties were mired in scandalous contracting practices whereby sham companies would be awarded contracts in return for extortionate kickbacks.<sup>100</sup> Across the spectrum, confidence in Iraq's political leadership fell, with Maliki enjoying only a 31% approval rating.<sup>101</sup>

## Negotiating a SOFA Extension

When the original Status of the Forces Agreement was signed off in December 2008, the US had intended to eventually extend the agreement – to allow for US troops to stay in Iraq beyond December 2011. Indeed the Bush administration had envisaged a long-term presence for US troops in Iraq similar to that in South Korea,

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<sup>95</sup> Haifa Zangana, 'Iraq', in Paul Amar and Vijay Prashad (eds.), *Dispatches from the Arab Spring: Understanding the New Middle East* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 308-24, 311.

<sup>96</sup> Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 675.

<sup>97</sup> Dodge, *Iraq: From War to a New Authoritarianism*, 171.

<sup>98</sup> Zangana, 'Iraq'.

<sup>99</sup> Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, 'Iraq Enters a Critical Period: Graphs for the Report on the October 2011 Survey', (Washington D.C.: National Democratic Institute, October 2011) 3, 18.

<sup>100</sup> There was little concern for whether or not the terms of such contracts were actually ever met, and thus the Iraqi public saw little in the way of improvements for the absolutely vast investment of Iraqi resources. Parker, 'The Iraq We Left Behind: Welcome to The World's Next Failed State', 104.

<sup>101</sup> Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, 'Iraq Enters a Critical Period: Graphs for the Report on the October 2011 Survey', 9.

where over 20,000 US troops are permanently stationed.<sup>102</sup> The Obama administration was much more ambivalent about its relationship with Iraq.<sup>103</sup> Eschewing the idealism of the Bush years, Obama's pragmatic realism led him to conclude that a semi-stable, semi-autocratic Iraq was the best that the US could hope for, and he was unconvinced about the need to extend American troop presence in the country.<sup>104</sup> Nonetheless, the US military assessed that a continued troop presence in Iraq was important and Obama focused on limiting the number of troops that would be left in Iraq, rather than advocating for a total withdrawal.<sup>105</sup>

Although Prime Minister Maliki was conflicted about the US role in Iraq, he decided on balance that a limited troop presence would be preferable to a total withdrawal of US forces.<sup>106</sup> By this time, however, Maliki had lost much of the political capital he had enjoyed in the original SOFA negotiations in 2008, and he struggled to pull together the agreement that he wanted. The popular disillusionment indicated by the demonstrations earlier that year, and Maliki's alienation of Iraqi parliamentarians, made it very difficult for the Prime Minister to pursue his foreign policy agenda. Although the other political parties in government were privately in favour of the SOFA extension, they used Maliki's support for the move as an opportunity to undermine him politically, declaring that the SOFA extension would be handing Iraq's sovereignty to the US.<sup>107</sup> Although Maliki had assured the Obama

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<sup>102</sup> Terence Hunt, 'Bush Sees South Korea Model for Iraq', *The Washington Post*, 31st May 2007.

<sup>103</sup> President Obama himself had a long history of opposition to the Iraq war, which he publicly condemned as a 'dumb war' in a 2002 speech. Obama's promise to disentangle the US from Iraq and to refocus military efforts on Afghanistan was a key part of his election campaign, and when he came to office he immediately ordered an assessment of both the Iraq and Afghanistan war efforts. Not only was Obama convinced that Iraq was the wrong centre of gravity for the US in the Middle East, he was also keen to shift US foreign policy focus away from the Middle East altogether towards the strategically important but overlooked continent of Asia. Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006) 294. Martin S. Indyk, Kenneth G. Lieberthal, and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Bending History: Barack Obama's Foreign Policy* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2012) 75. Laïdi, *Limited Achievements: Obama's Foreign Policy*, 73. Fawaz Gerges, *Obama and the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 10.

<sup>104</sup> Vali Nasr, *The Dispensable Nation: American Foreign Policy in Retreat* (New York: Doubleday, 2013) 148.

<sup>105</sup> The US military recommended that the White House keep a residual force of 16,000 troops in Iraq beyond December 2011, but the Obama administration put a ceiling at 10,000 and was keen to explore options of keeping even fewer than 10,000 troops in the country. Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 657, 60, 65.

<sup>106</sup> Mohammed Hussainy, 'Interview with author', (Amman, 31st October 2011). Former Senior Adviser to Obama Administration, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>107</sup> It was something of an open secret that Iraqiya leaders were keen for the US to stay in Iraq, not least because US troops had become a *de facto* protection for Sunnis from government forces. Several Shi'ite parties also privately expressed their willingness to see the troop extension go ahead,

administration that he would secure the SOFA extension, as time went on it became increasingly apparent that he was simply not capable of delivering on his promise.<sup>108</sup> Maliki could not muster the political support to usher the agreement through parliament, and he feared that publicly supporting the agreement could fatally undermine his fragile legitimacy in the eyes of the Iraqi public.<sup>109</sup> The Prime Minister suggested bypassing the Iraqi parliament, and simply extending the troop presence under the rubric of training, but the US military felt that the option did not provide the level of assurances that they needed.<sup>110</sup> By October 2011 it became clear that the Prime Minister had failed to make the SOFA extension happen. On 21 October 2011 President Obama announced that a total withdrawal of US troops from Iraq would take place by the end of the year.

The contrast between Maliki's confidence, legitimacy and level of political capital during the 2008 SOFA negotiations and his relative weakness and timidity in 2011 indicates the importance of regime strength when it comes to obtaining foreign policy goals. Although Prime Minister Maliki's moves towards authoritarianism had alienated his political colleagues and had called his legitimacy into question in some parts of the country, the Prime Minister did not yet wield the level of political power that he needed to unilaterally force the agreement through. Iraq now resembled, as Toby Dodge argues, competitive authoritarianism: the Prime Minister could not govern unilaterally but the space for democracy was being rapidly circumscribed.<sup>111</sup> It was nonetheless the case, however, that the Prime Minister was now the main arbiter of Iraqi foreign policy – and although he could not put together an agreement, neither the US nor Iraqi politicians circumvented him in this process. Maliki was clearly Iraq's sovereign leader, and if the agreement could not be reached through him, it seemed that it could not be reached at all.

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but anger and frustration with the Prime Minister hampered political cooperation on the issue. Hussainy, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>108</sup> An insider in the Obama administration observed that Maliki had initially promised to 'get this through,' but things changed once it became apparent that his political rivals would use the issue to 'club him over the head.' Former Senior Adviser to Obama Administration, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>109</sup> One senior Iraqi diplomat and Maliki insider admitted that Maliki did not have the support to 'get it through parliament.' Former Senior Iraqi Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>110</sup> Former Senior Adviser to Obama Administration, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>111</sup> Dodge, 'State and Society in Iraq Ten Years after the Regime Change', 244.

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued that as the Iraqi state strengthened in the aftermath of the Iraqi civil war, the state's credibility as a foreign policy interlocutor was enhanced in the eyes of foreign powers. The state's legitimacy was derived from its increasing capacity to monopolise violence in the country, and to articulate a narrative of state that was resonant with the population. The increased centralisation of state institutions, particularly of security bodies, and their dominance by the Prime Minister, limited the space in which competing political parties could manipulate state bodies in pursuit of their own goals and better enabled the Prime Minister to control state foreign policy. This process of centralisation, however, enabled the Prime Minister to deploy state institutions in pursuit of his own political ends, thereby undermining the legitimacy of the state as a professional and depersonalised arbiter of public affairs. The continuation of extreme corruption and its undermining of public service delivery, and the political manipulation of security forces, began to diminish the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of the Iraqi public.

Reduced legitimacy hampered the Prime Minister's ability to effectively pursue his foreign policy goals, but because of his grip over the state institutions and over violence the Prime Minister was also able to ensure that alternative sub-state actors could not take his place as foreign policy interlocutors. Although the Prime Minister by no means presided over a straightforwardly authoritarian state, he was able to significantly reduce the ability of competing political parties to deploy state resources to their own political ends, and was able to prevent violent sub-state actors from occupying territory and from effectively building local constituencies. When it came to the Kurds, however, the Prime Minister gathered the strength to challenge their overreach too late and was unable to prevent either their presence in disputed territories or their unilateral decision-making over the use of natural resources. The ability of the Kurdish region to consistently maintain a high level of internal stability, their creation of a desirable investment environment, and the success of their long-term diplomatic efforts had given them access to powerful international companies that have the resources, the will and the political leverage that could secure the long-term future of the autonomous Kurdish region.

# CHAPTER SEVEN: SYRIA AND THE SECOND IRAQI CIVIL WAR

## Introduction

This chapter argues that in 2012 and 2013 the Iraqi state dramatically lost legitimacy after its targeting of senior Sunni politicians triggered a series of events that plunged Iraq back into violent sectarian conflict. Its failure to provide security to Iraqi citizens once again empowered sub-state actors who have fuelled continuing violence in Iraq in addition to actively engaging in the civil war in neighbouring Syria. The renewed weakness of the Iraqi government has also rendered it increasingly vulnerable to Iranian influence. In pursuit of regime security, the Prime Minister has acted against Iraq's formal policy toward Syria in order to help Iran to better pursue its objectives there. Meanwhile, the KRG has continued to pursue a foreign policy that is entirely separate to Iraq's, and has heavily engaged with the Kurdish politics in civil war Syria. The level of independence enjoyed by Iraqi Kurdistan in its foreign relations raises questions about the impact of federalism on weak state foreign policy capacity, which are addressed in this chapter and in the conclusion to the thesis.

## US Withdrawal and the Power to be Weak

The end of the US troop presence in December 2011 gave Prime Minister Maliki the latitude to govern without the restraints imposed by the US,<sup>1</sup> and could be interpreted as the final moment at which sovereignty was restored to the country.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> US officials say that US influence over the Iraqi government was already in decline – particularly once the US had announced its intention to leave. They nonetheless acknowledge that the departure of US troops led to a significant loss of leverage over the Iraqi government. Former Senior Adviser to Obama Administration, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. US Government Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. Indeed soon after the US withdrawal, Prime Minister Maliki drastically limited US diplomatic access to Iraqi politicians and civil servants, and slowed the process of issuing visas to US personnel. Dodge, *Iraq: From War to a New Authoritarianism*, 185-6.

<sup>2</sup> One powerful Iraqiya financier declared that the party was striving for 'a sovereign state, void of occupation and external interference,' implying that the US presence in Iraq prevented the country from claiming full sovereignty. The irony is that Iraqiya ultimately wanted an extension of the US presence in the country to protect the Sunni population from what it saw as sectarian and politicized Iraqi security forces. Senior Iraqiya Financier, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

Although the Sunni and Kurdish communities were somewhat nervous about their security in the face of US withdrawal,<sup>3</sup> the Prime Minister could have used the opportunity to celebrate Iraq's unity, strength, and return to independence. Instead the Prime Minister chose to use his newfound freedom to target his political rivals.<sup>4</sup> Hours after an official military ceremony brought the US presence in Iraq to a formal end, tanks from the Baghdad Brigade surrounded the homes of three of Iraq's most senior Sunni politicians: Deputy Prime Minister Salih al-Mutlaq,<sup>5</sup> Finance Minister Rafi' al-Esawi, and Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi.<sup>6</sup> Several of Hashemi's bodyguards were arrested on terrorist charges and the Vice President fled to the Kurdish region as a warrant was issued for his arrest.<sup>7</sup> Forty-eight hours after their arrest, Hashemi's bodyguards were paraded on national television 'confessing' that the Vice President had ordered the assassination of Shi'ite officials and was linked to terrorist activity.<sup>8</sup> One of those bodyguards later died in custody from injuries likely sustained during torture.<sup>9</sup> Although there have been questions about Hashemi's links to unsavoury groups,<sup>10</sup> this attack on him was clearly politically motivated and designed to bolster support for the Prime Minister in his Shi'ite base

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<sup>3</sup> By October 2011 a mere 11% of Sunnis thought the country was going in the right direction, with their concerns about security rising, their personal economic situations deteriorating, and with a growing feeling that they were being treated unfairly by society and by the government. Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, 'Iraq Enters a Critical Period: Graphs for the Report on the October 2011 Survey', 31, 34, 32, 35. Kurds were also becoming increasingly fearful of the growing strength of the Iraqi central government, and in 2012 President of the Kurdish Regional Government Masoud Barzani accused the Iraqi government of seeking to buy F16 Fighter Jets to use against the Kurdish region. Dodge, *Iraq: From War to a New Authoritarianism*, 168.

<sup>4</sup> As a former advisor to Prime Minister Ja'fari observed, 'Maliki would not have dared to go after Hashemi with the US there.' Former Senior Adviser to Prime Minister Ja'fari, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>5</sup> The Prime Minister had already demanded that Parliament hold a vote of no confidence in Salih al-Mutlaq and the Deputy Prime Minister was already being barred from his office and from the cabinet. Sullivan, 'Maliki's Authoritarian Regime', 29. Jabar, Mansour, and Khaddaj, 'Maliki and the Rest: A Crisis within a Crisis', 21.

<sup>6</sup> The Baghdad Brigade is commanded by the Office of the Commander in Chief, which reports directly to the Prime Minister. Sullivan, 'Maliki's Authoritarian Regime', 11.

<sup>7</sup> *Asharq al-Awsat*, 'Al-Hashemi Hits Back Against al-Maliki' (20th December 2011).

<sup>8</sup> James Hider, 'Iraqi Vice-President Flees "Death Squads" Arrest Warrant', *The Times*, 20th December 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Human Rights Watch, 'Iraq: Investigate Death of VP's Bodyguard in Custody', (Beirut, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Several US officials have indicated that they believe either Hashemi or at least his bodyguards were guilty of crimes. US Government Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. Former Senior National Security Council Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. An article by the Iraq Institute for Strategic Studies claims that Al Qaeda affiliated personnel may have been integrated into Hashemi's security staff in order to prevent 'retribution by Al Qaeda.' Jabar, Mansour, and Khaddaj, 'Maliki and the Rest: A Crisis within a Crisis'.

whilst further undermining the already fragmented Iraqiya coalition.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately Hashemi was convicted on terrorism charges and sentenced to death by hanging<sup>12</sup> in a trial that was widely condemned as politicised by Sunni and Kurdish politicians.<sup>13</sup>

The highly charged Hashemi episode ushered in an era of revived sectarian polarisation in Iraq, as many Shi'ites believed in Hashemi's guilt and supported his conviction,<sup>14</sup> whilst the majority of Sunnis saw the trial as a witch-hunt and the latest in a series of steps designed to disenfranchise their community. Fully 79% of Shi'ites approved of filing charges against Vice President Hashemi, whilst 69% of Sunnis disapproved of it.<sup>15</sup> The attack on Hashemi also renewed tensions between Baghdad and Erbil, as the fugitive Vice President took refuge in the Kurdish region amidst demands from Baghdad that he be surrendered to the Iraqi authorities. Prime Minister Maliki accused Kurdish President Masoud Barzani of complicity in Hashemi's crimes,<sup>16</sup> and threatened to cut the KRG's income and to sack the Kurdish chief of staff of the Iraqi army in response to the Kurds' 'harbouring' of Hashemi.<sup>17</sup> President Barzani responded with an extensive attack on Prime Minister Maliki on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2012 in which he accused the Prime Minister of attempting to 'establish a one-million-strong army whose loyalty is only to a single person,' and warned the Prime Minister that 'enough is enough.'<sup>18</sup>

In the wake of this political crisis, Iraqi leaders began to coalesce and plans were made to launch a vote of no confidence in the Prime Minister. Signatures were

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<sup>11</sup> A senior member of the Maliki Government said that 'Hashemi is a criminal, but not only he,' and that the Prime Minister 'intentionally did this' because he thought it would make him a 'Shi'ite hero.' According to this figure, Maliki was not worried about the Sunni backlash because he 'knows very well Sunnis won't give him the vote.' Former Senior Member of Prime Minister Maliki's Government, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. This is supported by President Barzani's declaration that Prime Minister Maliki had privately asked him to smuggle Hashemi out of the country, even as he was publicly lambasting the Kurdish President for refusing to hand Hashemi over to the Iraqi authorities. Josh Rogin, 'Kurdish Leader: No to Arming the Syrian Opposition', *Foreign Policy*, 5th April 2012.

<sup>12</sup> *Al-Arabiya*, 'Fugitive Iraqi VP Hashemi Sentenced to Death by Hanging' (8th September 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Mohamad Ali Harissi, 'Iraqi Judiciary Draws Fire Over Fugitive VP Trial', *Agence France Presse*, 21st June 2012. There are serious questions about the impartiality of the Iraqi justice system. A string of pro-government decisions issued by the Federal Supreme Court substantiate claims that the justice system has been co-opted by the Maliki government. These include the ruling for a recount after Maliki's loss in the election, the ruling that placed all of Iraq's independent bodies including the Iraq High Electoral Commission under cabinet supervision, and the ruling that prevented parliament from initiating legislation. Sullivan, 'Maliki's Authoritarian Regime', 20.

<sup>14</sup> Jabar, Mansour, and Khaddaj, 'Maliki and the Rest: A Crisis within a Crisis', 18.

<sup>15</sup> Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, 'A Major Shift in the Political Landscape: Graphs for the Report on the April 2012 National Survey', (Washington D.C.: National Democratic Institute, April 2012b) 35.

<sup>16</sup> Jabar, Mansour, and Khaddaj, 'Maliki and the Rest: A Crisis within a Crisis', 20.

<sup>17</sup> Kaysi and Ottaway, 'The State of Iraq', 8.

<sup>18</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Iraq and the Kurds: Confronting Withdrawal Fears', 12.



gathered from the Kurdish parties, Iraqiya, and the Sadrists, and were submitted to Iraqi President Jalal Talabani who stalled the process by referring the signatures to the Criminal Investigation Department.<sup>19</sup> In the meantime furious lobbying and an alleged bevy of threats and promises issued by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps led to a number of MPs dropping their support for the motion and the vote of no confidence failed.<sup>20</sup> Despite widespread Sunni and Kurdish disapproval of Maliki's behaviour, the vote of no confidence also failed to inspire the Iraqi public. For many in the Iraqi population the continued poor performance of local services was their number one priority, and the vote of no confidence provided further proof that the Iraqi political elite did nothing but spend their time bickering amongst themselves.<sup>21</sup>

For Prime Minister Maliki, consolidating power remained a top priority. He took heart from the failure of the vote of no confidence, and was buoyed by his continued popularity in the Shi'ite heartlands. Indeed the Prime Minister's approval ratings in the south shot up by 20 points, and the Da'wah Party gained 15 points between October 2011 and April 2012, the very period in which this political crisis took place.<sup>22</sup> Only 14% of Shi'ites considered Maliki to be 'acting like a dictator,' compared to 64% of Sunnis.<sup>23</sup> The Prime Minister, to some extent, enjoyed the popularity of incumbency that comes with a patrimonial state; as one respected Iraq commentator notes, Maliki's legitimacy partly comes from 'being behind 6 million salaries.'<sup>24</sup> But the Prime Minister has also successfully cultivated an image as a strong leader and protector of the Shi'ites whilst also playing up the threats to Shi'ite

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<sup>19</sup> Jabar, Mansour, and Khaddaj, 'Maliki and the Rest: A Crisis within a Crisis', 30.

<sup>20</sup> Iraqiya leader Ayad Allawi alleges that politicians were told by Quds Force Commander Qasim Suleimani not to support the vote of no confidence, and promised that Iran would not allow Maliki a third term in office. Allawi, 'Interview with author'. Chief of Staff of the Kurdish Presidency Fuad Hussein said that parties changed their minds because of 'internal pressure and external pressure.' Hussein, 'Interview with author'. A number of other Iraqi political figures pointed to Iran as the source of the failure of the vote of no confidence. Former Senior Iraqi Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. PUK Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>21</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Deja Vu All Over Again? Iraq's Escalating Political Crisis', (Middle East Report No. 126, 2012b) 8.

<sup>22</sup> Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, 'A Major Shift in the Political Landscape: Graphs for the Report on the April 2012 National Survey', 8, 16.

<sup>23</sup> Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, 'A Major Shift in the Political Landscape: Graphs for the Report on the April 2012 National Survey', 12.

<sup>24</sup> Iraqi Commentator, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

security posed by Ba'athists and terrorists.<sup>25</sup> One senior ISCI member declared Maliki's popularity in the south 'a little bit strange' given that Iraq had 'not good services or economy,' but puts it down to Maliki's constant planting of 'very negative emotion.' 'Everyone in the south believes Maliki is a strong leader and wants to do good,' he continues, and when they see things are not improving 'they are not blaming him, they are blaming others.'<sup>26</sup>

The Prime Minister's pursuit of regime security led him to severely damage the fragile cross-sectarian legitimacy that the Iraqi state had achieved by fighting both Sunni extremists and Shi'ite militants in 2008 and 2009. Although the Prime Minister was motivated by a desire to protect his regime from political rivals, the fact that those rivals were primarily Sunni damaged the inclusive narrative of state that had persuaded many Sunnis to eschew violence in favour of political participation. The loss of this inclusive narrative of state was to precipitate an outbreak of violence that would undermine the functional legitimacy of the Iraqi regime across all communities.

## The Sunni Protest Movement

On 20<sup>th</sup> December 2012 the Maliki-controlled Baghdad Brigade<sup>27</sup> raided the home and offices of Sunni Finance Minister Rafi' al-Esawi and arrested a number of his security detail and staff in a move that strongly echoed the campaign against Vice President Hashemi almost exactly a year earlier.<sup>28</sup> Rafi' al-Esawi was a popular Sunni politician from the staunchly 'nationalist'<sup>29</sup> town of Fallujah, and protests quickly gathered pace in his defence. Starting in Fallujah and spreading to Ramadi, Mosul, Samarra and Tikrit, tens of thousands of Sunni protestors poured onto the streets defending Esawi<sup>30</sup> and decrying what they saw as the collective persecution

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<sup>25</sup> Maliki even threatened President Obama that if Sunnis in the Arab World tried to undo the gains made by the Shi'ites, 'we will all become Hezbollah.' Cited in Nasr, *The Dispensable Nation: American Foreign Policy in Retreat*, 157.

<sup>26</sup> Senior Member of Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>27</sup> Sullivan, 'Maliki's Authoritarian Regime', 11.

<sup>28</sup> *The Herald*, 'Arrests Spark Political Outcry' (22nd December 2012).

<sup>29</sup> Whilst those from Fallujah declare themselves nationalists and point to the intense resistance they mounted against US forces, some Iraqis dismiss them as religious extremists who detest the plurality that characterizes Iraq and thus cannot claim to be real nationalists.

<sup>30</sup> Esawi does appear to be innocent of the charges levelled against him and his staff, the US military investigated claims in 2010 that Esawi had links to terrorist groups and found them to be 'baseless.' Emma Sky and Harith al-Qarawee, 'Iraqi Sunnistan?', *Foreign Policy*, 27th January 2013.

of the Sunni community at the hands of the Iraqi government.<sup>31</sup> The protest movement developed an astonishing momentum, large scale protest camps were erected, protestors blocked the highway from Baghdad to Jordan and Syria,<sup>32</sup> and mass prayers evocative of those used in the Arab Spring were staged on the occupied highway.<sup>33</sup>

Although the targeting of Esawi was the catalyst for this mass action, the Sunni community's grievances had been mounting since the 2010 elections shattered their faith in the political system. Prior to the elections 78% of Sunnis said they would vote in the next elections,<sup>34</sup> a number which fell to 48%<sup>35</sup> after the 2010 elections in which the Sunni dominated Iraqiya coalition won the vote and yet failed to come to power.<sup>36</sup> The Sunni population was also sick of being disproportionately targeted in de-Ba'athification and anti-terrorism operations that resulted in arrests without due process, detentions without trial, and often torture in prison.<sup>37</sup> An April 2012 survey showed that three-quarters of Iraqi Sunnis did not think Iraq was a real democracy, with 69% believing that Prime Minister Maliki had too much power and 61% saying that Iraq's judges were becoming less independent.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, perceptions of the economic climate in Sunni dominated areas were far more negative than in Shi'ite areas; 72% of Anbaris branded the economic situation there as bad, whilst 78% of people in Shi'ite Maysan said that their economic situation

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<sup>31</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Make or Break: Iraq's Sunnis and the State', (Middle East Report No. 144, 2013b) 1-2. *Al-Jazeera English*, 'Iraq Mass Protests Mount Pressure on Maliki' (28th December 2012).

<sup>32</sup> *Al-Jazeera English*, 'Iraq Mass Protests Mount Pressure on Maliki' (28th December 2012).

<sup>33</sup> For images see Stephen Wicken, 'Protesters Turn Out During Ramadan Despite Rising Violence', (Washington D.C.: Institute for the Study of War, 2012). *The Kurdistan Tribune*, 'Million Man March' Planned Against Maliki' (28th December 2012).

<sup>34</sup> International Republican Institute, 'Survey of Iraqi Public Opinion', 38.

<sup>35</sup> Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, 'Iraq's Democracy at a Crossroad', (Washington D.C.: National Democratic Institute, December 2010) 13.

<sup>36</sup> Finance Minister Esawi articulated the Sunni perspective when he said 'if the winning bloc is not the one which will form the government, why are there blocs competing for the election?' Cited in Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 620.

<sup>37</sup> In late 2011 over 600 people in the Sunni dominated districts of Baghdad, Anbar, Salah al-Din and Diyala were arrested in a new anti-terror and anti-Ba'athist campaign that was widely seen as revenge for Sunni provinces that had tried to launch bids to devolve more power to their regions from the central government. Hundreds of university employees in Sunni dominated districts were also targeted for removal in a wide-ranging de-Ba'athification campaign. Sullivan, 'Maliki's Authoritarian Regime', 32. Dodge, *Iraq: From War to a New Authoritarianism*, 164.

<sup>38</sup> Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, 'A Major Shift in the Political Landscape: Report on the April 2012 National Survey', (Washington D.C.: National Democratic Institute, April 2012a) 5.

was good.<sup>39</sup> The demands articulated by the protestors were, therefore, wide-ranging – quickly moving on from the release of Esawi’s bodyguards to the dismantling of anti-terror legislation, the reversal of de-Ba’athification, and equal public employment opportunities for Sunnis.<sup>40</sup> There was also a wide variety of attitudes towards the government expressed in these protests, from those protestors who wanted basic reforms, to those who wanted a new political system, and others with extremist agendas who wanted to destabilise Iraq.<sup>41</sup> The nature of the demands and the breadth of interests represented at the protests made it difficult for any leader to claim to represent and to negotiate on behalf of the protestors. And because many of the demands were based on the particularities of how many Sunnis had experienced the Maliki government,<sup>42</sup> they were alienating and even threatening to many Shi’ite Iraqis.<sup>43</sup> The call for a radical reform of anti-terror laws and prisoner amnesty was, for example, antithetical to many Shi’ites who felt victimised by extremist mass-casualty attacks almost exclusively carried out by Sunnis that continued to kill hundreds of Shi’ites a year.<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps one of the most important trends in the Sunni protests has been a turning away from the mainstream Sunni political leadership. Though the protests may have started in response to the victimisation of a Sunni leader, it can be argued that Rafi’ al-Esawi was defended more as a member of his tribe and locality rather than as a political representative.<sup>45</sup> Many in the Sunni community were disappointed

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<sup>39</sup> International Republican Institute, 'National Survey of Public Opinion in Iraq', (Washington D.C., September 2012).

<sup>40</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Make or Break: Iraq's Sunnis and the State', 2. A new Sunni politician who had devised his political platform during the protests said that Sunnis simply wanted 'to be treated like Shi'a' by the Iraqi government. Iraqi Sunni Politician, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', (Amman, February 2013).

<sup>41</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Make or Break: Iraq's Sunnis and the State', 23.

<sup>42</sup> One Iraqi commentator observed that the protests had been the first time that the Sunni community were willing 'to accept a definition of themselves in sectarian terms,' whereas previously they had always tried to present themselves as anti-sectarian Iraqi nationalists. Former Iraqi Political Attaché, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', (January 2013).

<sup>43</sup> The protestors' use of Ba'athist era flags and sectarian rhetoric was extremely alienating for the Iraqi Shi'ite population and made them fearful of renewed persecution at the hands of Sunnis should the power balance in Iraq be reversed. Sky and al-Qarawee, 'Iraqi Sunnistan?'. Fanar Haddad, 'Can a 'Sunni Spring' turn into an 'Iraqi Spring'?', *Foreign Policy*, 7th January 2013. Former Senior National Security Council Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>44</sup> US officials dismissed the demands as 'maximalist' and as 'impossible' to meet given the support in the Shi'ite street for de-Ba'athification and anti-terror legislation. Iraq Analyst in US Administration, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. Former Senior National Security Council Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>45</sup> When Rafi' al-Esawi participated in certain protests he did so explicitly as a member of his tribe rather than as a member of the Iraqiya list. International Crisis Group, 'Make or Break: Iraq's Sunnis and the State', 2.

with the performance of its political representatives, and in large part had become disillusioned with the entire political process.<sup>46</sup> Iraqiya leader Ayad Allawi's approval ratings fell amongst Sunnis,<sup>47</sup> whilst protestors chased away Sunni Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq when he attempted to speak at a protest camp in Ramadi.<sup>48</sup> Rather than generating and leading the protests themselves, the Iraqiya leadership had been caught by surprise by the protest movement,<sup>49</sup> and, whilst they argued about how to respond,<sup>50</sup> local tribal and religious figures began to take the lead.<sup>51</sup> If anyone has emerged as a leader of the Sunni protests it has been cleric Abdul Maliki al-Sa'adi, raising fears that a new Islamic political elite could replace the current Sunni political cadre.<sup>52</sup>

Prime Minister Maliki's response to the mass demonstrations was confused, vacillating between offering concessions to the demonstrators and condemning them as Ba'athists and foreign agents.<sup>53</sup> Attempts to negotiate a settlement were hampered by the disunity of the protestors, and by the sensitivity of Shi'ite constituents to the reforms that were being proposed. An April 2012 settlement reached between Maliki and Deputy Prime Minister Salih al-Mutlaq was eschewed by protestors who saw Mutlaq as a traitor, rather than as their representative in negotiations, and was also rejected by all major Shi'ite parties for offering significant amendments to the de-

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<sup>46</sup> Maria Fantappie argues that Iraqiya's failure to secure positions of power in local government prevented them from having an impact on the lives of their constituents where they would feel it most. Joel Wing, 'Explaining The Political Factors Behind The Increasing Violence In Iraq, An Interview With Maria Fantappie, Iraq Researcher At The International Crisis Group', *Musings on Iraq: Iraq News, Politics, Economics, Society* (18th November 2013, 30th September 2013).

<sup>47</sup> Ayad Allawi's approval ratings amongst Sunnis fell by 16 points between July and October 2011. Osama al-Nujayfi, the Sunni Speaker of Parliament, also saw his favourability with the population as a whole drop by 10 points in the same period. Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, 'Iraq Enters a Critical Period: Graphs for the Report on the October 2011 Survey', 10, 13.

<sup>48</sup> Protestors pelted the Deputy Prime Minister's convoy with stones whilst his bodyguards responded with live gunfire. *Al-Jazeera English*, 'Iraq Protester Clash with Official's Guards' (30th December 2012).

<sup>49</sup> Iraqiya leader Ayad Allawi somewhat weakly argued that his party had already been pursuing the demands that would be picked up by the protestors. Allawi, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>50</sup> It took months for Iraqiya ministers even to decide to resign from cabinet in support of the protestors. International Crisis Group, 'Make or Break: Iraq's Sunnis and the State', 27.

<sup>51</sup> These figures had the local networks and (mostly mosque based) infrastructure required to sustain this mass mobilization of protestors. Iraqi Sunni Politician, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>52</sup> Former Iraqi Political Attaché, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>53</sup> Although the protests clearly responded to local grievances, there have been questions about how the protestors have been able to finance the months of activities that have taken place as part of this movement. One Iraqi diplomat claims that Qatar and Saudi Arabia have paid protestors \$100 a day to participate. Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari, however, says that he does not believe such 'conspiracy theories.' Former Senior Iraqi Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. Zebari, 'Interview with author'.

Ba'athification law.<sup>54</sup> As the prospect for a settlement receded, radical minorities become increasingly influential within some of the protest camps.<sup>55</sup> Jaysh Rijjal al-Tariqa al-Naqshabandi (JRTN) was one such militant group;<sup>56</sup> led by former Iraqi Vice President and Ba'athist Izzat al-Duri, the group caused a stir when its fugitive leader issued a video statement in support of the Sunni protests.<sup>57</sup> Fears were raised in February 2012 that JRTN were participating in protests in the northern village of Hawija, which was a 'stronghold' for the group.<sup>58</sup> In April the group was accused of being behind an attack on an Iraqi Security Forces checkpoint in which one soldier died and three were injured, and security forces believed that the men responsible were hiding within the Hawija protest camp.<sup>59</sup> Government forces surrounded the camp on April 23<sup>rd</sup> and demanded that the men be handed over, and when the protestors refused the camp was raided. Violent clashes ensued in which over 50 protestors – mostly unarmed – were killed, and 110 were injured.<sup>60</sup> The deaths caused an uproar across the Sunni protests, which had been surprisingly peaceful up to that point. JTRN and other *ad hoc* militant groups went on the rampage, attacking police stations and army convoys and temporarily taking over the town of Suleiman Beg.<sup>61</sup>

The rhetoric that dominated the protests made clear the extent to which Sunnis felt excluded by what they saw as a Shi'ite narrative of state. Many Sunnis felt that the vision of state held by the Prime Minister and senior Shi'ite politicians involved relegating Sunnis to the status of a persecuted minority. The failure of the Iraqi state to successfully include Sunni political representatives in the governing

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<sup>54</sup> Uticensis Risk Services, 'Inside Iraqi Politics,' (59, 18th April 2013) 2.

<sup>55</sup> As early as February 2013 a moderate Sunni politician warned that Maliki's unwillingness to offer solutions and his lack of respect for the protestors meant that the protest movement was going to 'turn violent.' Iraqi Sunni Politician, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>56</sup> JRTN is a somewhat extraordinary group that claims to draw inspiration from the historic Iraqi Naqshabandi Sufi order and whose political origins are rooted in Ba'athist era politics. For more detail on the group, its origins and beliefs see: Michael Knights, 'The JTRN Movement and Iraq's Next Insurgency', *CTS Sentinel*, 47 (2011).

<sup>57</sup> Raheem Salman, 'Fugitive Saddam Deputy Lends Support to Iraq Sunni Protests', *Reuters*, 5th January 2012.

<sup>58</sup> The Kurds accused JTRN of being behind the protests in the village and accused the local army division of flying the JTRN flag. Wladimir van Wilgenburg, 'Implications of the Hawija "Massacre" and Kirkuk Protest Movement', *Today's Zaman*, 12th April 2013.

<sup>59</sup> Tim Arango, 'Clashes in Iraq Carry Worries of a New Civil War', *The New York Times*, 28th April 2013.

<sup>60</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Make or Break: Iraq's Sunnis and the State', 31.

<sup>61</sup> Lewis, 'Al Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent: The Breaking Walls Campaign, Part 1', 19. International Crisis Group, 'Make or Break: Iraq's Sunnis and the State', 32.

process precipitated an almost total loss of confidence in the political system, and made Iraq much more vulnerable to renewed violence.

## A Second Civil War?

The Hawija incident marked a turning point in the breakdown of security in post-Surge Iraq. For disaffected Sunnis it seemed that participating in the political system had failed to deliver, and that peacefully protesting had brought nothing but further oppression, leading some to the conclusion that armed confrontation was the only way forward. The growing restlessness of the protests and the anger generated by the Hawija killings provided al-Qaeda in Iraq, which had been renamed Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in 2006,<sup>62</sup> with fertile ground in which to mount a resurgence in the country.<sup>63</sup> In 2010 ISI had been virtually defeated in Iraq; the Awakening movement, the engagement of Sunnis in the political process, and the extra US soldiers provided by the Surge had all contributed to starving al-Qaeda of the space it needed to operate. By the Spring of 2010, thirty-four out of forty-two top ISI leaders had been killed or were in jail, and ISI's operating capacity was severely degraded.<sup>64</sup> But the failure of the Iraqi political system to sufficiently integrate Sunnis offered ISI a new opportunity to mount a comeback in Iraq. In 2012 ISI mounted a campaign dubbed 'Breaking the Walls' which sought to target Iraqi Security Forces on behalf of those thousands of Sunni prisoners who had been unfairly detained, a message which resonated with much of the Sunni community.<sup>65</sup> As the demonstrations endured for months without resolution, ISI became an increasingly uncontested presence at the protests. Black ISI flags could be seen at a number of protest sites, whilst footage emerged of masked ISI fighters openly participating at a protest in Ramadi.<sup>66</sup> ISI has also been bolstered by the services of former Awakening fighters, many of whom have been abandoned by the Maliki government and have been co-opted by ISI for fear of being murdered if they refuse.<sup>67</sup> A renewed willingness of parts of the Sunni community to tolerate ISI

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<sup>62</sup> Aaron Zelin, 'Al-Qaeda in Syria: A Closer Look at ISIS', (Policy Watch 2137; Washington D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2013).

<sup>63</sup> One senior Sunni financier admitted that there were Ba'athist and Al Qaeda elements at the protests, and that Al Qaeda was able to recruit because some Sunnis wanted to mount war 'against the enemies of Sunnis,' but he also commented that the presence of such people at protests was frightening for many ordinary protestors. International Iraqi Businessman and Former Iraqiya Financier, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>64</sup> Lewis, 'Al Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent: The Breaking Walls Campaign, Part 1', 9.

<sup>65</sup> Lewis, 'Al Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent: The Breaking Walls Campaign, Part 1', 10.

<sup>66</sup> Ahmed Ali, 'Al-Qaeda in Iraq and the Iraqi Anti-Government Protest Movement', (Washington D.C.: Institute for the Study of War, 2013a) 1.

<sup>67</sup> Wing, 'Explaining The Political Factors Behind The Increasing Violence In Iraq, An Interview With Maria Fantappie, Iraq Researcher At The International Crisis Group', 4.



fighters in their midst has vastly increased the ability of ISI to mount effective attacks in the country. Since April 2013 there has been a significant rise in the number of ISI attacks, marked by the use of co-ordinated Vehicle Borne Improvised Explosive Devices (VBIEDs) which usually target Shi'ite civilians.<sup>68</sup> In July 2013 ISI mounted an audacious jailbreak at the Abu Ghraib prison in which 68 security guards were killed and over 500 prisoners escaped.<sup>69</sup> This and other similar jailbreaks have no doubt replenished ISI's ranks, and some of the more experienced fighters have likely contributed crucial technical expertise and leadership skills to the organisation.

The escalation of violence against Shi'ite civilians has begun to elicit retaliatory anti-Sunni violence on the part of resurgent Shi'ite militias. Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), an offshoot of the Mahdi Army, which had been the leading Shi'ite militia in the first Iraqi civil war,<sup>70</sup> has been a dominant actor in this renewed anti-Sunni violence, and is likely behind the murder of Sunnis at false checkpoints, and the staging of Improvised Explosive Device (IED) attacks on Sunni mosques.<sup>71</sup> AAH have been accused of murdering candidates for the 2013 provincial elections, and allegedly plotted to kill former Prime Minister and Iraqiya leader Ayad Allawi.<sup>72</sup> There has also been a rise in so-called 'morality killings' in Shi'ite areas, perhaps indicating that militias are trying to assert their authority and recreate local strongholds.<sup>73</sup> Although AAH has formally denied involvement in any violent acts inside Iraq, on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2013 AAH leader Qais al-Khazali announced that the group would co-operate with Iraqi Security Forces in reaction to the 'killings and

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<sup>68</sup> Jessica D. Lewis, Ahmed Ali, and Kimberly Kagan, 'Iraq's Sectarian Crisis Reignites as Shi'a Militias Execute Civilians and Remobilize', (Washington D.C.: Institute for the Study of War, 2013) 1,2.

<sup>69</sup> Jessica Lewis, 'Al Qaeda in Iraq's "Breaking the Walls" Campaign Achieves Its Objectives at Abu Ghraib', (Washington D.C.: Institute for the Study of War, 2013a).

<sup>70</sup> For more information about the origins of AAH see: Sam Wyer, 'The Resurgence of Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq', (Washington D.C.: Institute for the Study of War, December 2012).

<sup>71</sup> Lewis, Ali, and Kagan, 'Iraq's Sectarian Crisis Reignites as Shi'a Militias Execute Civilians and Remobilize', 1, 5-6.

<sup>72</sup> Ayad Allawi claimed that eighteen of his provincial election candidates had been murdered, and said 'Asa'ib al-Haq are planning to apparently kill me.' Allawi, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>73</sup> Lewis, Ali, and Kagan, 'Iraq's Sectarian Crisis Reignites as Shi'a Militias Execute Civilians and Remobilize', 5.

destruction' in the country,<sup>74</sup> raising fears amongst many Sunnis that the Security Forces would become infiltrated with Shi'ite militias as in the first civil war.<sup>75</sup>

The scale of violence across Iraq is beginning to transform life in the country, as Iraqi citizens feel increasingly insecure and fearful that Iraq may be plunging back into civil war. April 2013 saw a dramatic rise in the number of Iraqis killed, making it the deadliest month in Iraq since June 2008.<sup>76</sup> In May 2013, 1,045 Iraqis were killed in 560 security incidents, including 178 detonations of improvised explosive devices, 82 vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices, and 243 killings using small arms fire.<sup>77</sup> In the subsequent months civilian casualties have often topped 1,000 a month.<sup>78</sup> Although there is still support for the Prime Minister in Shi'ite constituencies, and sympathy for the Prime Minister's depiction of the violence as a 'war of genocide by terrorists,'<sup>79</sup> his inability to effectively protect the Iraqi people – and indeed his government's role in precipitating the political crisis that spawned this violence – has undermined his functional and normative legitimacy across Iraq.

### Maliki Weakened

The political crisis that has engulfed Iraq throughout 2013 has weakened the Prime Minister, and empowered his political rivals.<sup>80</sup> The Sadrists have desperately tried to re-position themselves politically to take advantage of Maliki's move away from the cross-sectarian centre-ground. Muqtada al-Sadr has re-emerged from his political retirement and the group has reached out to the Sunni protestors and condemned

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<sup>74</sup> Sinan Salaheddin, 'In Iraq, Sunni attacks spark Shiite calls to arms', *Associated Press*, 30th October 2013.

<sup>75</sup> Even prior to this announcement Sunnis feared the role that AAH was playing in the Iraqi Security Forces. One leading Sunni figure claimed that the Iraqi security forces were '100% Shi'a and criminals' and full of members of Asa'ib al-Haq. Zangana, 'Iraq'.

<sup>76</sup> *Reuters*, 'April Bloodiest Month in Iraq Since 2008: U.N.' (2nd May 2013).

<sup>77</sup> United Nations Iraq, 'UN Casualty Figures for May: More than One Thousand Iraqis Killed in One Month', <[http://www.uniraq.org/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=939:un-casualty-figures-for-may-more-than-one-thousand-iraqis-killed-in-one-month&Itemid=633&lang=en](http://www.uniraq.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=939:un-casualty-figures-for-may-more-than-one-thousand-iraqis-killed-in-one-month&Itemid=633&lang=en)>, accessed 19th November 2013.

<sup>78</sup> United Nations Iraq, 'UN Casualty Figures for Iraq', <[http://www.uniraq.org/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=itemlist&task=tag&tag=Casualty%20Figures&lang=en](http://www.uniraq.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=itemlist&task=tag&tag=Casualty%20Figures&lang=en)>, accessed 19th November 2013.

<sup>79</sup> *Reuters*, 'Iraq 2013: Deadliest Year Since 2008 With 7,000+ Killed' (8th November 2013).

<sup>80</sup> Former Senior Member of Prime Minister Maliki's Government, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. International Crisis Group, 'Make or Break: Iraq's Sunnis and the State', 27.

Maliki for stoking the unrest.<sup>81</sup> The Prime Minister's authoritarian moves have alienated Iraq's supreme Shi'ite religious leader Ayatollah Sistani, who has refused to meet with all elected officials since 2010,<sup>82</sup> and who has publicly exhorted the Prime Minister to address the demands of the protestors.<sup>83</sup> His own Foreign Minister, Hoshyar Zebari, has said that the Prime Minister is responsible for exacerbating mistrust between Iraq's sectarian communities and that he is trying to bring back 'Saddamism without Saddam.'<sup>84</sup> Altogether, Maliki is 'far more vulnerable now than he was in the run-up to the 2010 general election,'<sup>85</sup> and he is increasingly looking to work with other groups to bolster his legitimacy. The Prime Minister has long worked with Shi'ite militant group Asa'ib al-Haq, who he had turned to as a counterbalance to the militant Sadrism movement, with whom he had so often come to blows.<sup>86</sup> The relationship appears to have been renewed as the Prime Minister has faced increasingly troubled times. AAH vocally condemned the 2012 vote of no confidence in the Prime Minister,<sup>87</sup> and the following year AAH leaders were allegedly provided with security details courtesy of the Prime Minister<sup>88</sup> and the group held a large scale political rally in a government owned stadium in Baghdad.<sup>89</sup> The Prime Minister has perhaps tried to reconnect with the Shi'ite grassroots through his association with AAH, and is trying to use the group to compensate for the ineffectiveness of the Iraqi Security Forces. In September 2013 it transpired that the Iraqi government was creating a security division of the Iraqi Security Forces that brings together Shi'ite militias, including Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, the Mahdi Army and Kata'ib Hezbollah, to defend Baghdad from ISI.<sup>90</sup> Such a move risks empowering these militant groups as potential political rivals to his own Da'wah Party, but the Prime Minister may feel he has no choice but to partner with

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<sup>81</sup> *Al-Arabiya*, 'Shiite Leader Urges Maliki to Talk to Sunni Demonstrators' (15th January 2012). Duraid Adnan and Christine Hauser, 'Iraqi Prime Minister Faces More Calls for Resignation', *The New York Times*, 4th January 2013.

<sup>82</sup> Parker, 'The Iraq We Left Behind: Welcome to The World's Next Failed State', 106.

<sup>83</sup> Sky and al-Qarawee, 'Iraqi Sunnistan?'

<sup>84</sup> Zebari, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>85</sup> Ramzy Mardini, 'Metternich in Baghdad', *Foreign Policy*, (20th May 2013).

<sup>86</sup> As early as 2008 the Prime Minister had negotiated a cease fire with AAH and had released their leader Qais al-Khazali from prison. Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 594-6.

<sup>87</sup> Wyer, 'The Resurgence of Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq', 25.

<sup>88</sup> Wyer, 'The Resurgence of Asa'ib Ahl Al-Haq', 17.

<sup>89</sup> Lewis, Ali, and Kagan, 'Iraq's Sectarian Crisis Reignites as Shi'a Militias Execute Civilians and Remobilize', 7.

<sup>90</sup> Ahmed Ali, 'The Baghdad Division: Iraqi Shi'a Militia Elements to Form State-Backed Force', (Washington D.C.: Institute for the Study of War, 2013b) 1.

groups that can help him to robustly defend the nation's Shi'ites, and thereby to reclaim his legitimacy. It is also possible that the Prime Minister feels that such groups are becoming so powerful on their own that he risks being politically left behind unless he somehow joins forces with them.<sup>91</sup> In the midst of the renewed violence and political tensions of 2013 came the Iraqi Provincial Elections, in which the Prime Minister's Party lost around forty-two seats in yet another indication of his waning political fortunes.<sup>92</sup>

The outbreak of violence in Iraq has weakened the functional legitimacy of the Iraqi government across all communities. The failure of the Iraqi state to fulfil its primary responsibility, which is to protect its citizens, has led to the re-empowerment of local militia groups. These groups, which are once again attempting to provide security for their local communities, have been increasingly able to challenge the foreign policy authority of the state.

## Iraqi State Weakness and the Syrian Conflict

With a significant part of its Sunni population in revolt, and overwhelmed by resurgent violent militias, Iraq was in turmoil and the state's capacity to effectively pursue foreign policy was once again severely diminished. The inability of the Prime Minister to execute foreign policy according to what he considered to be in the best interests of Iraq demonstrates the intimate connection between state weakness and foreign policy.

The Iraqi Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister agreed that when it came to the civil conflict in neighbouring Syria it was in Iraq's best interest to stay neutral.<sup>93</sup> Iraq wants a negotiated settlement that keeps Syria intact and that prevents the further empowerment of extremist elements.<sup>94</sup> A 2013 Da'wah Party document describes its policy towards Syria as advocating 'for a political settlement in Syria,

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<sup>91</sup> An ISW report states that militia activities in Iraq indicate that the Prime Minister either 'tolerated the mobilization of militias or lost control of their activities in Baghdad.' Lewis, Ali, and Kagan, 'Iraq's Sectarian Crisis Reignites as Shi'a Militias Execute Civilians and Remobilize', 8.

<sup>92</sup> The number cannot be exactly determined because of changes in coalitions between provincial elections. Joel Wing, 'Complete 2013 Iraq Provincial Elections Results', *Musings on Iraq: Iraq News, Politics, Economics, Society* (19th November 2013, 6th August 2013).

<sup>93</sup> Zebari, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>94</sup> Iraq's Representative to the UN summarizes Iraq's position as in favour of 'elections and transition' in Syria, and declares that a 'peaceful transition is the only way' to resolve the Syrian conflict. Bayati, 'Interview with author'.

seeing military attempts at resolving the conflict as a recipe for the disintegration of Syria' which would ultimately benefit 'Al-Qaeda and other extremist groups.'<sup>95</sup>

Iraq shares a 400 mile long border with Syria, and has suffered extensive problems attempting to regulate that border to prevent the transfer of extremist foreign fighters into Iraq.<sup>96</sup> The unwillingness of the Syrian authorities to stop extremists from travelling into Iraq has long been a source of tension between the two governments, and diplomatic relations broke down as recently as 2009 over a series of spectacular bombings for which Iraq held the Syrian government responsible.<sup>97</sup> There has also been a tense personal relationship between Prime Minister Maliki and President Assad, the latter having supported Maliki's rival Ayad Allawi in the 2010 parliamentary elections.<sup>98</sup> The Iraqi Prime Minister therefore has little sympathy for the Ba'athist Assad and is not personally invested in his survival.<sup>99</sup> Though it may not naturally sympathise with the Assad regime, the Iraqi government is also extremely wary of a breakdown of the Syrian state which may provide extremists with a safe haven from which they can continue to destabilise Iraq.<sup>100</sup> They consider that a victory of Syria's Sunni-dominated rebel movement could empower militant Sunni groups in Iraq, leading to a civil war or the possible break-up of Iraq.<sup>101</sup> For that reason the Iraqi government is against any kind of

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<sup>95</sup> Islamic Dawa Party, 'Islamic Dawa Party: Vision for Iraq's Foreign Policy', (2013) 7-8.

<sup>96</sup> See chapter four for more details of Syria's approach to the transfer of militants into Iraq from its territory.

<sup>97</sup> On the 19<sup>th</sup> August 2009 truck bombings targeting Iraq's Foreign Ministry and Finance Ministry killed over a hundred civilians. A furious Prime Minister Maliki demanded that Syria hand over the alleged Syrian-based masterminds of this attack. When Syria refused, the Iraqi government recalled its Ambassador from Damascus. Mona Yacoubian, 'Syria and the New Iraq', in Henri J. Barkey, Scott B. Lasensky, and Phebe Marr (eds.), *Iraq, Its Neighbors, and the United States: Competition, Crisis and the Reordering of Power* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2011), 145-64, 146-47.

<sup>98</sup> Iraqiya leader Ayad Allawi said that Bashar al-Assad, along with the rest of the Arab world, supported his victory in the 2010 parliamentary elections and tried to convince Iran to change its anti-Allawi stance, but eventually Iran 'influenced Bashar al-Assad to shift position' away from overtly supporting Allawi. Allawi, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>99</sup> Despite having spent most of his years in exile in Syria, Prime Minister Maliki does not have fond memories of the country, declaring Syrians to be 'sons of bitches to the last man.' Parker and Salman, 'Notes From the Underground: The Rise of Nouri al-Maliki'. One Maliki insider said that the Prime Minister 'has a deep hatred of Syria from his time there' because he felt constantly humiliated by Syrian intelligence. Cited in Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America's Wars in the Muslim World*.

<sup>100</sup> Baghdad worries that the fall of Assad could 'have a profoundly destabilizing effect on Iraq's still fragile politics' because Syria could once again become a major source of weapons and fighters for militants in Iraq. Sean Kane and Elie Abouaoun, 'Baghdad's Wary Support for the Syrian Status Quo', (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2011) 1-2.

<sup>101</sup> Former Iraqi Political Attaché, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

military intervention in Syria in support of the rebels,<sup>102</sup> and has been wary of communicating with the rebels for fear of empowering them in any way. The Prime Minister and Foreign Minister even came to blows when the latter met with members of the Syrian opposition in Cairo. The Foreign Minister felt that the Iraqi government should make it clear that it was not supporting President Assad, whilst the Prime Minister favoured a much more ambiguous position.<sup>103</sup>

Despite their fear of the Islamist component of the Syrian opposition, it is not in Iraq's interests to support the Assad regime. Such a move would place Iraq firmly outside of the Arab consensus at a time when it has been trying to rebuild some prestige in the Arab world,<sup>104</sup> and would further antagonise Iraq's already restive Sunni population. The official Iraqi government position on Syria has, therefore, been to encourage dialogue between the government and the opposition without offering substantial support to either side.<sup>105</sup>

Iraq's actual interaction with the Syrian conflict, however, belies its stated national interests in the matter. In practice, Iraq has enabled the endurance of the Assad regime by allowing Iran to funnel weapons to Syria through Iraqi airspace, by enabling currency transfers for the embattled Syrian regime through the Iraqi currency markets, and by turning a blind eye to Shi'ite militants who have travelled to Syria to fight for the regime. This instance is a good example of how the concept of the 'national interest' can be used as a political tool without the existence of a concurrent process for integrating assessments of the national interest into the policy making process. The Prime Minister is able to restate his claim to legitimacy and to re-emphasise his position as a national leader in contrast to his opponents by

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<sup>102</sup> Iraq's representative to the Arab League says that the Arab pursuit of a military solution to the Syrian conflict is 'wrong,' and that the 'fall of Assad regime by force...will lead to civil war.' Azawi, 'Interview with author'. Prime Minister Maliki was also convinced from the beginning of the conflict that President Assad would 'fight until the last fingernail' and that a rebel victory was by no means inevitable. He was therefore extremely careful not to support the rebel fighters lest a surviving Assad should later punish Iraq for it. Former Senior National Security Council Official, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>103</sup> Former Senior Member of Prime Minister Maliki's Government, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>104</sup> In 2012 Iraq hosted the Arab League Summit for the first time since 1990. Iraq fought hard for the right to host the Summit, and poured political and monetary capital into the event to make it a success – all in an attempt to demonstrate that Iraq was back on its feet and had retaken its place amongst the Arab nations. Zebari, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>105</sup> One Iraqi diplomat describes the Iraqi position as favouring 'Assad to step from power gradually, not to be forced suddenly.' Former Senior Iraqi Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

claiming to act in the 'national interest', whilst simultaneously pursuing regime survival objectives that actively compromise Iraqi national security.

The tension between Iraq's stated national interests and its activities in relation to Syria can also be explained by the renewed weakening of the Iraqi state. Prime Minister Maliki had been dependent on Iran to broker the electoral coalition that returned him to power in 2010, and was now further indebted to Iran for scuppering the vote of no confidence that had threatened to remove Maliki from power in 2012. As the Prime Minister loses his domestic legitimacy he becomes increasingly dependent on external support to maintain his position of power, and Iran has taken advantage of this reliance to pressure Iraq into enabling Iran's policy of vigorously supporting the Assad regime. According to a 2012 US intelligence estimate, Iran flew 200 tonnes of ammunition, mortars, machine guns, assault rifles, and rockets to Syria through Iraqi airspace, triggering a severe response from the US ambassador in Baghdad.<sup>106</sup> The Iraqi government alternately denied that the flights were taking place and protested their inability to prevent them given that there is no Iraqi air force,<sup>107</sup> but the over-flights continued. Towards the end of 2013 the US administration accused Transport Minister Hadi al-Ameri of personally organizing the over-flights in co-ordination with the Iranians.<sup>108</sup> US officials admit, however, that Prime Minister Maliki is being put under enormous pressure by the Iranians to allow the over-flights at a time when he is domestically politically vulnerable.<sup>109</sup> The Iraqi government has also enabled both the Iranians and the Syrians to use Iraqi currency exchanges to purchase hundreds of millions of dollars, subjecting the Iraqi Central Bank to unsustainable levels of demand.<sup>110</sup> When Central Bank Governor Sinan al-Shabibi tried to erect measures to better regulate these currency exchanges, Prime Minister Maliki blocked the move and later ousted the Governor on trumped up charges.<sup>111</sup> The Iraqi government also supplied fuel oil to a desperate Syrian

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<sup>106</sup> US Ambassador Jim Jeffrey told the Prime Minister that he had to 'show the rest of the world' that he was not in 'the Iranian camp.' Cited in Gordon and Trainor, *The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama*, 677-8.

<sup>107</sup> Iraq's Representative to the Arab League offered both responses in a 2013 interview in Cairo. Azawi, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>108</sup> Khaled al-Shoumary, 'U.S. Accuses Iraqi Official for Allowing Iran Military Aid to Syria', *al-Arabiya*, 4th November 2013.

<sup>109</sup> Iraq Analyst in US Administration, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>110</sup> Khalid al-Ansary and Nayla Razzouk, 'Iraq Deplores "Currency Attack" as Dollars Flow to Syria, Iran', *Bloomberg*, 12th January 2012.

<sup>111</sup> Sullivan, 'Maliki's Authoritarian Regime', 23-4.

regime, making a renewable deal in 2012 to sell the regime 720,000 tonnes worth at 50% off the market value of the product.<sup>112</sup> And the Iraqi government has refused to support Arab League action that has sought to punish the Assad regime, abstaining from a 2011 Arab League vote to impose sanctions on Syria. Although the Iranian government is still not satisfied with the extent of Iraqi engagement in the Syrian conflict, it appears clear that Iranian pressure has already pushed the Iraqi Prime Minister into a level of involvement in the conflict that is not in Iraq's national interest.<sup>113</sup>

The re-emerging weakness of the Iraqi state has also empowered militias that have further undercut Iraq's Syria policy by directly engaging in the conflict. Hundreds of Iranian-backed Iraqi Shi'ite militants have crossed over into Syria to fight for the Assad regime, most of them highly trained and well-equipped.<sup>114</sup> These include fighters from Asa'ib al-Haq, the Mahdi Army and Kata'ib Hezbollah who have joined forces with either Assad's troops or with the umbrella Shi'ite militant body the Abu al-Fadhil al-Abbas Brigade to conduct offensive and defensive operations throughout the greater Damascus area.<sup>115</sup> Asa'ib al-Haq has confirmed its role in Syria, and has explicitly linked its fighting in Syria with its violent activities in Iraq, asserting that both conflicts are part of the same war against 'Takfiri extremists.'<sup>116</sup> The participation of Iraqi militants in Syria exacerbates sectarian tensions in Iraq, and further diminishes the ability of politicians to isolate Iraq from the effects of the neighbouring conflict.<sup>117</sup> Prime Minister Maliki's political weakness, however, and his increased dependence on Asa'ib al-Haq, has prevented him from taking a stand against Iraqi Shi'ite militant activities in Syria and has allowed Iraq's security institutions to turn a blind eye to the practice.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Lina Saigol and Michael Peel, 'Iraq Sends Crucial Fuel Oil to Syria', *Financial Times*, 8th October 2012.

<sup>113</sup> Mushreq Abbas, 'Iran Looks to Iraq for Syria Support', *al-Monitor*, 13th September 2013.

<sup>114</sup> Joel Wing, 'The Increasing Flow Of Iraqi Fighters To Syria, An Interview With University of Maryland's Phillip Smyth', *Musings on Iraq: Iraq News, Politics, Economics, Society* (21st November 2013, 2013).

<sup>115</sup> *The Daily Star*, 'Iraqi Shiite Militants Start to Acknowledge Role in Syria' (11th April 2013). Wing, 'The Increasing Flow Of Iraqi Fighters To Syria, An Interview With University of Maryland's Phillip Smyth'.

<sup>116</sup> Lewis, Ali, and Kagan, 'Iraq's Sectarian Crisis Reignites as Shi'a Militias Execute Civilians and Remobilize', 6-9.

<sup>117</sup> Some Iraqi Sunnis believe that Assad would have fallen if it were not for the support of Iraqi Shi'ites, and the highly emotive issue has widened the distance between Iraq's communities. Adviser to Iraqiya, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity', (January 2013).

<sup>118</sup> Suadad al-Salhy, 'Iraqi Shi'ites Flock to Assad's Side as Sectarian Split Widens', *Reuters*, 19th June 2013. Allawi, 'Interview with author'.



Just as the Iraqi Security Forces have become increasingly powerless to prevent al-Qaeda/Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) activities in Iraq after the almost total breakdown of the government's legitimacy in the Sunni community, the Iraqi government is also failing to prevent the transfer of ISI fighters into Syria. From May 2012 ISI expanded its operations into the Syrian conflict with support from some of the very same Awakening fighters that the Iraqi government had abandoned after their successful defeat of al-Qaeda in 2006 and 2007.<sup>119</sup> ISI sent a number of its fighters to Syria to establish an Islamist fighting force that would become Jabhat al-Nusra (JN), now the most effective rebel militia in Syria.<sup>120</sup> Part of the success of JN has been attributed to the expertise of both Syrian and Iraqi fighters in its ranks who have extensive fighting experience from their time as part of the insurgency in Iraq.<sup>121</sup> ISI continued to send weapons and fighters to JN until April 2013, when ISI's attempt to subordinate JN to its newly rebranded organisation, the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), failed and ISIS established its own branch in Syria.<sup>122</sup> The expansion of ISIS into Syria has provided its branches in Iraq with a stronger network of safe havens and more secure and extensive supply routes for the transfer of weapons and fighters into Iraq – thereby contributing further to Iraq's instability.<sup>123</sup> The Iraqi government has also been unable to prevent Iraqi tribes from smuggling weapons and goods to the Syrian rebels.<sup>124</sup> The trade is both lucrative for these tribes and acts on the extensive sympathy that there is for the Syrian uprising in Sunni areas of Iraq.<sup>125</sup> These tribes also allegedly act as a conduit for Saudi and Qatari aid to the Syrian rebels, further undercutting the Iraqi government's control over its borders and its foreign relations.<sup>126</sup>

The weakness of the Iraqi state, which has been evident in the loss of its monopoly over internal violence in Iraq and in the wholesale rejection by much of

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<sup>119</sup> Wing, 'Explaining The Political Factors Behind The Increasing Violence In Iraq, An Interview With Maria Fantappie, Iraq Researcher At The International Crisis Group '.

<sup>120</sup> Zelin, 'Al-Qaeda in Syria: A Closer Look at ISIS'.

<sup>121</sup> Tim Arango, 'Syrian Rebels Tied to Al Qaeda Play Key Role in War', *The New York Times*, 8th December 2012.

<sup>122</sup> Abigail Fielding-Smith, 'Iraq al-Qaeda Fighters Radicalise Syria', *Financial Times*, 18th August 2013.

<sup>123</sup> Lewis, 'Al Qaeda in Iraq Resurgent: The Breaking Walls Campaign, Part 1', 7.

<sup>124</sup> Some tribesmen claim to be returning their 'debt' to the Syrians for aiding them in the insurgency against US occupation. Dan Murphy, 'Weapons Flowing from Iraqi Sunnis to Syria's Rebels?', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 2nd April 2012.

<sup>125</sup> Free Syrian Army flags have been raised at the Sunni protests in Iraq in solidarity with the Syrian rebels, who many Iraqi Sunnis see as suffering through a parallel struggle against an oppressive Shi'ite dictator. Mardini, 'Metternich in Baghdad'.

<sup>126</sup> Kenneth Pollock and Daniel Byman, 'The Syrian Spillover', *Foreign Policy*, (2012).

the Sunni community of the Iraq state, has had a clear impact on Iraqi foreign policy towards Syria. The weakness of the Maliki regime has rendered it vulnerable to Iranian influence. Despite the Iraqi government deciding that a policy of non-intervention in Syria is in Iraq's best interests, the Maliki regime has facilitated Iranian support of the Assad regime. Meanwhile, the weakened Iraqi government has been unable to prevent sub-state Iraqi actors from intervening on both sides of the Syrian conflict. These actors have been empowered by the breakdown of security in Iraq, and have regained legitimacy by providing security or by offering a powerful sectarian narrative in Iraqi communities that have been deprived of state support.

### The KRG in Syria

The distance between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the central Iraqi government continued to widen in 2012 and 2013, and the weakening Iraqi grip over the Kurdish region allowed the KRG to pursue an entirely independent policy towards the Syrian conflict. The signing of a deal to build an oil and gas pipeline between Kurdish territory and the Turkish port of Ceyhan was roundly condemned by the Iraqi government, who had until then been able to control the piped export of oil and gas from Iraqi Kurdistan.<sup>127</sup> In 2013 the pipeline was completed and a deal was reached to build a second pipeline between Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey to transport the heavy oil from Kurdistan's northern fields.<sup>128</sup> The uncovering of extensive oil smuggling<sup>129</sup> from the KRG to Iran without the repatriation of revenues to Baghdad led Iraqi ministers to threaten to cut the KRG's budget, which they briefly did in March 2012.<sup>130</sup> Iraqi Oil Minister Hussein Shahrastani declared that Kurdish oil smuggling was depriving Iraq of \$5.6 billion in revenue,<sup>131</sup> whilst the head of the Kurdish Department of Foreign Affairs declared that if Iraq attempted to regain control over Kurdish resources, Kurdistan's

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<sup>127</sup> Pepe Escobar, 'The New Iraq (Oil) War', *al-Jazeera*, 30th May 2012.

<sup>128</sup> Humeyra Pamuk and Orhan Coskun, 'Turkey, Iraqi Kurdistan Clinch Major Energy Pipeline Deals', *Reuters*, 6th November 2013.

<sup>129</sup> A 2010 exposé in *The New York Times* suggested hundreds of millions of dollars-worth of crude oil and refined products were being smuggled from the KRG to Iran every year. Sam Dagher, 'Smugglers in Iraq Blunt Sanctions Against Iran', *The New York Times*, 8th July 2010.

<sup>130</sup> Hiltermann, 'Revenge of the Kurds'. International Crisis Group, 'Iraq and the Kurds: The High-Stakes Hydrocarbon Gambit', 12. Voller, 'Kurdish Oil Politics in Iraq: Contested Sovereignty and Unilateralism', 74.

<sup>131</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Iraq and the Kurds: Confronting Withdrawal Fears', 12.

participation in Iraq would be ‘over.’<sup>132</sup> Meanwhile the continued entry of supermajors into the Kurdish oil market further heightened tensions between the central and regional governments.<sup>133</sup> The rhetoric on both sides of the divide also escalated in the wake of the Hashemi debacle and the vote of no confidence, as the Kurdish President accused Prime Minister Maliki of seeking to buy F16 fighter jets from the US in order to ‘drive the Kurds back to the mountain.’<sup>134</sup> Maliki caused uproar by referring to the hotly disputed town of Kirkuk as an Arab city,<sup>135</sup> whilst Barzani declared that Kurdistan would secede if Maliki was still in power after the 2014 elections.<sup>136</sup> The war of words almost escalated into armed conflict in the town of Tuz Khurmato in December 2012 when Iraqi Security Forces attempted to arrest a Kurdish man in the disputed town. Both President Barzani and Prime Minister Maliki sent reinforcements to the area after a fire-fight broke out, leading the country perilously close to conflict between the Kurdish and the Iraqi armies.<sup>137</sup> A settlement was reached that averted further violence, but the incident demonstrated just how quickly the tension between the Iraqi government and the autonomous region could escalate into war.<sup>138</sup>

The KRG has pursued an independent foreign policy towards Syria during the conflict that has been at odds both with both the official and unofficial policies of the Iraqi government. The KRG has sought to shape the Syrian Kurdish reaction to the civil conflict in Syria in order to create a potential partner autonomous territory for the Syrian Kurds and to demonstrate its influence over the Kurdish populations to neighbouring powers. A primary aim of the Barzani government has

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<sup>132</sup> Falah Mustafa Bakr added, ‘we decided voluntarily to be part of this country, we are not Arabs and we never will be.’ Head of the KRG Department of Foreign Relations Falah Mustafa Bakr, ‘Interview with author’.

<sup>133</sup> Chevron and Total both signed production-sharing contracts with the Kurdistan Regional Government in 2012. Brian Swint, ‘Total Follows Exxon, Chevron Into Kurdistan Region of Iraq’, *Bloomberg*, 31st July 2012.

<sup>134</sup> Barzani claimed that a military report given to the Prime Minister suggested that F16s would enable the Iraqi government to ‘drive the Kurds back to the mountain.’ Jabar, Mansour, and Khaddaj, ‘Maliki and the Rest: A Crisis within a Crisis’, 20.

<sup>135</sup> Jabar, Mansour, and Khaddaj, ‘Maliki and the Rest: A Crisis within a Crisis’, 19.

<sup>136</sup> International Crisis Group, ‘Iraq and the Kurds: The High-Stakes Hydrocarbon Gambit’, ii.

<sup>137</sup> Tim Arango and Duraid Adnan, ‘For Iraq, Year Ends the Way It Began, With Guns Drawn’, *The New York Times*, 3rd December 2012.

<sup>138</sup> Perceptions of the legitimacy of the Iraqi government continued to fall in the Kurdish region, with only 30% of Kurds in 2012 believing that Iraq is a real democracy – a 38 point drop from 2011. Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, ‘A Major Shift in the Political Landscape: Graphs for the Report on the April 2012 National Survey’, 6.

been to unify the disparate Kurdish parties under one umbrella group.<sup>139</sup> The most powerful and unified Syrian Kurdish group is the Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (PYD), which is an offshoot of the militant Turkish group the PKK. The PYD continues to be heavily influenced by the PKK, and Barzani sought to enhance his access to Syrian Kurdish politics by uniting the many small Kurdish parties outside of the PYD into a Kurdish National Council (KNC).<sup>140</sup> Once the KNC had been formed, Barzani exerted a great deal of pressure over a number of months to bring the PYD and the KNC together under an umbrella body called the Supreme Kurdish Committee.<sup>141</sup> President Barzani was convinced, based on the Kurdish experience in Iraq,<sup>142</sup> that if the Syrian Kurds could unite and present their demands for regional autonomy whilst Syria was weakened by civil war, the Kurds would maximise their chances of achieving a beneficial outcome.<sup>143</sup>

The KRG has also sought to build up the capacity of the Syrian Kurds, again drawing on their experience of having become suddenly functionally independent in 1991 without the resources or experience to take over the management of the public service infrastructure that had been abandoned by Saddam Hussein.<sup>144</sup> To this end the KRG has provided training in bureaucratic management and public administration for the Syrian Kurds.<sup>145</sup> Early in the civil conflict President Assad withdrew his forces from Kurdish areas, betting that they would be least likely to join forces with the Arab rebel fighters – so Kurdish groups have already begun administering certain territories.<sup>146</sup> The KRG has been keen to establish itself as a primary influencer of Syrian Kurdish politics, and is competing with the PKK in this

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<sup>139</sup> Head of the KRG Department of Foreign Relations Falah Mustafa Bakr, 'Interview with author'. Senior Diplomat in the Kurdish Regional Government, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'.

<sup>140</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Syria's Kurds: A Struggle Within a Struggle', (Middle East Report No. 136, 2013a) ii.

<sup>141</sup> The Hewler Declaration of July 2012 mandated Syria's Kurdish parties to form a joint executive body to govern Kurdish areas. Thomas McGee, 'The Kurdish Issue in Syria and the Role of Massoud Barzani Beyond Iraq', <<https://www.aspeninstitute.it/aspenia-online/article/kurdish-issue-syria-and-role-massoud-barzani-beyond-iraq>>, accessed 21st November 2013. Ben Gittleson, 'Syria's Kurds Look to Iraqi Minority for Support', *The New York Times*, 31st January 2013.

<sup>142</sup> The long-warring PUK and KDP parties in Iraqi Kurdistan united to push for the best possible deal for the Kurdish region in the early years after the Iraq war. Because Iraq's other political parties were very weak at the time the Kurdish region was able to extract concessions that it would have never been able to achieve later on.

<sup>143</sup> International Crisis Group, 'Syria's Kurds: A Struggle Within a Struggle'.

<sup>144</sup> Sami Abdul-Rahman, 'Interview with author', (18th February 2013).

<sup>145</sup> Head of the KRG Department of Foreign Relations Falah Mustafa Bakr, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>146</sup> The PYD in particular has been collecting taxes and administering territories abandoned by the Syrian authorities. Turkish Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. International Crisis Group, 'Syria's Kurds: A Struggle Within a Struggle', ii.

regard.<sup>147</sup> In part the KRG wants to demonstrate its value as a strategic partner to Turkey,<sup>148</sup> because Turkey offers the KRG a lifeline to the outside world and a possible path to independence. Turkey has been nervous about the possible impact of Syrian Kurdish autonomy in refuelling the long-standing war between Turkey and the PKK.<sup>149</sup> In a bid to enhance its stature, the KRG has offered military training to the Syrian Kurds and has offered them strategic advice, mainly counselling them to avoid becoming entangled in the Syrian Arab civil conflict,<sup>150</sup> and to focus on securing their own territories. The KRG's intense involvement with the Syrian Kurds is expressly against the interests of the Iraqi government. Maliki's stated Syria policy is absolutely against any Iraqi interference in the Syrian conflict whatsoever, and the KRG clearly contravenes Iraq's stated neutrality. The KRG are also upstaging the unofficial Iraqi policy which has been to offer tacit support to the Assad regime. Though the KRG are advising against the Syrian Kurds joining the Free Syrian Army, they are even more strongly against the Kurds joining forces with the Assad regime – a strategy which the KRG believes would lead to revenge attacks against the Kurds by rebel forces. The Iraqi government has, however, been powerless to prevent the KRG from conducting an independent policy towards Syria as perceptions of the legitimacy of the Iraqi government in the Kurdish region have continued to plummet,<sup>151</sup> and as Iraq weakens under the weight of its own resurgent sectarian civil conflict.

The persistence of KRG independence in foreign policy making asks the larger question: to what extent does federalism in a weak state enable a federal region to conduct foreign policy independently of the central government? This thesis treats the federal Kurdish region as a sub-state actor, and hypothesises that its ability to conduct foreign policy is inversely correlated with the strength of the

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<sup>147</sup> Henri J. Barkey, 'The Syrian Crisis and the Future of Iraq', *The American Interest*, (2012).

<sup>148</sup> Head of the Kurdish Department of Foreign Affairs Falah Mustafa Bakr said it is 'important for Turkey to know Kurds in Syria won't be a threat to them.' Head of the KRG Department of Foreign Relations Falah Mustafa Bakr, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>149</sup> One Turkish diplomat claimed that two-thirds of the PKK's new recruits were Syrian, rather than Turkish. The same diplomat expressed concern about the level of autonomy that the PYD was being afforded in Syria. Turkish Diplomat, 'Interview with the author conducted on condition of anonymity'. International Crisis Group, 'Syria's Kurds: A Struggle Within a Struggle', iii.

<sup>150</sup> The Iraqi Kurds have been keen to stress that the Arabs did not come to the defence of the Syrian Kurds when they mounted an uprising against the discriminatory practices of the Assad regime in 2004. Hussein, 'Interview with author'.

<sup>151</sup> In a 2012 survey only 32% of Kurds said that Iraq was a real democracy, a 41 point drop from October 2011. Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, 'A Major Shift in the Political Landscape: Graphs for the Report on the April 2012 National Survey', 37.

central government. It appears, however, that the ability of a federal region to build its own institutional structure enables it to maintain foreign policy independence even when the central state regains its strength. This proposition will be considered in greater detail in the conclusion of the thesis.

The KRG's pursuit of Kurdish 'national interests' in the Syrian conflict is also worth noting. As part of its strategy to present itself to the international community as a *de-facto* state, the KRG has self-consciously adopted many of the trappings of statehood, including regularly referring to its policies as being driven by its assessment of the Kurdish national interest. Chief of Staff to the Kurdish Presidency Fuad Hussein, for instance, refers to the KRG's Syria policy as being grounded in 'our belief and our interest,' and highlights the fact that geographically Iraqi Kurdistan shares a border with Syria and that they have a burgeoning Syrian refugee population in their territory.<sup>152</sup> Framing Kurdish policy in this way the KRG echoes the way in which foreign policy narratives are traditionally constructed around the world, and allows the KRG to present itself to the international community as a pseudo-state that has an independent set of interests and a foreign policy based on the pursuit of those interests. By consistently emphasizing the ways in which it behaves like a state, and by highlighting the ways in which it is separate from Iraq, for example by showing KRG and Iraqi interests to be fundamentally different, the KRG continues to strengthen the legitimacy of its claim to statehood.

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<sup>152</sup> Hussein, 'Interview with author'.

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the Iraqi government's collapse of normative legitimacy amongst the Sunni community, and the ongoing waning of functional legitimacy precipitated by the resurgence of violent militancy, has re-empowered sub-state foreign policy actors. Both Sunni and Shi'ite sub-state actors are becoming increasingly involved in the Syrian civil war, and are reducing the ability of the central government to define Iraq's role in the conflict. The weakening of the Iraqi government has also rendered it more vulnerable to external influence, leading Iraq to pursue a Syria policy that undermines its national security. Meanwhile, the KRG has continued to build its foreign policy portfolio by pro-actively engaging with the Syrian Kurdish community and by seeking to influence the role of Syrian Kurds in the conflict.

The Prime Minister's decision to target senior Sunni politicians betrayed a fundamental lack of understanding of the processes by which security had been returned to post-civil war Iraq. Security and stability returned to Iraq in 2008 because parts of the Sunni community had been persuaded to buy into the political process and to deny support and safe havens to al-Qaeda elements in their localities. The priority for the Iraqi government in this immediate post-civil war state should have been to initiate a broad reconciliation and trust building programme to repair wounds between Iraq's communities and to solidify the legitimacy of its political system. Instead the Prime Minister focused on consolidating power and preventing political rivals from challenging his position. Although the decision to indict the Sunni Vice President was likely political rather than sectarian, it was seen as a deeply sectarian move by Iraq's Sunnis and prompted many to abandon their faith in the political process. As the non-violent protest movement also failed to deliver results to a Sunni community that felt largely embattled by arbitrary arrests and barred from public sector jobs, many became less and less resistant to the return of al-Qaeda militants to their midst. The resulting swell of violence across Iraq has been devastating, destroying hopes of rebuilding trust between Iraq's sects and returning the country to the precipice of civil war.

In this context, sub-state actors have once again been empowered to challenge the foreign policy authority of the Iraqi state. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has continued to strengthen as the Iraqi government fails to

exert its authority over the region, and the KRG has become embroiled in Syrian Kurdish politics as that community grapples with how to respond to the Syrian civil war. Shi'ite militants backed by Iran have fought alongside the Assad regime, whilst Iraqi al-Qaeda elements have heavily influenced the Syrian rebel movement's most effective fighting force, Jabhat al-Nusra. The Iraqi government has been powerless to prevent these actors from participating in the Syrian conflict, and has been susceptible to Iranian pressure to become more involved in the support of President Assad than is in Iraq's interests. The renewed weakness of the Iraqi state has reduced its capacity to exert control over sub-state actors, and the political vulnerability of the Prime Minister has rendered Iraqi foreign policy more susceptible to influence from external factors. As a result, Iraq is involved in the Syrian conflict in a way that further exacerbates the sectarian tensions in its own country, and makes it far more likely that Iraq will collapse into a second civil war.



## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS

A close reading of the Iraqi case demonstrates the utility of much of the conceptual framework posited at the start of this thesis. In this conclusion I start by assessing the utility of the weak state framework, and by determining the relative importance of functional relative to normative legitimacy. I then take each of my original hypotheses in turn and explore the myriad instances in which they have offered explanatory value in this study of Iraq's foreign policy making over the last ten years. On the basis of this discussion I draw some conclusions about the relative importance of each hypothesis. A discussion of the limitations of the hypotheses then follows, on the basis of which I propose a future research agenda. I also suggest that the empirical contribution made by this thesis could be expanded through the collection of additional data, particularly through the use of archives or of ethnographic fieldwork. I conclude that, although the approach I have taken is intended to provide an explanatory framework for the Iraqi case, it offers a useful starting point for future analyses of foreign policy making in other weak states.

This study of Iraqi foreign policy making has demonstrated the utility of the weak state conceptualisation when it comes to understanding domestic foreign policy making processes. By analysing each period in Iraqi politics according to its relative levels of functional and normative legitimacy, this thesis has been able to account for variation in foreign policy over time. At times when functional and normative legitimacy have been relatively high in Iraq, foreign policy has tended to be more centralized, more effective, and more closely aligned with policies that could be identified as being in the national interest. And the converse has tended to be the case when functional and normative legitimacy have been deficient. I would argue that the weak state category has proven to be much more useful than the categories used in the existing literature on foreign policy in developing states. The literatures on developing states, Third World states, and African states have proven to be remarkably applicable to the Iraqi state despite it being neither in Africa nor resource poor. It is the shared experience of legitimacy deficits that in fact bring these states together, and that accounts for the commonalties in experience across such different contexts. Moreover, categorising a state in terms of the level of legitimacy it enjoys amongst its citizenry focuses attention on the source of long-

term authority in a state, namely the consent and acquiescence of the governed, and thus enables us to get to the heart of the success or otherwise of state policy.

Based on the theorising of Seymour Martin Lipset, this thesis expected to find that normative legitimacy was marginally more important than functional legitimacy in shoring up state power. The Iraqi case study, however, has demonstrated that normative legitimacy is in fact a much more important component of state power than functional legitimacy. There has been less correlation, for instance, between the functional effectiveness of the Maliki government and support for the Prime Minister in Iraq's Southern provinces than I would have expected. Rather, support for the Prime Minister in Shi'ite dominated regions has tended to be very effectively achieved through the use of narratives that refer to the protection of Iraqi Shi'ism. Similarly, amongst many in Iraq's Sunni community, it has been their exclusion from what they have seen as pro-Shi'ite narratives of state and perceptions of pro-Shi'ite bias in state institutions that have driven their protests against the government, and that have led some to a violent rejection of the Iraqi state. This is perhaps because the use of exclusive, identity based narratives can trigger feelings of group insecurity and enhance threat perceptions. Groups that feel insecure, or even under threat from the state, are more likely to organise in armed opposition to the state than groups that feel functionally underserved by the state. The inability and unwillingness of the leaders of Iraq's major communal groups to establish any sort of consistent and common legitimising narrative for the post-2003 state has been shown to have played a crucial role in the making of Iraqi foreign policy.

## Utility and Limitations of Hypotheses

The working hypotheses that have guided this thesis have, on the whole, enabled me to make sense of an otherwise chaotic and confusing foreign policy landscape in Iraq. The focus on the proliferation of foreign policy actors has particularly allowed me to get the heart of Iraq's problems in pursuing the national interest, and in achieving its foreign policy goals. But there have also been some limitations, particularly in that the hypotheses do not help to elucidate Iraqi foreign policy whilst it was under the jurisdiction of the Coalition Provisional Authority, and that they do not allow us to account for the continued strength of the Kurdistan Regional Government in sufficient depth.

The first hypothesis that I suggested at the start of this thesis was: In a weak state, the central government is unable to monopolise authority over foreign policy, including setting of foreign policy goals and exercising effective control over interaction with foreign actors. This has clearly been the case throughout the period that I analyse in Iraq. The Iraqi state was at its weakest point in the late Ja'fari, early Maliki governments when the Iraqi civil war reached its height. The state had not only failed to contain the violence, but in some cases was an active participant in it. In this environment, the state's authority over foreign policy completely broke down and numerous sub-state actors were empowered to pursue their own, independent foreign policies. The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, and its militia wing the Badr Brigades, worked directly with Iran despite being partners in the coalition government. The Sadrists developed a strong relationship with backers in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and used some of the finance, equipment and weaponry that they had obtained to fight the Americans, against Iraqi civilians in the civil war.

The weakness of the early Maliki government's authority over foreign policy was also displayed when Sunni tribes were able to pursue close military relationships with the Americans totally independently of the central government. These tribes, many of whom had formerly supported the 'resistance' and were widely seen as opposing the government in the Iraqi civil war, were financed and armed by the US military without the permission of the Iraqi government.

The Maliki regime again lost authority over foreign policy when its increasing authoritarianism damaged its legitimacy amongst the Sunni community. The Sunni political elite reached out to Turkey for support, and gained political and possibly financial support from the foreign neighbour. As the Prime Minister's campaign against his Sunni political rivals intensified, Iraq's fragile political settlement began to collapse. Months of Sunni protests re-empowered al-Qaeda in Iraq, who mounted a vicious campaign of violence in Iraq that has sparked a wider civil conflict. The breakdown of the normative and functional legitimacy of the Iraqi state once again enabled sub-state Iraqi actors to challenge the foreign policy authority of the central government. In this instance, sub-state Iraqi actors have intervened on both sides of the Syrian conflict. Iraqi al-Qaeda affiliated militants have become influential amongst the Syrian opposition, and have had an extremely detrimental effect on the nature of that conflict. Iraqi Shi'ite militias, meanwhile,

have made a show of going into Syria to protect Shi'ite shrines, and have supported President Assad, in a move that has further exacerbated sectarian tensions in Iraq.

The Iraqi case demonstrates that, at moments when the Iraqi state is most deficient in functional and normative legitimacy, it is also able to exercise the least authority over foreign policy. Conversely, at moments when the Iraqi state has been stronger, it has been able to limit sub-state actors' foreign policy activities. In late 2008 and 2009, for instance, the Maliki government presided over the strongest incarnation of the Iraqi state since the invasion. Violence had dramatically fallen and the government was articulating a highly resonant, nationalist, non-sectarian vision for Iraq. At this stage al-Qaeda had been strategically defeated, the Shi'ite militias were very weak, and, except for the Kurdish parties which I will discuss later, relationships between Iraqi political parties and foreign powers were weaker than ever. In this context, the Maliki government was able to exercise clear authority over Iraqi foreign policy in negotiations with the US over a Status of the Forces Agreement.

The second hypothesis posited by this thesis was: In a weak state, foreign policy is driven by a primary concern for the security and authority of the foreign policy actor, which can result in foreign policy choices being made that are detrimental to the interests of the population as a whole. The Iraqi case gives us multiple examples of the Iraqi executive pursuing regime security over national security for fear of losing power to domestic competitors. When the Iraqi state was at its weakest point, and the country was consumed by violence that was in part being fuelled by Iran, the Ja'fari government pursued a favourable relationship with Iran in a bid to ensure the security of his regime in the face of opposition from domestic political rivals. As the Maliki government began to bleed legitimacy in the aftermath of the 2010 elections, in which he had lost the vote but managed to stay in power, he jettisoned his plans to extend the Status of the Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the US for fear that political opponents would exploit a renewed agreement to undermine him politically. This move contrasts with the original SOFA negotiations which took place in 2008, in which the Prime Minister was able to negotiate from a position of political strength and as such was able to pursue national security, rather than regime security, goals. In the final years covered by this study, Prime Minister Maliki's normative and functional legitimacy plummeted as internal violence once again subsumed Iraq and as Iraqi protestors clamoured for the Prime Minister to

leave office. In the face of these challenges, the Maliki regime has been unable to pursue the Iraqi national interest in Syria – which would have been a policy of strict non-intervention. Instead, the Maliki government has supported Iran’s pro-Assad policy in the hope that Iran will use its influence inside Iraq to ensure the security of the Maliki regime.

The final hypothesis explored by this study was: In a weak state, the capacity of the central government to effectively implement its foreign policy agenda is diminished. The weak state is likely to suffer from limited functional capacity, which is compounded by a legitimacy deficit which renders the state more cautious about pursuing policies that could elicit negative responses from the populace. This hypothesis has also been borne out by the Iraqi case study. The unelected Iraqi Governing Council and the government led by Prime Minister Ayad Allawi were functionally and normatively extremely weak. They had been appointed by the US, they had little control over the resources they needed to govern, and they were entirely dependent on US forces for security. These administrations were able to conduct extensive diplomacy, but when it came to making substantive foreign policy decisions, they were powerless. Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, for instance, was convinced that handing over peacekeeping operations in Iraq to a multi-national force composed of Muslim soldiers would radically reduce the tensions being caused by the presence of US troops, and would improve security and stability in the country. Without US support for the idea, however, the Prime Minister had absolutely no way of making his foreign policy plan into a reality. Although the functional and normative legitimacy of the Iraqi government had somewhat improved by the time of the Maliki government, the continued dependence on the US military undermined its ability to successfully pursue its foreign policies. For example, the Maliki government was powerless to prevent Turkey from conducting cross-border bombing raids on PKK positions in northern Iraq. The US military controlled Iraqi airspace, and decided to co-operate with the Turkish bombings, and even provided intelligence to the Turkish air force without the permission of the Iraqi central government.

Of the three hypotheses that have guided this thesis, it has been the first hypothesis that has offered the greatest explanatory value. The proliferation of foreign policy actors has the most serious effect on diminishing the capacity of the government to effectively execute its own policies, on reducing the likelihood that

foreign policy is produced that is in the best interests of the citizenry as a whole, and on further undermining the legitimacy of the central government. In the Iraqi case, the existence of multiple, competing foreign policy actors during 2005 and 2006 allowed Iran to play Iraqi actors off against each other, thereby maximising its influence in Iraqi domestic politics and bolstering its bargaining position vis-à-vis the formal government. The clear entry of Iranian figures into Iraqi politics at the time, and particularly their role in fuelling the militias during the civil war, severely diminished the legitimacy of the Iraqi government in the eyes of much of the citizenry and further compromised its ability to gain control over the state's foreign policy. The third hypothesis, which deals with the ability of the government to effectively pursue its own policies, has been somewhat less useful than anticipated because of the unusual operational effectiveness of the Iraqi foreign ministry. Led throughout this entire period by the capable and well-respected Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari, the Foreign Ministry has been able to maintain a modicum of functional effectiveness almost regardless of the domestic political situation in Iraq. Though the Foreign Ministry has been relatively effective when it comes to day-to-day foreign policy administration, the most important foreign policy issues have tended to come under the purview of the executive, and the ability of the executive to effectively achieve its foreign policies has been compromised at times when the government has faced a legitimacy deficit – so the hypothesis maintains some explanatory value. The extent to which state foreign policy sufficiently correlates with the national interest is extremely difficult to untangle, because it requires a fairly rigid understanding of what actions would be in the national interest when of course there are many possible interpretations of what the national interest is. I have tended to focus in this study, therefore, on instances where the foreign policy pursued has clearly been detrimental to the Iraqi state, and in this regard the hypothesis has been somewhat useful.

By using these working hypotheses to guide the parameters of this thesis, I believe I have been better able to understand Iraqi foreign policy making in the relevant period. The use of the 'weak state' analytical construct has enabled me to focus on the fundamentals of legitimacy and state authority, and has made sense of what would otherwise seem to be an extremely chaotic Iraqi foreign policy scene. The tools offered by my conceptual framework have usefully delineated the correlation between state weakness, the multiplicity of foreign policy actors, and the

capacity of the state to execute foreign policy. And my findings suggest that state weakness reduces the authority of the central government over foreign policy, it forces regime security considerations to take the fore in foreign policy decision making, and it reduces the capacity of the government to successfully pursue its policies. Although this thesis has deployed a methodology that neither seeks nor claims the generalisability of its results, I would nonetheless venture that the findings of this study suggest that the weak state prism is a useful way of analysing domestic foreign policy making in weak states, and that it is an improvement over the existing tools offered by the strong-state centric foreign policy analysis literature.

The Iraqi case study has also thrown up anomalies, suggesting that some qualifications to my stated conceptual framework would be useful. For the first year after the invasion Iraq was effectively an occupied state, in that the administrative and military capacity of the state was entirely controlled by a foreign power. The perception that Iraq was an extension of the US fuelled hostility towards Iraq from powers that felt threatened by the US. But US foreign policy making towards the wider region was not constrained by the domestic weakness of the Iraqi state. The US had access to another constituency, the American general public, with whom it could achieve the functional and normative legitimacy required to conduct effective foreign policy. The result was that Iraq was punished for US foreign policies that were not empowered by, and could not be disempowered by, Iraqi state strength or weakness. I conclude, therefore, that the weak state framework is not the best way to analyse the foreign policy behaviour of occupied states.

The Kurdish region had achieved a level of independence from the Iraqi government back in 1991, after the establishment of a no-fly zone in Northern Iraq. The region thus had a major head-start as compared with the rest of the Iraqi state. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) continued to establish its foreign policy independence in the aftermath of the US invasion, whilst the Iraqi state was at its weakest, and ever since then the KRG's ability to conduct foreign policy independently of the Iraqi state has progressively increased, and has not been diminished in periods of greater Iraqi state strength. In 2008 the KRG's relationship with Turkey flourished, with political and economic co-operation reaching new heights, despite the fact that in 2008 and 2009 the central Iraqi government was at its strongest point since the invasion. Although Turkey had also reached out to the Iraqi

government, when dissatisfaction was expressed about the extent of Turkish co-operation with the KRG, Turkey effectively chose the KRG over the Iraqi government. Similarly, in the last few years the KRG has been able to conclude a number of production sharing agreements with super-major oil companies despite the legal and diplomatic objections raised by the Iraqi government. Kurdish foreign policy has become an integrated and institutionalised part of the Kurdish Regional Government, and appears unmoved by changes in the rest of Iraq. The KRG's formulation of a mature, independent, Kurdish-focused foreign policy towards Syria is just the latest in a series of foreign policies that demonstrate that the KRG is acting more like a state than a sub-state foreign policy actor. The KRG took advantage of Iraqi state weakness to erect an elaborate foreign policy structure including a Department for Foreign Affairs and a series of permanent, diplomatic representations in strategic locations across the world. These structures have institutionalised and normalized Kurdish foreign policy making and have made it very difficult to reverse. The KRG's foreign policy power is also bolstered by the domestic strength of its governing institutions, and by the durability of that strength. Although there have been some political upheavals in the KRG such as the success of the oppositional Goran party and civil society criticisms of KRG governance, the KRG is largely functionally and normatively legitimate. Its normative legitimacy in particular is extremely strong, drawing on a widely shared Kurdish ethnic identity that evokes a mythology surrounding the long struggle for Kurdish freedom. Functionally, the KRG has been extremely successful in delivering security to the Kurdish population, despite the presence of the most appalling violence in neighbouring areas under Iraqi governmental control. As a result of its underlying strength, the KRG has proven to be a very attractive partner to foreign powers and to international commerce, much more so than the central Iraqi government which has demonstrably failed to resolve the underlying political and ethnic conflicts that constantly threaten its undoing.

At one level it is clear that the post-war Iraqi government, even at its strongest, could not match the normative and functional legitimacy achieved by the KRG and therefore could not dominate KRG policy-making. Beyond this explanation, however, it is possible that there is a particular dynamic at play when a federal region in a weak state institutionalises its ability to challenge the foreign policy authority of the central government. This is a fascinating dynamic that would



have important implications for the long-running debate about the utility of federalism as a conflict-management structure in the developing world. The literature on federalism has traditionally focused on assessing its ‘capacity to represent and accommodate territorially based ethnic, cultural, and linguistic difference in divided societies.’<sup>1</sup> A more recent strand in the literature, known as ‘new institutionalism,’ has focused its research agenda more specifically on the efficacy of different institutional structures that divide power between such groups. But the literature has somewhat neglected the impact that federalist structures have on the policy making capacity of the central state, particularly in a weak state setting. The literature on federalism in the developing world has tended to focus on the way in which federalism has interacted with conflict in African countries such as Nigeria and Ethiopia.<sup>2</sup> But questions remain about the extent to which the adoption of federalist structures inhibit the growth of functional capacity in the central government, and I have yet to come across any work that discusses how federal structures limit the ability of a weak state’s executive to execute foreign policy. There is a nascent literature on foreign policy making in federal regions in strong states, such as Scotland, Flanders, Quebec and Catalonia,<sup>3</sup> which raises some important questions around the impact of federalism on the long term cohesion of the state. I would suggest that there is a real opportunity here for a researcher to launch a new research agenda that builds on the recent investigation of foreign policy making in the federal regions of developed states and asks how federalism affects foreign policy making in weak states. Such a research agenda could grapple with some of the core questions in the federalist literature by deploying new evidence and by addressing these questions from a different angle. It could ask how

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<sup>1</sup> Jan Erk, 'Federalism and Its Discontents: The Limits of New Institutionalism', *The Social and Political Foundations of Constitutions*, (2012).

<sup>2</sup> See David Turton (ed.), *Ethnic Federalism: The Ethiopian Experience in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: James Currey Ltd, 2006). Aaron Tesfaye, *Political Power and Ethnic Federalism: The Struggle for Democracy in Ethiopia* (Maryland: University Press of America, 2002). John Mukum Mbaku, Pita Ogaba Agbese, and Mwangi S. Kimeyni (eds.), *Ethnicity and Governance in the Third World* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001). Asnake Kefale, *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Ethiopia* (Oxford: Routledge, 2013). Ebere Onwudiwe and Rotimi. T Suberu (eds.), *Nigerian Federalism in Crisis* (Ibadan: Programme on Ethnic and Federal Studies, 2005). Lovise Aalen, *The Politics of Ethnicity in Ethiopia: Actors, Power and Mobilisation under Ethnic Federalism* (Boston: Brill, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> See Ferran Requejo (ed.), *Foreign Policy of Constituent Units at the Beginning of the 21st Century* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, Institut d'Estudis Atonòmics, 2010). David Crieckemans, 'Foreign Policy and Diplomacy of the Belgian Regions: Flanders and Wallonia', (Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2010). Michael Keating, *Nations Against the State: The New Politics of Nationalism in Quebec, Catalonia and Scotland* (Basingstoke: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

federal structures impact the foreign policy capacity of the central state; how the production of competing foreign policies between the region and the central government affect the ability of either to effectively pursue their interests; and how the process of engaging in foreign policy activity affects cohesion between the region and the centre. Based on my understanding of the KRG, I would hypothesise that federal structures in weak states institutionalise challenges to the foreign policy authority of the central government. This dispersion of foreign policy authority renders the state more vulnerable to external intervention and reduces the ability of the state to successfully pursue its national interest. The dispute over foreign policy authority, and increased intervention from foreign powers, is likely to result in conflict between the central government and the federal region. Its fostering of foreign policy competition, therefore, means that federal structures in a weak state act as a centrifugal force that are likely to result in internal conflict. But it is for future researchers to explore this hypothesis further.

The constructivist methodology that was deployed by this thesis offered a suitable approach to the qualitative data that has formed the basis of this study. It has allowed me to appreciate the multiple narratives about contemporary Iraqi politics that are at the heart of its current state of political crisis, and has enabled me to honestly and authentically reflect Iraqi interpretations of events throughout the course of this thesis. Future studies on Iraqi foreign policy could benefit from the use of a wider range of data than was available to me in this study. Once archives related to this time period are declassified in Iraq and in those countries with which Iraq has had important bilateral relations, a researcher could add a great deal more detail and depth to the analysis offered here. A more comprehensive study of the Iraqi foreign ministry itself would also make for a fascinating addition to this field, particularly if an ethnography of the ministry could be conducted at a time when Iraq is perhaps a little less violent than it is today. Although, as has been seen, the Foreign Ministry is only one of many potential loci of foreign policy production.

This thesis has made a significant contribution to the empirical literature both on domestic Iraqi politics and on Iraqi foreign policy since the invasion of Iraq. It has systematised the observations made in the literature on the foreign policies of developing states, and transformed them into a set of working hypotheses. Through a close reading of the Iraqi case, made possible by dozens of elite interviews conducted as part of this research, I have shown that, with a few qualifications, my

hypotheses are borne out by this case, and have suggested a new prism through which weak state foreign policy making can be better understood.

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## SELECTED LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Supervisors have been provided with confidential information identifying anonymous interview subjects for verification purposes.

Abbawi, Labeed, Deputy Iraqi Foreign Minister, 21<sup>st</sup> February 2013, London.

Abdul Jaber, Rafea, Sadrist Politician, 1<sup>st</sup> March 2013, Dead Sea, Jordan.

Abdul Rahman, Bayan Sami, Head of KRG Representation to UK, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2013, London.

Adviser to Iraqiya, January 2013.

Allawi, Ayad, Former Iraqi Prime Minister, Leader of Iraqiya, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2013, London.

American Official, February 2013, Washington DC.

Amin, Mudhaffar, Former Ba'athist Ambassador to United Kingdom, 31<sup>st</sup> October 2011, Amman.

Azawi, Kais al-, Iraqi Representative to the Arab League, 6<sup>th</sup> June 2013, Cairo.

Bakhtiar, Mala, Chief of the PUK Polit-Bureau Executive, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2013, Suleymaniyah.

Bakr, Falah Mustafa, Interview at Department of Foreign Relations, 5<sup>th</sup> March 2013, Erbil.

Bayati, Hamid al-, Iraqi Representative to the UN, 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013, New York.

Darbandi, Hamid, President Barzani's Ambassador to the *Syrian* Opposition, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2013, Erbil.

Diplomat at the Iraqi Embassy in Jordan, November 2011, Amman.

Faisal, Prince Turki al-, Former Director Saudi Intelligence Agency, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2013, Cambridge MA.

Fattah, Hala, Iraqi Historian, 15<sup>th</sup> November 2011, Amman.

Former American Diplomat, February 2013, Washington DC.

Former Diplomat at the Iraqi Representation to UN, March 2013

Former Iraqi Political Attaché, January 2013.

Former Official in the Office of the KRG Prime Minister, March 2013, Erbil.

Former Senior Adviser to Obama Administration, February 2013.

Former Senior Adviser to Prime Minister Ja'fari, February 2013.

Former Senior American Official, January 2013.

Former Senior Diplomat in the Kurdish Regional Government, March 2013, Erbil.

Former Senior Iraq Director in US Government, January 2013, Washington DC.

Former Senior Iraqi Diplomat, January 2013, (a).

Former Senior Iraqi Diplomat, January 2013, (b).

Hadi Abbas, Jawad, Iraqi Ambassador to Jordan, Amman, 24<sup>th</sup> November 2011, Amman.

Halgurd Mala, Hamid, Director of the Communications Directorate at the Ministry of the Peshmerga, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2013, Erbil.

Hassan, Naufel al-, Iraqi Commercial Attaché to the US, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2013, Washington DC.

Hussainy, Mohammed. Director of the Identity Center, 31<sup>st</sup> October 2011, Amman.

Hussein, Fuad, Chief of Staff of the Presidency, 7<sup>th</sup> March 2013, Erbil.

International Iraqi Businessman and Former Iraqiya Financier, March 2013, Amman.

Iraq Analyst in US Administration, February 2013, Washington DC.

Iraqi Diplomat, June 2013.

Iraqi Sunni Politician, February 2013, Amman.

Jabori, Abdulla al-, Iraqi Politician, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2013, Amman.

KRG Foreign Policy Adviser, March 2013, Erbil.

Kubaisi, Yayha al-, Iraqi Commentator, 24<sup>th</sup> October 2011, Amman.

Makiya, Kanan, Iraqi Academic and Commentator, 19<sup>th</sup> January 2013, Cambridge.

Member of Iraqi Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, March 2013.

Muharam, Herish, Head of the Board of Investment of the Kurdistan Region, 10<sup>th</sup> March 2013, Erbil.

Mustafa, Chia Nawshirwan. Son of Goran Leader, 14<sup>th</sup> March 2013, Suleymaniyah.

PUK Member and Journalist, March 2013, Erbil.

PUK Official, March 2013, Suleymaniyah.

Sadeq, Mohammed. Iraqi Cultural Attaché to Jordan, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2011, Amman.

Said, Haydar. Iraqi Commentator, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2011, Amman.

Salih, Barham, Former Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, 13<sup>th</sup> March 2013, Suleymaniyah.

Selcen, Aydin, Turkish Consul General, 4<sup>th</sup> March 2013, Erbil.

Senior Adviser to PUK, February 2013.

Senior British Diplomat, June 2013, London.

Senior Da'wah Party Member and Former Adviser to Prime Minister Maliki, March 2013.

Senior Financier of Iraqiya, November 2011, Amman.

Senior Iraqi Diplomat, January 2013.

Senior Member of Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, January 2013.

Senior Member of Prime Minister Maliki's Government, February 2013.

Senior Official at the Jordanian Foreign Ministry, November 2011, Amman.

Senior Turkish Diplomat, February 2013.

Sheikh, Safa al-, Deputy Director of the Iraqi National Security Council, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2013, London.

Talabany, Suhad, Identity Center, 15<sup>th</sup> November 2012, Amman.

Trita Parsi, Iran Commentator, 28<sup>th</sup> January 2013, Washington DC.

Turkish Diplomat, February 2013.

Turkish Diplomat, June 2013.

U.S. Government Official, February 2013, Washington DC.

US Military Officer, October 2013, Cambridge MA.

US Official, February 2013, Washington DC.

van Wilgenburg, Wladimir, Journalist, 5<sup>th</sup> March 2013, Erbil.

Windawi, Mouayad al-, Iraqi Academic, 12<sup>th</sup> November 2011, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2011 and 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2013, Amman.

Xulum, Kani, Kurdish Activist, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013, Washington DC.

Zebari, Hoshyar, Iraqi Foreign Minister, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2013, Suleymaniyah.

Zubaydi, Sadoun al-, Former Personal Translator to Saddam Hussein, Former Ambassador, 26<sup>th</sup> September 2011, 25<sup>th</sup> October 2011 and 28<sup>th</sup> February 2013, Amman.