The War in Iraq and the Broader Middle East

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The 2003 Iraq war and the “democracy-building” effort in its wake have initiated and/or accelerated significant changes among Iraq’s immediate neighbours. Iraq’s ethnic and religious characteristics are the basis of a web of special relationships not only within the country, but in the larger region as well, reflecting the neighbours’ interests in Iraq, posing a threat and providing a possibility for interventions into Iraq’s domestic affairs. For the Arab world and Iraq’s Arab neighbours, the Arab character of Iraq is of a special significance, with cross-border terrorism emerging as a special new type of threat. Iran’s Iraq-policy is guided by the imperative of retaining its own sovereignty, internal and external stability on the one hand, and achieving the acknowledgement of its regional power status on the other. The policy of the Republic of Turkey towards Iraq has been characterized by a strategy of minimizing risks, while one—if not the most important—threat to Turkey has been posed by the Kurdish PKK (Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan) operating from the Iraqi border regions.

Every neighbour agrees that from the point of view of regional stability Iraq’s integrity is of primary importance. From this perspective Iraq’s federal structure itself is perceived as a threat—an intermediary stage on the road to disintegration. While every neighbour agrees that they would not want to see a (too) strong Iraq, a (far too) weakened Iraq is also a threat. The level and extent of their interference in Iraq is defined by their aims and capabilities, which are changing continuously according to the events of this multi-actor game. In this regional subsystem of global international relations, therefore, the war in Iraq is far from being over.

The policies and actions of Iraq’s neighbours greatly influence its stability and prosperity. No country in the region wants a chaotic Iraq. Yet, Iraq’s neighbours are doing little to help it, and some are undercutting its stability. Iraqis complain that neighbours are meddling in their affairs. When asked which of Iraq’s neighbours are intervening in Iraq, one senior Iraqi official replied, “all of them”.

The present paper looks at the regional implications of the war in Iraq, including the interests of Iraq’s neighbours, their relationship to and activities concerning Iraq, looking to answer the question raised by the project “Has the War Ended?”

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2 The Hungarian Institute of International Affairs started a project on the implications of the Iraq war. Its basic assumption was that from the point of view of the international order the war had already ended. The findings of the project were published—in Hungarian—in the quarterly of the Institute, Külsőyi Szemle 6 (2007) 2–3.
Introduction

In the past decades the Middle and the Near East have undergone profound changes. The Persian (Arab) Gulf region has received enhanced attention following the entry into office of the George W. Bush administration, which the events of 11 September 2001 could only momentarily divert. In fact, soon they were made into one of the main reasons to start the war against Iraq by the “Coalition of the Willing”. In the framework of the War on Terror, President Bush announced the Greater Middle East Initiative, the most important element of which was the democratization of the Middle East. In this process, the American administration was convinced, the Iraqi “domino” would play an outstanding role. Although the war in Iraq did send waves across the region, its events also brought processes and transformations long on-going in the region into the limelight—giving the impression that these were the direct results of the Iraq war. Simultaneously, the events in Iraq, which themselves fit into the series of such transformations, have initiated new processes creating a new strategic environment.

In the course of the decades preceding the Iraq war, with the exception of the Islamic revolution in Iran, no regime change occurred, which changed the identity of a state and its relations to the others so dramatically. However, on the borders of the region—under the influence of external forces—several other events took place, which had a decisive impact on statehood and interstate relations. As a consequence of the dissolution of the Soviet Union new states came into being on the northern and north-eastern borders of the region, which—in this form, within their present borders—have never enjoyed independent statehood. They do, however, share a long historic memory and a civilizational past with the region. The Middle East expanded in the sense that with the termination of Cold War dividing lines, previous relationships were re-introduced and gained legitimacy.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union had a decisive impact on the relations within the region, as well. While formerly the “Socialist” Arab states (Iraq, Syria, Algeria) could always depend on the political, moral, financial and military support of the Soviet Union at home as well as in international fora, it was not only this support that evaporated, but the ideological source and background providing the basis of such regimes did, as well. In the new world order the superpowers joined forces in the resolution and management of the conflicts of the region, like in the 1991 Gulf War and in October 1991, when they launched the Arab–Israeli peace process in Madrid under joint supervision.

In the post-Cold War international order identity, the ethnic, religious and cultural aspects of international relations have gained significance, filling in the space formerly

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3 The Greater Middle East Initiative aims at terminating the roots of terrorism in the region expanding from Morocco to Indonesia by supporting the democratization of the regional states. The Arab countries consider the initiative a threat, Iran takes it as an effort at regime change, while Turkey supports it as a programme promoting Turkish interests.

4 After the break-up of the Soviet Union Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan raced for influence in Central Asia on the basis of ethnic or religious affiliation. By now it has become clear that although these influences do have an impact, what’s more, the United States has appeared in the region, the biggest defining factor remained Russian influence.
taken by ideologies. This has a special relevance in the Middle East—taken in the traditional, classical sense\(^5\)—, where Arab, Iranian and Turkish/Turkic ethnic groups meet and intermingle and which lies on the fault-lines between Sunni and Shiite Islam.

Tied up with the outside effects, a kind of re-arrangement started in the region, the main reason of which was not the Cold War \textit{per se}, but the changes in the conflict that has ruled the region in the past 60 years. The 1978 Camp David negotiations led to a peace agreement between Egypt and Israel, which resulted in the isolation of Egypt by the other Arab states—a move symbolically manifest in the moving of the seat of the Arab League from Cairo to Tunis. Although the Arab world had never been a unified monolithic structure and had been characterized by several fault-lines and conflicts, Arab unity has always been an obligatory element on the political agenda, the direct consequence of which was the unified Arab stance against Israel. With the Egyptian–Israeli peace agreement, however, the virtual unity of the Arab world seemed to deteriorate, giving way to an open competition for the leading role.

The internal processes and those forced upon the region from the outside led to the total re-arrangement of regional balances, to the transformation of the traditional actors, as well as to direct interference by alien great powers. Beside the regional actors—the Arab world, Israel, Turkey and Iran—the military presence of the “international coalition”, first and foremost the United States and to a lesser extent Great Britain, exercised a further significant impact on the regional balance of power. The Arab world has ceased to exist as a political unit in its former sense. In spite of the fact that in the past years, increasingly upon Saudi initiative, the Arab states have adopted a unified position in the most important questions (the Saudi peace plan). Closely connected to this development, other regional states—Iran, Israel and Turkey—“entered the Arab regional order”.\(^6\) Located on the periphery of the Arab world, they are transforming into the power centres defining the regional balance, due to or in spite of their relations to the United States. Turkey, a NATO ally is finding itself in conflict with the United States increasingly frequently over Iraq. Israel, “the strategic partner of the United States” in the region carries no role in the war in Iraq. Iran, openly hostile to the United States, cannot be left out of any Iraqi arrangement.

While it would be a mistake to say that the only and exclusive reason of each and every change within the region was the war in Iraq, at the moment the Iraqi developments constitute one of the most important formative elements of the global and regional political relations.

\(^5\) Although the Middle East can be defined geographically in more than one way, in the perception of the classical—European—oriental studies one of its most general understandings is the territory stretching from Egypt to Iran, incorporating the central territories of the Arab, Persian and Turkish sub-civilizations.

Iraq in the Region

Iraq has been one of the key actors in the modern Middle East and as such, has influenced regional processes as well as the regional balance of power. Its strategic location has made Iraq unavoidable, sometimes even above the regional context. Iraq is also one of the most controversial states of the region—and not only because of the Baath [Ba‘ath] Party having ruled the country for decades or because of Saddam Hussein. Its uniqueness emanates from its ancient heritage and its being a modern state, its Socialist Arab structure and its oil wealth, its practically unquestioned support by the international community and its being outlawed and sanctioned by the same. Iraq incorporates all the institutions, trends and developments that characterize the 20th century Middle East: family and tribal relations, group solidarity, modernization and nation-state, revolutionary radicalism, Sunni and Shiite contradictions, Arab nationalism and Socialism, etc.

Over and above its geographic—strategic position, Iraq is located at the cross-point of the three ethnic groups defining the Middle East historically and culturally (Arabic, Persian/Iranian, Turkish/Turkic) and along the fault-line between Sunni and Shiite Islam, which *sui generis* bears the options of coexistence and confrontation among these ethnic and religious communities. There are three big ethnic groups living in Iraq (Arabs, Kurds and Turkomans), the presence of which supposes an ethnicity-based, special relationship with the neighbouring states, reflecting their interests in Iraqi affairs. These are further influenced by religious, mostly Sunni and Shiite, differences. Each community has family and tribal relations across the borders. And the opening of the Iraqi borders has made religious visits (e.g. pilgrimage to the Shiite holy shrines) and contacts among religious communities divided for long, possible. In this context, the specific impact of the official Iranian propaganda—spreading the state ideology and *raison d’être* of the Islamic Republic—cannot be disregarded.

Present day Iraq was “constructed” following the First World War on the remnants of the Ottoman Turkish Empire out of three *vilayets* (administrative units) under British control. In the previous centuries, however, the northern, mostly Kurdish (Mosul), the central, mostly Sunni Arab (Baghdad) and the southern, mostly Shiite Arab populated *vilayets* had had no sense of belonging or joint development apart from the framework provided by the Ottoman Turkish Empire. Under foreign interference, however, new boundaries were drawn which provided a framework pointing towards a “nation state” within which the three administrative units and their inhabitants experienced a kind of common development. The Arab rhetoric, but especially the Iraqi national ideology and the propaganda of the Baath Party, which came into power in 1968, could only artificially hide the different identities of the state-forming communities, and tried to create some kind of unity

7 Ethnically and linguistically the Kurds belong to the Iranian peoples. They do not have a state of their own, but the fact that they mostly live in one compact bloc reaching over boundaries provide them specific political opportunities. The Turkomans living mostly in and around Kirkuk (see map 2) can rely on the support of Turkey. The Arabs have 21 states and their organization, the Arab League to support them.
and common identity on a territorial basis with temporary success. Over and above party propaganda, common Iraqi identity was strengthened by two developments, one forced and one spontaneous: as the result of the forced re-settlement of certain groups of the Iraqi society, mostly Kurds, Turkomans and Shiites, the population became more mixed than before. Simultaneously, urbanization, one of the most characteristic global processes in the 20th century, helped further dissolve previous—relative—homogeneity. From the point of view of Iraq’s neighbours these movements of the population mean that the place of their interference may be away from the territories considered to make up their traditional sphere of interest. Further, since in the new Iraqi state administration the big ethnic and/or religious groups are represented according to their share in the population, a new environment was created that was drastically different from the traditional one. While it provided an opportunity for minorities like the Iraqi Turkmans or the Kurds to articulate their local demands, it opened up new channels of possible interference by outside and/or neighbouring powers.

When discussing the war in Iraq, therefore, the whole complex regional context should be analyzed, elaborating on the relations of the region itself on the one hand, and on the relations of the three dominant Iraqi communities and their kin states on the other.

The Arab World

When considering the situation in Iraq, the Arab world, and the interests and relations of the Arab countries to Iraq can be analyzed on two levels: from the point of view of the Arab world as such (represented generally by that of the Arab League), and from the point of view of Iraq’s Arab neighbours (Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait).

While the unity of the Arab world in the “virtual political sphere” (in the political field, where the structures, institutions, values and norms of the state imported by the West appear) is usually questioned, in the “real political sphere” (in the political field, where the values and norms of the traditional Arab political structures are prevailing and where the questions of power are determined) the Arab world appears as reality. This duality characterizes the “forced modernization” that the Arabs have experienced since the beginning of European colonization and it is present in the political rhetoric as well (“Arab homeland”, “Arab unity” and “Arab citizen”). It is embodied in the Arab League, which in the legal sense, in the virtual sphere is an alliance of states, but which in the real sphere is based on a pre-judicial, family–tribal–ethnic community making up Arabic ethnicity.9

8 László Tüske, Utópia a huszadik századi iszlámban [Utopia in 20th Century Islam], manuscript, pp. 10–11.
9 Arab ethnicity had a special role long before the advent of Islam: closely connected to genealogy, it meant nobility and a strict desert moral code.
The Arab League,\textsuperscript{10} which is often called the Arabic United Nations, involves all 22 Arab states, including the state \textit{in nascendi} of Palestine. The main criterion of membership—as it is reflected in the name—is Arab ethnicity, regardless of the ratio of Arab inhabitants or of other ethnic groups that might live there. The war in Iraq and its consequences, however, reveal a so far invisible or overlooked dimension of the Arab League, namely its Sunni Arab character. The modern history of the Arab states so far has not been claimed to be characterized by Sunni Islam\textsuperscript{11} (except for Saudi Arabia, the \textit{raison d’être} of which is the Wahhabi branch of Sunni Islam), even if there are Arab states with sizeable Shiite communities, or even if a civil war had evolved among the different Muslim communities (e.g. the war in Lebanon). What’s more, the pan-Arab idea in some Arab states, like Egypt, Iraq and Syria, was joined with a secular worldview.

The building of the new Iraq exposed Arab unity and the Arab League to new challenges: in the Iraq of pan-Arabism and Arab renaissance not only the foreign minister (Hoshyar Zebari), but also the President (Jalal Talabani) are Kurds; reference to the Arab character of the state was omitted from the constitution;\textsuperscript{12} and the leading Sunni Arab elites have been forced into the background. The debate over the Arab character of Iraq has been going on since 2003. While the Arab League demanded several times that the Iraqi constitution declare that Iraq is an Arab and Muslim country, other Arab constitutions do not necessarily include a reference to the Arab character.\textsuperscript{13} When in October 2005 Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani and Amr Moussa, the Secretary General of the Arab League met, the “Arab dimension” of Iraq was on the agenda. (Ayatollah Sistani himself is not Arab, but is of Iranian origin, and has no Iraqi citizenship.)\textsuperscript{14}

Non-Arab minorities in Iraq, especially the Kurds who are now in government position, therefore, look to the Arab League with suspicion since—in their perception—Iraq is a multi-ethnic state. (It should be noted that the Baathist leadership—in spite of all its Arab nationalism—in spite of all its Arab nationalism—on the basis of Iraqi realities wanted to tie identity to territory, and not to ethnicity.)

The majority of the Arab states opposed the war in Iraq: the declaration of the Arab League following the October 2001 war against Afghanistan warned that the Arab states would not tolerate an attack against any Arab state.\textsuperscript{15} Nevertheless, starting the war in

\textsuperscript{10} The Arab League was initiated by the British in 1945.
\textsuperscript{11} While in the history of Islam with the exception of some temporary periods and places mostly Sunnis were in power and in overwhelming numbers, political movements, initiatives and groupings were mostly led by Sunni Muslims. The most outstanding counter-example is Iran, where Shiite Islam has been the official religion of the state since 1501. It should be noted that Shiites usually make up for some 10\% of the whole Muslim community.
\textsuperscript{12} The constitution only says that “Iraq is a multiethnic, multi-religious and multi-sect country. It is part of the Islamic world and its Arab people are part of the Arab nation.” Article 3 of the Iraqi constitution, \url{http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Iraq}.
\textsuperscript{13} www.cfr.org/publication/9061/arab_league_and_iraq.html.
\textsuperscript{14} “We examined Iraq’s Arab dimension, its unity and all its negative aspects.” \url{www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=14831}.
\textsuperscript{15} “Launching strikes against any Arab country under any pretence would lead to severe complications,” said Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa, in an interview to the Egyptian radio on 10 October 2001. \url{http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1589750.stm}. “Attack any Arab country, and you’ll lose our support for the war on terrorism. The international coalition will unravel.” 11 December 2001, \url{http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/1698345.stm}.  

\textit{Autumn 2007} 9
Iraq by the “Coalition of the Willing” was supported by Kuwait, Jordan, Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, even if openly they did endorse the war. In spite of this, Arab governments received the war and the regime change in Iraq nervously. While they were generally positive about the disappearance of the aggressive and threatening regime, which was militarily much stronger than the fellow Arab states, the regime change initiated from the outside posed a threat. Although they did not believe that it would be in the interest of the United States to introduce such a change in their respective countries, but they could never be sure as they were also disappointed in their opinion that the United States would not attack Iraq without a clear UN Security Council mandate and without much bigger international support. Fast stabilization in Iraq would have been beneficial to the Arab governments since while most Arab countries were to a certain extent dependent on the United States, they could not disregard their public opinion, which was unified in opposing the American intervention. Public reaction to regime change and the huge sympathy surrounding the sufferings of the Iraqi population had also to be taken into account. (The impact of the pre-2003 Iraqi events on the general Arab public opinion, shared by many in the elites, should not be underrated: the sanctions following the 1991 Gulf War, which divided the Arab societies deeply, brought not only public opinion, but also the media and a part of the political elites to support Iraq. Sympathy with the Iraqi people resulted in a cautious rapprochement and Iraq was practically readmitted into the Arab community, even if Kuwait and Saudi Arabia did not share this general feeling.)

In the course of the American military missions aimed at improving the increasingly chaotic security situation, innumerable Iraqi civilians died and/or were exposed to humiliation. The myth of US invincibility was refuted, and the moral justification of the American actions was undermined. Arab public opinion, including the political elites’, was following the American policy in the region and in Iraq with suspicion and distrust, especially when it was disclosed that the grounds on which the war had been started were fictitious.

The slogan of democratization—apart from some opposition intellectuals—has not impressed Arab public opinion, since on the grounds of the situation in Iraq and the increasing danger of terrorism, Arab governments have been further limiting political
freedoms as, e.g. the freedom of expression. The Arab public has become disenchanted with democratization, human rights, etc., and considers these the neo-colonial tools of American intervention.

Preceding 2003 the “strong” Iraq, following 2003 the “weak” Iraq has posed a serious security threat for the Arab states, raising several political and security problems in which a joint opinion should be elaborated and the participation of all should be secured. The fate of the Iraqi Sunnis has been a common concern. In the new Iraqi structure elaborated under the guidance of the United States Sunnis are represented according to their ratio (approx. 20% of the population), and thus constitute a minority in a land, where for centuries they have been the ruling elite. Moreover—even if involuntarily—they have been identified with the Saddam regime by the foreign media and political circles, and have, therefore, received a kind of “collective guilt” stamp. A further concern is posed by the Iraqi Shiites, because, on the one hand, several radical movements of the Iraqi Shiites hold government positions. On the other hand, the political role and freedom of expression of the Shiites pose domestic security threats to the Arab countries with Shiite minorities. A further element of the threat is the growing Iranian influence in the region and in Iraq, the extent and depth of which can only be guessed at. This—together with the political role of the Kurds—has raised the question of the territorial integrity of Iraq, especially after the constitution deciding on the federal structure was passed. Last, but not least, the Arab states cannot disregard the effects of the Palestinian conflict. It is widely known that even before the war in Iraq the Arab countries voiced the opinion that first the Palestinian–Israeli conflict should be settled. But the Bush administration was convinced that the democratization of Iraq would promote the Palestinian–Israeli peace: it would have a domino effect in the whole of the region, and by terminating the Iraqi regime the Palestinians would be rid of one of their main supporters and would, therefore, be forced to act. Arab opinion, on the other hand, was united in that as long as the Palestinian conflict was not settled, it made no sense to start the settlement of another conflict.

21 It must be noted that following the Gulf War Iraq was not strong any more, in spite of the fact that it had a significant number of troops. But their modernization was not possible under the sanctions, which were also hard on the economy.

22 In the original American plans elections were to be held on the US model of conventions. The one man–one vote was demanded by Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, and the Americans finally gave in.

23 The United States would support the Arab countries to act jointly against the Iranian threat and to curb Iranian intervention in Iraq. The eight best allies of the US—on the initiation of the US Secretary of State—made up an informal group to discuss regional issues, but the Arabs are reluctant to participate fearing to appear as members of an anti-Iranian coalition. Glenn Klessner, “Arab Group Signals Iran to Avoid Meddling in Iraq,” The Washington Post, 17 January 2007, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/16/AR2007011600406.html.

24 According to opinion polls an overwhelming majority of Arabs think that the war by the United States in Iraq will have a negative impact on the settlement of the Arab–Israeli conflict. Arab Public Opinion on the United States and Iraq, http://www.brook.edu/press/review/summer2003/telhami.htm.

25 See, e.g. the American initiative trying to bring its Middle Eastern allies, threatened by the Iranian nuclear programme, into an anti-Iranian bloc. The initiative came at the time when the Saudi peace plan re-appeared. However, until Israel comes to a settlement with the Palestinians and the Arabs, it is not likely that any Arab state would be ready to form an alliance with Israel, whatever the common concern may be.
In spite of their preferences, the Arab states could not but accept the war and regime change in Iraq. The increasing violence and civil war have come to threaten the security of the neighbouring Arab states. Iraqi settlement and avoiding of the escalation of the civil war are general Arab interests, yet the Arab states and/or the Arab League undertake only a limited role in the consolidation and rebuilding of Iraq. Reasons for this include the position of the Iraqi government on the one hand, which did not receive every offer favourably, and in the fear, on the other, that they would appear as the collaborators of the United States. The latter became especially important after the completion of large-scale military operations, but lost relevance when the final Iraqi parliament and government were elected.

Following the fall of the Saddam regime, the seat of Iraq remained empty in the Arab League, which tried to keep a distance from the new Iraqi institutions imposed by foreigners, including the Iraqi Governing Council, which was considered to be the puppet of the United States and its credibility was, therefore, very low. It should be noted that when Hoshyar Zebari, the Foreign Minister of the Governing Council (who is to this day the Foreign Minister of Iraq) came to represent his country for the first time at the summit of the Arab Foreign Ministers, it took hours till the representatives decided to accept the US-nominated Governing Council as the lawful representative of Iraq.\(^{26}\)

The Iraqi government has often criticized the Arab League because it has not participated in the Iraqi consolidation and re-building. This inactivity has strengthened the Iraqi Kurd and Shiite opinion that the main reason of this incapacity/ inability was the already mentioned Sunni character of the Arab League.\(^{27}\) Although several plans have been made to ensure Arab participation,\(^{28}\) and some Arab governments expressed their intention to send troops,\(^{29}\) the only complex proposal was put forward in July 2004 by Saudi Arabia. The “multi-national Muslim forces” initiative, which would incorporate not only Arab, but other Muslim forces, however, had a pre-condition, namely that the Muslim troops would substitute the American forces and not complement them. In the course of 2005 it seemed that the demand by the Iraqi government that the Arab League undertake a bigger role in Iraq and ask its member states to delegate diplomats to Iraq (no Arab country had an ambassador in Baghdad\(^{30}\)), was finally met. In October 2005 the Secretary General

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26 “The decision was taken for the sake of higher Arab interests to help Iraq preserve its Arab identity and national unity, in order for Iraq to enjoy stability so it can preserve its territory and gain control of its sovereignty, end the occupation and control its destiny,” said Amr Moussa on 9 September 2003, http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iraq/2003/09/iraq_030909-165049.htm.

27 Formerly there were opinions that should the Arab League send troops to Iraq, Kurds and Shiites would interpret it as a “Sunni intervention”. It is also a fact that the Iraqi Sunni community has a more favourable opinion of the Arab League than other Iraqi groups.

28 In 2004 Iyad Allawi, the Prime Minister of the temporary Iraqi government—among others—wrote a letter to the leaders of Egypt, Bahrain and Oman asking them to send troops to Iraq. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3860823.stm.

29 The first Arab ruler, who offered to send troops to Iraq should the Iraqis ask for them, was Abdullah, King of Jordan, in July 2004. Iraq refused the offer by saying that it would not be fortunate if the neighbouring countries sent troops, since neighbours have specific interests in Iraq. Yemen also offered troops on the condition that peace-building in Iraq was put under the control of the UN and the Arab League. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3860823.stm.

30 The king of Jordan delegated an ambassador, but because of an attack on the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad, he could not go. http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/VBOL-6PAD76.
of the Arab League, Amr Moussa visited Iraq, but the delegation preparing his visit was attacked. The Arab League opened a representation in Baghdad, but a sizeable Arab participation is still lacking. In 2006 the Iraqi government called again for increased Arab involvement, which they considered as the only solution to the security problem in Iraq. But what gave a new impetus to Arab thinking was the news that the United States was ready to talk to Iran about Iraq. At the Khartoum summit of the Arab League it was made clear that the Arabs considered any solution without their involvement to be doomed to fail. “Any solution for the Iraqi problem cannot be reached without Arabs and Arab participation. Any result of consultations without Arab participation will be considered insufficient and will not lead to a solution.”

With the escalation of the Iraqi situation in 2007 Arab public opinion took a definite turn: on the one hand, the Arab League criticized the Iraqi government for the first time because of its incapability to halt religious violence and to put an end to the conflict, on the other hand they raised conditions to their participation in the Iraqi stabilization conference convened on 10 March 2007 in Baghdad. Although there were great expectations preceding the Baghdad conference, as well as the conference held at Sharm ash-Sheykh (or Sharm el-Sheikh) on 3–4 May 2007, but their most important achievement was that they took place at all and provided an opportunity for the representatives of the United States and Iran, and of Syria respectively, to meet. On the first day of the Sharm ash-Sheykh conference the International Compact for Iraq—a 5-year UN-supported development and aid programme aiming at the political, economical and social development of Iraq—was accepted. The International Compact put very strict conditions to the programme including political reconciliation, the amendment of the Iraqi constitution, the disarmament of the militias, the relaxing of the ban on the employment of former Baath Party members and a law on the even distribution of Iraqi oil incomes. The Maliki government should have met all these conditions long ago. The fact that these questions are still on the agenda in 2007, raise the question if the Maliki government is able to take the necessary measures, especially concerning national reconciliation.

As an amendment to the International Compact, upon the call put forward by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in his opening speech, the participants were discussing the


33 All these demands were articulated mostly in defence of the Sunni Arab communities. They demanded that Iraqi citizens should be treated equally by law, and not on the basis of their religion or ethnic affiliation. They urged the termination of the Shiite militias and a timetable to the withdrawal of foreign troops, the amendment of the Iraqi constitution and the withdrawal of laws, which provide advantages for Shiites and Kurds. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/04/.

writing off of the still existing portion of Iraqi debt. This debt is estimated at some 120–140 billion USD, and consists of four different parts: 37.15 billion USD owed bilaterally towards the members of the Paris Club; 67.4 billion USD towards countries outside the Paris Club; some 20 billion USD owed in trade debts and some 500 million USD are multilateral debt. Above that, Iran and Kuwait demand war compensation, at least a partial one, which they claim cannot be written off, since the wars initiated by Iraq have left such deep injuries in their societies, that they would never agree to a complete waiver of these compensations. Paris Club member states have already written off 80% of the Iraqi debt on the condition that Iraq would do everything in its power to have other creditor states write off equal or greater shares of Iraqi debts to them. At the Sharm ash-Shaykh conference the aim, supported by the United States and Great Britain, was to forgive the total Iraqi debt, which others refused arguing that an oil-rich country should not get more support than a poor one. Russia demanded an opportunity of investment in the Rumayla oil fields in return for writing off the debt, but was refused by the Iraqi government. Saudi Arabia, which announced that it would waive 80% of the some 15–18 billion Iraqi debt, is still “negotiating the terms”. (Hungary has forgiven 80% of the Iraqi debt, some one billion USD.)

35 If we add to all this the compensation demanded for war damages and interrupted contracts, and the relevant interests, the amount is some 300 billion USD. http://www.cfr.org/publication/7796/#24.
38 Some say that writing off the debt has a symbolic relevance only, since Iraq has not paid for years. http://tvnz.co.nz/view/page/488120/1096446.
39 So far 52 states have written off some 80–100% of its Iraqi debt. www.200704/19/print20070419_367806.html.
Iraq’s Arab Neighbours

Beyond the general Arab interests, Iraq’s Arab neighbours—Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait—have special interests in Iraq, which may, from time to time, be in contradiction with all-Arab policies or may prevent the articulation of a joint Arab position.

Syria

Syria’s Iraq policy in the broader context is determined by the historical–ideological rivalry of the two countries on the one hand, and—especially since the Hariri killing (2005)—by the Syrian desire to avoid challenging the international community and the United States. In a narrower context, the suspicion and accusation of supporting the Iraqi insurgency, the refugee question, the relations with the new Iraqi leadership and the situation in Iraq define the main directions of the Syrian Iraq-policy.

Historically, the relationship between Syria and Iraq was characterized by a political and ideological rivalry. Both states were based on the Baathist Arab nationalist and socialist ideology, represented by the Baath Arab Socialist Party—in power in Syria since 1963 and in Iraq between 1968–2003. The Baath was established in Syria in 1943 by Arab intellectuals (the party constitution was approved in 1947) who had studied in France (hence the socialist element). Returning to Syria they articulated the theoretical elements of their movement—Arab socialism, nationalism and pan-Arab unity—under the influence of European nationalism and leftist ideologies. The Baath had regional organizations in other countries like Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen and Sudan, but in 1966 a rift occurred between the Syrian and the Iraqi party organizations over the question of leadership, though both held on to the name and ideology. Apart from a short period of rapprochement in 1978–1979, when even the idea of a union between the two countries was raised, the relationship between Syria and Iraq has been tense and characterized by rivalry. With the coming to power of Saddam Hussein the relations were broken for good. While in the 1980–1988 Iraq–Iran war practically the whole of the international and Arab community supported Iraq, Syria stood by Iran, which led to a certain isolation within the Arab world. Syria could only step out of this isolation during the 1991 Gulf War, when it joined the international coalition, which forced Iraq out of Kuwait. Although following the Gulf War Syria was ready to play a role in the maintenance of the security of the Gulf, the Damascus Declaration has not been realized. The Gulf states concluded bilateral defence agreements with the United States, Great Britain, etc., instead.

42 In the eyes of the Arabs Iraq was the defender of the Arabs against the Shiite Persian radical ideology.

43 The Damascus Declaration was an agreement among the Gulf Cooperation Council states, Egypt and Syria on political, economical and cultural co-operation, which was concluded after the Gulf War. On the basis of the agreement Egyptian and Syrian troops were to be stationed in the Arab states of the Gulf. http://www.meij.or.jp/text/Gulf%20War/damascus.htm.
Syria participated in the Arab–Israeli peace process, the negotiations, however—both on the bilateral level with Israel and on the multilateral level—, were disrupted and had to be re-started several times. International attention turned to Syria in February 2005 when the ex-Prime Minister of Lebanon, Rafiq Hariri was murdered and Syrian involvement was suspected. The international community started an investigation to ascertain if Syria was involved, and while under international pressure Syrian troops were withdrawn from Lebanon, Syrian influence has remained significant. (Syrian troops came to be stationed in Lebanon during the Lebanese civil war. Following the war Syrian troops had an important role in the stabilization process. According to the Taif Agreement the two governments were to negotiate the question of the Syrian military presence, but in the end Syria’s soldiers remained in Lebanon and were important tools of Syrian political and economical influence.44)

Although Syria was not listed among the “axis of Evil”, the United States has made it clear that Syria may be a target of American activism in the region. The American threat was underscored by accusations similar to those brought against the “axis of Evil”,45 and also by more specific criticism of Syria’s anti-American regional activities (the Arab–Israeli peace process, the termination of the Saddam regime and the Iraqi insurgency, the isolation of Iran and Hezbollah activities in Lebanon).46

Syrian–Iraqi rapprochement in the last years of the Saddam regime was a disquieting factor for the United States. Syria even proposed a pan-Arab front to prevent American intervention.47 On the eve of the war in Iraq, although Syria voted in favour of Resolution 1441 in the UN Security Council, Syrian anti-American rhetoric became stronger. Syria accused the United States of attempting to create a new American order in the Middle East and claimed that the only aim of the US in Iraq was to gain control over oil. At the same time they accused the Arab states that they stand by silently and do nothing to prevent the attack on Iraq—a statement, which made Syria isolated within the Arab world once more.

The escalating Iraqi crisis seems to open a new chapter in the relationship between Syria and the United States: in 2007 the American leadership came to the conclusion—long proposed by their regional allies—that the Iraqi situation cannot be solved without the involvement of all of Iraq’s neighbours, including Syria and Iran. The meeting of the American and the Syrian foreign ministers at the Sharm ash-Shaykh conference was a consequence of this conclusion.48

44 In a common Syrian opinion Lebanon is part of Greater Syria, which was cut off from the country in the course of the settlement following the First World War, therefore, Syria has a right to Lebanon. Syrian troops have been in Lebanon since 1976.
45 Weapons of mass destruction—Syria is accused with owing chemical weapons and pursuing a biological weapon programme in spite of the fact that in December 2003 the country put forward a proposal on making the Middle East a zone free of weapons of mass destruction; support of terrorism—several militant organizations have found refuge in Syria, which are considered terrorists by the United States; violation of human rights—Syria is a one-party military dictatorship, where fundamental freedoms are limited.
Syria was against the war in Iraq, but—compared to Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey—plays a relatively minor role in the Iraqi developments. Nevertheless, it has good—often personal—relations to every significant Iraqi group, mostly because many from the opposition of the Saddam regime had taken refuge in the country (Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki or President Jalal Talabani, etc.). Syria, which has a Sunni majority, but is directed by an Alawite minority, maintains good relations with the Iraqi Sunnis, in which the common secular ideology has a role. In November 2006—after almost 30 years—Syrian–Iraqi diplomatic relations were restored and in January 2007 the Iraqi President visited Syria (the first such visit in decades).

The relations between the two governments have been good recently, even if the United States accuses and the Iraqi government criticizes Syria for not doing enough to guard the Syrian–Iraqi border and to prevent militants from crossing from Syria into Iraq. Though the some 700 km long border is easy to pass, experts argue that the Iraqi insurgency is 90% Iraqi in origin, and even a total and perfect sealing of the border could not change the intensity and make-up of the Iraqi insurgency.

From the Syrian point of view the other direction of the movements across the border is of concern: an estimated 1.2–1.4 million Iraqi refugees have arrived in Syria and their number is growing by the day. The refugees are a huge burden on the Syrian authorities not only from a social and humanitarian aspect, but also from the point of view of domestic security. The UNHCR (UN High Commissioner for Refugees) has started its investigations on the situation.

Syria is interested in a unified Iraq with a strong central power, which has friendly relations to Syria. Although a low intensity conflict is in Syria’s interests—since that would keep the United States tied down in Iraq—the escalation of the conflict, and especially the break-up of Iraq is not. Syria eyes Kurdish autonomy and the possible separatist efforts of the Kurds with suspicion, all the more so because political activity has been on the rise among its own—some 1.7 million strong—Kurdish population since 2004. In Syria’s opinion Iraq needs a strong man and authoritarian rule in order to stay united, for the domestic situation to be stabilized and to pose no threat to its neighbours.

50 Some 70% of the Syrian population is Sunni Muslim, while some 12% belong to the Alawite minority. (Prados and Sharp, *Syria*) The Alawite denomination became general in the beginning of the 20th century. Earlier they were called Nusayrites. The Alawites (Nusayrites) show similarities with the “twelver” or “imamite” Shiites, but have preserved the extreme character of their teachings through their long history. See: Heinz Halm, “Nusayriyyah” in C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs and G. Lecomte, eds., *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (EI2), vol. 8 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), pp. 145–146.
52 This is equal to approximately 6% of the Syrian population.
53 E.g. classes at schools may easily have 60 pupils, or Iraqi prostitution has appeared and is on the rise, etc. *Warnings of Iraq Refugee Crisis*, BBC, 22 January 2007, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6286129.stm.
54 Yacoubian, *Syria’s Relations*, p. 4.
Jordan

The Jordanian perspective on Iraq is defined by its geographical position and the composition of its population. Squeezed in between Israel and Iraq, with a society more than half of which identify themselves as Palestinians, the connection between the Palestinian–Israeli conflict and the war in Iraq and the relevant threats have become clearly visible. Due to its location, Jordan’s policy can be characterized as a kind of balancing policy coupled with an active diplomacy: neutrality in the 1990–1991 Gulf crisis and war and the 1994 peace with Israel needed to be “mended” in the Arab world, and Palestinian connections and their support needed to be “justified” in the international fora. During the decade-long embargo following the Gulf War, Jordan maintained good relations with Iraq and served as its only connection to the outside world. (Before 2003, Jordan was Iraq’s only neighbour, which had a good relationship with it and, at the same time, co-operated closely with the United States.) Although the situation in Iraq has always been very important, and will remain so, for Jordan, the Palestinian–Israeli conflict—because of its domestic political implications—weighs more heavily on foreign policy than Iraq. Being squeezed in between two escalating conflicts is the worst-case scenario in Jordanian strategic planning, which is the reason why it does not support fast US withdrawal from Iraq.

Jordan has no territorial disputes with Iraq and its ability to influence processes in Iraq is fairly limited, partly because it has no direct relationship to any Iraqi group. Although there are tribal and family relations across the border, it is the some 800,000 Sunni Arab Iraqi refugees that ensure “human resources”, a direct contact for Jordan. The refugees—beside the mostly Sunni Arab Jordanian population—play an important role in the forming and shaping of the Jordanian concern over the fate of the Sunni Arabs in Iraq. King Abdullah and the Jordanian government supported the war in Iraq in spite of the fact that the two states at their foundation were ruled by members of the same Hashemite family, the two later were separated to a certain extent, since the attention of Jordan turned towards the Palestinians, while Iraq was more engaged in its rivalry with Syria.

Approximately 60% of the Jordanian population are of Palestinian origin. On the definition of Palestinians, see Beáta Paragi, “A palestzini arabok nemzeti identitásának fejlődése” [The Development of National Identity at the Palestinian Arabs], in Erzsébet N. Rózsa (ed.): Nemzeti identitás és külpolitika a Közel-Keleten és Kelet-Ázsiában [National Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East and East Asia] (Budapest: Teleki László Alapítvány, 2005), pp. 67–84.

Jordan was the only Arab country that gave citizenship and passport to the Palestinian refugees.

The 1000 km long highway between Baghdad and Amman was the connecting link between Iraq and the outside world, through which Iraq could be accessed.

Both states were established by the British in the framework of the post-First World War arrangements, and as an acknowledgement of Arab involvement in the war the two sons of the Hashemite family were put on the throne: Abdullah in Transjordan and Faysal in Iraq. In details see, e.g. George Antonius, The Arab Awakening (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1938).

Including the direct relatives of Saddam Hussein and the Baathist leadership. (As is known, in 1996, when the two sons-in-law of Saddam Hussein defected, they took refuge in Jordan with their families and tried to make contacts with the West, first of all with the United States from there. In the end, however, upon a call from Saddam Hussein they returned to Iraq, where they were executed upon their arrival.)
of the fact that an overwhelming majority of the Jordanian public opposed it, and only 9% thought that military action against Saddam Hussein was justified. Jordan was the only Arab country, which maintained a diplomatic representation in Iraq during the war, even after its embassy was attacked, and the first Arab country, which delegated an ambassador to Iraq again, even though he could not occupy his post because of that attack.

The war in Iraq and its consequences are threatening the Hashemite Kingdom with destabilization. Jordan has a double interest in Iraq and in the Iraqi reconstruction: security, from the political as well as the economic viewpoint, and the maintenance of the very delicate domestic balance. A stable and unified Iraq under a strong central government, which does not threaten its neighbours, does not protect terrorist organizations, does not help increase Shiite influence and ensures the rights of its minorities, especially those of the Sunni Arab minority, is vital for the Jordanian security.

The present Iraqi situation, however, poses the biggest challenge to Jordan exactly in these points. The federal structure implicitly bears the danger of dissolution. Jordan has been the target, and sometimes even the victim, of terrorism originating in Iraq. In August 2005, terrorists shot three missiles at an American Navy ship anchoring in the Gulf of Aqaba, and blew up hotels in Amman in November 2005. In several other cases the Jordanian police succeeded in preventing terrorist attacks. Abu Musab az-Zarqawi, the Jordanian-born leader of the Iraqi al-Qaida was a special threat for Jordan: he was responsible for several terrorist attacks in the country and against its interests. (In spite of this, when in June 2006 he was killed, he was given a martyr’s burial in his hometown of Zarqa.) From the Iraqi point of view, it is Jordan that can be accused of not doing enough to eliminate terrorism of Jordanian origin. Beside Zarqawi, the explosion in Hilla in February 2005 posed a serious challenge for the Iraqi security forces and has become a symbol of Jordanian terrorism. (Some 120 Iraqis died in the attack. The terrorist, who committed it, was called a martyr in Jordan. After the explosion in Hilla, demonstrators attacked the Jordanian embassy in Baghdad.)

The relationship between Baghdad and Amman is fairly tense and is characterized by distrust. The Iraqi government accuses Amman that it does not clearly distance itself from the Sunni uprising in Iraq. They cannot forget either that Jordan had maintained close contacts with the Saddam Hussein regime. The Shiite majority Iraqi government is apprehensive about the statements by King Abdullah on the Shiite awakening, though

62 “Jordan can’t afford to have more than one Iraq to its east.” Quoted in Lasensky, “Jordan and Iraq,” p. 3, http://www.usip.org.
63 King Abdullah of Jordan was the first to speak of the danger of a Shiite crescent. The presence and increase of Iranian influence in Iraq is a serious security policy factor in the Jordanian foreign and security policy thinking.
64 “Jordan is a Sunni Arab state, and one issue on which both the King and the public are united appears to be ‘Sunni solidarity’.” Lasensky, “Jordan and Iraq,” p. 5.
67 Four Jordanian MPs visited the family to pay their condolences. Later the MPs were charged with “inciting sectarianism”. One MP called Zarqawi a martyr. Jordan MPs face Zarqawi charges, 13 June 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/5075422.stm.
the King has downgraded his rhetoric since 2005, once the Iraqi government had been elected. The Jordanian government, on the other hand, accuses the leadership in Baghdad of not doing enough to eliminate (Shiite) militias and to defend (Sunni) minorities.

Jordan looks upon its relations to the United States as a strategic partnership and in this frame of mind supports US efforts in Iraq and in the war on terror, in spite of the fact that there are several points of contention between the two allies: from the Sunnis loosing influence while the Shiites (and Iran) gaining ground, to the question of the Iraqi debt. King Abdullah was the first among the Arab leaders to offer to send troops to Iraq (refuted at once by the Jordanian Prime Minister), but because of the already mentioned Iraqi opinion the offer was not realized. The main point of contention between the United States and Jordan, however, is the management of the Palestinian issue: Jordan plays an active role in the efforts to settle the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, and is, therefore, disappointed in the United States that it does not deal—or does so only in a very limited way—with a conflict of vital importance for Jordan (and for the region). The support by Jordan, on the other hand, is increasingly important for the United States in a region, where support for the American foreign policy is rapidly deteriorating even among US allies.

As it was mentioned before, the King supported the US war in Iraq in spite of Jordanian public opinion. The United States has a very bad image among the Jordanian public, without a parallel even within the Arab world. Many think that the elimination of the Saddam regime and the de-Baathification of army and administration have forced the Iraqi Sunnis into the background. It did not help either that Ahmad Chalabi—who was picked by the United States at the beginning of the war to lead the new Iraq—was sentenced in Jordan with fraud and other banking crimes. At the same time the prosecution of Saddam Hussein was followed with great sympathy. In the course of the trials Saddam Hussein could transform from a failed dictator into an Arab hero again.

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68 When the Turkish Parliament voted against the US request that would have made it possible to open a north-western front, Jordan’s significance increased. It is still not clear what US troops movements took place from Jordanian territory into Iraq as a consequence. Lasensky, “Jordan and Iraq,” p. 8.

69 “We are not a party to this war. Let’s establish that,” said Jordanian Minister Bassim Awadallah, who is a friend of King Abdallah. “His majesty and the government have been very vehement about this, very vocal about this. We in the government are also as angry as the people on the street.” http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/04/06/60minutes/main548009.shtml.

70 According to a Gallup poll conducted in 2003, only some 6% of the Jordanian public has a favourable opinion of the United States. (The 3020 people interviewed agreed that the reason of their negative opinion was the Middle East-policy of the United States and not their Arab values.) Shibley Telhami, Arab Public Opinion on the United States and Iraq: Postwar Prospects for Changing Prewar Views, The Brookings Institution, Summer 2003, http://www.brook.edu/press/review/summer2003/telhami.htm.

71 In details see Erzsébet N. Rózsa, “Szaddám Huszein: bukott diktátorból ‘arab hős’?” [Saddam Hussein: from a Fallen Dictator into an Arab Hero?], História 29 (2007) 3: 8–14, http://www.historia.hu/. “The capture of the fallen dictator—while many celebrated it all through Iraq—started a chain of events, both predictable and unpredictable. The United States and its allies initiated the open and transparent prosecution of the dictator in court. Saddam Hussein was charged and sentenced by an Iraqi court. In the process, however, there were several formal flaws (e.g. one judge resigned because the Iraqi government put pressure on him, another because being a Kurd himself, he felt emotionally involved) and some of the defenders of Saddam were murdered. The biggest problem still was that the broadcast of the trial gave Saddam the possibility to ‘build himself up’ from a fallen dictator into a hero.”

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Jordan has important economic interests in Iraq. The country is poor in oil resources, and before the war its relations to Iraq—beside the mentioned “connecting link”, the road from Baghdad to Amman—were mostly based on benefits from Iraq, first of all on oil provided at a discount price. With the Iraq war these benefits were terminated, partly because Iraqi oil output could not meet the expectations. Today, Jordan’s oil needs are met from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates at a favourable rate, which, however, cannot be maintained for long. Jordan is trying to conclude an oil supply agreement—under favourable conditions—with Iraq as well. The economic and trade relations between the two countries are fairly good, in spite of political tensions. The Iraqi situation has created several opportunities for the Jordanian economy: just as after the 1991 Gulf War the settlement of Palestinians expelled from the Gulf initiated an outstandingly high economic growth. In consequence of the Iraqi refugees in Jordan the Jordanian real estate market is booming. Several ventures and international aid organizations are conducting their Iraqi activities from Jordan. As a result of American benefits provided in return for Jordanian support, Jordan exports to the United States total one billion USD annually. Besides, investments from the Arab world, especially from Kuwait, are also significant. According to Jordanian sources Iraq has some one billion USD trade debt towards Jordan, which the country tries to handle separately from other Iraqi debts.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia’s Iraq policy is basically defined by its efforts at maintaining stability. While formerly a strong Iraq was a threat (and at the same time a counter-balance to Iran), now the weak Iraq is the biggest threat with the possible spillover of the conflict, and due to the Shiite awakening in Iraq and in the region, as well as within Saudi Arabia itself. Fight against terrorism and the stamp of terrorism (while itself is also a target) is threatening the strategic relationship with the United States as well. Saudi regional peacemaking and peace initiating efforts in the Gulf towards Iran and in the Arab world at large (the Saudi peace plan, the Palestinian unity government, the multinational Muslim forces initiative, etc.) can also be explained in this context of stability.

Historically the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iraq has been problematic ever since the beginning of modern statehood, as the two ruling families, the Al Saud and the Hashemites had been fighting each other on the Arab Peninsula prior to the First World War. In the 1920’s, the Wahhabi militia allies of the Saudi ruling family several times crossed over into the territories under Hashemite control, thus into the territory of present-day Iraq as well. The Uqayr agreement (1922) sponsored by the British aimed at

72 In 2000, when the price of oil was around 30 USD/barrel, Jordan could buy it at 9.50 USD/barrel from Iraq, Lasensky, “Jordan and Iraq,” p. 5.
73 Ibid., pp. 5–6.
74 The treaty delineated the border between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, along which, at the Kuwaiti border, a neutral zone was defined, in which both military and temporary buildings were forbidden. At the same time, it allowed Nomads access to the pastures and wells in the zone. In 1991 Saudi Arabia had
limiting the Saudis by delineating the Saudi–Iraqi border. Following this, however, it was the Iraqis who were complaining about the limitations. Although the Hashemites are ruling only in Jordan today (the Hashemite Kingdom, the Hijaz was occupied by the Saudis in 1925, and the Iraqi Hashemites were dethroned by a military coup in 1958), the Saudis are very sensitive to the Hashemite legitimacy (descent from the Prophet) to this day, since their legitimacy is based on pure and rude force, and the legitimacy provided by the religious (Wahhabi) forces. In the Hashemite–Saudi controversy, support on a family basis contrasts with support on a religious basis.

After the fall of the Iraqi monarchy (1958), but especially with the coming into power of the Baath Party (1968) the relationship between the two countries further deteriorated. Saudi Arabia felt encircled by socialist/communist countries and groups (Iraq, South Yemen, the armed opposition groups in Oman, etc.). The 1979 Iranian Islamic revolution, however, changed the Saudi perception overnight: in the face of the threat of the exported radical Shiite revolutionary ideology, Sunni Arab controlled Iraq appeared as a bulwark against the Persian “heresy”. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the Iraq–Iran war Saudi Arabia—qualifying its support to Iraq—initiated the creation of the Gulf Cooperation Council to deter Iran on the one hand, and to demonstrate the distance between Iraq and the GCC states on the other, to decrease the threat. The 1991 Gulf War enlarged the Iraqi threat again compared to the Iranian regime, which had been transformed from a Shiite Muslim revolutionary into a political and ideological adversary. The Iraqi threat was eliminated by the war in Iraq, which profoundly changed the Saudi security environment: the aggressive, Baathist Iraqi regime, ready to attack its neighbours, disappeared from power. The weak Iraq sinking into an escalating civil war, however, is also a threat for Saudi Arabia, partly because of religious violence, partly because of the increasing influence of Shiite Iran.

From the Saudi perspective it is not so much the break-up of Iraq, which is the primary threat, as the eventual failure of the Iraqi state, which is increasingly a fact on the ground, in spite of the constitutional framework of the democratic Iraq. The eventual breaking away of the Kurdish territories in the north does not threaten Saudi Arabia’s direct security environment, and in the beginning Iraqi Shiites getting into governing position was not considered a threat either. In their perspective Iraqi Shiites are Iraqis in the first place, most of whom would not like to follow the Iranian model, the theory of the Islamic government elaborated by Ayatollah Khomeini. However, if the break-up of Iraq

the 1975 agreement and the 1981 agreement registered with the UN, which administratively divided the neutral zone between the two countries. Although exact delineation of the dividing line was not accomplished even at this time, by this measure the neutral zone officially ceased to exist. On the treaty in details see, e.g. www.law.fsu.edu/library/collection/LimitsinSeas/IBS111.pdf.
75 On 28 January 1926, Ibn Saud was proclaimed the King of Hijaz.
77 The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was established as a political, economic and military co-operation, however, its military aspect is practically not functioning. Its members are Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Qatar. http://www.gcc-sg.org/home_e.htm.
78 According to Saudi sources the threat of Kurdish separatism was exaggerated. Saudi politicians praised the Kurdish leaders for not pursuing separatism. McMillan, “Saudi Arabia and Iraq,” p. 4.
79 More on the question, in Erzsébet N. Rózsa, “Evolúció és/vagy revolúció az Iráni Iszlám Köztársaságban” [Evolution and/or Revolution in the Islamic Republic of Iran] in Erzsébet N. Rózsa
is followed by the intervention of the neighbours, upsetting the changing, fragile regional balance, this may have special consequences for Saudi Arabia. From a Saudi perspective the biggest challenge and threat is undeniably posed by Iran.

While in the past decades the Sunni–Shiite controversy seemed increasingly to become an emotional and cultural issue, under the circumstances of the Iraqi conflict it has become once again a political reality, which has led to religious violence and a civil war. Ever since the occupation of the Hijaz, Saudi Arabia has considered itself the leader of the Islamic world. The Saudi king is called—among other names—“the guardian of the two holy places” [Mecca and Medina]. This leading role was challenged by the Islamic revolution and Ayatollah Khomeini, who claimed the leadership of a global Islamic revolution with a Shiite ideology. Although this revolutionarism resonated and found sympathy in the Islamic world, causing reactions in the Sunni states as well, because of its Shiite character—and last, but not least its Persian tint—, its impact was limited. It is worth remembering that even the Iraqi Shiites remained resistant to the calls of Ayatollah Khomeini to unite with their fellow-Shiites and fought together with their other Iraqi fellow-citizens during the Iraq–Iran war, a fact that supports the Saudi perspective on Iraqi Shiite identity.

In the context of the Saudi–Iraqi relationship, however, the Saudi (Sunni) leading role includes some ambiguity. Saudi Arabia was founded on the very strict Wahhabi (Salafi Sunni) ideology, and thus could be termed as the first Islamic fundamentalist state, both in theoretical, and in a generic sense, where Shiites were prosecuted as heretics as late as the beginning of the 20th century. In Shiite historical memory the 19th century events, in the course of which Wahhabi Sunnis “purified” Mecca and Medina of the elements of Shiite practice and the devastation of the shrines of Ali in Najaf and Hussein in Kerbela, are still vividly remembered.

Currently, Iraqi Shiites pose a double threat: in the Iraqi religious/civil war they threaten the existence of the Sunni (Arab) minority, while they may have a catalytic effect on the Saudi domestic political scene and among the Saudi Shiite minority. On the one hand, it is the religious duty of the Saudi king and the government to support the Iraqi Sunnis, on the other hand Saudi sources have raised the possibility to support them openly. Although the Saudi Shiite minorities belong to another branch of Shiite Islam than their Iraqi brethren, the Saudi municipal elections held in spring 2005 reflected some Shiite mobilization. The cautious reform started by King Abdullah was more the reason than the consequence of this activism. Should the Shiite governorates in southern Iraq unite, as is frequently mentioned, the new Shiite entity would be a special threat for Saudi Arabia.

(80) Approximately 10–15% of the Saudi population, some 2 million people are Shiites, who mostly live in the Eastern Province of the Kingdom. The biggest oilfields and oil wells are also located there.


82 Such a union would have a symbolic significance as well, since the territory, where the Sunni–Shiite split took place shortly after the advent of Islam, would get under Shiite control for the first time in history. McMillan, “Saudi Arabia and Iraq,” p. 10.
The present (Shiite majority) Iraqi government’s perception of Saudi Arabia is influenced—even if no mention of this is made—by the events of the past, especially when concerns arise that militants spreading Wahhabi ideology may cross the border. Preventing Saudi militants from entering Iraq is a common Iraqi, Saudi and American interest. (For Saudi Arabia the eventual return of such militants is also a threat.) The Saudi authorities try to do their utmost to seal the Saudi–Iraqi border against such incursions.\footnote{In 2004–2005 Saudi Arabia spent 1.2 billion USD on strengthening the border control. Obaid and Cordesman, \textit{Saudi Militants in Iraq}, p. 11.} In 2006 they started to build—along some 900 km—a wall to replace the present 7 m high sand dunes, in front of which there is an 8 km wide strip of no-man’s land. (Saudi authorities plan to build such walls all along the borders of the country, which would mean some 6500 km, in defence.) However, intelligence and internal security experiences show that volunteers from Saudi Arabia enter into Iraq not through the common border, but via Syria.\footnote{Sources note that it is usually these volunteers who commit suicide attacks since “Iraqis do not explode themselves.”}

Although there is contradictory information on the composition of the Iraqi insurgency, the number of the foreigners is estimated at 10\% (or even less), which means altogether some 3000 fighters. On the basis of the number of those held in custody by the United States and the Iraqi security forces and other data only 12\% of them, i.e. some 350 fighters are of Saudi origin.\footnote{Obaid and Cordesman, \textit{Saudi Militants in Iraq}, pp. 4–6.} Surveys show that “the vast majority of Saudi militants who have entered Iraq were not terrorist sympathizers before the war; and were radicalized almost exclusively by the Coalition invasion.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 5.} Saudi public opinion is ambiguous on the war in Iraq. Generally they do not like the Iraqis, whom they consider arrogant, lazy, corrupt and uneducated.\footnote{McMillan, “Saudi Arabia and Iraq,” p. 5.} (It should be noted that simultaneously with the “Arab unity” aspect overwriting any other element of identity in the Arab world, there are several stereotypes regarding the different Arab groups/countries, which are based on several different components. The Iraqis, as other Arab groups who settled down on territories of historical civilizations, consider that civilization as their own and use it systematically in building political legitimacy. It is thus understandable that Iraqis consider the Saudis—on the Arab Peninsula—uncivilized.)\footnote{When Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faysal made a remark on sectarianism in Iraq, Iraqi Minister of Interior Bayan Jabr retorted: “This Iraq is the cradle of civilization that taught humanity reading and writing, and some Bedouin riding a camel wants to teach us.” Quoted in McMillan, “Saudi Arabia and Iraq,” p. 5.} Apart from that, because of the close tribal relations overreaching the borders, the Saudi public opinion is demanding the protection of the Iraqi Sunni community from the Shiite militias.

The Saudi public has a very bad opinion on the United States and its policies in the region.\footnote{According to a Gallup poll conducted in 2003, only 4\% of the Saudi public had a favourable opinion on the United States. (The 3020 people interviewed agreed that the reason of their negative opinion was the Middle East-policy of the United States and not their Arab values.) Telhami, \textit{Arab Public Opinion}.} They generally oppose American presence in Saudi Arabia, the land of
Islam, and the war in Iraq, and they sympathize with the Sunni insurgency there. They are especially apprehensive of the picture of Saudi Arabia projected following the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Almost the whole of the Saudi public is convinced that the US war in Iraq “will mean more war in the Middle East”. Beside the public, parts of the political elites think that in spite of Israel keeping away from the Iraqi developments, the Americans are doing in Iraq what is dictated by Israel.

Although Saudi–American relations started in the 1940’s and were based on oil, significant economic interests have been formulated since, which were added to by the joint political interest of containing communism. The present political and military relationship is based on the agreement concluded in the 1980’s, in the framework of which American early warning and monitoring systems were deployed in Dhahran. Following the 1991 Gulf War US–Saudi military relations have become very strong, in spite of the fact that—as was mentioned before—the public has opposed it.

Iraq’s stability is a joint US–Saudi interest, although the Saudis do not believe that democracy-building could succeed in Iraq and are convinced that Iraq needs a strong man. Nevertheless, in the details there is much controversy between the US and Saudi Arabia. On the eve of the Iraq war the Saudi Foreign Minister warned President Bush that should he remove Saddam Hussein by force, he would be “solving one problem and creating five more”. Saudi Arabia opposed the disbanding and the “de-Baathification” of the Iraqi military and security forces, and does not like the American–Shiite co-operation, in the framework of which Iraqi Sunnis are pushed into the background. Many even in the highest Saudi political circles think that the United States are “handing the whole country over to Iran without reason”, therefore, a fast withdrawal of the American troops from Iraq is not in the interest of Saudi Arabia. At the same time the Saudi opinion is clearly

90 Since the 1991 Gulf War there has been many frictions between the troops stationing in Saudi Arabia and the local population. In the conservative Wahhabi society the uniforms of the American female soldiers caused a huge uproar, therefore, to wear such uniforms in public was forbidden in order to avoid further problems. However, an American court ruled that the female soldiers cannot be restricted in the selection of the clothes they wear. To avoid further frictions with the public, American military bases were withdrawn farther away from population centres. It should also be born in mind that the primary demand by Osama bin Laden is the elimination of American military presence in Saudi Arabia.

91 As a reaction to hostile American statements a movement aiming at the boycott of American products started in Saudi Arabia after 9/11. E.g. instead of Coca Cola and Pepsi Cola the Saudis started to drink their Iranian counterpart called Zemzem Cola, which sounded familiar with its religious connotation.

92 Telhami, Arab Public Opinion.

93 In the Arab public opinion anti-Israeli feelings are very strong and conspiracy theories on Israeli involvement are widespread.

94 The option of a “strong man” has been raised from time to time, beside the Saudis the King of Jordan raised it as well. According to analysts, however, it is not realistic as no person can be seen in the Iraqi political arena who—on the basis of his personality, past, capabilities and connections—could fit.


reflected in the statement made by King Abdullah in March 2007 claiming the US presence in Iraq illegal.97

Saudis think that it is the Iraqi government that is responsible for the religious violence in Iraq—including the attacks on the Sunni communities and the still extant Shiite militias—, therefore, the King has rejected meeting the Iraqi Prime Minister, in spite of the fact that during his visit to Riyadh, US Vice President Dick Cheney personally asked him to do it.98 Saudi Arabia so far has not openly intervened in the Iraqi civil war. However, since the debate on troop withdrawal started to increase in the United States, the Saudi leadership has started to reconsider its policy of abstention. (King Abdullah told Cheney that Saudi Arabia “might provide financial backing to Iraqi Sunnis in any war against Iraq’s Sunnis if the United States pulls its troops out of Iraq”.99) It is generally believed that this support is already in practice, even if not in an official form, but through Saudi private actors. (According to some sources there is already a “proxy war” going on between Saudi Arabia and Iran in Iraq, but Cheney has denied that.)100 In the long run, however, analysts do not exclude the possibility that should the US troops leave, Saudi Arabia would intervene in Iraq even militarily in defence of the Sunni communities.101

Saudi Arabia has two main economic interests in Iraq: oil and the Iraqi debt. Due to the high oil prices Saudi Arabia in 2005 gained some 50 billion USD extra profit,102 but its own foreign debt accumulated during the Gulf War is still significant (some 164 billion USD).103 With the sharply increasing oil demand, as well as with some oil markets becoming uncertain, (Nigeria, Iran, Bolivia), a further increase in Saudi production and significant investments to this end are needed. Iraqi oil production has still not reached its pre-war capacity, and the limited growth of Iraqi oil production is favourable for Saudi Arabia, since it has to invest less in its own oil sector. In the short run the interests of the two countries, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, therefore, coincide. In the long run, however, they may become rivals: should the situation in Iraq be normalized, to finance the rebuilding of the country, Iraq will not only try to keep oil prices high, but will necessarily demand greater quotas for itself.

During the Iran–Iraq war Iraq has accumulated some 40 billion USD debt towards its Arab neighbours, out of which it owes some 15–18 billion USD to Saudi Arabia.104 In spite of the urging of the United States, Saudi Arabia was for a long time reluctant to follow the example of the Paris Club, until finally in 2007 it announced that it would forgive 80% of the Iraqi debt, however, negotiations on the details are still going on. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia has offered Iraq one billion USD in loans to help the reconstruction, and gave 300 million USD in humanitarian aid.

101 “Stepping into Iraq.”
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
Kuwait

The basic underlying element defining Kuwait’s Iraq policy as well as Kuwait’s foreign policy in general, is the claim by Iraq over Kuwaiti territory. The Iraqi demand refers to either the whole of Kuwait’s territory, and/or the delineation of the frontier between the two states, and/or the ownership of the islands of Bubiyan and Warba.

Kuwait’s territory has been controlled by the Sabah family since 1756, in spite of the fact that in name it belonged to the Ottoman Empire—19th century Ottoman–Turkish maps present Kuwait’s territory as part of the Basra vilayet—and that British troops were stationing there till 1961.

The 1922 Uqayr agreement delineated the borders between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and Iraq respectively, however, it said nothing on the border between Kuwait and Iraq. In 1923 the British High Representative in Iraq delineated this border in a memorandum, which in 1932—upon Iraq’s application to the League of Nations—was presented as the border of the country. When Kuwait became independent, Iraq tried to emphasize its claims by moving troops to the border, the returning British troops, however, deterred this threat. Till 1963 the Arab League sent troops into Kuwait, which, however, left then upon Kuwait’s request. The Iraqi government coming into office in 1963 acknowledged (again) Kuwait’s independence and the Iraqi–Kuwaiti border as it was put down in Iraq’s application into the League of Nations and did not oppose Kuwait’s accession to the UN and the Arab League any more. Although during the 1960’s and 1970’s there were several border incidents and Iraq tried to get hold of Bubiyan and Warba, the Iraq–Iran war (1980–1988) brought a turn in the relationship of the two countries: Kuwait provided Iraq with significant financial support, therefore, Iraq abstained from repeating its territorial claims.

The Iran–Iraq war, however, left the issue of Iraq’s strategic exit (the exit of the Iraqi oil) to the Persian Gulf unsolved, since, on the one hand, Iraq could not gain full control over the Shatt al-Arab waterway, and on the other, the dispute over the Rumayla oilfield along the Iraqi–Kuwaiti border could not be resolved either. (The border is running over the oilfield, but while the Iraqis stopped oil production during the war, Kuwait went on with oil extraction. This was the reason why Iraq blamed Kuwait with extracting oil from the Iraqi side as well.) The debate with Kuwait was added to by the loan provided by Kuwait to Iraq, the some 13 billion USD, which should have been paid back to Kuwait after the war. As is well-known, on 2 August 1990 Iraq invaded, and a week later annexed Kuwait: the Rumayla oilfield and the two islands, Bubiyan and Warba were annexed to the Basra governorate, the other parts of Kuwait became to be Iraq’s 19th governorate.

105 In 1756 Arab tribes proclaimed the Kuwaiti Autonomous Sheikhdom and elected the Sabah family as their leaders.
106 On the status of Kuwait and on the British protectorate the 1899 British–Kuwaiti and the 1913 Anglo–Ottoman-Turk agreements prevailed, in which Great Britain acknowledged the supremacy over Kuwait, which was called an autonomous territory within the Ottoman-Turkish Empire, in the affairs of which the Turks would not interfere.
The international coalition on 26 February 1991 re-established Kuwait’s independence and a UN committee delineated the border between Iraq and Kuwait again (Kuwait gained some territory), which was accepted by Iraq in 1994. The Gulf War seemed to finalize the two basic principles of Kuwait’s foreign and defence policy: Iraq will always be a threat, irrespective of the character and nature of any Iraqi government; and Kuwait’s security can be guaranteed by the United States only. Although following the Gulf War Arab states in the framework of the Damascus Declaration tried to find an Arab regional solution to the security challenges of Kuwait and the other Gulf states, but the initiative died away. Kuwait concluded defence agreements first with the United States, then with Great Britain, France and Russia, and has tried to develop its own defence capabilities, mainly from American sources.

Kuwait’s relationship with the United States—and with all who participated in the coalition for the liberation of Kuwait—is very good, which is reflected, among others, in the fact that in the reconstruction after the war mostly American companies received commissions. (At the same time, the Arab states, which stood by Iraq during the war, lost the goodwill and support of Kuwait.)

Kuwait agreed with the war in Iraq in spite of the fact that it joined the Arab states opposing the United States action. It lent most of its territory, two air bases and its ports to US troops. During and after the war American troops are transported through Kuwait: while some 90,000 American troops are staying in Kuwait at all times, some 20,000 are there continuously. The Iraqi regime change meant for Kuwait the termination of the Iraqi threat and will mean so as long as US troops are staying in Iraq. The sharpening debate in the United States over the withdrawal of the troops from Iraq increasingly raises concerns in the Kuwaiti elites and public. Although the escalation of the situation of Iraq, the religious and ethnic civil war is a threat for Kuwait, a strong, united Iraq would revive old fears and mistrust.

The Iranian–Kuwaiti relationship is a side issue in Kuwait’s Iraq policy, which in the 1990’s—on the basis of anti-Iraqi feelings—improved significantly, in spite of the fact that the United States does not like that. Although Kuwait would not like to see the increase of Iranian influence among its own Shiite minorities—approximately 25% of the Kuwaiti population is Shiite—, it is even more wary of the influence of the radical Shiite organizations (Dawa, SCIRI) that have become members of the Iraqi government, especially that the terrorist attacks against the American and French embassies in December 1993, and the attempt on the life of the Amir in 1985 were committed by Dawa activists.

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108 “Kuwaitis see the war as one waged by the Iraqi people and remember previous Iraqi promises to respect Kuwait’s sovereignty.” http://countrystudies.us/persian-gulf-states/32.htm.


110 Jordan, Sudan, Yemen and the Palestinian Authority, as a result of which Palestinians working in Kuwait were expelled.

111 Katzman, Kuwait, p. 2.

112 The present Iraqi Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki is a member of the Dawa. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/target/etc/cron.html.
The settlement of outstanding financial issues between Kuwait and Iraq is an important element in Kuwait’s Iraq policy. While Kuwait gave 425 million USD humanitarian aid to Iraq after the fall of the Saddam regime, and offered some 500 million USD for the reconstruction, it still holds to its demand that Iraq should repay the loan—although it agreed to forgiving a part of it—, and that Iraq should pay compensation for the war losses.\(^\text{113}\)

**Iran**

Iran’s Iraq policy is based on its main foreign policy directives: independence, internal and external security on the one hand, and the acknowledgment of its regional power status, on the other. To achieve both aims Iran almost “obsessively” tries to avoid the interference of foreign states, as is put down in a separate article in the Iranian Constitution. The war in Iraq, while significantly improving Iran’s security policy environment and expanding its field of manoeuvre in Iraq, at the same time led to new challenges, which directly threaten the security of Iran.

Iran is one of the beneficiaries of the war in Iraq: its greatest enemy in its immediate neighbourhood, Saddam Hussein was eliminated and in the new Iraqi regime Arab Shites received government and parliamentary positions. As a consequence, Iran today has a bigger influence in Iraq than it ever had. The Iraqi developments have decreased Iran’s isolation (and the perception of isolation). Yet, in spite of the favourable changes, several threats and/or challenges may arise from Iraq (Sunni–Shiite religious and civil war, Kurdish independence, a committed and united government friendly towards the United States, a rival Shiite religious leadership, etc.), among which the most serious is that the troops of the “Great Satan”, the United States, which is openly threatening Iran, have totally encircled Iran.\(^\text{114}\) In the new situation Iran has two aims: on the one hand to make sure that Iraq does not pose a threat anymore, and on the other, to deter and/or possibly keep the United States bogged down in Iraq.

Iran—first of all because of its Shiite character\(^\text{115}\)—has the greatest direct influence over Iraqi developments among Iraq’s neighbours. Its Persian character, however, clearly and markedly distinguishes it from Iraq. The “Arab–Ajam” (non-Arab, mainly Persian) distinction was characteristic of the first era of Islamic conquest, which lost most of its relevance with the expansion of the caliphate and the inclusion of several peoples in the 8th century, but which received a new significance in the Iraq–Iran war. In the secular, radically Arab nationalist Iraq, Saddam Hussein regularly referred to the parallel of the battle of Qadisiyya\(^\text{116}\) to symbolize the victory of the Arabs over the “heretic” Persians.

\(^{113}\) Katzman, *Kuwait*, p. 3.

\(^{114}\) According to an Iranian anecdote there are only two countries in the world which have the United States as their only neighbour: the other one is Canada.

\(^{115}\) Iran’s official religion has been Shiite Islam since 1501.

\(^{116}\) In the battle of Qadisiyya (637) Arabs had a decisive victory over the troops of Yazdagerd III, which meant the end of the Sasanid dynasty.
The more conservative Arab states in the Gulf, first of all Saudi Arabia, looked onto the war as the heroic struggle of Sunni Muslims against “heretic” Shiites.

With the Islamic revolution Iran claimed the leadership of the Shiite (and of the whole) Muslim world, which—because the Shiite minorities were suppressed and/or kept a low profile in Iraq and the other Gulf Arab states—went unchallenged. Yet, Iran suffered from a serious “lack” of legitimacy. The two holiest sites of Shiite Islam, Najaf and Kerbela,\footnote{117} and the graves of the imams\footnote{118}—with the exception of the 8th imam, Ali Reza—are in Iraq. Owing to the relative balance of power, however, the two Iranian Shiite centres, Qom and Mashhad could significantly enhance their roles as the leading centres of Shiite Islam. Najaf in Iraq and pilgrimage from across the border was under political control, while Qom on the basis of the close co-operation between the religious establishment and the Iranian political leadership gained a leading political role. The fact that the significance of the religious centres was relative, was proven when upon the opening of the Iraqi–Iranian border crowds of Iranian pilgrims set off towards the Iraqi holy places, where a separate infrastructure has been built to accommodate them.

In 1980–1988 Iran and Iraq fought a bloody war, in which one million people died and in the course of which Iraq used chemical weapons. The main reason of the war—beside the containment of the Shiite threat—was the control over the Shatt al-Arab waterway. The river, which is the border between the two countries, is Iraq’s only exit to the Persian Gulf, except for the port of Umm Qasr.\footnote{119} Control over the Shatt al-Arab had been the subject of debate for decades between Iraq and Iran. The 1975 Algiers agreement delineated the border along the Thalweg. In 1980 Saddam Hussein appeared on the Iraqi television and tore the agreement into pieces before he attacked Iran, which had been weakened by the Islamic revolution. The impact of the war on the Iranian society would be difficult to overestimate. (In the Iraqi public the memory of the Iran–Iraq war was overwritten partly by the Kuwait war and the following sanctions, and partly by the present war.) The main events of the war are still regularly commemorated on national days of remembrance, the martyrs are still mourned and their photos are present in the streets. There are still many disabled people around, who were crippled in the war. In spite of all the recent changes, Iran’s relationship to Iraq is still overshadowed by the memory of the war and the conviction that the international community left Iran alone.\footnote{120} The war ended with a ceasefire, and to this day no peace treaty has been signed. Iran demands some 100 billion USD in compensation for the losses and damages in the war, with several hundred prisoners of war still missing.

\footnote{117} Ali was murdered in 661 and was buried in Najaf. His younger son, Hussein was martyred and buried in Kerbela. The most important religious schools were developed around the two shrines.

\footnote{118} In Shiite Islam Ali and his family are highly honoured. Ali and his direct descendants up to the twelfth imam were divinely authorized to interpret the divine laws.

\footnote{119} Though Iraq is considered to be a state in the Persian Gulf, in fact it has a very short coast only. The port of Umm Qasr is along this coast, but part of it was given to Kuwait when the new Iraqi–Kuwaiti border was delineated. The exit from Umm Qasr can be controlled from the islands of Bubiyan and Warba, the status of which is questioned by Iraq.

\footnote{120} It should be noted that during the war Iran several times complained in the international fora of Iraq’s usage of chemical weapons, in vain.
In the 1991 Gulf War Iran kept a low profile: while it did not join the international coalition and openly advocated the necessity of maintaining Iraq’s territorial integrity, it opposed the presence of foreign troops, especially following the war. During the years of sanctions, from time to time a kind of rapprochement could be detected between Iraq and Iran, which, however, was based more on a coincidence of interests than deliberate policy. The “dual containment” policy initiated by the Clinton administration featured high among the reasons of this rapprochement.

With regard to the 2003 war in Iraq, Iran had a rather ambivalent opinion. While the elimination of Saddam Hussein’s regime was to its interests, the lasting presence of the numerous American (and British) troops is not only contrary to its interests, but pose the biggest conceivable security threat for Iran. Many in the Iranian political elite would prefer the Cold War with Iraq under UN sanctions, because of its predictability and stability, even if it was maintained by authoritarian tools. Statements such as “Iran supports neither Iraq, nor the United States”; and the policy of “active neutrality” reflect this ambivalent position. On the eve of the war in Iraq the Iranian leadership was convinced (most of them are still convinced) that the real target of the United States was Iran and the war in Iraq was camouflage only. The attack on Iraq almost coincided with the Iranian New Year (21 March) and with state and administrative holidays, so the Iranian leadership did not have to directly comment on the events. And by the time they took up work again, most of the main operations had been completed.

Iranian opinion on the consequences of the war is also ambivalent. On the one hand, the fact that in the new Iraq the Iraqi Shiites got into a governing position is a favourable development, on the other, the lasting presence of the United States in the direct neighbourhood is a serious threat. Yet, the fact that the escalation of armed violence keeps the United States tied down, serves Iran’s interest as well. It is the paradox of the Iraqi situation that while the Shiite threat is increasingly featuring in the rhetoric of the United States and in its perception of the Islamic world and/or the Middle East, by eliminating the Baathist regime in Iraq it helped bring Shiites into power, who are part of the overall Shiite political awakening in the region. What’s more, these Shiite groups in the Iraqi government maintain armed militias, and have a terrorist past (and present).

123 In details see Dénes Gazsi, “Iran: Irak csak ürügy volt, a valódi célpont mi vagyunk” [Iran: Iraq was Only a Pretext, the Real Target is Us], Kül-Világ 2 (2005) 4, http://www.freeweb.hu/kul-vilag/2005/04/gazsi.pdf.
124 “The last daily before the Iranian New Year was published on 19 March 2003, and the first one after the New Year on 29 March.” Ibid.
125 In spite of the fact that some armed militias were integrated into the new Iraqi security forces, their loyalty to the central government may be questioned, especially when confronted by their loyalty to their organization. A further concern is that the majority of the security forces are Shiites, and that according to some sources within the security forces homogenous—Sunni and Shiite—units were established. The State of Iraq’s Security Forces, 11 September 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/ americas/6168525.stm.
Muqtada as-Sadr had representatives in the government—until they have withdrawn—, even though many radical armed conflicts have been clearly connected to him and his Mahdi Army. (In 2004 American troops besieged Najaf, where Muqtada as-Sadr and his followers made their stand. The siege was called by Iranian ex-President Rafsanjani “the second Stalingrad.”) Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki belongs to the Dawa Party, which is accused by Kuwait of committing terrorist attacks in the country. The leaders of the SCIRI (the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq) are also members of the government, while their armed militia, the Badr Brigade has practically taken over the Ministry of Interior, i.e. has been integrated into the Iraqi state security forces. Under “normal” circumstances the United States would not only not maintain relations with these groups, but would have them on its list of terrorist organizations. (It should be noted that the Iraqi branch of the Mujahedin-e Khalq, made up of Iranian dissidents, fights against Iran from Iraqi territory, and although it is listed by the United States among the terrorist organizations, it still has not been eliminated in Iraq, in fact, it seems to operate freely.) Iran would like to see a united Iraq. The present situation in which fellow Shiites are sufficiently represented and have a significant role in the control of the country suits Iran, even if it does not like the federal structure of Iraq. Federalism is a threat because of the presence of large minorities in Iran, as both a separate Shiite state, and an independent Kurdish entity would/could encourage them.

It is generally accepted that Iran has a significant influence among Iraqi Shiites. Such a statement, however, conceals the fact that the Iraqi Shiites are very much divided along tribal and political, as well as religious lines, not to mention the presently invisible group of Shiite seculars. The extent and depth of the Iranian influence is very difficult to assess. It has several personal elements, and it changes according to the Iraqi developments. The leaders of the SCIRI had lived in Iran for years. They usually favour an Iranian state model, but in order to maintain their position in the government, they have to make compromises with other factions, which have an impact on their relations with Iran and political intentions.

Nevertheless, the Iraqi situation also poses several threats for Iran. It may give reason and incentive to the United States to put pressure on Iran and to curb and/or violate Iranian interests in Iraq. While international analyses usually focus on the Iranian influence in Iraq, the impact that Iraq and the Iraqi developments have or may have over Iranian domestic and foreign policy usually go unnoticed. The situation in Iraq may deepen the differences among Iranian political elite, while the Iranian leadership considers Iraqi democratization a threat due to its potential to be held up as a blueprint for the region. The

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127 In 2005 Bayan Jabr was appointed to the head of the Ministry of Interior, who formerly had been a commander of the Badr Brigade. [From mid-2006 he has been the Minister of Finance.] Following his coming into office there were several accusations that he brought the members of his militia into the security forces and turned a blind eye to the activities of the death-quads attacking the Sunni population. Guide: Armed Groups in Iraq, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4268904.stm#top.
129 Iran tried to establish contacts not only to the Shiite, but all other Iraqi political groups, even if the extent of such contacts was different. Ehteshami, “Iran’s Assessment of the Iraq Crisis,” pp. 144–145.
measures of democratization in Iraq (constitution, referendum, parliamentary elections) are formally not unknown in Iran; on the contrary, they look back on a hundred-year-old tradition. (Parliament and constitution have been established institutions in Iran since the 1906 Constitutional Revolution.) Should the situation in Iraq become stabilized, especially under a non-religious government, the Iraqi transition may create a dangerous precedent.

**Shiite Rivalry?**

Iraq (or a Shiite Arab entity emerging in the South) may eventually pose a religious challenge. The quietist Najaf may gain ground at the expense of the activist Qom, and may give a bigger role to Arab Shiites, in spite of the fact that Najaf—exactly because of its traditional quietism—will not challenge Qom politically. (Further, it is in the tradition of Shiite thinking to hide one’s own belief, and not to openly admit it.) Najaf and Qom embody and present the two, clearly distinguished concept in Shiite Islam. While the Shiite clergy traditionally favours the separation of religion and politics, religious and political authority, the activists advocate the connection of religion and politics, religiously based legitimacy and practice of politics. The first is exemplified by most of the Iranian grand ayatollahs, who keep away from politics; the latter by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who in his theory of the “Islamic government” advocated the absolute power of the religious scholar (velayat-e motlaqe-ye faqih). The “velayat-e faqih” has become the theoretical basis of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Khomeini-like activist trend, however, was not an overwhelming phenomenon in the Iranian Shiite tradition, in spite of the fact that as long as Saddam Hussein limited the operation of Najaf, Qom was the political and religious centre of the Shiite world. The Iraqi Shiites taking refuge in Iran helped to maintain and reinforce the perception that in Shiite Islam the “velayat-e faqih” and the “Islamic government” is the dominant theoretical mainstream. Ayatollah Ali Sistani living in Najaf is positioned somewhere between the two trends—activism and quietism. With regard to the transition in Iraq he has stated several times that he favours the separation of religion from politics. And though he has given his opinion on several political issues (he was practically forced to by the developments), he does not undertake an institutional political role.

But Ayatollah Ali Sistani and the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei present another aspect of the Najaf–Qom difference/distinction. Upon his coming into office, many disputed the scientific/theological credentials of Ayatollah

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133 It should be noted that Ayatollah Sistani rejects meeting American politicians, but receives the Iranian leaders. Ehteshami, “Iran’s Assessment of the Iraq Crisis,” p. 145.
Khamenei. Although by now these have been “rectified”,\textsuperscript{134} it is a widely held concept that should an Iranian Shiite believer look for a religious legal opinion on a political issue, he should turn to Ayatollah Khamenei. But should he look for answers to religious questions, he should turn to the other ayatollahs, among whom Ayatollah Sistani is increasingly gaining acknowledgement. Although legal interpretation knows no boundaries, i.e. a Shiite believer may look for a legal ruling with any authorized religious personality, the general practice is that the Iraqi Arab Shiites turn to Ayatollah Sistani, and the Iranians to the Iranian ayatollahs.\textsuperscript{135} Yet an increasing number of Iranians turn to Ayatollah Sistani, who is widely considered the most theologically knowledgeable Shiite religious personality. In February 2004, 400 Iranian intellectuals, writers, artists and parliamentary representatives wrote a letter to Ayatollah Sistani asking him to give his opinion on the “massacre of democracy and the transformation of parliamentary elections into a mere stage play”,\textsuperscript{136} which also implies that a rivalry of political influence may arise between the leaderships in Najaf and Qom/Tehran—even if its probability at the moment is relatively limited.

\textbf{The Kurds}

It is not only an eventual Shiite rivalry, however, why Iran would not like to see the break-up of Iraq. While the Kurds are much less visible in the Iranian system than in Turkey or Iraq, the presence of the some 4 million Kurds is a domestic political factor, in spite of the fact that the Iranian Kurds are not the biggest minority in Iran.\textsuperscript{137} The Iranian Kurds maintain a close relationship across the Iraqi–Iranian border, especially in the region of Erbil, and any development in Iraqi Kurdistan has—by nature—an impact on the politicization of the Kurds in Iran.

The PJAK (Party of Freedom and Life in Kurdistan), the armed Iranian Kurdish organization was established in 1997—among circumstances still unclear. Although according to official Turkish and Iranian opinion the PJAK is an off-spring of the PKK, according to PJAK activists themselves the party was launched by young intellectuals as a human rights movement and its main aim was to reinforce Kurdish identity and prevent its dissolution. In 1999 the group moved to Northern Iraq, from where they carry on their armed fight against the Iranian army,\textsuperscript{138} causing some tensions between Iraq and Iran. The PJAK has some 3000 armed fighters. Its aim is not the establishment of a separate Kurdish state, but the substitution of the “velayat-e faqih” with a democratic and federal

\textsuperscript{134} Ayatollah Khamenei has become a Grand Ayatollah in the meantime.
\textsuperscript{135} The question of whose legal interpretations a believer is going to accept, is not only a matter of prestige, but has a financial aspect as well: believers pay their contribution to the upkeep of the community (a religious duty) to the foundation of the religious authority whose ruling and opinion they are following.
\textsuperscript{137} Only some half of Iran’s population is Persian. Some 25% are Azeri Turks. Kurds make up approximately 7–8% of the population.
\textsuperscript{138} The PJAK does not attack civilians, a fact that even the Iranian government is bound to acknowledge.
system, in which Kurds (Azeris, Beludj and Arabs) would gain representation. With these aims they are challenging the raison d’état of the Islamic Republic on the one hand, and Iranian nationalism on the other.

Iran and the United States

The relationship of Iran and the United States since 1979 has been characterized by open hostility, including ideological elements as well, especially since the entering into office of George W. Bush and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. In the Iranian perspective the United States is the “Great Satan”, while President Bush has called Iran (the Iranian regime) a member of the “Axis of Evil.”

The Iranian leadership is convinced that the United States wants to bring about a regime change in Iran, which the Americans do not even try to conceal. What’s more, from time to time information is leaked about military plans being prepared to attack the Iranian nuclear installations. The American leadership, especially President Bush regularly accuses Iran of supporting the Iraqi armed insurgency in spite of the fact that there is relatively little direct information to this effect. Analysts increasingly tend to agree that approximately 90% of the insurgency is of Iraqi origin and about half of the remaining 10% foreigners, come from Saudi Arabia. There is no significant number of Iranians in custody either with the American or the Iraqi security forces, apart from the five Iranian diplomats who were arrested by American troops in January 2007 in Northern Iraq. The United States questioned the diplomatic status of the Iranians and accused them of the preparation of violent attacks, in spite of the fact that they had been working at the Erbil consulate of Iran for years, and that the President of Iraqi Kurdistan, Masoud Barzani intervened on their behalf. The Iranians were at the end of October, 2007 still in American custody. As a parallel, the case of the British navy of officers can be mentioned, who while patrolling on the Shatt al-Arab and the Gulf crossed over into Iranian waters and were captured by the Iranians. (The border between Iraq and Iran in the Gulf has not

140 “Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people’s hope for freedom. ... States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger.” The State of the Union address given by President Bush on 20 January 2002, http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html.
141 US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice asked 75 million USD from Congress in February 2005 for the democratization of Iran, which was approved by Congress in the budget for 2006. http://www.niacouncil.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=805&Itemid=2.
142 The United States keeps some 19,000 persons in custody in Iraq, out of which only 160 are foreigners, half of whom are of Saudi origin. The Iraqi security forces hold some 560 foreigners, half of them Egyptians and one-fifth are Sudanese. Iraqi sources mention the arrest of altogether 461 Iranian citizens, who were soon released (possibly they were pilgrims). 15 July 2007, http://www.juancole.com/2007_07_01_juancricole_archive.html, http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-saud15jul15,0,3132262.story?coll=la-home-center.
The Iranians released the Brits after a couple of weeks and the exhaustion of the propaganda opportunities. While the British administration accuses Iran of inciting violence and supporting the insurgency in and around Basra (Iranian weapons have been seized from the insurgents), the Iranians accuse the British and the Americans of inciting and supporting political unrest among the Iranian minorities.

Nevertheless, the interests of the United States and Iran coincide and/or overlap in Iraq (and Afghanistan), which makes (should make) dialogue unavoidable. While the United States is making great efforts at the normalization and pacification of the situation in Iraq under an increasing domestic pressure to withdraw the troops, Iran is interested in a limited conflict only, since it would keep the United States from carrying out its threats against Iran. An escalation of the conflict would be contrary to Iranian interests, as this could mean a further increase in the forces of the occupying foreign state, which Iran would like to avoid by all means. Any escalation might also lead to the break-up of Iraq, which Iran—together with all the direct neighbours—would like to avoid. And though in the most recent American proposals to Iraq the establishment of three main regions is proposed—a plan vehemently rejected by the Iraqi government, the break-up of Iraq, because of its regional implications, is not in the interest of the United States either. A limited dialogue with the United States would be in Iran's best interest and would be supported by many in the Iranian political elite, first of all because of economic reasons and in order to solve the international tensions over the Iranian nuclear programme.

Iran is unsurpassable in Iraq, even if the Iraqi Shiites would not accept an Iranian dictate. However, it seems that the Iraqi government in local or regional issues acts upon its own interests even if the United States does not like it, e.g. in their policies towards Iran and Syria. Any Iraqi position taken against the United States is an important achievement for Iran, since a committed pro-American government, which would by all assumptions keep good relations with Israel—the legitimacy of which Iran does not accept—, could pose a serious threat.

In May 2006 President Ahmadinejad sent an 18-page letter to President Bush inviting him to discuss as equal partners global and regional issues. Although then the American president dismissed the initiative of Ahmadinejad, in Iraq—it seems—this will be realized. With the dramatic deterioration of the situation in Iraq and with the Bush administration’s Iraq policy increasingly discredited, the United States is forced

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144 The difference between the ways how the prisoners/POWs were handled should be noted: while the United States keeps them hidden, provided no information on them, the British navy personnel were on the Iranian TV every day, first with their “confessions”, then with the ceremony organized for their departure, where even President Ahmadinejad met them.

145 Already during the 1991 Gulf War Turkey, Iran and Syria issued joint declarations that the territorial integrity of Iraq should be preserved.


148 In the first American plans the new pro-American Iraqi government would keep good contacts to Israel. That at that time this was a real American scenario is shown by the fact that when the design of the new Iraqi flag was selected, beside the yellow colour of the Kurds there were the peace-blue stripes reminding of the Israeli flag and igniting the common Zionist conspiracy theory.

to compromise and listen to its allies. At the Iraq conferences in March 2007 in Baghdad
and in May 2007 in Sharm ash-Shaykh the first high-level meetings took place between
the leaders of the American and Iranian diplomacy.

Regional Power Status

The direct American–Iranian meetings raise the question if they mean the acknowledge-
ment of Iran’s regional power status. The attacks on 11 September 2001, the wars in
Afghanistan and in Iraq, and the democratic transition/escalating violence have signifi-
cantly increased the field of manoeuvre of Iran. On its eastern border, the rule of the
Taliban, who were threatening Iran to the extent that in 1998 the two countries almost
got to war150 and who challenged the Iranian radical Shiite Islam with their even more
radical Sunni Islam, was eliminated with an international consensus. On its western
border, the aggressive Baathist Arab nationalist regime, which for decades was a coun-
ter-weight to Iran, was—under a dubious international mandate—brought down. In its
direct surroundings in the Persian Gulf Iran has no rival with comparable capabilities
left. The GCC states, including Saudi Arabia, cannot pose a real counterweight to Iran.
Their policies are, therefore, of a dual nature: on the one hand, they try to provide for their
own security by involving external powers to deter Iran and with their own initiatives to
establish a regional security structure, which, however, has not yet been realized.151 On
the other hand, they try to maintain good relations with Iran, take its interests into consid-
eration and involve Iran in the discussions of regional questions.

The fall of the Saddam regime gave a new impetus to the relationship between the
GCC states and Iran, as the Gulf states had no longer to keep a distance from Iran. The
war in Iraq did not change the development of their relations fundamentally. The new
impetus became more manifest in the form of co-ordinations the GCC states started to
look for with Iran. Still, the escalation of the religious and civil war, and especially an
eventual early withdrawal of the US troops from Iraq could bring Iran and Saudi Arabia
to an open armed conflict.152

The reluctance with which the firmest supporters of the United States in the region—
Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (as well as Jordan
and Egypt)—position themselves to the establishment of a coalition against Iran should
be understood in this context. In September 2006 US Secretary of State Condoleezza
Rice initiated the formation of an informal grouping to discuss regional issues. The group
issued a declaration in January 2007, in which they warned of the destabilization of the

150 Upon the occupation of Mazar-i Sharif, the Taliban murdered 11 Iranian diplomats. Iran brought a
significant number of troops on the Iranian–Afghan border following the incident. *Thousands of
Civilians Killed Following Taleban Takeover of Mazar-e Sharif*, Amnesty International, 3 September

151 Erzsébet N. Rózsa, “Békefenntartási törekvések a Perzsa-/Arab-öbölben” [Peace-keeping Endeavours
in the Persian/Arab Gulf] in Béketeremtés–békefenntartás [Peace-making, Peace-keeping],

152 According to some sources there is already a “proxy war” going on between Saudi Arabia and Iran in
Iraq, which both parties denied. See in details in the part on Saudi Arabia.
Persian Gulf and supported the “principle of non-interference”, which was understood by the analysts as a veiled warning to Iran. Yet, the group was not very anxious about the newest plan by President Bush about the stabilization of Iraq. But Arab support is also fairly reserved in the other anti-Iran co-operation initiated by the United States on the Persian Gulf and supported the “principle of non-interference”, which was understood by the analysts as a veiled warning to Iran. Yet, the group was not very anxious about the newest plan by President Bush about the stabilization of Iraq. But Arab support is also fairly reserved in the other anti-Iran co-operation initiated by the United States on the Iranian nuclear programme. Arab reluctance is explained, on the one hand, by the fact that they do not want to be seen as parts of an anti-Iranian coalition. On the other hand, as long as the Israeli nuclear arsenal, the main security concern of most of the Arab states for several decades cannot be discussed, they are not willing—especially in coalition with Israel—to make a united front against the Iranian nuclear threat. (Although the Gulf Arab states are worried about the Iranian nuclear programme, they do not perceive it as the primary threat.) Especially, while the Palestinian–Israeli conflict is still unresolved, and as the war in Lebanon in 2006 has whipped up Arab sentiments both against the United States and Israel, and since Israel has not been ready to negotiate the Saudi peace plan for years.

It should be noted that efforts at a regional power status are not new in the Iranian foreign policy. Iran during its 2500–3000-year-long history was usually a regional hegemonic state. Mohammed Reza Pahlavi wanted to make his country the “policeman of the region” and was speaking of “Iran’s responsibilities and obligations”. The Islamic revolution and the policy of its export also reflected an effort at a kind of ideological hegemony, even if analysts say that in spite of its ideological rhetoric, Iranian foreign policy has been very rational. Although the fall of the Taliban and the Baathist regime, the increased Iranian influence in Iraq, the Lebanon war, etc. are increasing the regional weight of Iran, they also delineate the limits of Iranian hegemony. Shitites make up some 10% in the Islamic world. The Iranian cultural sphere covers only a relatively narrow neighbourhood, and the revolutionary religiosity deters even the more religious societies, the conservatism of which is incompatible with revolutionary ideology.

The Iranian nuclear debate, which the United States tries to handle separately from the Iraq debate in the cautiously started bilateral meetings, plays an immense role in the relationship of the United States and the Islamic Republic. From the Iranian perspective

154 In the Arab argumentation it is still the Israeli nuclear arsenal that poses a threat, and since Arab efforts in this regard have failed for decades, the Arab League called upon its member states to start (civilian) nuclear programmes. Seven Arab states—including Egypt and Saudi Arabia—already notified the International Atomic Energy Agency of their intentions. Amr Moussa, Secretary General of the Arab League in his opening address at the 56th Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs: A Region in Transition: Peace and Reform in the Middle East, held in Cairo, Egypt, 11 November 2006.
155 The Arab public opinion and the political elites agree in their perception of Condoleezza Rice’s statement following an Israeli attack in Lebanon that had many civilian victims, saying that these were “the birth-pangs of the New Middle East” or in how they related to the fact that the United States did not call upon Israel to stop its attacks, etc.
the two are much more connected. The war in Iraq diverts attention from the Iranian nuclear programme. At the same time the negotiations started on the issue of Iraq sooner or later cannot avoid co-ordination in the nuclear issue either. In the development of the Iranian nuclear programme, the Iraqi nuclear programme and the lessons that could be drawn from it must by all means have played a role. Also, the Iranian nuclear programme constitutes an integral part of the Iranian efforts at regional hegemony, since no under-developed country can become a regional power and the existence of a nuclear industry and developments is an important sign of modernization.

**Economic Influence?**

Iranian influence is fairly strong in the Iraqi (most of all Southern Iraqi) economy and reconstruction, although its extent and depth is as difficult to define as that of Iran’s political influence. Iran is Iraq’s leading trading partner (with its almost 20 billion USD export to Iraq). It is building an airport and other infrastructure in Najaf in order to accommodate Iranian pilgrims there, opening banks, operating companies and non-governmental organizations, is supporting schools and universities, etc.

At the same time there exists an unofficial, invisible sphere of economic relations, in which the main actors of the economy are the pilgrims and the religious foundations. In Islam almsgiving, contribution to the upkeep of society is a religious obligation, which—in the Shiite Islamic practice—is usually handled by the religious foundations established by the religious personalities authorized to interpret divine laws. Since the believer can freely choose the person, whose authority and teachings he accepts, and since Shiite theologians in the course of their lives spend longer periods and teach at several holy places, the route of such donations is impossible to follow and the activities of these foundations are not transparent. (E.g. Ayatollah Khomeini lived in exile in Najaf, and later his grandson also withdrew there. The Iraqi al-Hakim family on the other hand, took refuge in Iran and returned to Iraq from there after 20 years.) Beside their intransparent nature the outstanding characteristic of the religious foundations is that they can be “inherited”. The foundations of one or the other famous ayatollah may remain in the care of the family, especially if the members of the family pursue the same profession/carrier. Muqtada as-Sadr is also supported by the religious foundation of his grandfather and father, and the institutions (schools, hospitals, etc.) operated by the foundation, which, therefore, have a significant role in the provision of his mass support.

The dynamically developing relations between Iraq and Iran are overshadowed by the Sunni concern at the increasing Iranian economic influence and by debates such as...

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the 100 billion USD demand by Iran in compensation for war losses and damages, or the controversy over the 153 Iraqi civilian and military aircraft, that were flown to Iran in the first days of the 1991 Gulf War and have never been returned.

Iraq controls the world’s third largest oil reserves, though at present its oil extraction and exports are still well below the pre-war level. In the general Middle Eastern perception the most important reason of the Iraqi war was the seizure of the strategic control over Iraqi oil, in spite of the fact that among the reasons officially given by the United States oil was never mentioned. In some opinions, however, in the neo-con rationale for war oil played a significant role: a pro-American Iraq leaving the OPEC, in which the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia and Iran dominate could provide the world with cheap oil and could break the power of the OPEC. Iran (and Saudi Arabia) do not have to fear an Iraqi rival as yet, and they are benefiting from the present high oil prices.

**Turkey**

Prior to the First World War, the territories that make up the Iraq of today were part of the Ottoman Empire. Following the carving up of the Ottoman lands, provinces with Arab majorities from North Africa to Iraq were granted “independence” and were made into “nation-states”, under British and French mandates. This moment marked the severing of the links between Turkey and the Arab territories. To this rule, Iraq proved an exception of sorts due to its proximity and to the common historical heritage reaching back to the period between 750 and 1258 when Baghdad functioned as the capital of the Islamic caliphate. The Republic of Turkey has no territorial claims on Iraqi territory, save the temporary and rhetorical references to the old *vilayet* of Mosul, conditioned primarily by Turkish domestic politics. Despite this interest, the Republic of Turkey today fails to exert any influence over the various ethnicities of Iraq, save a part of the Iraqi Turks/Turkomans.

The policy of the Republic of Turkey towards Iraq has been traditionally focused on minimizing risks. Atatürk’s foreign policy credo (“peace at home, peace in the world”) has showed the path to Turkish leaders, instructing them to avoid confrontation. This general maxim has held sway over Iraqi–Turkish relations even at times such as the fall of the Iraqi monarchy (1958), when these deteriorated significantly. In fact, Turkey has always sought balanced relations with the Iraqi leadership, including the Baathists, who rose to power in 1968. Especially in the nineties, following the end of the Cold War, there was a perception of threat coming from Iraq among Turkish elites, yet this did not concern the Iraqi government proper. One of the chief anxieties in Turkish security thinking has been the presence of a Kurdish population on the Iraqi side of the border, especially since these latter tended to have close ties, familial and other, to Kurds living in Turkey. The relations between Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey, despite mutual distrust, have nevertheless started to

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163 Peter Kiernan, *Iraq’s Oil: A Neo-con Dream Gone Bust*, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/HE17Ak01.html.
develop at a considerable pace, primarily due to the oil pipeline and the highway which link up Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan with Europe via Turkey.

In the 1990’s, Turkey held an important position in the effort to contain Iraq, despite previously prosperous economic and trade partnerships interrupted by the sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council. The sanctions caused a considerable loss to segments of Turkish society, and this “sacrifice” brought by Turkey has been resurfacing as a formative element in Turkish policies towards Iraq in recent years.

Prior to 2004, EU accession may have deflected much of Turkish popular and media interest towards the West, yet since then the deteriorating situation in Iraq has attracted ever growing attention. This has been giving second thoughts to both popular opinion and decision-makers since, as Iraq has come to be seen as a potential risk factor and also because they were treated to seeing the United States stepping up to support a federal Iraq. Contrary to previous US promises of eliminating the presence of the PKK in Northern Iraq, the PKK has been able to renew its terrorist activities in Turkey after 2004, causing Turkish sentiment towards the United States to hit an all-time low and catalyzing a series of minor crises in bilateral relations. In this situation, the most severe constraint on potential Turkish activism in Iraq is still the ongoing accession process with the EU, which has created a double bind for Europe: the EU is opposed to the idea of a Turkish intervention in Northern Iraq, yet it would also prefer to avoid a radical Islamist and aggressive Iraq facing its future borders, as well. To make things more complicated, the effects of atrocities against Turkoman citizens in Iraq, especially on Turkish thinking about the benefits of intervention, are hard to estimate.

It is widely accepted that the most basic strategic interest of Turkey with regard to the current situation in Iraq is the preservation of state unity. A strong and united Iraq would act as a counterweight to Iran and would also possess the resources to control the problematic northern areas, upholding law and order. Thus, both Turkish public opinion and the government believe that the disintegration of Iraq would only render the region even less calculable and contribute further to security concerns. Still, in recent years there has been a change in the Turkish position: while the idea of a federal Iraq had been flat out refused in prior years (following the logic that federalization would prove but a stop on the way to partition), there is evidence that it has accepted the terms of coexistence with the new Iraq. One factor contributing to this shift in position has been the realization that whatever its preferences, Turkey is not in a position to prevent the processes from unfolding, and this includes the Iraqi choice of state structure, as well. Also, even if the eventual break-up of Iraq were to yield a Shiite theocracy, and a chaotic and violent Sunni Arab state, a new and consolidated Kurdistan could emerge as the third state from the ruins, which would necessarily link up with the rest of the world via Turkey, making the

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164 (Then) Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit said that if the Iraqi Kurds “take a step that could be tantamount to a declaration of independence … Turkey would consider its options including use of force.” Quoted in *Iraq: The Turkish Factor, CRS Report for Congress, RS 21336*, 31 October 2002, p. 3.

165 The worst-case scenario in Turkish strategic and security policy thinking is still the break-up of Iraq. On the one hand because an independent Kurdistan might emerge in Northern Iraq, which—according to most analyses—Kurds living in Turkey would like to join, and on the other hand, in Southern Iraq a Shiite entity may be created, which may get under the influence of Iran.
former also dependent on the latter to some extent. This may in fact suit Turkish security interests more than a unified Iraq sinking into chaos.166

The past years have shown that Turkey does not seek to get embroiled in the conflict militarily, unless its own internal security was to demand intervention. In more practical terms, this refers to a single scenario: PKK attacks on Turkey launched from Iraqi territory.

As long as Iraq preserves its territorial integrity, Turkish policy towards Iraq, subject to a heated domestic debate167 and taking shape as described in the above paragraphs, has three formative dimensions. These include the status of Northern Iraq and the situation of Kurds and Turkomans in the state, the developments in Turkish–American relations and the Turkish losses incurred during the period of UN sanctions against Saddam Hussein’s regime.168

Northern Iraq: Kurds and Turkomans

The Turkish political elite has committed itself publicly to observing a rigid policy of “red lines”, the crossing of which would trigger severe repercussions, not excluding Turkish military intervention.169 These have become accepted parts of political discourse and public thinking, and include the construction of a self-contained Kurdish entity, the transfer of Kirkuk/Kerkük to the Kurdish federated state and atrocities against Turkomans. These red lines have not proved absolutely resistant to changes to Turkish policy towards Iraq and developments in Iraq itself over the past two or three years,170 yet there is currently a general tendency of reasserting their validity and even projecting the possibility of armed conflict in this context.

Kurdish Independence? The Emergence of a Kurdish Political Entity

It is widely known that the Kurds, whose language and ethnicity belongs to the Iranian family, were left out of the reshuffling of borders and the founding of states that followed the partition of the Ottoman Empire. The approximately 20 to 25 million strong Kurdish minority lives spread out in mountainous neighbouring border provinces of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and Armenia. While the daily agendas of the respective Kurdish communities are determined by local concerns, every Kurdish organization and popular movement

166 This does not mean, however, that Turkey would be ready to accept an independent Kurdistan.
167 The opposition and the leaders of the army, including Chief of General Staff General Yaşar Büyükakın have several times accused the Erdoğan government of not having a complex Iraq policy. Henri J. Barkey, “Turkey and Iraq. The Perils (and Prospects) of Proximity,” United States Institute of Peace (USIP), Special Report 141 (July 2005): 9.
170 According to Kirişçi, the Turkish foreign policy establishment could not but accept the extinction of these red lines. Kirişçi, Turkey’s Foreign Policy, pp. 64–71.
confesses to the idea of a unified Kurdish state while the very same idea ranks as a security threat in all host countries.

Approximately one half of the total Kurdish population, 12 to 15 million people, used to be settled in the especially backward eastern and south-eastern parts of the Republic of Turkey. Today, a significant part of this population lives scattered across the country, with some having fled the situation reminiscent of civil war and others having left in search of employment.\textsuperscript{171} The Kurds have been engaged in a political and often armed struggle for an independent Kurdish state, the civil war fought by the Kurdish Workers’ Party (PKK) against the government between 1984 and 1999 came to a close with the arrest of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan: the PKK abandoned armed struggle and dissolved itself. In 2004, however, a renascent PKK relaunched its campaign.\textsuperscript{172} At the same time, surveys suggest that pan-Kurdish identity has been weakened in recent years, due to the granting of cultural rights to the minority by the Turkish government as part of the EU accession process. Voting preferences show little divergence when comparing Turkish and Kurdish voters living in the same districts,\textsuperscript{173} excepting those Kurds who live in compact ethnic blocs. In such areas, the Democratic People’s Party (DEHAP), a spokesperson for Kurdish political rights polled about 40–50\% in 2002, while the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) gained 10 to 20\% of the popular vote there. This result, however, translated to a nation-wide support of 6.2\%, well below the 10\% parliamentary threshold.\textsuperscript{174} Interestingly enough, the early elections of 2007 saw about 100 candidates of Kurdish origin enter parliament as delegates of the victorious AKP, and the majority of the 27 independent deputies are also Kurdish.

The dream of an independent and autonomous Kurdistan has been approximated most by Kurds in Northern Iraq who came under the surveillance and protection of the international community following the 1991 Gulf War. Iraqi Kurdistan has enjoyed the de facto independence of a state within the state since then, while nominally remaining part of the Iraqi Arab Republic. For Turkey, this quasi-independence seemed a threat even without formal recognition, as it feared for the consequences in inspiring its own Kurdish population to embark on a similar path and because the armed groups of the PKK routinely sought refuge in Northern Iraq. This period saw Turkey try to establish connections with the Kurdish leadership in Northern Iraq and build up some degree of influence in the region. The 1998 agreement between the two major Kurdish parties in Iraq was sponsored by Turkey alongside the United States and Great Britain.

The 2003 war in Iraq and the setting up of the new state machinery made Kurdish separatism and the drive for independent statehood appear as an even more direct threat to the Turkish government, the military, political elites and the public opinion alike. The

\textsuperscript{171} Sources usually refer to Istanbul and Izmir, saying that Istanbul is the biggest Kurdish city with its approximately two million Kurdish inhabitants.
new Iraq became a federal republic in which Kurds—both as a result of their political activism and as a result of their numbers—wielded far more influence than had been the case previously. Turkey was a staunch opponent to federalization, fearing that it would be but a stopover towards the establishment of an independent Kurdish state, especially in light of the unofficial referendum held in Kurdistan on 15 December 2005 in tandem with Iraqi parliamentary elections, in which over 90% of the votes were cast in favour of independence. Iraqi Kurdish leaders know perfectly well that their plans for independence are not supported by the United States. Masoud Barzani, president of the regional government in Kurdistan has stated that independence is “for the time being” not on the table. In the end, Turkey had to face the facts and accepted the new federated region of the Iraqi Kurds without frowning over the turn of events. While the potential independence of Iraqi Kurdistan appears in Turkish thinking as a Damoclean sword over their heads and evokes reactions of paranoia, in the recent past a series of new arguments have seen the light in favour of coexistence with Iraqi Kurdistan and investing into building political and economic partnerships. In this context, it has been argued that

- co-operation with Kurds in Northern Iraq may have a beneficial effect on the Kurdish–Turkish relationship within the country, adding more impetus to the tendencies which have characterized these in the course of the accession negotiations with the EU;
- Northern Iraq is undergoing a period of boom-like economic growth which spills over into the Turkish economy, positively impacting the most backward regions of the country;
- Jalal Talabani, the leader of the Kurdistan Patriotic Union (PUK) was elected to the presidency, which is a positive development from Turkish perspective, since it seems to signal that Iraqi Kurds are investing into the existence of a united Iraq; and
- were Iraq to break up after all, a secular and stable Kurdistan would make an ideal buffer state between the lands of Sunni radicals and religious extremist Shiias on one side and Turkey on the other.

All these considerations and the full-hearted acceptance of the special position of Iraqi Kurds could be negated by the detrimental effect of only one potential threat, the PKK. Despite its loss of strength, armed insurgents hiding out in Northern Iraq still rank as a significant security threat.

One of the features of the war waged by the PKK against the Turkish army and a cause of interstate crises has been the granting of refuge by the 4 to 5 million Kurds to armed Kurdish fighters fleeing Turkey, preventing the army from tracking them down. These groups are closely connected, as both families and tribal affiliations reach across the border. Given the permeable borders between the two countries, Ankara and Baghdad struck a deal in the mid-1980’s which granted the right to the militaries of the other country to continue the pursuit of insurgents in a border zone no deeper than 10 km in their territory, as well.\footnote{Kathleen Ridolfo, Iraq: Turkey Threatens Military Incursion, http://www.payvand.com/news/06/jul/1208.html, and Turkey: Ankara Eyes Iraq Incursion against PKK, http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iraq/2006/05/iraq-060503-rferl01.htm.} In practice, this agreement on hot pursuit served only Turkish interests, since the Iraqi army was forbidden to enter Northern Iraq, more exactly the...
territories north of the 36th parallel of latitude, after 1992. In the wake of the war, news came in regularly about the Turkish army operating in the border zone and even about Turkish troops being stationed in Northern Iraq. According to estimates, about 1,200 to 1,500 elite military personnel have been stationed permanently in Northern Iraq, and these troops are said to have stayed on with the assent of the United States even following the invasion of Iraq.

According to official Iraqi estimates, approximately 3,000 PKK guerillas are holding out in Northern Iraq. The Iraqi government has officially forbidden operations against Turkey by the PKK from Iraqi territory. It is, however, not in a position to send troops to Northern Iraq and the fact remains that many Iraqi Kurds sympathize with the cause taken up by the PKK. The possibility of a Turkish intervention because of PKK activities arose as early as February 2005. (Cross-border operations of the PKK have resulted in 600 dead since January 2006. In May 2007, for instance, PKK activists detonated a bomb in the Ulus district of Ankara, in a crowded shopping street, killing 14.) There is both increasing tension and anger in Ankara concerning the fears that the regional government in Iraqi Kurdistan may be consciously harbouring the PKK. Such opinion is only strengthened by news such as the interview given in his place of residence, Mosul, by Osman Öcalan, the brother of Abdullah Öcalan, and himself a combat veteran of the PKK and a terrorist by definition for Turkey.

Recent PKK activities have led to incursions by Turkish troops into Iraq, in depths of 3–4 kilometres. Some argue that such decisions were made by local military commanders, yet it is harder to explain the arrest of Turkish military personnel in Suleymania, 180 km deep into Iraqi territory in early June 2007. At the same time, military and political elite groups in Turkey seems to be more and more in agreement—at least in their rhetoric—concerning the issue of Turkish intervention. While many analysts see in the declarations tools that can be useful in domestic political quarrels and for pressuring the United States and deterring Kurds in Iraq, it is to be feared that Turkey may manoeuvre itself into a position where backing down becomes impossible (especially if the controversy over Kirkuk is added to the foil).

Chief of General Staff General Yaşar Büyükanıt asked the Turkish government as early as April 2007 to consent to the invasion in Iraq. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan refused this plea on the grounds that the PKK needs to be eliminated in Turkey first—a move paradoxically seen by many as a gesture towards the Kurdish minority. On 27 June, General Büyükanıt demanded that the government set the guidelines for an operation against Iraq. In early July, it was reported that the Turkish government and the military have agreed on the details of the cross-border military operations, while also adding that such a move would require the assent of the Parliament, as well. For now, no

176 http://www.byegm.gov.tr/YAYINLARIMIZ/CHR/ING/09/96x09x12.TXT.
177 Among others, Barkey, “Turkey and Iraq,” p. 10.
178 “We are fighting in Baghdad, we cannot send troops to Kurdistan,” said Hoshyar Zebari, Iraqi (Kurdish) Foreign Minister, quoted in Azzaman in English, 23 June 2007, http://www.azzaman.com/english.
180 Ibid., p. 11.
major military action is expected. At the same time, the Iraqi Foreign Minister reported in July 2007 that Turkey is stationing 140,000 troops at the Turkish–Iraqi border,\textsuperscript{182} with news about Turkish military incursions into Iraqi territory, denied by both the Turkish and Iraqi foreign ministers, surfacing simultaneously. The setting up of a security zone on the Iraqi side of the border emerged once more, an idea not explicitly rejected by also not supported by the US.\textsuperscript{183}

While Turkey has to avoid confrontation with the United States and with the European Union, both certain to denounce a future Turkish military intervention in Northern Iraq, the situation has already put the United States between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, the US is stationing only minimal troops in the northern, more peaceful part of the country, who are only partially able to monitor the situation on the border. The United States, however, has also promised Turkey to eliminate PKK bases in Iraq, a promise, which it cannot make good on, nor can it get its Iraqi Kurd allies to fulfil it. In the end, this situation is not only antagonizing to important American allies, NATO-member Turkey and the vital Kurdish element in Iraq, but offers Turkey a chance to rely on the war on terror rhetoric of the US. The US would prefer to see an agreement among the Turkish government, Baghdad and the Kurdish regional government in Northern Iraq,\textsuperscript{184} yet such an agreement is ruled out by Turkey’s insistence on negotiating exclusively on an intergovernmental level. (This policy raises the question of Baghdad’s influence in Iraqi Kurdistan once more.)

Despite the increasing complexity of the situation analysts tend to agree that it was the chaotic situation in Iraq that the northern part of the country could once more become a haven for Kurdish combatants from Turkey. The PKK has ceased to be the strategic threat to Turkish security it once had been, but the very fact of the armed activities, conjuring up memories of the earlier struggle, as well as the civilian and military casualties of the terror campaign are unacceptable to Turkey. The domestic political crisis in Turkey only serves to aggravate the situation further, and makes the question of how long the Turkish government can and would want to exercise restraint—despite American presence in Iraq and the accession negotiations with the EU, threatened gravely by a potential Turkish intervention in Iraq.


\textsuperscript{184} “We encourage the governments of Iraq and Turkey … with the engagement of the Kurdish regional government … we urge the government of Iraq … according to our limited resources …” Daniel Speckhard, chargé d'affaires of the US Embassy in Baghdad, \textit{International Herald Tribune}, 28 June 2007.
Iraqi Turkomans

The 2003 Iraq war and the state-building that followed constituted an opportunity and a constraint on Turkish preferences at the same time. The Iraqi Turkomans could be used as a bargaining chip in the argument against the emergence of an independent Kurdish entity, perceived to mean clear and direct danger. This may not have been able to stop the process, but did put obstacles into its way. The question of Iraqi Turkomans, together with mandatory recognitions of ethnic kinship has become a required component in both domestic and foreign agenda setting discourse, embraced by all political forces.\textsuperscript{185} Turkomans in Iraq, however, are divided over accepting the support of Ankara, and even the Iraqi Turkoman Front is resented by many. What is more, about half of Iraqi Turkomans are Shiias, many of whom have joined the insurrection against American occupation forces and the Iraqi government. Other groups hold that they would be better off in Kurdish territory, given that the authorities of the latter would likely be forced to co-operate with Turkey—an option more enticing than coming under the rule of Arab fundamentalists.

For the Turkish government, the lack of success of the Iraqi Turkoman Front (ITF), which secured a mere three places in the parliament at the December 2005 elections,\textsuperscript{186} and the currently visible processes of fragmentation in the party are distressing signs. These add to the dissatisfaction with the questionable degree of influence Ankara possesses vis-à-vis the ITF and the strained relationship between the Turkish army and the ITF. There is evidence that army personnel belonging to the special forces have co-operated at least on a few occasions with the ITF, yet these episodes do little to change the overall picture.\textsuperscript{187} In light of the complexities of the situation, Osman Korutürk, Turkish ambassador to Iraq has proposed a new policy line, modelled on the experiences with the Turkish minority in Bulgaria. The central idea behind the proposal consists of providing incentives to the Iraqi Turkomans to become a self-sustained community while building a coalition in the process which would encompass all of the Iraqi Turkish groups.\textsuperscript{188}

Kirkuk

Kirkuk is a territory of Northern Iraq with 950,000 inhabitants, while the city of the same name functions as the centre of the region (750,000 inhabitants). Iraqi Turkomans consider Kirkuk to be their cultural centre, a capital of sorts, which, in the past, has been

\begin{footnotesize}
185 E.g. according to the Vice Chief of General Staff General İlker Başıbug Iraqi Turkomans are “ethnically of the same origin as the Turks”. Barkey, “Turkey and Iraq,” p. 5.
186 ITF received 0.87\% of the 8.5 million votes.
187 The best known case took place in Sulaymania on 4 July 2004, when American soldiers captured some Turkish troops and ITF activists, who were allegedly preparing for radical operations. The Turkish soldiers were treated the way al-Qaeda terrorists are, e.g. were transported to Baghdad hooded, etc., a fact very much resented by the Turkish public. Presented as “an injustice by the United States against Turkey” the incident further strengthened anti-Americanism in the public. Western public became aware of the incident mostly upon the release and the media coverage of the Turkish box office hit \textit{The Valley of the Wolves: Iraq}. Barkey, “Turkey and Iraq,” p. 10.
\end{footnotesize}
an example for the coexistence of four distinct ethnic and religious communities—Iraqi Turkomans, Kurds, Arabs and Christian Assyrians. In the recent past, the interethnic relationships of the city has been disturbed twice, the discovery of oil and the oil industry which required and attracted additional labour migrating from other parts of Iraq, and the Arab assimilationism of Saddam Hussein’s regime, which displaced thousands of non-Arab families and settled Arabs in their place in Kirkuk. One of the very tangible results of the fall of the Baathist rule for the region and the city of Kirkuk has been making possible the return of the displaced families to their original place of residence.189 Their return, however, generated numerous new problems. On the one hand—according to Iraqi Turkomans—, Kurdish migration to Kirkuk has been exceeding the numbers originally displaced, with some sources claiming an influx of 600,000 Kurds since 2003.190 On the other hand, the general process of the return of displaced families makes the fate of the Arab families uncertain.191

Some analysts argue that Kirkuk may gain a greater significance with regard to the security and the future of Iraq than Baghdad itself. This is because the status of the oil-rich province has not been cleared up to this day. The Iraqi constitution adopted by the referendum of 2005 foresaw the normalization of the situation in Kirkuk by 31 March 2007, to be followed—with a 31 July 2007 deadline—a census, then—with a 31 December 2007 deadline—a referendum on future standing of Kirkuk and other disputed territories.192 The situation, however, has only been deteriorating193 as the deadlines were drawing closer, a trend acknowledged even by members of the Kurdish community.194 Yet Kurds still insist on holding a referendum in 2007, despite calls for postponing it both from the Iraqi and the US government.195 The Kurdish reply to such calls has been to threaten with withdrawing from the government, arguing that putting off the Kirkuk question could escalate the situation—making it the interest of all parties involved to have it happen sooner than later.

189 “The Iraqi Transitional Government, and especially the Iraqi Property Claims Commission and other relevant bodies, shall act expeditiously to take measures to remedy the injustice caused by the previous regime’s practices in altering the demographic character of certain regions, including Kirkuk, by deporting and expelling individuals from their places of residence, forcing migration in and out of the region, settling individuals alien to the region, depriving the inhabitants of work, and correcting nationality. To remedy this injustice, the Iraqi Transitional Government shall take the following steps:...” Law of Administration for the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period, 8 March 2004, Article 58, para (A), http://www.cпа-iraq.org/government/TAL.html.
191 Although the Iraqi government approved of the proposal which guarantees a 15,000 USD support to each Arab family ready to move out of Kirkuk, there are many even within the government who oppose such a measure. Jim Muir, Relocation Plan for Kirkuk Arabs, http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/middle_east/6515291.stm.
193 In July 2007 several attacks were carried out in Kirkuk (the city and the province), in which dozens of people died. In the biggest attack on 7 July some 200 people were killed. This latter event was called the butchering of Iraqi Turkomans in some media.
194 Among others President Jalal Talabani, Dreazen, “Why Iraq’s Kirkuk is Vital.”
195 Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has neither set a date, nor separated an amount for the referendum in the state budget.
The debate, which in the past has been limited to the disputes between Kurds and non-Kurds on the local, and to the disagreement between the central government and Sunni Arabs on the national level, has grown to encompass more and more players. Today, the Shiite Arab faction giving the majority in the government has also become embroiled, and also unnerved, by the issue. It is an obvious interest of the central authority to keep oil revenue under control, and, adding to this hard-to-bargain issue, there has been increasing involvement on the part of Shiite militias in support of Iraqi Turkomans, partly Shiites themselves. (The first major demonstration of solidarity took place in 2004, when all major Shiite militias, including the Mahdi Army, the Badr Brigades, the Iraqi Hezbollah and the Dawa, held a march in Kirkuk.) Even the firebrand cleric Muqtada as-Sadr has given an opinion on the question, stating that “Kirkuk has to remain an indivisible part of Iraq. We look upon it as the Holy Land of Iraq, a land to be defended … Kirkuk is an Iraqi city.”

The Kirkuk conflict has given worry to neighbouring states, as well. These concern first and foremost the dangers of Kurdish secession: in such a scenario, the Kirkuk oil fields and pipelines could become the means to finance the independent Kurdish state, a protection in view of which Kurds could calmly face the potential international consequences of their separatism. The Turkish government is in favour of postponing the referendum until after the revision of the Iraqi constitution. The way Turkish domestic politics has been shaping up has increasingly forced the Turkish government to make commitments to protecting the interests of Iraqi Turkomans, despite the fact that short of direct intervention the range of instruments to this end is rather limited. The conference titled Kirkuk 2007, held in Turkey and addressing the future of the region, was organized without inviting representatives of the Iraqi Kurds, and was called in response a meddling into domestic affairs by Iraqi Kurdish leaders. Sadettin Ergeç, a leader of the ITF went as far as to call for the abandoning of the referendum plan, stating that “Kirkuk is no mere province, but a joint possession of all Iraqis, and therefore all Iraqis have to have a say in its future”. In practice, this constituted a call to have Kirkuk put under the supervision of the federal government. In this context, some analysts have concluded that the likelier it becomes that a referendum will in fact be held in 2007 on the issue, the likelier it is that “Turkey … is going to take matters in its hands … be it alone or in co-operation with a neighbouring state [Iran].”

For the United States, the escalation of the Kirkuk dispute could have immeasurable consequences. It makes it into a very real possibility that its NATO-ally, Turkey and its most important allies in Iraq, the Kurds could become involved in armed conflict, and also increases the likelihood of a second conflict between its two, hitherto co-operating partners within Iraq, Kurds and Shiite Arabs who have thus far tended to leave issues of vital interest to one of the parties be administered by the interested coalition partner.

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196 Dreazen, “Why Iraq’s Kirkuk is Vital.”
198 The Turkish government cannot do anything against the announcements made by, e.g. Masoud Barzani claiming that Kirkuk would become part of Kurdistan. Barkey, “Turkey and Iraq,” p. 11.
199 Iraq: Turkey Keeps Nervous Eye on Kirkuk.
200 Sylvia Tiryaki, “Turkey should not Have High Hopes for Intervention in Iraq,” Turkish Daily News Online, 12 February 2007.
Having a NATO-member enter into an ad hoc coalition with Iran, the chief adversary of the US and possibly even with Syria, the history of American presence with Iraq would have the episode of the greatest American debacle added to it.

Turkish–American Relations

After the end of the Cold War and especially the break-up of the Soviet Union it was generally thought that Turkey would lose much of its significance rapidly, which would have a serious impact on Turkish–American relations. However, the dual containment of Iraq and Iran, the 1991 Gulf War, the maintenance of the sanctions, the security of the oil pipelines running through Turkey and finally the War on Terror have made Turkey an indispensable ally, which the United States could always rely on, even beyond its neighbourhood, as in the Balkans or in Afghanistan. The war in Iraq, however, has opened a new chapter in Turkish–American relations, which has been increasingly characterized by tensions which cast their shadow over, or even threaten, Turkish–American co-operation elsewhere. Ankara is aware of the fact that it cannot turn against Washington, but it is bound to handle the developments in its direct neighbourhood along its own immediate interests and thus may oppose US interests—a fact increasingly disapproved by the American administration.

While after 11 September 2001 the Turkish government as well as the public fully supported the War on Terror and the elimination of the Taliban, in 2003 most of the public opposed the war in Iraq, in spite of the fact that the Turkish government was ready to support the United States. On 1 March 2003, however, the Turkish Parliament did not approve of the American request that Turkish territory could be used to open the north-western front from there—much to the surprise of all, since in February 2003 it was Turkey that asked for NATO protection. It was then that American strategic planning started to seriously consider Iraqi Kurds as potential and indispensable allies, which—taking into consideration that the United States had promised Iraqi Kurds (in 1992 and in 1998) that they would support a federal Iraq, and that during the decade of Iraqi sanctions the US had supported and defended the Kurds—caused serious concerns among the Turkish elite and public.

Nevertheless, in October 2003, when the United States turned to several Muslim countries for support (troops) in the Iraqi reconstruction, the Turkish Parliament with a considerable majority (358:143) authorized the government to send 10,000 troops to Iraq exclusively for peace-keeping and reconstruction tasks. Although according to

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201 The parliamentary decision is generally considered to be an unlucky coincidence of events rather than a deliberate decision, because a part of the representatives being convinced that the Parliament will give its approval was not present. Even so the proposal was beaten with only 3 votes.

202 Since France, Germany and Belgium did not support the preparations to defend Turkey against possible Iraqi missile attacks, Turkey asked for a special consultation in NATO. It should be noted that Hungary sent 2000 chemical protection uniforms to Turkey in the framework of NATO support.

203 First of all Bangladesh, India and Pakistan were approached, but none of these agreed to send troops. http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/1008/p01s02-woiq.htm.

some sources Turkish troops were foreseen to operate in the Mosul–Kirkuk–Erbil triangle, the United States meant to delineate their place of operation somewhere in Southern Iraq and would have provided a 8.5 billion loan in return, the only condition of which was Turkish support to the United States in Iraq.205 This, however, has never been realized: upon the vehement opposition of the Iraqi Kurds, the Iraqi Foreign Minister announced that they would not think it fortunate if the neighbouring countries undertook military tasks in Iraq. As a consequence, both the Turkish government and the United States gave up the plan. Turkey has, for the second time, lost the opportunity to participate in the Iraqi events under an international mandate.

The war in Iraq and the deterioration of the Iraqi security situation, of which the revival of armed operations by the PKK is considered an integral part, have made the previously pro-American Turkish public increasingly anti-American.206 American military operations, failures and excessive actions (Abu Ghraib) to which Turkish interests had also fallen victim207 and that had been presented in great detail in the Middle Eastern and the Turkish media, have had a great role in this. Anti-American sentiments were further strengthened by the public belief that the real aim of the United States in Iraq was to gain strategic control over oil and oil pipelines.208 Today only some 8% of the Turkish public has a favourable opinion of the United States, which puts the Turkish government into a difficult position, especially since their own supporters, the AKP voters are the least pro-American.

The public and the political elite accuse the United States of not doing anything despite promises to the contrary against terrorist operations in Iraq, by which they mean the PKK.209 The United States on the one hand is not in a position to send troops to Northern Iraq against PKK fighters (especially since order is being maintained there by the allied Kurdish organizations), on the other hand, the PKK has never threatened American endeavours in the region in fact it has seized every possibility to emphasize its readiness to co-operate.210

American policy-makers, on the other hand, are disapproving of Turkey’s regional activities, e.g. the negotiations of Hamas leader Khalid Meshal in Ankara, and the stance Turkey has taken vis-à-vis Iran and Syria, opposing their isolation.211

In spite of all disagreements, however, in questions falling outside their respective Iraq-policies, Turkish–American relations seem undisturbed. The United States goes on firmly supporting Turkey’s application and membership in the European Union.212

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206 Kirişçi, *Turkey’s Foreign Policy*, p. 83.
207 The Turkish public especially remembers two events: in 2004, then in 2005 Turkomans also fell victim to American military operations in Tel Afar, the aim of which was the elimination of insurgents; and the already mentioned incident in Sulaymania, when American soldiers took Turkish soldiers into custody.
208 Kirişçi, *Turkey’s Foreign Policy*, p. 80.
210 Leicht, *Turkey Sends Troops to Iraq*.
211 Kirişçi, *Turkey’s Foreign Policy*, p. 82.
212 This support has been so firm that in the Union many consider Turkey the “Trojan horse” of the United States. Ibid., p. 84.
The Turkish government is further supporting the US plan for the democratization of the Middle East, since they think that a democratized neighbourhood and liberal market economy would suit Turkish interests best.  

**Turkish Losses**

Turkey—the elites and the general public alike—opposed the war in Iraq because of economic considerations as well. Turkey had just got over a deep economic crisis, and the memories of the 1991 Gulf War and the Turkish losses suffered in consequence, were being vividly remembered. According to the President of the Turkish Chamber of Commerce, as a result of the Gulf War and the sanctions against Iraq, Turkey lost some 50–60 billion USD, partly as the result of the ruptures in trade with Iraq, partly due to the closure of the oil pipelines running through Turkey. Turkish estimates of the losses usually include uncompleted or abandoned development projects in Eastern Anatolia.

From a Turkish financial and economic perspective, it is a basic interest that the oil pipelines coming from Iraq through Turkey should operate properly, and that the cross-border economic development, which has a stimulating effect on Eastern Turkey, should continue unhindered. In the past years Turkish business circles have played an immense role in the enhancement of trade and investment between Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey (direct flights were introduced, etc.).

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213 Ibid. p. 80.
Conclusion

The war in Iraq has provided Iraq’s neighbours with new possibilities, but at the same time it has created new challenges as well. While all neighbouring states agree that they do not want to see (too) strong an Iraq, an (overly) weakened Iraq is also a threat.

All Iraq’s neighbours agree that from the perspective of regional stability Iraq’s integrity is of primary importance. The federal structure of Iraq, therefore, is considered a threat—a step on the way to disintegration. Opinions, however, differ on the character of the new Iraq. Arab states would like to see an Arab Iraq, while the Iraqi leadership emphasizes the multi-ethnic character of the country. Turkey supports a strong central government, which is also in the interest of Iran as long as it is dominated by Shiites. Arab countries—according to their traditions and practice—think a “strong man” would be the solution.

For the neighbouring states Iraq is the arena and the symbol of the developments and shifts in their relationship with the United States. NATO member Turkey has come into a series of conflicts with the United States, while the “Axis of Evil” member Iran and the possible target Syria have started direct negotiations with the US. Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are supporting the United States in Iraq, but they are reluctant to give up their claim to Iraqi debt and war compensation—even under US pressure. Apart from rhetoric, most of them would not support a fast American withdrawal.

Iraq’s neighbours have specific interests and stakes in Iraq: the influence of Jordan, Syria and Kuwait are not overly significant from the perspective of the country and of the region, but Iran and Saudi Arabia are already almost fighting a “proxy war”, which—should the United States withdraw its troops—could turn into an open direct conflict. The Turkish Army is standing on the Iraqi border ready to intervene should Turkomans be attacked or Turkish interests be violated.

The general public in the region—perhaps with the exception of Kuwait—has an increasingly negative opinion of the United States and its role in Iraq, and even this already negative opinion is deteriorating further at a rapid pace. It is generally thought that the war was started for and is about gaining strategic control over Iraqi oil, and that in the background Israel is dictating the events, speaking over the shoulders of the United States, in spite of the fact that Israel has kept a very low profile in the question of Iraq. (Iraq has, since the 1991 Gulf War, played a very limited role in Israeli threat perceptions.)

For the public and the political elite, the Palestinian–Israeli conflict and the war in Iraq are clearly related: in contrast with the American rhetoric that the road to Jerusalem (and Ramallah) goes through Baghdad, they are convinced that without the settlement of the Palestinian issue, the situation in Iraq cannot be solved either. Moreover, as a result of the war in Iraq, the Palestinian–Israeli peace is farther away today than it has ever been since the outbreak of the second intifada. At the end of 2007, both Baghdad and Jerusalem seem to be beyond reach.

Within the sub-regional order, therefore, the war is far from over.
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