

2003

Iraq “the Day After”

Phebe Marr

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Marr, Phebe (2003) "Iraq “the Day After”," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 56 : No. 1 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol56/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

An Arabist and a leading specialist on Iraq, Dr. Marr has lived and worked in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon and has traveled extensively in the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and East Asia. Dr. Marr received a B.A. in international relations with honors from Barnard College, an M.A. in Middle East studies from Radcliffe Graduate School, and a Ph.D. in history and Middle East studies from Harvard University (1967). She served as a research analyst for the Arabian American Oil Company (1960–62) in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, and as chair of the Near East and North Africa program at the Foreign Service Institute (1963–66). She has been a fellow of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard and an associate professor of Middle East history at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, as well as at California State University, Stanislaus. She was a senior fellow at the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University, retiring from the U.S. government in 1997. In 1998 and 1999 she was a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars in Washington, D.C. Dr. Marr is on the editorial board of the Middle East Journal and is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the Middle East Institute. She is currently updating her book, The Modern History of Iraq, to be published by Westview Press.

© 2002 by Phebe Marr
Naval War College Review, Winter 2003, Vol. LVI, No. 1

IRAQ "THE DAY AFTER"

Internal Dynamics in Post-Saddam Iraq

Phebe Marr

Of all the unknowns facing policy makers in Iraq, the greatest is what kind of leadership is likely to come after Saddam Husayn. Much, of course, will depend on the means of unseating him. However, little hard thought has yet been spent on who might replace him, what orientation and policies alternative leaders might have, and the processes by which leadership can be selected and legitimated over the long term. These gaps need to be addressed, though the answers may have to remain somewhat speculative.

Regime replacement will be one of the most difficult decisions facing the U.S. administration, because of the absence of good options. Inside Iraq, there is no alternative political leadership available. Well qualified leaders may exist, but they will be difficult to identify beforehand. It is clear that no such leadership can emerge while Saddam Husayn's regime is in place. By definition, political leaders must have followers and at least some rudimentary organization. Under Saddam Husayn's security system, no such activity can take place. The absence of clearly identifiable alternative leadership leaves a great deal to chance and to last-minute efforts at organization by would-be successors the "day after"—not a good foundation for exercising control over the situation.

Some attempt to identify sources of leadership inside Iraq can be undertaken beforehand. The best framework for such a process is probably examination of Iraq's institutional framework and of the leadership below the top levels, which will inevitably depart with Husayn. Such institutions obviously include the military, elements of the bureaucracy, the educational establishment, and even the Ba'th Party itself. But there is a problem here. These institutions have been heavily infiltrated by party members and clan relations of Saddam Husayn, and anyone with experience in administration and in the exercise of authority is

likely to have been influenced by their thinking and orientation. How much change is likely to result from such leadership?

Outside of Iraq, alternative political leadership does exist. The “outside” opposition has been operating among Iraq’s exile community—in Europe, the United States, and the Middle East—for over a decade, and its members can be clearly identified. However, the various groups constituting this opposition have different agendas and some deeply held but divergent views about Iraq’s future, preventing coalescence around a common direction or leader. Meanwhile, aside from the Kurdish parties, it is not clear how much support the outsiders have inside Iraq. Hence, if an outside opposition element is to become Iraq’s alternative government, it will have to be put in power by the United States.

These factors present the United States with a policy dilemma. The major justification for a policy of “regime change” advanced by the Bush administration rests on U.S. interests, not the benefits it would bring to the Iraqi population, although these may be substantial. Paramount among American interests are an end to Iraq’s program of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and institution of a regime that would be more friendly—or at least not hostile—to U.S. aims, including cooperation in the “war on terrorism” and achievement of regional stability. The alternative leadership most likely to produce these results is the opposition in exile, most of whom have been in the West for an extended period of time and have absorbed Western ideals and aims. However, installing this leadership would be the most expensive option for the United States; it would require U.S. forces on the ground and other military support for some time. A change from inside Iraq, initiated by as-yet-unidentified leaders, would be the least costly for the United States, as presumably avoiding long-term occupation and possibly even destructive military action. But such leadership, especially if it emerges from inside the regime, may not be able—or willing—to guarantee a long-term change in WMD policy or a new, more friendly, political orientation. It may also have difficulty in maintaining domestic order and control.

THE “INSIDE” OPTION

Should the regime in Baghdad disappear, by whatever means, what potential leadership forces would the United States have to work with inside Iraq? What is it likely to find? A critical factor in this regard is that in the decade since 1991, Iraq has become more fragmented—socially, culturally, and even politically—than at any time since the Second World War. This is not to say that Iraq is likely to break up into its three main ethnic and sectarian components—a Kurdish north, an Arab Sunni center, and a Shi’i south. Such an eventuality is highly unlikely, because of the demographic mixture of these communities in many large cities and because none of these communities is itself homogeneous.¹ But Iraq’s

cohesion as a state and its sense of identity as a nation could break down. Indeed, this cohesion has been eroding steadily over the decade, owing to the alienation of all Iraqi communities from a repressive, narrowly based government that has kept itself in power by, in part, relying on one sectarian group and playing off one community against another. As a result, keeping Iraq together and reconstituting a spirit of unity will be more difficult than it would have been a decade ago, and a failure of the central government in Baghdad to maintain control over the country could have more serious consequences.

In the North

In the north of the country, in a zone encompassing about 10 percent of Iraqi territory, the Kurds have been governing themselves for over a decade. In 1992, after the upheavals of the uprising, an exodus of refugees (almost half the population), and the establishment of a safe haven and a no-fly zone by the United States and its allies, the Iraqi government withdrew its forces and administration from an area that extends from Zakhu in the north through Irbil in the center to al-Sulaymaniyyah in the south. Kurdish political parties took control. However,



despite an election in 1992 and the establishment of a Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), the Kurds were not able to establish and maintain a unified government. After several years of civil conflict between the two main Kurdish parties, the Kurdish region split in two. In the northeast, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), under Mas'ud Barzani, governs the territory from Zakhu, on the Turkish border, to Irbil; in the southwest, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), under Jalal Talabani, governs the remaining territory from its capital in

al-Sulaymaniyyah. A slice of territory on the Iranian border around the town of Halabjah has come under the control of religious parties, leaving the Kurdish border open to hostile forces from Iran or Iraqi territory under Saddam's control.²

Nonetheless, the Kurds have produced real political leadership, with recognized political parties, and effective control of a portion of Iraqi territory. Their *peshmergas* (militias) maintain security, their parties administer the region, and in recent years, with some help from outside, a measure of prosperity and

greater freedom has come to the north.³ This new reality and the bargaining power it gives the Kurds will have to be recognized in a post-Saddam Iraq.

However, although the Kurdish political parties can be expected to join a post-Saddam government—indeed, they would certainly bargain for a hefty share of power in it—they cannot provide alternative political leadership for the country as a whole. In this sense, the Kurdish parties are not comparable to the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. The real issue is whether the Kurds would be willing to cooperate with other Iraqi groups across ethnic and sectarian lines to establish a unified Iraq. Indeed, they may instead seek to enlarge their territory to include Kirkuk and the oil fields of the north. (The Kurds have consistently claimed this territory in bargaining with the central government and have just as consistently been refused, foreshadowing a future, post-Saddam problem.)

The Kurdish parties have demonstrated time and again that they are interested in greater self-government in the north, not leadership of a government in Baghdad.⁴ The PUK has shown more willingness to cooperate with Arab opposition groups to overthrow the regime than has the KDP, which has preferred to solidify its base in the north.⁵ But neither party has shown much of a desire to lead an Iraqi state; in fact, the degree of self-government to be accorded to Kurds in a future Iraq has been a bone of contention in all opposition discussions. A decade of self-government by these parties, including the development of separate institutions of government and the extensive use of the Kurdish language—weakening the facility to use Arabic—will pose problems of integration in the post-Saddam period.

An alternative leadership exists among the Kurds—one that is less nationalist and more interested in integration into Iraq—but it shows little evidence of being able to displace the two dominant political parties. This leadership centers on tribal leaders, such as the Baradostis, the Surchis, and others, who used to be affiliated with the central government's apparatus of control in the north. These leaders commanded tribal contingents who worked with the Iraqi army in defending the border against Iran (and from the Kurdish parties). The 1991 rebellion, in which they played leading roles, ended in their displacement as leaders.⁶ Interestingly, some of them have formed an association with Arab tribes in territory under Saddam's control, with a view to working for a new government. Their group comprises Kurds and Arabs, Sunni and Shi'ah, giving more promise of integration.⁷ However, their tribal organization cannot now match that of the two political parties, although the tribal leaders could play supportive roles in a new government.

A small "Islamic" enclave on the border with Iran has produced alternative leadership vested in, notably, the Islamic Movement of Iraqi Kurdistan (IMIK), under Mullah 'Uthman 'Abd al-'Aziz, and other smaller Islamic parties. These

groups and the support they command are far too small to play a role in any alternative government in Baghdad, but as Sunni Islamists they represent a new trend in Iraq, one that may have increasing appeal to Arab Sunni youth as well as Kurds. In fact these Islamic groups have been a destabilizing force in the north, frequently

In time, even Iraqis who initially greet the change of regime with relief and delight would turn against a foreign occupying force.

fighting with military forces of the PUK, in whose neighborhood they operate. In fact, news reports claim that this region is harboring militant Islamic groups, such as the

newly formed Ansar al-Islam (Supporters of Islam), that would come under U.S. definitions of terrorist.⁸ This small enclave suggests the larger dangers that could emerge in case of the collapse of centralized control in Baghdad.

In the South

South of Baghdad, the Shi'ah population, accounting for at least 60 percent of Iraq's inhabitants, has over the past decade become more alienated from the central government and more isolated from the outside. They have borne much of the brunt of two wars, a rebellion that was brutally put down in 1991, and the effects of neglect and sanctions. The result has been smoldering unrest and repressed animosity toward a Sunni-dominated regime. These factors have encouraged a greater Shi'i identity, although this Shi'i voice lacks a sense of direction and a domestic outlet for expression. Whatever form this Shi'i identity may take in the future, it shows as yet little evidence of separatism. Rather, the Shi'ah, virtually all Arabic speakers except for a small minority of *fayli*, or Shi'i Kurds, consider themselves indigenous Iraqis; they want a say in Iraq's government commensurate with their numbers. Increased Shi'i identity may well translate into a demand for a Shi'i-dominated government, which would change fundamentally the dispensation of power in Baghdad.

The problem for the Shi'ah will be translating this potential vision into reality. As yet, they have no indigenous leadership or organization that effectively represents their interests. The best-known Shi'i group is SCIRI (the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq), which has at least a recognized leadership, an administrative hierarchy, and some irregular military forces (the Badr Brigade). These, however, are all situated outside Iraq, mainly in Iran. How much support SCIRI can call on inside Iraq is a question. It can probably count on a core constituency in such Shi'i strongholds as the holy cities (al-Najaf, Karbala) and the marsh area (or what is left of it), and underground in southern cities and towns. But these supporters are probably a minority of the heterogeneous Shi'i community; the ability of Shi'i groups like SCIRI to recruit

widespread support may be limited by their ties to Iran, their clerical leadership, and their strong religious agenda.

Inside Iran, SCIRI has an elaborate organization, consisting of an executive council of about fifteen, a larger assembly (a potential parliament in exile), and a military wing of five to ten thousand soldiers. While SCIRI does include some Kurds and Turkmen, the overwhelming majority are Arab Shi'ah, some of Persian origin and background. In 1982, when it was founded, SCIRI was an umbrella organization for various Shi'i religio-political organizations, including al-Da'wah ("The Call," the original Iraqi Shi'i party, founded as an underground movement in the late 1950s), the Islamic Action Organization, SCIRI itself, and others; since then it has mainly become a vehicle for Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, an ayatollah from a well known Najaf clerical family.⁹

The base of the movement is mainly Iraqi Shi'i exiles in Iran, whose numbers have been estimated at anywhere from 250,000 to a million (the latter figure is probably too high). While some of these people are poor refugees in camps along the border with Iraq, many others are middle class and have integrated into Iran's cities and towns. Many of these would have to relocate to Iraq if Hakim was to have a base in the country.

SCIRI suffers from several other drawbacks in addition to its foreign location. The movement and its leadership have undergone a number of splits, particularly over issues of Shi'i ideology—such as support for Ayatollah Khomeini's concept of the *vilayat al-faqih* (rule by the Islamic jurist), now incorporated into the Iranian government. The most pronounced difference has occurred with members of the Da'wah, some of whom have retained a distance from SCIRI. Factional fighting among followers of various clerical leaders has also taken place. Far more important, however, has been SCIRI's tie to Iran, which has hurt Hakim's movement in two ways. First, Iran's support (indeed, control and domination) of the movement has been used by the regime to justify repression of the Shi'ah—expulsion of Iraqi Shi'ah to Iran, especially during the Iran-Iraq war; arrests and executions of Shi'i activists; and gradual reduction of the mobility of Shi'ah into government—as a result of which Shi'i ability to affect policy and attitudes in the center has virtually disappeared. Second, SCIRI's ties to the adversary against which Iraq fought an eight-year war has hurt the group's potential for recruitment. It is generally agreed that during the rebellion of 1991, when Shi'ah raised banners displaying Hakim's picture, a number of potential recruits were alienated.

At the same time, SCIRI has not had the benefit of a strong outside patron. Iran provides aid and support, but it is itself a weak and politically fractured polity, not in a position to overthrow the regime in Baghdad. SCIRI and other Iraqi Shi'i opponents of the regime have complained (with justification) of too little

help from Iran, which has been far more concerned with its own national interests and with preserving the peace along its border with Iraq.

The religious seminaries in al-Najaf and Karbala, the usual sources of Shi'i leadership, have been greatly weakened by repression over the last two decades. Attacks on Shi'i clerics and their followers began in the mid-1970s and reached a climax in 1980 with the execution of Muhammad Baqr al-Sadr, a militant and popular Shi'i figure who had been a founder of al-Da'wah in the late 1950s. Expulsions and persecution continued during the Iran-Iraq war. In 1991, after the Shi'i rebellion, the chief *marja'* (religious authority), Ayatollah Abu-l-Qasim al-Khu'i, was forcibly taken to Baghdad, made to appear on television in support of the government, and then put under virtual house arrest. This incident was followed in subsequent years by the unexplained deaths of a succession of religious leaders.¹⁰ The most recent (February 1999) was that of Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, a chief *marja'* who had been selected by the regime for his "moderation" but who sealed his own fate when he began to exercise real leadership on behalf of the Shi'i community, generating widespread popularity. These executions and deaths have stripped the community of religious leaders capable of organizing opposition to the government. Under whatever circumstances, however, clerical leadership has always been somewhat problematic for the Shi'ah, since it mobilizes religious followers but tends to raise anxiety among the secular Shi'i community, as well as among Sunnis, Arab and Kurd, who fear sectarianism.

Tribal groups also represent a certain potential for leadership in the Shi'i community (as is true for Arab Sunnis). In towns and rural areas of the south, tribal ties have always been stronger than in Baghdad, and in recent years the regime has strengthened tribal leadership as a means of shoring up a failing local administration. Tribal leaders who are loyal are rewarded with land, positions in the military for their sons, and other favors. Many new clan and tribal leaders have been appointed by the regime, to ensure their loyalty. Nonetheless, as tribal leaders have been given more local authority and opportunities to acquire wealth, they have used it to increase their power and status—some might turn against the regime. In the 1991 rebellion, for example, a number of tribal leaders helped galvanize their districts and communities, particularly in Hillah and al-Diwaniyyah. But tribal leadership too is problematic. Traditionally, tribes have been better at rebellion than at the construction of new political formations. Their leaders collaborate across tribal and ethnic lines only with difficulty. Moreover, tribal ties do not constitute a desirable basis for a modern state.

Since 1991, the south has been the locus of sustained unrest. Roads have been cut, government installations attacked, and on occasion riots unleashed. Such events have been intermittent but a constant factor over the decade.¹¹ Neglect of the region and decline in its economy have caused an outflow of its population;

once Iraq’s second most populous city, Basra is now fifth. This decline has produced resentment, but it has not yet produced groups or leaders that can mobilize the population. This growing alienation in the south from the regime—and the Sunni center—may make cooperation more difficult in any new regime.

In the Center

The geopolitical center of the country is focused on Baghdad, a demographically mixed city, but it includes the predominantly Arab Sunni cities along the Tigris River north to Mosul and the Euphrates west to Syria—a zone often called the “Sunni triangle.”¹² This central region has provided the bulk of the leadership for Iraq, not only under the current regime but under previous regimes as well. Never, however, has any regime been as narrow in its base as the present one.¹³ Even if the top levels of the current regime are removed, leadership at lower levels is likely to continue to come from the center, which contains most of the Iraqis with the experience and capacity to govern. Moreover, the center is most likely to provide new political leadership at the top, if change is engineered from inside. Aside from Saddam and his coterie, what are we likely to find here?

The current regime rests on three pillars: the kinship network that surrounds and supports Saddam; the institutions of party and state that implement his orders; and a small economic elite that enjoys most of the benefits of the state-controlled oil resources. It is within this nexus that we must look for what we are likely to get if the regime is replaced from inside.

Saddam himself refers to the first two pillars as, respectively, *ahl al-thiqah* (the people of trust—that is, those on whom one can rely for loyalty), and *ahl al-khibrah* (the people of expertise—the technocrats and professional administrators). While there is some overlap, these two groups are, for the most part, distinct and separate.

The “people of trust” are drawn almost wholly from Saddam’s kinship group, and it is to their kinship tie that they owe their positions. At the top of the system is a thick network of people from Saddam’s extended family and clan, the Albu Nasir, or Bayjat.¹⁴ Much has been written on this phenomenon, which has consistently grown over the last three decades but has reached an apogee since the rebellion of 1991.¹⁵ Saddam’s own extended family, whether descendent from his father (the Majids) or his stepfather (the Ibrahims) or his uncle (the Talfahs), and now including his sons, has, during his long tenure, occupied key posts in the security system and the Republican Guard, helping to keep the regime in power. A system of marriages within the clan has strengthened this extended family and its hold on power. Allied with the Bayjat, for purposes of recruitment, are other Sunni tribes and clans from the central area, among them the Ubayd, the Jubur, and the Dulaym.¹⁶

This political structure, now solidified in Iraq, raises several policy questions relating to “the day after.” First, while any change must replace Saddam Husayn and his entire extended family, as well as the secret police and the top of the security system, how much of the clan network can be removed without bringing an end to law and order—indeed, without a serious outbreak of retribution? In the military as well, much of the clan network may remain, particularly if new leadership emerges from the military. Second, if new political leadership emerges as a result of a coup or a struggle within the regime, will another clan or tribal group replace the Abu Nasir? How much of the clan system will persist? Above all, how can the kin/clan network be replaced with more modern institutions, open to all, and less dependent on personal loyalty and ties? Whatever leadership comes to power, the clan system, now deeply imbedded in key structures, will have to be dealt with.

The *ahl al-khibrah*—the experts, technocrats, and educated professionals—are much more numerous than the “people of trust,” and they are to be found in the various institutions of state. Chief among these are the Ba’th Party, the bureaucracy, the educational establishment, and the military. While in a change of regime the party itself is likely to collapse, many of its cadre would remain.

Should the regime in Baghdad disappear, by whatever means, what potential leadership forces would we have to work with inside Iraq? What are we likely to find?

Much of the education establishment, including the elaborate university system, would also endure, although much of its administration has been “Ba’thized,” especially at the upper levels. The bureaucracy, which together with

the educational establishment employs about 17 percent of the workforce (exclusive of the military), is the repository of much of Iraq’s educated middle class, and it will remain as the bulwark of government after any regime change.¹⁷

Iraq’s military, for its part, is a key repository of potential leadership. Iraq has several militaries, not just one. The regular army, greatly weakened by sanctions, is an old, pre-Ba’th institution with some degree of independence and a sense of national identity. The Republican Guard—smaller but more effective, and more carefully recruited, trained, and vetted for loyalty—is presumed to be a main base of regime support, but it could fracture in the event of a change. The various special forces protecting the president and the members of the regime would certainly disappear with Iraq’s leader.

The educated technocrats are also more mixed in background and more reflective of Iraqi society as a whole than the *ahl al-thiqah*. They include substantial numbers of Arab Shi’ah, as well as Kurds, Turkmen, and urban Sunnis outside the clan system. What can be expected of the “people of expertise”? One

segment of this class—in its middle to late forties or older—may be Western educated, often in Britain or the United States. They are generally secular and culturally Western. They are also likely to be energetic, well disciplined, and competent managers and professionals. A second layer of the bureaucracy, and a larger one, has been educated in Iraq. Many have gone through the Saddam University system, which includes a variety of faculties, from law and political science to medicine. While regime loyalty is necessary for entrance, its students are drawn from the best-performing high school graduates. The selection process provides the best students a channel for upward mobility and gives the regime competent apparatchiks and managers. Military officers, whether regular or Republican Guard, are generally educated in Iraq; their exposure to the English language and foreign environments may be more limited than those of preceding generations. But officers, especially in the regular army, represent a cross section of the Iraqi population, and many do not identify with the regime.

While most of these professionals and technocrats will adapt to a new order, a number are Ba'th party members and have imbibed a number of attitudes inculcated in the last two or three decades that may be difficult to change. As in the Soviet Union, the old ideology and predilection for an authoritarian order may remain among the core.

The third pillar of support is a growing wealthy elite, sometimes referred to as an "economic mafia." This group includes Shi'ah and Sunnis, Kurds and Arabs, most of whom owe their positions to patronage from the regime, which controls the oil revenues that flow through the state's coffers. While this revenue has been limited under sanctions, it has increased since the "oil for food" program began to take effect at the end of 1996. Many members of this elite are contractors and new entrepreneurs, but almost all are dependent for their income on their relationships to the regime. While some economic and financial expertise may reside in this group, it cannot be expected to produce new political leadership.

Future political leadership from inside Iraq would more likely come from the first two pillars and probably the second. Among Iraq's institutions it is the military—or even remnants of the Ba'th Party—that is most likely to provide alternative leadership; it is less likely that new political leaders would come from the bureaucracy or the educational establishment, whose members have been more accustomed to following orders than to leading. However, the presence of competent, experienced administrators and military officers bodes well for a transition. Once new political leadership is in place, the country can be defended and an administration put in place.

However, should new leadership emerge from within this establishment, questions would arise for the future. Could political leadership from the center—

most likely Arab Sunni—accommodate the pent-up desires and aspirations of the Kurds and Shi'ah, and would it be willing to cede to them appropriate shares of power? Will such a leadership be trusted by other communities? And would it be able to establish control over the country, or would it face rivals for power? If the leadership were military, additional problems of civil-military relations would arise; few Iraqis want the return of military rule, which in the 1960s brought instability, coups, and dictatorship.

A second set of questions relates to the degree of change a new centrist leadership would bring, particularly with respect to policies of concern to the United States. Would a new military leader be willing—and able—to forgo the entire Iraqi WMD program and still maintain the support of the armed forces? How far would such a leadership go to accommodate the United States and the West, after decades of hostile propaganda from the regime, as well as actual hostilities and a decline due to sanctions? U.S. support for the regime—in the short term—would be essential for its survival. Above all, political attitudes and practices, acquired under an authoritarian—indeed, a totalitarian—regime might be difficult to change, especially in the short term. The political nature of the regime and its willingness to be inclusive will affect the degree of U.S. support for it.

THE “OUTSIDE” OPPOSITION

Unlike potential leaders in Iraq, “outside” opposition leaders can be clearly identified and are fairly well known, especially to U.S. policy makers; the key actors are briefly described below. Over the past decade, many of them have been exercising political leadership among the Iraqi exile community and within key constituencies of Western governments. Their views and their disputes are public—because, of course, they are operating in an open, Western environment.

The flaws of this outside opposition are also clear and need not be elaborated on here. First, of course, is their fragmentation and their inability to cooperate, even among like-minded groups. While some, like the Shi'i religious organizations and the Iraq Communist Party, have mutually exclusive agendas that make real collaboration difficult, even moderate, middle-of-the-road groups, such as the Iraqi National Congress and the Iraqi National Accord, have been unable to bury personal and political rivalries to cooperate constructively. Collaboration across ethnic and sectarian lines (the Kurdish parties with SCIRI, for example) has been difficult. While all agree on the need for regime change, none yet agrees on the formula for replacement. (These deep-seated differences may be a good reflection of the kind of struggle that may ensue “the day after.”)

The second problem with the outside opposition is the degree of support they command inside Iraq, and among which constituencies. If they should return to Iraq, would they be able to mobilize support from a sufficiently large political

spectrum to maintain stability? Or does their present fragmentation presage a future struggle for power, spreading instability, even a collapse of the central government? The regime in Baghdad has charged that many opposition leaders have been outside Iraq for so long that they have no ties with anyone inside. It is a fact that once out of the country, it is difficult to continue regular contacts within Iraq, let alone engage in political mobilization. The Kurdish parties are on Iraqi territory, but support beyond their own areas is limited. It is worth noting that the opposition inside faces the same dilemma.

The Iraqi National Congress. The INC, headed by Ahmed Chalabi, is the best known of the opposition groups in the West. Founded in 1992 as an umbrella group, it originally included the two Kurdish parties, the Iraq Communist Party (ICP), some Arab nationalist groupings, and, at least nominally, SCIRI, as well as various individuals and smaller bodies. A number of opposition groups continue to belong to the INC, but most have since gone their own ways, leaving the INC primarily a vehicle for Chalabi and his supporters. Chalabi's strength lies in his intellect (he is a graduate of MIT and the University of Chicago, a former mathematics professor and banker) and his political skill and tenacity in lobbying for support in the West, especially within the American political system.¹⁸ For a time he tried to put down roots in northern Iraq. However, he has alienated many leaders who resent his attempts to keep the strings of power in his own hands. He has also been controversial in American policy circles. The main question with Chalabi and the INC is whether it can command support inside Iraq.

The Constitutional Monarchy Movement. The Constitutional Monarchy Movement, now attached to the INC, is headed by Sharif 'Ali bin al-Husayn, one of the few surviving members of the Hashimite royal family of Iraq.¹⁹ Raised and educated in the United Kingdom, he has proposed a liberal, parliamentary regime in which, if chosen by the population, he would play the role of a constitutional monarch. There is in fact nostalgia among Iraqis for the Hashimite period, seen in retrospect as more moderate and democratic than its successor regimes, but it is not clear how much support this option would enjoy inside Iraq "the day after."

The KDP and PUK. The two Kurdish parties have already been dealt with. Both the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan are legitimate political parties, with leaderships, organizations, and irregular military forces at their disposal. In the summer of 2002, they were variously estimated to number from forty to seventy thousand, altogether. They are already "on the ground" in Iraq, controlling between them, as noted, about 10 percent of Iraqi territory. They would have to supply the backbone of any domestic military

move to oust Saddam Husayn and would seek to have significant roles in formulating a new political order in Iraq, as well as in a replacement leadership. But their aspirations—and ability—to lead regime change in an Arab Iraq are marginal, although they could hold the balance of power in a new government.

The PUK, under Jalal Talabani, has given more evidence of a willingness to cooperate with other groups in overthrowing the regime than has Mas'ud Barzani and the KDP, which is reluctant to upset the status quo without guarantees from the United States and assured American protection. The rivalry between these two parties, though currently submerged, could flare up again over any new allocation of power after a regime change.

SCIRI. The main base of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq is outside Iraq, within the large exile community in Iran, many members of which may wish to return to Iraq and would need to be integrated. SCIRI's actual support for change, its contribution to military operations through the Badr Brigade, and the extent of its cooperation with the United States would be largely determined by Iran. How much actual support it would get from Shi'ah inside Iraq is a major unknown, given its affiliation with Iran and its strong support for the concept of an Islamic republic in Iraq. Although SCIRI has verbally espoused a democratic regime in Iraq, its long commitment to Islamic Shi'i causes worry for some Iraqi Sunnis and many secular Shi'ah. Hakim, its leader, may have a role to play in a new government, but installing him as the leader of such a government would be counterproductive in the extreme.

The Iraqi National Accord. The INA, formed in 1990, is a centrist organization composed mainly of dissident Ba'thists who have broken with the party. The INA, led today by Ayyad Alawi, a neurosurgeon, a Shi'i, and a former Ba'thist, has attracted a number of members who played a role in the regime and its mili-

tary in the 1970s and 1980s. This group claims to have an "insider" understanding of the regime, as well as continuing contacts with military and civilians who work for the regime but are committed

If an outside opposition element is to become Iraq's alternative government, it will have to be put in power by the United States.

to its replacement. However, an attempted coup in 1996, with U.S. support, failed because the INA had been penetrated by Saddam's agents and supporters. As before, it is not clear how many levers the INA can pull, or whether a group with previous ties to the regime would find support in the country as a whole.

Defecting Army Officers. The opposition in recent years has been joined by a number of defecting military officers, including generals. Chief among these are Nizar al-Khazraji, former army chief of staff; Wafiq al-Samarra'i, former chief of

military intelligence; and Najib al-Salihi, former Republican Guard commander. They and others have formed several opposition associations. A number of these officers aspire to head a new, centrist regime, but most are cooperating with civilian groups, such as the INC, and with the U.S. government. While all these defectors claim to have important contacts in Iraq, the degree to which they could sway military units is a question. Outside, their organization is still weak, and they have yet to win Western support for the dominant roles to which they aspire. Their military backgrounds, while an advantage in terms of leadership skills, may prove a liability with respect to civilian support, especially from Kurds and Shi'ah.

The Iraq Communist Party. One group that has not received much notice from the West is the ICP, one of the oldest and best organized opposition groups in Iraq. Outlawed in Saddam's Iraq, the ICP now has members abroad, especially in Syria and in Western and Eastern Europe. It may survive underground inside Iraq, but little has been heard from it in recent years, aside from remnants in the north, where they have some Kurdish supporters and are allowed to operate. The ICP organization is small and weak inside Iraq, and the party lost its patronage with the collapse of the USSR. However, leftist, even Marxist, views are popular in Iraq in intellectual circles, and they appeal to Kurdish and Shi'i dissidents, as well as the lower classes, which have grown in recent years with sanctions. The party's anti-Western, anti-imperialist stand has prevented it from taking part in U.S.-supported opposition activities. In a "day after" scenario it could emerge as a significant intellectual force, but not one likely to condone a Western-oriented regime or support U.S. aims in Iraq. The same can be said for a number of smaller nationalist and leftist opposition groups, situated in Syria, that are unlikely to play a role in a U.S.-sponsored regime change.

THE POLICY DILEMMA

As this brief survey of the outside opposition indicates, the major problem with exile groups lies in the fact that they would have to be put in power by the United States, and probably maintained there by American forces if they are to survive until a new constitutional regime can be established. With the exception of the Kurds, who cannot take over Baghdad on their own, the opposition's leadership and organization is outside Iraq. While some groups could generate domestic support if they were placed in power under U.S. forces, how much and in which constituencies remain in question. They would have to contend with forces, institutions, and individuals already in place and desirous of maintaining their positions in the hierarchy. In short, putting the outside opposition in power in Iraq would require the occupation of the country. Invasion and occupation of

Iraq is the most costly policy option for the United States, not only in military and economic terms but politically as well. In time, even Iraqis who initially greet the change of regime with relief and delight would turn against a foreign occupying force. Regional states would do so even earlier. The level of military support would have to be carefully calibrated—enough to sustain the new regime but not enough to generate increased anti-American sentiment in the region. Such feeling would impede the war on terrorism.

Although installation of the outside opposition is the most costly scenario for the United States, it is the option most likely to effect genuine change in Iraq over the long term. The exile opposition is the most Westernized Iraqi community; it is most likely to agree to eliminate WMD and reorient foreign policy in a productive way. It has also had the most extensive exposure to democracy and hence is most capable of leading a transformation of the system in that direction.

By contrast, a change of regime from inside Iraq is the least costly option for the United States. Such a change is likely, at least initially, to bring a centrist regime. This kind of change could be induced in a number of ways—most of which must remain speculative. American pressure, including military, could cause the regime to crack and important elements inside it to turn against Saddam, to prevent an invasion and to assure survival of the regime in some form. Regime change could also be brought about by military action from the United States, including forces on the ground. The United States could then select a provisional local council from among forces inside Iraq, necessarily relying heavily on technocrats and others with experience in administration. How to select such a group and on what basis is one of the major uncertainties with this option. If the regime is overturned without U.S. troops on the ground, Washington will have little control over the sequel.

Any change from the center is likely to replicate the current distribution of power, with heavy reliance on the Arab Sunni population and on the military and bureaucratic institutions that currently run the country. Such a regime is less likely to bring real change. If the military played an important role in the regime, several questions would arise. Would it be willing to relinquish all weapons of mass destruction? Would it be friendly to the United States and willing to reorient foreign policy in a Western direction, or would nationalism resurface? Above all, would such a regime be able to stabilize itself without the assistance of U.S. forces? Would it be more inclusive of Kurds and Shi'ah, more open and democratic? Infusing such a system with perhaps four or five thousand people from the vast Iraqi exile community who had been persuaded to return, even if temporarily, would help set the transformation on a desirable path. But these outsiders would have to be welcome to the new centrist regime.

In general, any change from inside Iraq will probably have to rely on the second tier of leaders, military and civilian, now in place. The new regime would have, first of all, to establish a modicum of stability in and control over the country—a difficult task. It would have to incorporate more Kurds and Shi’ah into the central government, to provide this stability. It would have to accommodate the aims and goals, especially on WMD and foreign policy, for which the United States would have spent so much political, diplomatic, and even military capital.

In the end, how much support a new leadership has inside Iraq may not be the most important question facing the opposition but rather how much it has from the United States. The primary American interest in regime change is an end to Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and to its hostile behavior. A more democratic government is an important, but secondary, consideration. From the perspective of the United States, the fall of the current regime may be the easiest part of the undertaking. Replacing Saddam’s regime with a new leadership that is willing and able to satisfy U.S. strategic demands may prove costly, and it may require a long-term American presence on the ground. The United States may be about to learn that “empire” cannot be achieved on the cheap.

NOTES

1. As is well known, Iraq is a multiethnic, multisectarian country. The three main communities consist of the Arab Sunnis (15–20 percent of the population), who inhabit Baghdad and the cities and towns of the Tigris and Euphrates north and west of the capital; the Arab Shi’ah (over 60 percent), who inhabit Baghdad (a Shi’i-majority city) and the territory south to Basra; and the Kurds (about 17 percent), who inhabit the mountains and plains of the northwest. Iraq also has sizable minorities of Turkmen and various Christian minorities.
2. The PUK has contested control over this area, but its authority is weak. The region has been under strong Islamic influence; there have been numerous press reports of hostile foreign groups penetrating the region (see the *Washington Post*, 21 August 2002). On 2 April 2002, Barham Salih, the PUK’s prime minister, was nearly assassinated and a number of his bodyguards were killed, presumably by these forces.
3. These conditions have been frequently described by visiting journalists in the past four or five years, and they were observed by the author during visits to the region in 1992, 1993, and especially 1998.
4. During the rebellion of 1991, despite some cooperation with other opposition parties, the Kurdish parties were not willing to sacrifice their own aims or extend their control beyond the Kurdish area.
5. In 1995 and 1996, the PUK cooperated with the Iraq National Congress (INC) in failed military attempts to overthrow the regime, an indication of PUK willingness at that time to go beyond Kurdish aims.
6. The 1991 rebellion broke out in Basra in February and March, in the wake of the Persian Gulf War. Violence, especially among the Shi’i population, spread to other cities, including Baghdad, and inspired a parallel uprising in the Kurdish north. Iraqi forces brutally quelled the uprising in the following months, first in the south, then in the Kurdish zone.

7. Published statement of the Tribal Alliance of Iraq, 5 May 2002 (photocopy furnished to author).
8. The origin and nature of the Ansar is not clear. The PUK accuses it of ties to al-Qa'ida. Associated Press, Ankara, Turkey, 29 April 2002.
9. Hakim's father was Muhsin al-Hakim, the chief *marja'* from 1955 to 1970.
10. A son of al-Khu'i, Muhammad Taqi, was killed in 1994. In 1998, two senior clerics were killed—Ayatollah Shaykh Murthdhal-Burujardi in April, and Grand Ayatollah Shaykh Mirza 'Ali al-Ghawari in June.
11. For example, there were clashes between government and opposition forces in the Basra province in August 1996 and in April 1997. In 1998 Vice President Izzat al-Din Ibrahim was nearly assassinated in Karbala, and in 1999 there were attacks on Ba'th Party headquarters in Basra in April, and on a Republican Guard unit in May. 'Ali Hasan al-Majid, one of the regime's henchmen, was finally put in charge of security in the south—temporarily.
12. These areas include the provinces of Baghdad, Ramadi, Nineveh, Anbar, Salah-al-Din, and Diyala.
13. For example, of the seventeen members of the Regional Command of the Party elected after the 1991 rebellion, thirteen were Arab Sunni; there were only three Shi'ah, and one Christian. Geographically, twelve were from the "Sunni triangle" in the center, one from Baghdad; only four were from the rest of Iraq, excluding the area under Kurdish control. Isam al-Khafaji, "State Terrorism and the Degradation of Politics," in *Iraq since the Gulf War*, ed. Fran Hazelton (London: Zed Books, 1994), pp. 28–9.
14. Technically, the Albu Nasir is Saddam's tribe, and the Bayjat his clan. In practice the two are virtually interchangeable.
15. See, for example, Amatzia Baram, *Building toward Crises* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998), chap. 2; and Faleh A. Jabbar, *From Storm to Thunder* (Tokyo: Institute for Developing Economies, 1998), chap. 1.
16. One author has posed a hierarchy of clans in the current power structure, with the Bayjat on top, followed by the Tikritis, the Duris, and various clans from Anbar Province, Samarra', and the Juburis. Jabbar, p. 6.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
18. Chalabi is under a cloud in Jordan for allegations of banking fraud stemming from his previous management of the family banking business.
19. He is a maternal cousin of Faysal II, the last king of Iraq, killed when the monarchy was overthrown in 1958.

