BEYOND THE SHATT AL-ARAB:

HOW THE FALL OF SADDAM HUSSEIN CHANGED

IRAN-IRAQ RELATIONS

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CPA	Coalition Provisional Authority
IGC	Iraqi Governing Council
INA	Iraqi National Accord
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp
IRP	Islamic Republic Party
ISCI	Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (SCIRI)
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KDPI	Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
MKO	Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization
PJAK	Party of Free Life in Kurdistan
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
SCIRI	Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (ISCI)
SOFA	Status of Forces Agreement
UIA	United Iraqi Alliance

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

ABSTRACT

The fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 is the one of the most important events in the history of Iran-Iraq relations. Prior to the US-led invasion, Iran and Iraq were by no means friends and fought each other bitterly for eight years in the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s. The enmity continued throughout the following decade, as Iran and Iraq developed intimate relationships with each others' dissidents and exiles. When Coalition forces finally toppled Saddam Hussein's government on April 9, 2003, the slate was cleared for Shi'ites and Kurds to assume power for the first time in Iraq's 80 year history. For leadership in the new Iraq, Shi'ites and Kurds turned to the organizations that struggled against the Ba'athists. Thus, Iran's Iraqi allies were able to fill Baghdad's power vacuum through elections and, at times, by force. As a result of regime change, Iran-Iraq relations have improved considerably. Despite some clear progress though, several contentious issues still remain.

ILLUSTRATION 1: IRAN AND IRAQ

INTRODUCTION

Regime change in Iraq has been an ambition of American policy ever since Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990. Thereafter, the United States championed a series of policies which were intended to weaken Saddam Hussein and bring about his demise. UN Sanctions, no-fly-zones and support for Iraqi dissidents were all designed to contain and reduce the Ba'athist regime's power. Despite the enormous economic and political pressure, Saddam Hussein survived and continued to defy the United States and its allies. In response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, however, the Bush Administration made regime change in Iraq a top priority of American foreign policy. A hostile Iraqi government, coupled with potential weapons of mass destruction programs and tenuous links to terrorist organizations, was deemed too large a threat to the United States.

The removal of Saddam Hussein was intended to transform the country and make Iraq a hub for democracy. The Bush Administration believed that a democratic Iraq would stabilize the region and secure Middle Eastern oil for the global economy. Moreover, it was hoped that a free and democratic Iraq would set an example for other oppressive regimes in the Middle East and

thus spread democracy. In George W. Bush's State of the Union Speech on January 20, 2004, he proclaimed, "And above all, we will finish the historic work of democracy in Afghanistan and Iraq so those nations can light the way for others and help transform a troubled part of the world."[1] In the context of Iran-Iraq relations, though, regime change in Iraq would end the policy of dual containment and make Iraq an ally against the Islamic Republic of Iran. Such an ambitious plan was destined to profoundly change Iran-Iraq relations in ways that the Bush Administration had not anticipated.

Contrary to its intention, American policy in Iraq empowered opposition groups and exiles with longstanding ties to the Iranian government. By dismantling the government, implementing democracy and reinforcing sectarian identities through new governing institutions, Shi'ites and Kurds were sure to inherit Iraq due to their large populations. This alone was to be a seminal event because Shi'ites and Kurds had never governed in Iraq's 80 year history. Most of Iraq's Shi'ites and Kurds vehemently opposed Saddam Hussein's dictatorship and tasted the wrath of his regime on numerous occasions. For both Shi'ite and Kurdish resistance organizations, Saddam Hussein's chief regional enemy, Iran, was an ally of convenience. Iran was the largest Shi'ite country in the world and it had supported Kurdish rebels in Iraq long before Saddam Hussein officially assumed the presidency in 1979. Iraq's resistance groups were all too eager to receive aid and to open offices in the Iranian capital. These organizations worked with Iran on the eve of the US-led invasion and when they came back to Baghdad in 2003, most maintained their relationships with the Islamic Republic. American policy in Iraq set the stage for the best relations Baghdad and Tehran had seen in decades.

CHAPTER 1

A HISTORY OF IRAN-IRAQ RELATIONS

From the very beginning, Iran-Iraq relations were heavily influenced by geopolitical

forces and events. British colonialism, the Cold War and the War on Terror were all responsible

for intensifying cooperation or enmity between Iran and Iraq at one time or another. The few

instances of healthy relations occurred in the presence of a mutual regional threat. Most notably,

the pinnacle of Iran-Iraq relations occurred in the mid-1950s, when the Iranian and Iraqi

governments adopted a mutual defense agreement known as the Baghdad Pact. The treaty was

intended to contain the expansion of the Soviet Union and its allies in the Middle East. The

worst period of Iran-Iraq relations began in 1958, after a new government in Baghdad switched

sides in the Cold War and became an ally of the Soviet Union. During this phase, unresolved

issues such as border ambiguity, access to the Shatt al-Arab waterway and ethnic tensions were

exacerbated and put the two countries down a path to war.

The Origins of Iran-Iraq Relations

The story of Iran-Iraq relations begins in the 1920s, yet the history of this region goes

back thousands of years. Iran sits upon the remnants of the Persian Empire and has been a

discernible political entity for centuries. The Qajar Dynasty ruled for more than a century until

Reza Khan, a prominent military officer, staged a coup d'état in 1921. By 1925, he established

the Pahlavi Dynasty and became the Shah.[1] Iraq, on the other hand, is a product of colonialism

and is essentially a grouping of the three eastern-most provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The

Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 awarded the three Eastern Ottoman provinces of Baghdad, Basra

and Mosul, to the British and the French after World War I. In 1921, Baghdad and Basra were

made into a British mandate and Faisal al-Hashemi, the famous leader of the Arab Revolt, was

made king.[2] Five years later, Mosul was added to the mandate, forming the semi-independent

nation of Iraq as we know it today.

Iran viewed its newly-created neighbor with suspicion and refused to recognize Iraq's

legitimacy. As a mandate, Iraq was dominated by the British and would not obtain independence

until 1932. Even then, British forces still remained at select locations throughout the country.

Reza Shah, in his own battle against British influence, resented the special privileges awarded to

British nationals in Iraq under the Judicial Treaty of 1924. Iran withheld its recognition of Iraq,

hoping to secure those same privileges for Iranian nationals inside Iraq. By 1929, the Judicial

Treaty was renounced and Iran finally recognized Iraq. This filled King Faisal with a sense of

optimism about Iran-Iraq relations and he made his first official visit to Iran on April 22, 1932.

However, King Faisal's hopes sank in the face of Iranian claims to the Shatt al-Arab waterway,

which served as a southern border between Iran and Iraq.[3] Iran requested that the Iran-Iraq

border be moved to the middle point of the Shatt al-Arab, also known as the Thalweg Line. King

Faisal vehemently rejected Iran's request and Iraq pleaded its case for complete sovereignty over

the Shatt al-Arab to the League of Nations on November 29, 1934.

King Faisal's 1932 visit marked the beginning of the struggle over the Shatt al-Arab and the rest of the Iran-Iraq border. Iraq's first representative in Iran, Tawfiq al-Suwaidi, identified three basic points of contention which defined Iran-Iraq relations in the 1930s and continued to be issues in subsequent decades.[4] He cited the open and unguarded part of the Iran-Iraq border in the Kurdish north, the condition of ethnic Arabs in Iran's southwestern province of Khuzestan and, most importantly, the Shatt al-Arab waterway. The Shatt al-Arab was consistently Iraq's primary foreign policy concern because the country has so little coastline and limited access to the Persian Gulf. The speech given by Iraq's foreign minister to the League of Nations on January 14, 1935 addresses this point:

> On the general question of equity, the Iraqi Government feels that it is Iraq and not Persia that has grounds for complaint. Persia has a coastline of almost two thousand kilometers, with many ports and anchorages. In the Khor Musa, only fifty kilometers away to the east of the Shatt al-Arab, Persia possesses a deep-water harbor penetrating far into Persian territory, where she has already constructed the terminus of the Trans-Persian Railway. Iraq is essentially the land of the two rivers, Euphrates and Tigris. The Shatt al-Arab, formed by their junction, constitutes Iraq's only access to the sea; it requires constant attention if it is to be kept fit for navigation by modern shipping, and Basra, 100 kilometers from the mouth, is Iraq's only port. It is highly undesirable, from Iraq's point of view, that another Power should command this channel from one bank.[5]

By 1937, Iran and Iraq finally compromised and reached an agreement about their border along the Shatt al-Arab. The Frontier Treaty kept the border on the Iranian riverbank and put the majority of the river, including its entrance to the gulf, in Iraqi hands. However, the border deviated to the Thalweg Line for four miles around the oil-rich Iranian city of Abadan. Though some tension still remained, this treaty made it possible for Iran and Iraq to improve relations and sign mutual defense agreements.

After the border was clearly defined and agreed upon by both countries, Iran and Iraq

entered a series of pacts and treaties that made them more or less allies. In 1937, Iran, Iraq,
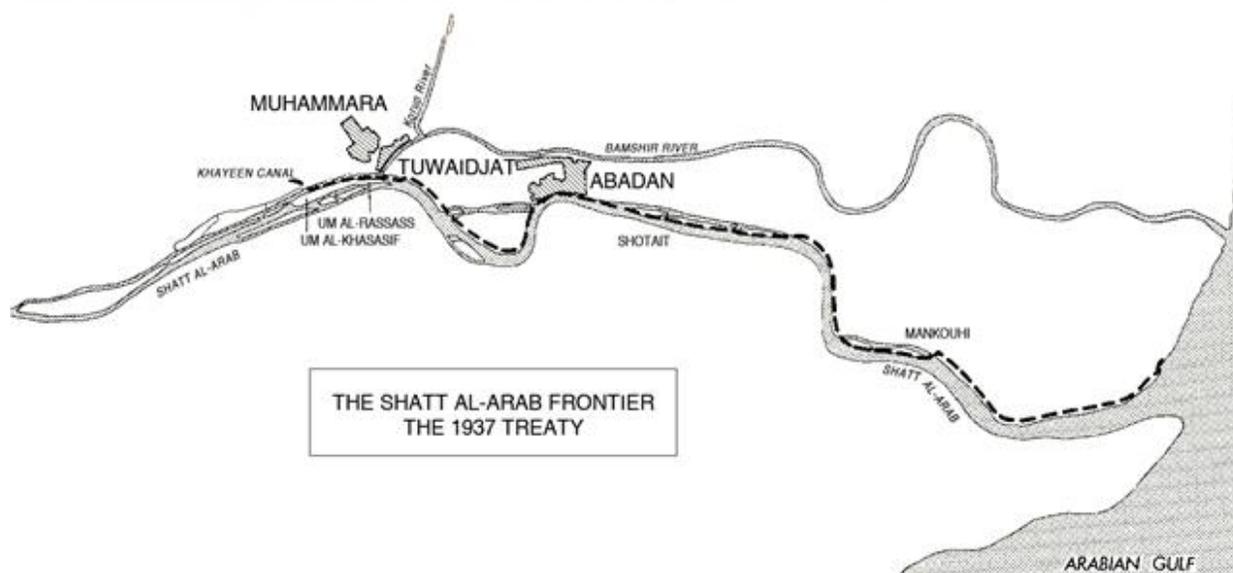
ILLUSTRATION 2: THE SHATT AL-ARAB AFTER THE 1937 TREATY

Map is from Tareq Y. Ismael, *Iraq & Iran: Roots of Conflict* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982), 17.

Turkey and Afghanistan signed a symbolic non-aggression pact which became known as the

Saadabad Pact. This agreement was a British invention and it was largely directed at the Soviet

Union. Twelve years later, Iran and Iraq signed the Treaty of Good Neighborly Relations and

exchanged ambassadors. These treaties vastly improved relations, but the zenith of Iran-Iraq

relations happened in 1955, when the Iranian and Iraqi governments entered into the Middle East

Treaty Organization (more commonly known as the Baghdad Pact) with Turkey, Pakistan and

Britain. Like the 1937 Saadabad Pact, the Baghdad Pact was intended to curtail Soviet

expansion.

The treaty quickly became a cornerstone of US policy in the region and it was well-suited to the new Eisenhower Doctrine. By the mid-1950s, the popularity of Arab nationalism, championed by Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, was becoming a threat to the Middle East's pro-Western monarchies. Nasser dealt a serious political blow to the Western colonial powers, Britain and France, in the Suez Crisis of 1956. This event, coupled with the Soviet Union's role in the construction of the Aswan Dam and Egypt's recognition of the communist government in China, convinced Washington that Arab nationalism threatened to push Middle Eastern nations onto the communist side of the Cold War. In his special address to Congress on January 5, 1957, President Eisenhower laid out his vision for American assistance to countries like Iran and Iraq in the region:

> The action which I propose would have the following features. It would, first of all, authorize the United States to cooperate with and assist any nation or group of nations in the general area of the Middle East in the development of economic strength dedicated to the maintenance of national independence. It would, in the second place, authorize the Executive to undertake in the same region programs of military assistance and cooperation with any nation or group of nations which desires such aid. It would, in the third place, authorize such assistance and cooperation to include the employment of the armed forces of the United States to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations, requesting such aid, against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by International Communism.[6]

The Baghdad Pact and the subsequent assistance from the United States via the Eisenhower Doctrine made for the best relations between Tehran and Baghdad because it placed them on the same side in the Cold War. The alliance with the United States and the Western democracies, however, was especially controversial for the Iraqi government. In the face of Arab nationalism's growing popularity, Iraq was the only Arab nation to join the Baghdad Pact.

Even the Middle East's other pro-Western Arab monarchies, like Jordan and Saudi Arabia, refused to join such an alliance. With the Iraqi people, the Baghdad Pact only reinforced their aversion for the government's policies. Though the Baghdad Pact temporarily strengthened relations between Tehran and Baghdad, the partnership would only last as long as the Iraqi government was an enemy of the Soviet Union and Arab nationalism.

The first three decades of Iran-Iraq relations is a tale of hostile neighbors who reconciled their differences to meet mutual challenges. At the time Iran and Iraq signed the Baghdad Pact, both firmly supported the West in the Cold War. Muhammad Reza Shah, the son of Reza Khan, owed his throne to the United States and, more specifically, to the CIA after they ousted Prime Minister Mosaddiq in 1953. Similarly, the Hashemite monarchy was propped up by the British who reoccupied Iraq after a coup d'état in 1941. Nevertheless, Arab nationalism posed a major threat to both the Shah of Iran, who feared an Arab super-state on his border, and the Hashemite monarchy of Iraq, whose legitimacy among Iraqis waned in the face of its pro-British and pro-Western stances. When the last Iraqi king was overthrown and brutally murdered on July 14, 1958 by a group of military officers who were sympathetic to Arab nationalism, it shattered the emerging partnership.

<u>Revolutions, Coups and Bitter Enemies</u>

The 14 July Revolution in Baghdad ended a cordial period in Iran-Iraq relations and ushered in an era of intense hostility. The new Republic of Iraq withdrew from the Baghdad Pact in March 1959 and allied itself with the Arab nationalists. This shocked Western nations and Iran, who saw the balance of power in the Middle East tilt favorably towards Gamal Abdel Nasser and his allies. Iran responded to the broken alliance through a show of force. Iran

increased its troop presence along the Iran-Iraq border and Iranian ships in the Shatt al-Arab

stopped paying fees to Iraqi authorities, which was a violation of the 1937 Frontier Treaty. The

Shah also wanted alterations made to the Iran-Iraq border. In November 1959, he demanded that

the border along the whole of the Shatt al-Arab be moved to the Thalweg Line, for equal

shipping rights. The Shah's new aggressive challenges to Baghdad were disregarded, as Iraq

was plunged into a war with the Kurdish north and became paralyzed by political turmoil,

suffering through no less than five regimes and three coups in the 1960s.

The circumstances of the late 1960s and early 1970s allowed Iran to rise and assert its

authority in the Persian Gulf. In 1971, the British finally withdrew from the remainder of their

gulf sheikhdoms. The Shah took this opportunity to seize three tiny islands off the coast of the

United Arab Emirates. In Iraq, the Ba'ath Party, which briefly took control of the central

government in 1963, regained power in 1968 and inherited a demoralizing Kurdish insurgency.

Besides the uprising in the north, Iraq's Arab allies were dealt a serious blow by the Israelis in

the Six Day War of 1967. The Shah exploited Iraq's weakened state by unilaterally abrogating

the 1937 Frontier Treaty in April 1969. Despite Iraq's feeble position, this was a potentially

dangerous act and it almost led to an armed confrontation between the two countries. The

confidential diary of Asadollah Alam, who was Court Minister from 1969-1977 and one of the

most powerful men in Iran, is quite revealing. His entry from April 20, 1969, following the

abrogation of the 1937 Frontier Treaty, discusses how close the two countries came to war:

> The American ambassador called this afternoon, anxious to know what's going on with Iraq. I
>
> told him as little as I thought expedient. Beforehand General Nassiri had come to my office with
>
> encouraging news; the internal situation in Iraq is close to breakdown and their army has come
>
> under attack from the Kurds. In these circumstances al-Tikriti, their Defense Minister, has assured
>
> the Savak representative in Baghdad that there can be no question of war. What's more, the Iraqi

shore of the Shatt al-Arab has flooded and brought their army to a stand-still. Merely to save face,

they have repeated their claim to possess inalienable rights in the Shatt al-Arab. Tomorrow the

Abu Sina will sail under an Iranian flag from Abadan to the Gulf. If the Iraqis open fire on her

then we'll know to fear the worst.[7]

Iranians and Iraqis did clash in a series of sporadic border skirmishes over the next few

years, but the conflict never developed into all-out warfare. The Ba'athist regime in Baghdad

responded to Iran's disregard for past border treaties by strengthening their relationship with the

Soviet Union. In April 1972, Iraq signed a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union. The Shah

and the Nixon Administration were alarmed by the treaty, and met several months later to

discuss Iraq's new relationship with the Soviet Union. Asadollah Alam commented on the

Tehran meeting between the Shah, President Nixon and National Security Advisor Henry

Kissinger in his June 1, 1972 diary entry:

> HIM (His Imperial Majesty, the Shah) is convinced that he (President Nixon) greatly appreciates
>
> the stability of Iran and the responsibilities we've assumed in the Persian Gulf. Kissinger told
>
> HIM that the Russians have gone too far in their relations with Iraq, adding that something would
>
> have to be done to stop the rot.[8]

Tehran and Washington saw Iraqi Kurds as the most palpable mechanism for weakening

Baghdad. For that reason, the Shah, with shipments of advanced weaponry from the United

States, increased its level of military aid to Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq. Open war between

Baghdad and Kurdish rebels broke out once again in 1974. However, by the mid-1970s, the

Iraqi army was much better trained and equipped than it was in 1961, when it first attempted to

put down Kurdish rebels in the north.

The Iraqi army's success against Kurdish rebels in the north prompted Baghdad and Tehran to reach one of the most significant agreements in Iran-Iraq relations. On March 6, 1975, Saddam Hussein, the vice president and future president of Iraq, and the Shah of Iran met in Algiers and agreed to a set of provisions aimed at allaying Iran's and Iraq's adverse relationship. The signing of the Algiers Accord resulted in three important concessions. First of all, the accord required that Iran end its support for the Kurdish insurgency in northern Iraq. The accord does not explicitly address the Kurds by name, though it was understood that this was Iran's part of the bargain. The accord simply states:

> Accordingly, the two parties will restore security and mutual trust along their common boundaries, and hence will commit themselves to exercising a strict and effective control over their common boundaries with a view to putting a definitive end to all acts of infiltration of a subversive character no matter where they originate from.[9]

Iraq, on the other hand, made two significant concessions. Iraq was forced to end its active opposition to Iran's 1971 seizure of the three islands off the coast of the United Arab Emirates. More importantly, Iraq conceded to moving the entire border along the Shatt al-Arab to the midway point, the Thalweg Line. Thus, Iran was granted equal access to Iraq's single point of access to the Persian Gulf. The Shah was more than happy to trade the Kurdish rebels, who were losing to the Iraqi army at any rate, for equal access to the Shatt al-Arab. In fact, the Shah considered this one of the single most important foreign policy accomplishments of his reign. The Algiers Accord was designed to be a lasting solution to the problems that plagued Iran-Iraq relations, but regime change in Iran ended that prospect.
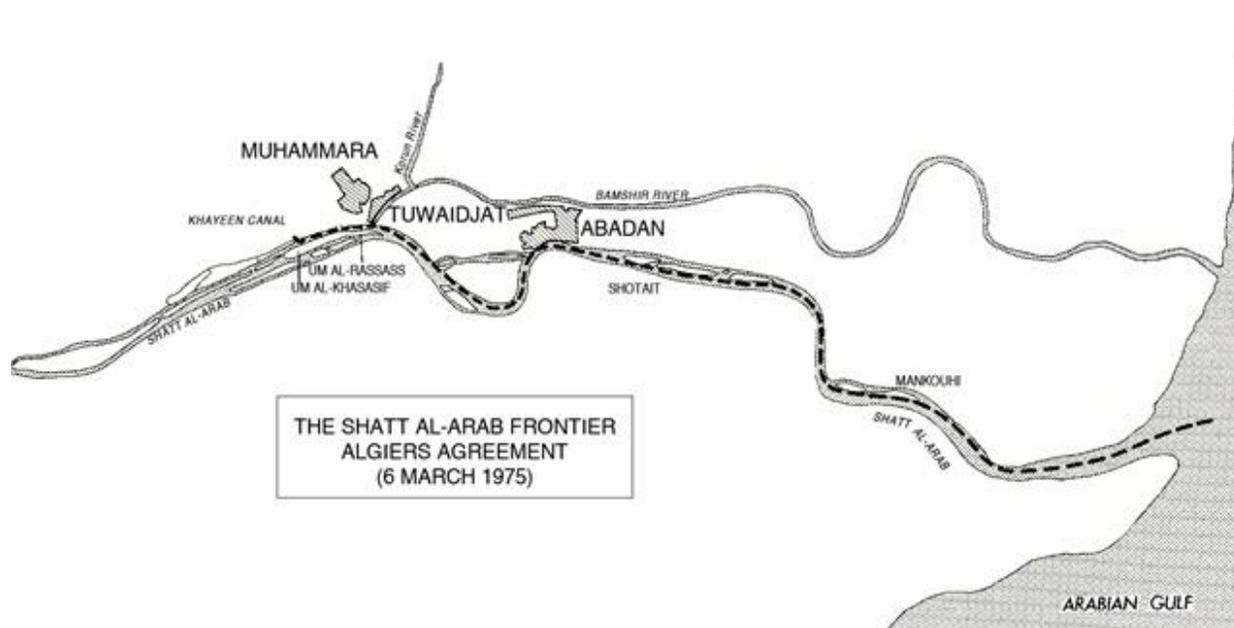
ILLUSTRATION 3: THE SHATT AL-ARAB AFTER THE 1975 ALGIERS ACCORD

Map is from Tareq Y. Ismael, *Iraq & Iran: Roots of Conflict* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982), 23.

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 shocked the world and changed the whole dynamic of Iran-Iraq relations. In 1975, the Shah was considered one of the strongest leaders in the Middle East and he commanded one of the world's most advanced militaries. The notion that he and the Pahlavi Dynasty could fall and be replaced by a regime led by an elderly, exiled cleric, a mere four years later, seemed ludicrous. However, that is exactly what happened. Ayatollah Ruhollah Mousavi Khomeini was a staunch critic of the Shah during his exile in the Iraqi city of Najaf. In 1978, the Shah asked Iraq to expel Khomeini, who left for France, only to be returned to Iran a year later by the revolution. In response to the revolutionary turbulence in Iran and his ideological incompatibility with the world's oldest revolutionary, Ayatollah Khomeini, Saddam Hussein looked to take advantage of the situation. In 1979, as left-wing and conservative factions battled one another for power in Tehran, Iraq increased aid to secessionist elements in Iranian Kurdistan and Khuzestan. Then, on September 17, 1980, Iraq unilaterally abrogated the

1975 Algiers Accord. The stage was set for the one of the longest and most ideologically-driven wars of the 20th Century.

On September 22, 1980, Saddam Hussein sent his army across the Iran-Iraq border and launched a war that would last eight long years. Iraq's surprise attack made significant gains in the initial stages of the invasion, but it stalled shortly thereafter. On November 5, 1980, Ayatollah Khomeini expressed his bitter contempt for Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi invasion to a crowd of Pakistani military officers who were returning from the Hajj and declared:

> What has happened to all these Moslems, those who are aware of the situation in this region? They know that Saddam – this oppressor – without prior warning attacked Iran from sea, air and land and has occupied the cities of Iran. Thanks be to God that this attack has so depleted Saddam's borders that it will take them years to be made up for. This underhanded attack will overwhelm Iraq and will waste the resources which should have been used for furthering Islam. We have not been the initiators of this war, and we will never do so in the future, but should anyone aggress against us, we will smash him in the mouth.[10]

The war degenerated into a stalemate and resembled the bitter trench warfare of World War I. Mustard gas, a chemical weapon which had been absent from the battlefield since the Great War, reappeared and was used by the Iraqis in large quantities. The Iranians, on the other hand, deployed myriad squads of boy-soldiers to run over and clear minefields for the regular Iranian infantry attacks. Casualty estimates for the war differ tremendously, as the most conservative of Western estimates put the total loss of life at 367, 000, with hundreds of thousands of more wounded and maimed.[11] The Iran-Iraq War ultimately became the longest conventional war of the 20th century.

Just like in other stages of Iran-Iraq relations, external forces played a major role in the war. The loss of Iran's number one ally, the United States, certainly impacted Saddam Hussein's decision to invade the country. The United States, who feared the repercussions of Iran's new brand of Islamic fundamentalism on their Arab allies in the region, shifted its support to Iraq. American support made it possible for Saddam Hussein's forces to fight off Iran's counter-offenses and drag the war out. In the eyes of the United States, a long and costly stalemate was ideal because Iraq, who was still an ally of the Soviet Union, was also a regional threat to their Arab allies in the Persian Gulf. Even though the outcome was favorable, the United States was left without a friend in either Baghdad or Tehran for the very first time.

Reconciliation and the 1991 Gulf War

Peace was difficult for both the Iraqi President and the Iranian Supreme Leader to accept after such a long and costly struggle. Khomeini famously likened his acceptance of the 1988 ceasefire to being "more deadly for me than taking poison."[12] Despite the cessation of total war, Iran and Iraq never achieved a true peace. As recently as 2003, hundreds of prisoners of war had yet to be exchanged. By war's end, Saddam Hussein amassed mountains of debt and armaments. Iran-Iraq relations slowly improved, though, as Saddam Hussein turned his attention away from Iran and focused on his Arab neighbors.

Resolution 598, which was passed unanimously by the United Nations Security Council on July 20, 1987, was a first step towards ending the Iran-Iraq War. The most important provisions in UN Resolution 598 called for an immediate ceasefire, a withdrawal to internationally recognized borders and a timely prisoner exchange with heavy UN oversight and cooperation with the Secretary General. The resolution was not accepted right away, and it took

Khomeini an entire year to accept the ceasefire part of the agreement alone. On August 20,

1988, Iran formally accepted UN Resolution 598, which effectively ended the war. Though the

ceasefire aspect of resolution was accepted by both sides, the exchanges of territory and

prisoners of war were not. This would complicate Iran-Iraq relations in the following years.

According to the Iranian government, Saddam Hussein made the first steps towards

reconciliation after the ceasefire was accepted. Hussein sent a letter addressed to Ayatollah

Khomeini's successor and the Iranian President on April 21, 1990 which contained a proposition:

> I am proposing that a direct meeting take place between us, in which from our side, I, God's
>
> creature, the sender of this letter, and from your side, Mr. Ali Khamenei and Mr. Hashemi
>
> Rafsanjani with a number of your assistants should participate. I also propose that this meeting
>
> take place in revered Mecca, the Kibla of Muslims and the ancient household which our Lord
>
> Abraham (Peace Be Upon Him) constructed, or in any other venue which we shall agree on in
>
> order that with God's help we can strive for the attainment of a peace which our peoples and all of
>
> the Muslim umma are waiting for.[13]

The Iranian government also claims that it received a letter from Yasser Arafat, the

Chairman of the PLO, the following day. The letter reiterated Saddam Hussein's proposal and

said, "The Iraqi President's unexpected and important letter is, in fact, indicative of good-will

towards Iran."[14] The Iranian government was skeptical of Saddam Hussein's proposal, and they

completely rejected the idea of holding reconciliation discussions in Saudi Arabia, which was an

ally of Iraq's in the Iran-Iraq War. In the following months, the Iranian and Iraqi leaders

continued to exchange letters, which failed to accomplish anything substantive other than

agreeing to meet in Geneva for preparatory meetings. The major roadblock to reconciliation was

the Shatt al-Arab. Saddam Hussein still clung to the notion that the river's sovereignty was one

hundred percent Iraqi. The Iranians rejected the Iraqi President's position, and argued that the

parameters of the 1975 Algiers Accord should be reinstated. The painstaking process of reconciliation hastened, though, after Iraq invaded another one of its neighbors.

On August 2, 1990, less than two years after the end of the 20th Century's longest conventional war, Iraq invaded the tiny Arab emirate, Kuwait. Many Iraqi leaders have historically seen Kuwait as a part of Iraq and commonly referred to the country as "Iraq's nineteenth province."[15] However, Iraq's decision to invade in 1990 was primarily motivated by surmounting debt and Kuwait's unwillingness to forgive the loans that were given to Baghdad during the Iran-Iraq War. Throughout the whole engagement, Iraqi leaders were mindful of the Islamic Republic and allowed at least 100,000 Iranian nationals to leave Kuwait with all of their belongings.[16] Nevertheless, Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani condemned the invasion and said that he would abide by UN Resolution 661, which imposed mandatory sanctions and an embargo on Iraq. Iran's rhetoric did not discourage President Hussein, and he sent his sixth letter since the end of the Iran-Iraq War to Iranian leaders. In the letter, Saddam Hussein agreed to exchange prisoners of war and withdraw from the 920 square miles of Iranian territory that Iraqi forces still occupied.[17] More significantly, however, Saddam Hussein bowed to Iran's stance on the Shatt al-Arab and wrote:

> We are in agreement with your proposal presented in your letter of 8 August 1990 which our
> representative in Geneva, Mr. Barzan Takriti received from your representative, Mr. Cyrus Nasseri
> and which observes the necessity of recognizing the 1975 Treaty as the basis due to its being
> related to the principles mentioned in our letter dated 30 July 1990.[18]

It is not clear why Saddam Hussein gave in to the Iranian position on the Shatt al-Arab. One obvious reason could be the annexation of Kuwait and its port facilities. If Saddam Hussein truly believed that Kuwait would remain a permanent part of Iraq, then the Shatt al-Arab was no

longer Iraq's only gateway to the Persian Gulf. On the other hand, Saddam Hussein could have been apprehensive over the strong international backlash against his invasion, and saw Iran as a potential partner to end the crisis. No matter the reasoning, Rafsanjani accepted Hussein's offer and the border issue was finally put to rest. On September 10, 1990, Tariq Aziz, the Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq and Saddam Hussein's close advisor, traveled to Iran secretly and proposed a reopening of diplomatic relations.

As foreign armies gathered in the Persian Gulf to force the Iraqis from Kuwait, Iran became a third party. It supported the goals of the United Nations force, but not the process. Iran's leaders repeatedly condemned Saddam Hussein's invasion and respected the UN sanctions. Nevertheless, Iran was against the presence of American troops in the region and put forward their own peace plan which called for both Iraqi and UN forces to leave Kuwait and be replaced by an Islamist peacekeeping force. In addition, the Islamic Republic prohibited the UN from using its airspace. Yet the Iranian government allowed as many as 198 Iraqi airplanes to make emergency landings in Iran during the conflict.[19] These planes were never returned to Iraq, but on the other hand, Iran refrained from shooting them out of the sky. The US-led ground assault on Iraqi troops in and around Kuwait finally commenced on February 24, 1991. The operation was a resounding success, as Iraqi forces were pushed out of Kuwait and defeated decisively within 100 hours.

Saddam Hussein's troubles did not end with the loss of Kuwait though. Within a week, he faced Shi'ite and Kurdish insurgencies throughout Iraq. Nasariyah, Karbala, Najaf and Basra all rebelled against the defeated Iraqi dictator, and numerous portraits of Ayatollah Khomeini and Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, the leader of an Iraqi resistance group based in Tehran, were seen. President Rafsanjani himself commented on the Shi'ite uprising and called on Saddam

Hussein to step down. Though the Ba'athist regime put down the insurgency and reclaimed most of its territory, the uprising cost it three provinces in the Kurdish north which eventually formed an autonomous zone under the American and British no-fly-zone. Iraq's standing in the region would never be the same under Saddam Hussein.

Iran benefited from the 1991 Gulf War in two very important ways. First of all, Iran secured an arrangement with Iraq, on its own terms, which reestablished their presence along the Shatt al-Arab. Secondly, Iran's primary regional challenger was effectively neutralized. But after the defeat of Iran's primary regional enemy, Iran did not rise to dominate the gulf. The war opened the door for the world's sole superpower, the United States. American policy, now more than ever, became the driving force behind Iran-Iraq relations.

<div align="center">The United States and Dual Containment</div>

After the Gulf War, the United States took on a new and aggressive stance against both Iran and Iraq. In 1992, American Senators Al Gore and John McCain first sponsored a bill aimed at both Iran and Iraq, called the Non-Proliferation Act. Subsequently, on May 18, 1993, Martin Indyk, who served in the Clinton Administration's National Security Council, articulated a similar, but more comprehensive strategy for future US policy. Indyk explained to an audience at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy:

> "Dual Containment" derives from an assessment that the current Iraqi and Iranian regimes are both
>
> hostile to American interests in the region. Accordingly, we do not accept the argument that we
>
> should continue the old balance of power game, building up to balance the other… We reject it
>
> because we do not need it… The coalition that fought Saddam remains together. As long as we
>
> are able to maintain our military presence in the region; as long as we succeed in restricting the
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> military ambitions of both Iraq and Iran; and as long as we can rely on our regional allies – Egypt,

Israel, Saudi Arabia and the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council], and Turkey – to preserve the

balance of power in our favor in the wider Middle East region, we will have the means to counter

both the Iraqi and Iranian regimes.[20]

A cornerstone of Dual Containment was the continuation of the United Nations'

sanctions against Iraq, which were the most comprehensive ever in the organization's history.[21]

The UN sanctions were originally intended to compel Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait

in 1990. The sanctions were ultimately sustained after the war, until the 2003 invasion, to

undermine and weaken the Ba'athist regime. In the context of Iran-Iraq relations though, the

sanctions actually pushed the two countries closer together. The sanctions devastated the Iraqi

economy and population, raising infant mortality rates to alarming heights. Estimates on the loss

of life caused by the sanctions generally range from 100,000 Iraqis to over a million. As a result,

the Iraqi people and Saddam Hussein's regime gained sympathy from Iran and other countries

around the world. Iranian leaders repeatedly issued statements which denounced the sanctions

and looked for alternative solutions to the conflict. In addition to rhetoric, Iranian and Iraqi

leaders started to authorize joint searches for soldiers, who were still missing-in-action from the

Iran-Iraq War.

Similarly to the UN sanctions, Iran also responded to military strikes in Iraq by

condemning the United States and displaying sympathy for the Iraqis. Though Iranian forces

regularly conducted their own cross-border raids into Iraq to attack Iranian dissidents, Tehran

began to protest American missile strikes as far back as 1993. By the time the United States

initiated Operation Desert Fox, which was a four day bombing campaign against Iraq in

December 1998, Iranian leaders called for a reevaluation of policies against Iraq. Kemal

Kharrazi, who was the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, gave a statement several months prior

to Operation Desert Fox and asserted, "We oppose agitation in the region and the use of force and believe that, in addition to increasing the Muslim Iraqi people's problems, military action will further complicate the current situation in the region."[22]

Within two years, Iran participated in a sanction-busting exercise in defiance of US policy against Iraq. Due to the suffering of Iraqi civilians under the sanctions and Saddam Hussein's fervent support for the Palestinians, almost all of the 22 members of the Arab league were compelled to send flights to Iraq. By October 2000, Baghdad airport was receiving at least one foreign flight a day. On October 13, 2000, Kemal Kharrazi flew to Baghdad via Iran Air. The flight was arranged by Iranian President Mohammad Khatami and Iraqi Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan at the September OPEC meeting. While Kharrazi was in Baghdad, he expressed an interest in using Iraqi airspace for direct flights to Syria and Lebanon. Additionally, Kharrazi discussed future economic cooperation and Iranian pilgrimages to the Iraqi cities of Najaf and Karbala. This meeting embodied the new relationship that was developing in response to US policy.

Throughout the decade following the Gulf War, Iran and Iraq worked together on a few issues to defy their common enemy, the United States. Saddam Hussein's regime had few friends after 1991, and was thus willing to accept a helping hand from almost anyone in the region. Iran was under pressure from Dual Containment and used the suffering of the Iraqi people under the sanctions as a means to defy the United States. Iran and Iraq were nothing more than hostile neighbors who came together, on occasion, to meet a mutual threat coming from an external force.

The Eve of the 2003 Invasion

Iran-Iraq relations during the first years of the Bush Administration somewhat resembled their uncomfortable relationship during the Clinton years. After the attacks of September 11, 2001 on the United States, Iran and Iraq faced a surge in American jingoism. The Iranian and Iraqi regimes still despised one another, but they maintained some common positions aimed at undermining their shared enemies. Nevertheless, when the American invasion of Iraq seemed imminent, the Islamic Republic took several notable steps to ensure an influential role for itself in a post-Ba'athist Iraq.

After September 11th and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan, the United States treated Iran and Iraq as two of its largest foreign policy concerns. On January 29, 2002, George W. Bush gave the first State of the Union speech of his presidency. He famously branded Iran and Iraq key enemies in the War on Terror and declared:

> Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom. Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax and nerve gas and nuclear weapons for over a decade. This is a regime that has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens, leaving the bodies of mothers huddled over their dead children. This is a regime that agreed to international inspections, then kicked out the inspectors. This is a regime that has something to hide from the civilized world. States like these and their terrorist allies constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world.[23]

Bush's axis of evil speech was immediately condemned by both Iranian and Iraqi officials. The Iranians resented being lumped in with Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime. Iran's Foreign Minister, Kemal Kharrazi, denounced President Bush's speech the following day

by calling it "arrogant" and claiming that it was only intended to divert public opinion away from Israeli atrocities in the Palestinian territories.[24] On the same day, Salem al-Qubaissi, head of Iraq's parliamentary commission on Arab and international relations, accused the United States and Israel of state terrorism.[25]

The 2nd Palestinian Intifada was one regional issue where Iran and Iraq consistently found common ground. For years, Iran and Iraq had condemned Israeli policy against the Palestinians. However, the intensity of the 2nd Intifada and the added pressure of US policy increased Iran's and Iraq's attention on the issue. Saddam Hussein gained notoriety for his generous donations to Palestinians in the face of tough UN sanctions. Hussein gave $500 to $1,000 to Palestinians who were injured by Israeli forces and, on one occasion, gave $10,000 to one Palestinian family whose young son was killed by an Israeli shell.[26] Tehran, for its part, held a two day conference in June 2002 to support the Palestinians. Arab leaders from all over the Middle East were invited and asked to speak.

At the height of the 2nd Palestinian Intifada, Iran and Iraq cooperated on a series of minor issues. In January 2002, Iraqi Transport Minister, Ahmad Morteza Ahmad, visited Tehran in order to finalize a deal for the reopening of direct flights between Baghdad and Tehran, which had been suspended since the Iran-Iraq War. Iran's Deputy Transport Minister, Behzad Mazaheri commented on the agreement and said, "Once a suitable ground is prepared, Iranian flights into Iraq will resume."[27] Developments in Iran-Iraq relations continued throughout the remainder of the year. In early 2002, Iran released another 700 Iraqi prisoners of war and agreed to launch additional joint Iranian and Iraqi search operations for soldiers who were missing-in-action along the border.[28] In addition to the search operations, Iran and Iraq exchanged the remains of thousands of soldiers from the Iran-Iraq War.

In the months prior to the invasion of Iraq, Iran developed a two-pronged strategy to counter American policy. The first and most observable scheme of the Iranian government was to publicly oppose American military intervention in Iraq. To perform this task, Iran utilized its diplomatic ties with Iraq and other countries in the region. On January 19, 2003, Hussein Sadeqi, who headed the Iranian Foreign Ministry's Persian Gulf desk, traveled to Baghdad to discuss Iran-Iraq relations. Naji Sabri, Iraq's foreign minister, also traveled to Tehran that month for similar talks. Iranian Foreign Minister, Kemal Kharrazi, traveled to Istanbul on January 23rd to meet with his counterparts from Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Turkey. Kharrazi said at the conference, "We have to stick to multilateralism and urge the United States not to resort to unilateralism."[29] Iran's halfhearted diplomatic strategy ultimately did nothing to prevent the US-led invasion of Iraq. On March 21, 2003, a day after the invasion of Iraq began, President Khatami declared, "We have opposed this move from the outset and today we again clearly condemn this military attack."[30]

Despite Iran's rhetoric, the Islamic Republic actually prepared well in advance for Saddam Hussein's overthrow and aided Iraqi opposition groups. In January, Tehran welcomed an array of Iraqi opposition leaders who were working with the United States, including the now famous advocate for the invasion, Ahmed Chalabi, to plan a post-Ba'athist Iraq. Other Middle Eastern countries also sent representatives to Tehran to meet with Iraqi opposition leaders. On January 11, 2003, the Deputy Prime Minister of Kuwait met Iranian officials and suggested a meeting with Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim, the leader of an Iraqi Shi'ite opposition group headquartered in Tehran.

The most significant meeting in Tehran, though, took place over the course of several days in late January. More than a dozen exiled Iraqi opposition leaders held a conference,

meeting with Iranian leaders and formulated plans to enter northern Iraq. The Islamic Republic offered to aid the Iraqi exiles by allowing them to enter the Kurdish Autonomous Region via the Iranian border, before the invasion commenced. Kenan Makiya, an Iraqi opposition leader who was invited to a White House event by President George W. Bush and a participant in the Tehran conference, said in an interview, "The Iranians are actually offering to protect us so we can hold our meetings in northern Iraq. Would you believe that?"[31]

The opposition conferences and meetings continued into the month of March, just days before the beginning of the US-led invasion. On March 6, 2003, Tehran hosted another conference for Iraqi opposition leaders. However, this event was exclusive to Iraq's Shi'ite opposition parties. The conference was intended to promote unity among Iraq's Shi'ites in a post-Ba'athist Iraq and to address Sunnis Arabs' uneasiness about an Iraqi Shi'ite government. Nouri al-Maliki, the future Prime Minister of Iraq, assured Iraq's Sunni Arab population in his statement that Iraqi Shi'ites would not hold them all responsible for Saddam Hussein's actions.[32] The frequent meetings of Iraqis in Tehran demonstrates Iran's partial complicity in the removal of Ba'athist regime.

Iran welcomed the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, but did not want the United States to benefit at his expense. Like the 1991 Gulf War, Iran took a position that supported the ultimate goal of the United States, but not the means. Iran was troubled by the notion that they would be caught in the middle of a giant vice by American forces situated in Afghanistan and Iraq. Perhaps one Iranian veteran of the Iran-Iraq War described Iran's position aptly when he stated, "We absolutely hate Saddam Hussein. For us, America and Saddam Hussein are one and the same thing. But the people of Iraq are our brothers, and we don't want to see them being hurt."[33]

In spite of the Islamic Republic's apprehension, the invasion presented an opportunity for Iran's

closest Iraqi allies to seize power in Baghdad.

CHAPTER 2

IRAQI SHI'ITES AND IRAN

American policy in post-Ba'athist Iraq guaranteed that Shi'ites would dominate

Baghdad's new central government. Shi'ites, who are Iraq's majority, had never held power that

was proportional to their own numbers. During the reign of Saddam Hussein, most Shi'ite

political activity was religiously motivated and organized underground. The Iranian

government, as believers of the same faith and an enemy to Ba'ath Party, was a natural ally for

Iraq's disaffected Shi'ites. Iran armed and funded exiled Iraqi Shi'ites to undermine Saddam

Hussein's regime. These groups earned respect among many Shi'ites inside Iraq for their

vigorous opposition to the Ba'athist government and thus, translated that respect into political

capital once Baghdad fell to coalition forces. By toppling Saddam Hussein and holding elections

in Iraq, the United States inadvertently handed the country over to Iran's closest allies.

<u>The Islamic Da'awa Party</u>

The Islamic Da'awa Party has the longest history of organized political activity among

Iraqi Shi'ites. It emerged in the late 1950s as a response to Arab nationalism and leftwing

political ideology. The party supports the inclusion of religious scholars in government and

believes that policy should be guided by the tenets of Islam. Though technocrats generally run

the party, the concept of an Iranian style theocracy has been a disputed topic among the party's

leadership. By the 1970s, the Islamic Da'awa Party began to clash with Iraqi government forces

and was brutally oppressed. As revolution spread throughout neighboring Iran, Saddam Hussein

cracked down on this group even harder.

On March 30, 1980, the Iraqi government pronounced the Islamic Da'awa Party an

illegal organization, and party membership was made punishable by death. More than 45

Da'awa members were executed shortly thereafter.[1] In an act of revenge, several Da'awa

members tried to assassinate Tariq Aziz, who was the Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq and a

trusted aid of Saddam Hussein, on the first year anniversary of the founding of the Islamic

Republic of Iran. Several months later, Tariq Aziz blamed the Islamic Da'awa Party for pushing

Iran and Iraq into all-out war:

> The religious figures were ready to instigate conflict with Iraq. When they assumed office in Iran
> they had already established as a target the overthrow of the government in Iraq. Therefore, they
> would be in no need of encouragement after their takeover. Moreover, they were convinced of the
> availability of practical means to realize this target. This conviction came through… the politico-
> religious opposition groups in Iraq, especially the "Al-Da'wa Party", whose leaders went to
> Tehran and Qum immediately after the revolution of Iran and kept close to its religious and
> political officials, persistently putting their case to them that conditions in Iraq were almost ripe
> for the overthrow of the government and that Iran had only to extend financial, military and
> propaganda aid to these groups and to start a conflict in Iraq.[2]

Following the assassination attempt on Aziz, Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr, who was the

most prominent intellectual force within the Islamic Da'awa Party, issued a decree which

proclaimed that Saddam Hussein's government was un-Islamic. As a result, al-Sadr was

abducted by government forces and was tortured and brutally executed. Exactly one year later,

on April 9, 1981, Ayatollah Khomeini gave a speech to 3,000 Iraqi exiles to commemorate the

death of Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr. Khomeini declared:

> I would like to express my condolences to the oppressed masses of the world and especially to the
>
> Muslim people of Iraq and Iran on the occasion of the first anniversary of the martyrdom of
>
> Ayatollah Sadr. My dear people, my dear brothers you have been expelled from your homeland
>
> and have suffered much hardship from the Baathist government. We too, have been sharing with
>
> you many agonies inflicted on us by that same government… We will not forget what they did to
>
> the late Ayatollah Hakim, nor what they did to Ayatollah Sadr who would not tolerate their
>
> injustice and who only meant to establish in Iraq an Islamic government.[3]

After al-Sadr was executed, the Islamic Da'awa Party broke up and most of its members

fled to the Iranian holy city of Qom. Da'awa members were allowed to operate freely inside Iran

and carried out a number of violent operations against the Iraqi government and its allies. In

December 1981, the Da'awa Party claimed responsibility for the attack on the Iraqi embassy in

Beirut. In 1982 and 1987, Da'awa members made two bold, but unsuccessful assassination

attempts on Saddam Hussein. Their most famous attack, though, occurred on December 12,

1983. More than a dozen Da'awa members bombed the American and French embassies in

Kuwait, citing those countries' support for Saddam Hussein's regime against Iran as a motive.

Although no Westerners were killed in the blasts, several Arabs of various nationalities did lose

their lives. In all, 17 people were arrested for the attacks, including Jamal Jafaar Mohammad,

who was eventually elected to the Iraqi parliament in 2005.

Ties between the Islamic Da'awa Party and the Islamic Republic of Iran became more

tenuous after the end of the Iran-Iraq War. Many Da'awa members left Iran and moved to cities

like Damascus and London. The party did remain active throughout the 1990s and claimed

responsibility for several attacks, including the assassination attempt on Uday Hussein in 1996.[4] Nevertheless, Da'awa's goals became more ambiguous after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, and clear divisions within the party's leadership began to set in. Many important Da'awa members began to cultivate an independent Iraqi nationalist image for their party. As a result, the party disciplined several members who exhibited extremely pro-Iranian allegiances. For instance, a prominent member of the party, Sayyid Kazim al-Ha'iri, advocated the subordination of Da'awa's Tehran branch to the Supreme Leader of Iran. Most Da'awa members did not support Ha'iri's position and he left the party shortly thereafter. On another occasion in 1998, the Islamic Da'awa Party's Tehran spokesman, Muhammad Mahdi al-Asifi, declared his allegiance to Ayatollah Khomeini's successor, Ali Khamenei, in a book that he released.[5] Such a statement had not been approved by other Da'awa leaders and al-Asifi's party membership was suspended as a consequence.

Iranian-Da'awa relations began to improve once again as the US-led invasion of Iraq seemed imminent. The Islamic Da'awa Party participated in all of the Iraqi opposition conferences held in Tehran. In fact, the March 6th Iraqi Shi'ite opposition conference was opened by members of the Islamic Da'awa Party. The day before the conference, Nouri al-Maliki, the future Prime Minister of Iraq, expressed disbelief that his party could cooperate with other exile groups supported by the United States.[6] After coalition forces dismantled the Ba'athist government, though, the Islamic Da'awa Party became a cautious participant in the American political process for Iraq. Da'awa members were involved in both the Iraqi Governing Council and the Iraqi Interim Government. Even so, the party still advocated a large role for Iran in the rebuilding of Iraq. On August 14, 2004, Ibrahim al-Ja'afari, who was the Vice President

of the Iraqi Interim Government and head of the Islamic Da'awa Party at that time, stated the following in an interview:

> I personally look at Iran as part of the geographical entourage of Iraq and a friendly state which stood by Iraq's side in time of crisis. It harbored Iraqis when Saddam Hussein killed, displaced and harmed many of them. It is a state like all Iraq's other neighbors, which has common interests with us. I look forward to seeing Iraq's relations with Iran and all its other neighboring countries rise to the level of advanced countries. But in return, I expect all neighboring countries to refrain from interfering in our sovereignty like we do not interfere in theirs. Some are trying to disturb such relations with Iran, although there is a consensus within the Iraqi Interim Government on the need to improve ties with Iran and all other neighboring countries and to set up a common strategy with them. In case of any interference, we should address that neighbor openly and start a dialogue instead of resorting to a media war.[7]

Al-Ja'afari and the Islamic Da'awa Party went on to win many seats in the new Iraqi parliament in January. The Da'awa Party joined other pro-Iran Shi'ite parties in forming the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) coalition and took the largest share of seats of any bloc in the Iraqi Transitional Government. The success of the UIA alarmed many of Iraq's Sunnis and secular parties. Several Sunni insurgents began to refer to the new Iraqi government as the "Safavid Government," disparaging the Islamic Da'awa Party and other UIA members for their close ties to Iran.[8] Despite the general opposition by Iraqi Sunnis though, the Islamic Da'awa Party was successful, and Ibrahim al-Ja'afari was made the new prime minister.

Al-Ja'afari has a long and complicated history with the Islamic Republic of Iran. He moved to Iran in 1980 to escape the Ba'ath Party's persecution and remained there for nine years. After the Iran-Iraq War, he and other Da'awa members sought a more limited relationship with Iran and moved to London as a result. Al-Ja'afari became the party's spokesperson in the

United Kingdom and returned to Iraq in 2003. Iran praised the January 2005 elections in Iraq and after al-Ja'afari became prime minister, he received several high-ranking Iranian officials. Most notably, on May 17, 2005, less than two weeks after Ibrahim al-Ja'afari formed his government, the Iranian Foreign Minister, Kemal Kharrazi, traveled to Baghdad. Kharrazi congratulated al-Ja'afari on becoming prime minister and stayed for three days. This was the first visit by a minister from a neighboring country since the 2003 invasion. The visit sent a clear message to the United States and other Arab countries in the region that Iran would play a significant role in the Ja'afari Administration's agenda.

Al-Ja'afari eventually became unpopular and the prevalent sectarian violence quickly became associated with his premiership. In the December 2005 elections for a permanent Iraqi government, the Islamic Da'awa Party and other Shi'ite parties did very well once again. Nevertheless, Iraqi Sunnis, Iraqi Kurds and others opposed restoring al-Ja'afari to the position of prime minister and the UIA looked for another Da'awa member to succeed him. Nouri al-Maliki was finally chosen as a compromise candidate and he became the first prime minister of the permanent Iraqi government.

Al-Maliki was supported by several factions, including the United States and Muqtada al-Sadr, in part because he was thought to be less pro-Iranian than other Da'awa members. Al-Maliki fled Iraq in 1979, after the government issued an order for his execution. He eventually made his way to Tehran, but only stayed there for a few years. Al-Maliki settled in Damascus, where he ran the party's newspaper, al-Mawqif, among other activities until 2003. Although al-Maliki was not historically tied to Iran, he believed a close relationship with the Islamic Republic was important for Iraq. He visited Tehran no less than three times within the first two years of taking office. On September 12, 2006, while on an official visit in Tehran, al-Maliki said, with

respect to Iran and Iraq, that "Even in security issues there is no barrier in the way of cooperation."[9] Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and other members of the UIA continued to see Iran as a key to Iraq's future role in the region.

However, as the Islamic Da'awa Party became stronger, it gradually moved away from its reliance on Iran. The Maliki Administration became more popular with Iraqis as it clamped down on militias and reasserted government control in Baghdad, Basra and other cities. These successes slowly transformed the Islamic Da'awa Party, and al-Maliki became increasingly focused on centralization of the government and Iraqi nationalism. These stances conflicted with the other pro-Iran Shi'ite parties of the UIA, who advocated federalism and emphasized Shi'ism in their party platforms.   The UIA split and the Islamic Da'awa Party left it to form a new coalition called the 'State of Law.'

The creation of the State of Law coalition is a clear sign that the Islamic Da'awa Party is moving away from a predominantly pro-Iranian platform. That State of Law coalition espouses Iraqi nationalism and it includes several Sunni groups who vehemently oppose a close relationship with Iran, such as the National Front for the Salvation of Iraq, which is a product of the Sunni Awakening in Anbar province. Al-Maliki recently stated that "The birth of State of Law represents a historic milestone and development in establishing a modern Iraq built on nationalist principles."[10] This move by the Islamic Da'awa Party could also represent a general feeling of skepticism towards Iran by Iraqi Shi'ites. The coalition did extremely well in the regional elections of January 31, 2009, and dominated the Shi'ite parties who still remained in the UIA. Though it is too early to tell, the continued success of the Islamic Da'awa Party and the State of Law coalition could lead to a shift in Iraq's policy towards Iran.

The Islamic Da'awa Party's relationship with the Islamic Republic of Iran has gone through a major transformation. The party was founded on Shi'ite religious principles and found a natural ally in the Iranian government. When Da'awa members fled Iraq in 1980, and also when they returned in 2003, they saw a healthy relationship with the Iranian government as the key to their own success. The power obtained after the 2005 elections changed the party. As head of the central government, the Islamic Da'awa Party became more accountable to all Iraqis, not just a faction of pious Shi'ites. Da'awa officials have now adopted a platform of Iraqi nationalism and allied themselves with various non-Shi'ite groups. Da'awa's State of Law Coalition has put Sunnis into power who distrust the Islamic Republic of Iran and do not see it as a cornerstone of Iraqi foreign policy. Nevertheless, the Islamic Da'awa Party was never the most pro-Iranian Shi'ite party in the UIA. Other Shi'ites are tied much more closely to Tehran with respect to ideology and material support.

The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq

The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) has the closest ties to the Iranian government of any organization in Iraq. The organization's original name, the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), reflects the profound impact that the Islamic Revolution in Iran had on this group. SCIRI was founded in Tehran during the Iran-Iraq War and was primarily composed of Iraqi Shi'ite prisoners of war, refugees and dissatisfied elements of the Islamic Da'awa Party. The organization advocated a large role for the ulama in government and the group's leader, Ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim, embraced Ayatollah Khomeini's concept of Vilayat al-Fiqh (Guardianship of Islamic Jurists). Unlike the Islamic Da'awa Party, the SCIRI was created under the supervision of the Iranian government while in exile. For this

reason, SCIRI members had far less freedom than their Da'awa counterparts and most SCIRI members remained in Iran until the fall of the Ba'athist government in 2003.

What the SCIRI lacked in independence was made up for by massive material support from the Iranian government and the creation of a powerful militia. The SCIRI militia, known as the Badr Brigade, was created in the 1980s and fought alongside the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) against the Iraqi army. During the Iran-Iraq War, the Badr Brigade had as many as 20,000 soldiers under its command.[11] The Iranian government and the SCIRI retained much of the Badr Brigade's strength long after the end of the Iran-Iraq War. In 1991, the Badr Brigade played a significant role in the Shi'ite uprising throughout southern Iraq. There were numerous reports in March 1991 claiming that hundreds, and even thousands, of armed fighters from Iran crossed the border into Iraq.[12] It is widely believed that these were members of the SCIRI's Badr Brigade, and the fact that portraits of Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim were seen throughout Iraqi cities thereafter, supports this assertion.

After Saddam Hussein crushed the Shi'ite uprising, the SCIRI and the Badr Brigade remained active and frequently attacked Iraqi government installations. Soldiers of the Badr Brigade launched numerous raids along the Iran-Iraq border throughout the 1990s with limited success. On occasion, the Badr Brigade infiltrated border positions and conducted operations deep inside Iraq. On May 13, 2000, *al-Jazeera* reported that the presidential palace in al-Karkh district of Baghdad was bombarded by nearly a dozen Katyusha rockets. Several prominent Iraqi officials were killed as a result. Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, the brother of Ayatollah Hakim, claimed responsibility for the attack. One Iraqi official responded to the attack by claiming that the operation was carried out by agents of Iran. He declared, "The Iranian regime bears full responsibility for such heinous acts and that the crime will not go unpunished."[13]

Like Iran and the Islamic Da'awa Party, the SCIRI responded to the buildup for the invasion of Iraq by criticizing the United States and simultaneously preparing for the downfall of Saddam Hussein's regime. SCIRI members participated in many of the Iraqi opposition conferences in early 2003 and, most notably, led the discussions at the meetings in Tehran. By March 2003, the Badr Brigade retained about 10,000 trained fighters and started to infiltrate Iraq just days before the opening of the US-led invasion.[14] Later, as coalition forces drove towards Baghdad, the Badr Brigade was able to secure several Iraqi towns. SCIRI members became the dominant force in predominantly Shi'ite cities such as Basra and Kut. The actions taken by the SCIRI and the Badr Brigade paved the way for Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim's triumphant return to Iraq, after 23 years of exile in Iran.

Al- Hakim returned to Iraq on May 10, 2003 with an enormous entourage and several hundred guards. The Ayatollah stopped in Basra and gave a speech at a stadium to as many as 100,000 Iraqi Shi'ites.[15] He thanked the Islamic Republic of Iran for its years of support and criticized the United States for trying to impose a government on Iraq. After his speech, al-Hakim visited other cities which were predominantly Shi'ite and spoke at the Grand Mosque in Kufa. In addition to his admirers, al-Hakim's tour attracted the attention of Iraq's Sunni insurgents who passionately opposed Iranian influence in Iraq. Several assassination attempts were made against the Ayatollah, and SCIRI offices were bombed in Baghdad and other major Iraqi cities. Finally, on August 29, 2003, Ayatollah al-Hakim was killed by a suicide bomber. It was later learned that al-Hakim's killer was Yassin Jarad, the father-in-law of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq.[16] Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, the younger brother of Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim, took over the organization.

Abdul Aziz al-Hakim's rise largely dispelled the widespread suspicion that the SCIRI intended to establish an Iranian-style Islamic republic in Iraq. Abdul Aziz al-Hakim lacked the Islamic education and authority of his older brother, who was an ayatollah. Abdul Aziz was also less critical of the United States and steered his party towards a path of participation in the new governing bodies. The SCIRI allied itself with the Islamic Da'awa Party, and it became the second half of the most successful bloc, the UIA, in the Iraqi parliament. In the 2005 elections, the SCIRI technically won a larger share of seats in the Iraqi parliament than their Da'awa counterparts. However, American fears of the SCIRI's relationship with Iran encouraged the UIA to put forward Da'awa members for the position of prime minister, instead of the SCIRI's candidate, Adil Abdul Mehdi. Even though a SCIRI member did not become prime minister, the party still became a major force in the new Iraqi government.

In parliament, SCIRI members championed a series of pro-Iranian policies. The most important of these policies was the creation of an autonomous region in the south for Iraq's Shi'ites. Federalism was a very contentious issue in the 2005 constitutional process and Abdul Aziz al-Hakim vigorously supported its implementation. On August 10, 2005, he said the following to a crowd in the holy city of Najaf:

> Regarding the central-southern region, we think that it is necessary to form one entire region for
> central and southern Iraq, due to the common characteristics of the residents of these parts and the
> same unjust policies which were adopted against them.[17]

Federalism became a contentious issue because of the lucrative oil fields in the region. The SCIRI was by far the strongest party in southern Iraq, and its members had already infiltrated much of the new Iraqi police force in that area. The establishment of an autonomous zone gave SCIRI almost complete control over the exportation of oil and distribution of its

profits. In July 2005, Iran and Iraq agreed to build three pipelines which linked Basra to Iranian ports via the city of Abadan. The plan called for 150,000 barrels of Iraqi crude oil to be shipped to Iranian oil refineries per day.[18] This gave Iran tremendous power, as they would be given the right to refine and export a significant portion of Iraq's crude oil. The fight over autonomy in the Shi'ite south led one member of al-Qaeda in Iraq to express his disdain for Shi'ite religious parties, like the SCIRI, and their pro-Iranian policies:

> They (the Shi'ites) pose a danger not only to Iraq, but to the whole region. If the Shi'a have influence over Iraq, or if they obtain some kind of autonomy in southern Iraq, they will be so much closer to extending their influence. After all, they exist in considerable numbers in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain. If these Shi'a get organized and if their initiatives get support from countries that sponsor them – Iran, Syria and Lebanon – it will mean that they have reached advanced stages in their 50-year plan.[19]

Several months after the fight to establish federalism, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim proposed talks between Iran and the United States. In March 2006, al-Hakim said that due to the large roles played both the United States and Iran in Iraq, "it is in the interests of the Iraqi people that such a dialogue is opened."[20] Iran's Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Ali Larijani supported al-Hakim's proposition and said, "To resolve Iraqi issues, and to help the establishment of an independent and free government in Iraq, we agree (to talks with the United States)."[21] American officials were skeptical of al-Hakim's proposal and Larijani's enthusiasm, as Iran had refused talks proposed by the United States on previous occasions. The timing of al-Hakim's proposal was noteworthy because Iran was being censured by the United States and other countries for their suspected nuclear program. American officials thought that Iran was merely using Abdul Aziz al-Hakim and the SCIRI to buy more time and deflect international attention away from their nuclear program.

Though the relationship between Iran and the SCIRI is obviously quite strong, there have been some signs that the SCIRI leadership is trying to distance itself from Tehran. In May 2007, the party officially removed the word 'revolution' from its name and renamed itself the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI). The party claimed that the name change was long overdue, and that it needed to remove the word 'revolution' to reflect a new, post-Ba'athist phase in Iraq's history. However, the ISCI also changed its party's principles to recognize Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani, Iraq's leading Shi'ite cleric, as its primary religious guide instead of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei. Many observers believed this was the ISCI's first steps towards distancing itself from Iran in order to broaden its constituency in Iraq. The ISCI tried to dispel the rumor, and on May 12, 2007 they issued an official statement:

> The sons of the Iraqi people will not forget the noble positions taken by some world states towards
> Iraq's issues, foremost of which is the Islamic Republic of Iran, which helped and hosted hundreds
> of thousands of Iraqis for several years during Saddam [Hussein's] regin.[22]

Within a week of the announcement, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim was diagnosed with cancer. Al-Hakim decided to stay in Iran and he received medical treatment from a hospital in Tehran. The leader of the ISCI returned to Baghdad sporadically over the next two years to make several party announcements. Finally, al-Hakim passed away in Tehran on August 26, 2009. The next day, Supreme Leader Khamenei stated, "This is a big loss for [the] Iraqi nation and government and a painful one for Iran. His services to his country in forming a national government before and after Saddam's fall are unique and unforgettable."[23] Al-Hakim's body was initially taken to Qom, where tens of thousands of Iranians turned out to mourn his death. Shortly thereafter, his body was brought back to Iraq for burial next to his brother, Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim, in Najaf's cemetery.

Abdul Aziz al-Hakim's son, Ammar al-Hakim, eventually succeeded his father and became the new leader of the ISCI. Like his father, Ammar al-Hakim lacks the religious legitimacy of someone like his uncle, Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim. Nevertheless, Supreme Leader Khamenei was one of the first to publicly support Ammar for the leadership position in the ISCI. Ammar al-Hakim retains pro-Iranian sentiments, and he has spent a majority of his life that country. In August 2005, he even suggested that Iraq change its official name to the "Islamic Republic of Iraq."[24] Ammar al-Hakim's ascension indicates that despite some recent moves to distance the party from Iran, the ISCI will continue to seek an active relationship with the Iranian government. On December 12, 2009, Ammar al-Hakim conveyed his vision for Iraq's foreign policy in an interview:

> A positive Arab role in Iraq is not only an Arab interest; it is a need for Iraq. We believe that the logic of some Arabs, which says that Iraq should move away from Iran to be close to Arab states, needs to be looked at again. We believe that our national interest, as Iraqis, makes it inevitable that we should have a good relationship with Iran. We share 1,400 kilometers of border, as well as cultural, historical and political interests. Arabs should not have a negative view of this relationship, but should instead see it as something positive. Iraq can be a bridge and play the role of mediator for the problems between Iran and Arab countries. It is not logical for a country with the weight of Iraq, with respect to history, civilization, potential, wealth and capability, to throw itself into the laps of others. We are not agents for anyone, but we will exchange with others as long as it is in our national interest.[25]

The ISCI and Ammar al-Hakim are Iran's chief allies in Iraq, and that is unlikely to change in the near future. The ISCI has consistently supported policies which would benefit Iran and make Iran-Iraq relations a cornerstone of Iraqi regional policies. The ISCI and the Islamic Republic of Iran also share a common political philosophy, which makes them natural friends by

virtue of their similarities. Nevertheless, if the ISCI takes a more dominant role in the new Iraqi

government, they will rely upon their relationship with Iran much less. The ISCI leadership has

agreed to participate within the confines of the political process set up by the United States.

American assistance, as well as free and fair elections, make the ISCI more accountable to non-

Iranian actors, thereby weakening their relationship.

Muqtada al-Sadr and the Mahdi Army

Muqtada al-Sadr's rise in the aftermath of the 2003 invasion was a complete surprise to

the United States and Iran. Muqtada al-Sadr represented a truly homegrown religious and

nationalist movement, which emerged undetected during the decade of hardship under the UN

sanctions. After the invasion, al-Sadr and his followers were staunchly against the presence of

coalition forces. In addition, al-Sadr's followers were adamantly against the growing influence

of Iran in the country, despite the fact that they shared a religion and political philosophy with

the Islamic Republic. Muqtada al-Sadr could not fight everyone at the same time though, and he

gradually began to accept limited assistance from the Iranians.

Muqtada al-Sadr comes from a prominent religious family. His father-in-law,

Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr, was a grand ayatollah and one of the founders of the Islamic Da'awa

Party. His father, Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr, was also a grand ayatollah and one of the most

popular figures among Iraqi Shi'ites in the 1990s. Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr retained anti-

Iranian sentiments and was very critical of religious figures, like Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim of

the ISCI, who left the country for Iran to avoid the wrath of Saddam Hussein. Mohammad Sadiq

al-Sadr upset both Iraqi and Iranian clerics in Tehran by proclaiming himself the leader of Iraq's

Shi'ite community. On February 19, 1999, al-Sadr and two of his sons were gunned down along

the outskirts of Najaf. It is widely believed that the Ba'athist government assassinated him for his passionate speeches against the regime. For the next four years, Muqtada went into hiding and stayed out of the public eye.

Muqtada al-Sadr reappeared in early 2003 and exploited his family's reputation. Al-Sadr, who was not even 30 years old at the time of the invasion, never obtained the religious legitimacy of his relatives and was limited to the title of 'Sayyid,' which only denotes lineage to the Prophet Muhammad. Nonetheless, al-Sadr was invited to speak at several important religious venues. On January 22, 2003, Sadr gave a speech at the Grand Mosque in Kufa which echoed his father's nationalist sentiments and resentment for Iraqis in Iran:

> Let it be known to all that I will not succumb to any party who has broken with the Iraqi people
> and who is not experiencing their suffering. The Iraqi people will remain my sole advisor, Islam
> my religion, Iraq my homeland, and my protectors "the two Sadr's" (may God hallow their
> gracious spirits). Even if I retire from public life for legitimate reasons, my heart will remain
> willing to sacrifice my body and soul for your sakes. I will never abandon you, in good times or
> in bad, for, if I have registered opposition, it has been in attempt to carry out my father's counsel
> (may God hallow his secret). Even if it has been abrogated in one way or another, I have cleared
> my own conscience before God, the descendents of the Prophet, and my father, and I will devote
> myself entirely to other important matters, even though this might expose me to the danger of
> being murdered or arrested.[26]

Muqtada al-Sadr continued to express anti-Iranian sentiments over the next few months. He disparaged several Iraqi religious figures, including Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim and Ali al-Sistani, for their Iranian lineage. Additionally, al-Sadr expressed his resentment of some Iraqis and Iranians over the mishandling of his father's funeral. The Hakims and other ISCI leaders used to denounce al-Sadr's father as an agent for Saddam Hussein. After he was assassinated by

the Ba'athists, Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr's followers were enraged and some chanted anti-Hakim slogans at his funeral in Qom. Other al-Sadr supporters threw shoes and cigarette butts at al-Hakim once he showed up at the funeral. Muqtada never forgot the Iraqis who tried to disgrace his father's name from the comfort of their homes in Tehran.

Despite the conspicuous animosity, Iranians were attracted to Muqtada al-Sadr after the invasion because of his bold opposition to the presence of coalition forces in Iraq. On June 7, 2003, al-Sadr traveled to Iran at the invitation of the government. Al-Sadr participated in an event which commemorated the death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and met several important officials, including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the former president, Hashemi Rafsanjani. In addition to political figures, al-Sadr also allegedly met several high-ranking members of the Iranian military.[27] Besides the general goodwill of the visit, al-Sadr was able to secure Iranian food supplies and financial support for the Shi'ites living in the slums of Eastern Baghdad, which had now been renamed Sadr City in honor of Muqtada's father. The Iranians, for their part, saw al-Sadr's visit as an opportunity assuage his movement's anger for the Iraqi Shi'ites who just returned from Iran. The Islamic Republic hoped that it could help unite groups like the Islamic Da'awa Party, the ISCI and the Sadr movement to form a powerful Shi'ite bloc before future elections.

After his visit in Iran, al-Sadr toned down his rhetoric against Iraqi Shi'ites coming back from Iran and announced the formation of a new militia. On July 18, 2003, al-Sadr gave a speech and proclaimed the creation of a religious army to drive coalition forces out of Iraq. It became known as the Mahdi Army and its first fighters were assembled by October 2003. Though many men owned guns in Iraq, numerous sources assert that the Mahdi Army received a substantial amount of its weaponry from Iran. According to one former IRGC general, Iran

provided weaponry and basic training to members of the Mahdi Army shortly after Sadr's July 2003 announcement.[28] In addition, the Arab newspaper, Asharq al-Awsat, reported that the Mahdi Army received as much as $80 million in aid from Iran by 2004.[29] In spite of the allegations, Iran still claims that it did not arm Sadr's militia.

The Mahdi Army finally clashed with coalition forces in April 2004, after the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) shut down Sadr's newspaper, al-Hawza. The closure of the newspaper, coupled with rumors of an arrest warrant for al-Sadr due to the murder of another cleric, prompted his followers to rise up in the holy city of Najaf. The Iranian government was opposed to the uprising, and President Mohammad Khatami publicly criticized Muqtada al-Sadr. Khatami stated, "Iran considers any policy that would intensify the crisis in Iraq and jeopardize the establishment of security harmful for Shi'ites and Islam."[30] Then, a few days later on April 14th, Iran sent a delegation to Baghdad in order to negotiate an end to the conflict. Although Iran opposed the presence of coalition forces in Iraq, they did not support Sadr's actions because it threatened the Iraqi political process. The CPA was due to hand over power to the Iraqi Interim Government in June 2004 and elections for a new transitional government would take place shortly after that. Iran believed that the ISCI and the Islamic Da'awa Party could win power through these processes. Therefore, it was not in Iran's interest to delay the establishment of an Iraqi government that would potentially be controlled by their closest allies.

After the ceasefire agreement, al-Sadr went underground and did not make any public appearances until May 2005. His reappearance coincided with the drafting of a new Iraqi constitution.   Unlike the ISCI and other pro-Iran parties, al-Sadr passionately opposed federalism and wanted a strong central government. After the Iraqi constitution was ratified in October 2005, Sadr's party joined the ISCI and the Islamic Da'awa Party in the formation of the

UIA, the powerful Shi'ite bloc. The coalition did extremely well and the Sadrists won 32 of the 275 seats in the new Iraqi parliament. Though his followers did not win the most seats, Muqtada al-Sadr still played the role of king-maker and prevented the ISCI's candidate, Adil Abdul Mehdi, from becoming prime minister. Al-Sadr backed a lesser known member of the Islamic Da'awa Party, Nouri al-Maliki, for the position of prime minister because he thought that al-Maliki was less inclined to promote Iranian interests in Iraq. On this point, al-Sadr and the United States agreed, and al-Maliki was made the new prime minister.

On January 22, 2006, Muqtada al-Sadr made another official visit to Tehran. Al-Sadr met with the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Ali Larijani, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Manouchehr Mottaki. The three of them discussed ways to expand Iran-Iraq relations and the need to push American forces out of Iraq. The meeting marked a turning point in the relationship between Iran and Muqtada al-Sadr. After the meeting, al-Sadr made an unprecedented statement and declared that his Mahdi Army would fight anyone who tried to attack Iran.[31] Al-Sadr had never made such a pro-Iranian statement in public. For the Iranians, the meeting and the subsequent change in al-Sadr's tone were huge successes. Muqtada al-Sadr's movement, which was once hostile to Iranian influence in Iraq, was now allied with the other pro-Iran Shi'ite parties, even in the face of sizeable policy disagreements.

Several months after the establishment of the permanent Iraqi government, though, al-Sadr began to express his disappointment with the Maliki Administration. Once Prime Minister al-Maliki took office, he showed little interest in getting coalition forces to leave Iraq. Finally, just before the November 30, 2006 meeting between Nouri al-Maliki and George W. Bush, Muqtada al-Sadr pulled his party out of the ruling coalition. In the following months, as the surge of American forces began to be deployed in Baghdad and other cities, the Mahdi Army

began to use noticeably more sophisticated weaponry. More specifically, coalition forces faced off against high-tech grenade launchers and roadside bombs which were capable of penetrating armored vehicles. Numerous American and Iraqi officials, including Mowaffaq al-Rubai'e, an Iraqi national security advisor, claimed that these weapons were being supplied by Iran in response to the surge and American opposition to Iran's nuclear program.[32] Like the previous accusations, Iran denied all claims that it was arming the Mahdi Army. However, it is unclear how the Mahdi Army could get such advanced weaponry without assistance from a larger force, such as Iran. Furthermore, it makes sense that the Islamic Republic of Iran would see the Mahdi Army as a counterweight to an increased American presence in Iraq and a means of forewarning the United States against making military strikes in Iran.

In addition to fighting coalition forces, the Mahdi Army clashed with the ISCI's militia, the Badr Brigade, throughout 2007. The two militias had been clashing periodically with one another ever since the invasion of Iraq began in 2003. In August 2005, the Badr Brigade claimed that former Ba'athists worked in Muqtada al-Sadr's offices, which prompted members of the Mahdi Army to burn down more than 300 ISCI offices in Baghdad and southern Iraq.[33] The conflict reached new heights by 2007 though, and ISCI officials in the Iraqi government called for a dissolution of the Mahdi Army. In a June 11, 2007 interview, al-Sadr commented on the Shi'ite violence and said, "What happened with the Badr organization and the Mahdi Army in many parts of Iraq is the result of a sad misunderstanding. We have held discussions to stop this [from] being repeated."[34] On August 29, 2007, al-Sadr announced the suspension of the Mahdi Army's activities and the closure of its offices. He traveled to the holy city of Qom, and is believed to have stayed in Iran ever since.

Muqtada al-Sadr's departure from Iraq demonstrated the limits of Iranian support for his movement. Though the Iranians supported al-Sadr in his campaign to rid Iraq of coalition forces, they never wanted his movement to gain real political power. The ISCI had always been the primary focus of Iran's policy in Iraq, and when Sadr's forces became a threat to the ISCI, Iran offered al-Sadr sanctuary to defuse the situation. If the Iranians truly backed al-Sadr, they would have supplied his movement with the necessary weaponry and training to take on the Badr Brigade and Iraq's government forces.

Several months later, Iran helped the Iraqi government neutralize the Mahdi Army and take back al-Sadr strongholds throughout the country. In March 2008, the Maliki Administration ordered the Iraqi army to take back Basra and other Iraqi cities which were under the control of militias. After the initial skirmishes, representatives of the Islamic Da'awa Party and the ISCI traveled to Iran and negotiated a ceasefire. The exact sequence of events, as well as the role of Iranian officials, is still unknown due to the secrecy of the meeting. According to one source close to the Maliki Administration, Iraqi officials traveled to Tehran and presented evidence of Iranian munitions which were being utilized by the Mahdi Army.[35] Afterward, the Iranian government brought Muqtada al-Sadr to Tehran in order to get his militia to stand down. Another account, relayed by a member of the ISCI, suggests that Qassem Suleimani, a high ranking member of the IRGC, invited Iraqi officials to Qom and mediated the subsequent ceasefire negotiations.[36] Regardless of the exact sequence of events, it appears a ceasefire agreement between Da'awa and ISCI party members on the one hand, and Muqtada al-Sadr on the other, was worked out behind closed doors in Iran.

Ever since Muqtada al-Sadr left Iraq in 2007, his exact whereabouts and activities have been unknown and are open only to speculation. Many experts believe that al-Sadr is living in

Qom and working on his religious education with Iranian scholars. This scenario is quite

plausible since Muqtada lacks the religious legitimacy possessed by other famous Sadrs, like his

father and father-in-law. On May 1, 2009, Sadr made a rare public appearance and met with the

Turkish Prime Minister in Ankara. It is most likely that al-Sadr traveled to the Turkish capital

via Iran, but this information could not be confirmed.[37] Currently, most experts believe that al-

Sadr is spending a majority of his time in Iran, waiting for an opportunity to arise in Iraq.

Muqtada al-Sadr's relationship with Iran is fundamentally different than the Islamic

Da'awa Party's and the ISCI's. The al-Sadr movement was initially formed in a vacuum,

completely free from Iranian influence. Within months of the March 2003 invasion, Iran and

Muqtada al-Sadr came together in an imperfect relationship of convenience. Neither party

wanted the other to wholly succeed in Iraq. The Islamic Republic played the role of mediator on

numerous accounts to make sure that al-Sadr never threatened the power of the ISCI and its Badr

Brigade. Without the long-term presence of coalition forces, there would have been no common

interest to induce the Iranian government and Muqtada al-Sadr to form a relationship.

American policy in Iraq inadvertently brought Shi'ite parties, with longstanding ties to

Iran, into power and compelled other Shi'ite factions to form new relationships with the Islamic

Republic. The success of the Islamic Da'awa Party and the ISCI ensured that Iran would play a

major role in the development of a post-Ba'athist Iraq. Despite some distancing of these parties

from the Iranian government, Da'awa and ISCI members still seek an active relationship with

Iran and turn to Tehran in times of crisis. This tendency was apparent most recently in the

March 2010 parliamentary elections, when Iyad Allawi's coalition, known as the Iraqiyya bloc,

won a narrow and unexpected plurality victory over Maliki's State of Law coalition. Allawi has

since accused the Iranian government of inviting members of the Islamic Da'awa Party and the

ISCI to Tehran in order to form a ruling coalition that would prevent him from becoming the new prime minister.[38] The relationship between Iraqi Shi'ites and Iran is quite important to understanding Iran-Iraq relations in the post-Ba'athist era. However, they are not the only Iraqis who established longstanding ties to the Iranian government prior to the 2003 invasion.

CHAPTER 3

IRAQI KURDS AND IRAN

Like Iraq's Shi'ites, Iraqi Kurds have an extensive history of cooperation with Iran. Even

before the rise of Islamic Republic in Iran and Saddam Hussein in Iraq, these two countries used

each other's Kurdish populations to undermine the other's central government. Neither Tehran

nor Baghdad ever wanted to see the creation of an independent Kurdish nation; they merely

wanted to preoccupy their neighbor with internal strife, rather than having them focus on larger

regional issues. Iraq's Kurds themselves were often put in precarious situations by seeking the

support of a neighboring country that also contained its own Kurdish nationalist movements.

Iraqi Kurdish groups overlooked the suppression of Kurdish nationalist movements in Iran in

order to secure material aid from the Iranian government for their own causes in Iraq. When

Saddam Hussein's regime fell in 2003, it was these Kurdish nationalists which assumed power in

Baghdad and the Kurdish provinces of the north.

<u>The Birth of Kurdish Nationalism in Iraq</u>

The Kurds are one of the largest ethno-linguistic groups in the world without an

independent state. In the 1920s, after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the area which

encompasses a majority of the Kurdish population was divided into four countries: Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. Over time, each nation witnessed the development of Kurdish nationalist groups. In Iraq, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) rose and dominated the early Kurdish opposition to the central government.

The KDP's history is rooted in the early 1930s, when Mustafa Barzani, an Iraqi Kurd, participated in a fierce struggle for Kurdish independence against the newly-formed states of the Middle East. The revolt was ultimately put down by a joint Iraqi-Turkish force, but Barzani escaped its capture. He traveled to Iran a decade later and helped to establish the Republic of Mahabad, the first and only independent Kurdish state, in December 1945. In response to the establishment of the republic, the KDP was formed in Iraq in order to promote Kurdish interests and independence. The charismatic leader, Mustafa Barzani, became the organization's president shortly thereafter. Despite the excitement caused by the Republic of Mahabad, the state was short lived, and the Shah of Iran sent an army to crush it in 1946. Without the sanctuary of an independent Kurdish state, Barzani fled to the Soviet Union and the struggle for a separate Kurdish state in Iraq floundered for more than ten years.

The Kurdish movement was reawakened after the 1958 revolution when the central government allowed the KDP's leader, Mustafa Barzani, to return to Iraq. The new government in Baghdad believed that Barzani could be used to calm the Kurdish separatist movement in the north. However, Barzani's return produced the exact opposite effect, prompting Baghdad to launch an all-out offensive against Kurdish rebels in 1961. The Shah of Iran and his Cold War allies, the United States and Israel, sought to undermine the Arab nationalist regime in Baghdad by supplying the Iraqi Kurds with weapons. In May 1970 alone, the Nixon Administration directed $16 million to Barzani and the KDP via the CIA.[1] With this support, the Kurds tied

down the central government's forces. The conflict contributed significantly to the rapid succession of failed Iraqi regimes that symbolized the 1960s.

The emerging relationship between the Iranian government and the KDP was mutually beneficial. The Iranians gained by using the KDP to undermine one of their largest regional enemies. Equally beneficial, this relationship compelled the KDP to end its support for Kurdish nationalists in Iran, such as the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI).[2] The KDP, for their part, received massive amounts of material support from Iran, and after Baghdad signed a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union in 1972, Iran and the KDP became even more cooperative. Even though the KDP and Iran were pushed closer together by the 1972 treaty, the accord was, in retrospect, responsible for a low point in their relationship. Due to Baghdad's relationship with the Soviet Union, the Iraqi military was better equipped to handle the KDP's forces. On December 4, 1974, Asadollah Alam, the Iranian Court Minister, expressed his doubt about the Kurdish nationalists' ability to fight off Iraqi forces in his diary:

> He (the Shah) instructed me to liaise with Savak and the other security agencies and to notify the
> Chief of the General staff that if the Kurdish guerrillas prove incapable of resisting an Iraqi
> counter-offensive, we must remove our long-range guns from the front line to prevent them falling
> into enemy hands.[3]

When conflict between the KDP and the Iraqi government reopened in 1974, the Kurds were unable to resist the central government's offensives. The Shah decided to cut his losses and used his support for the KDP as a bargaining chip in the Algiers negotiations in March 1975. In return for access to the Shatt al-Arab, the Shah cut off all supplies to the Iraqi Kurds and withdrew his forces. Without a lifeline from Tehran, the KDP was extremely vulnerable.

Asadollah Alam described the Shah's willingness to abandon the Kurdish rebels in his March 7, 1975 diary entry:

> I asked what the fate of the Kurdish guerrillas will be. Apparently he has already ordered General
>
> Nassiri to offer them shelter in Iran. But what about the idea of an autonomous Kurdistan?
>
> "Moonshine from the word go" said HIM (His Imperial Majesty, the Shah). "They've suffered
>
> defeat after defeat. Without our support they wouldn't last ten days against the Iraqis. I spent four
>
> and a half hours with Saddam Hussein, and he admitted that several times the presence of our
>
> troops and artillery had been the only factor to stand between the Iraqis and total victory."[4]

In the aftermath of the Algiers Accord, Iraqi Kurds poured across the border into Iran to avoid the fury of the Iraqi forces. As many as 100,000 Iraqi Kurds left for Iran, including Mustafa Barzani and other KDP leaders who were given residences on the outskirts of Tehran.[5] Iraqi Kurds never forgave the Shah for betraying them in March 1975. The agreement with Baghdad put an end to the high-level collaboration between the Shah's government and the KDP. The freeze in Iranian-KDP relations did not last long though because the Shah was overthrown four years later.

The 1975 Algiers Accord was a worst case scenario for the KDP, and the organization lost many of its members to another Iraqi Kurdish organization. On June 1, 1975 in Damascus, Jalal Talabani announced the formation of a new party known as the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The PUK became an umbrella for left wing and socialist Iraqi Kurdish organizations. The PUK was not only hostile to the Ba'athist government in Baghdad, but it was also an enemy to the KDP. In 1978, the PUK established close ties with the KDPI in Iran, which prompted retaliation by the Shah. The PUK was nearly wiped out in the late 1970s, as they simultaneously fought against Iraqi, Iranian and KDP forces. Relations between Iraqi Kurds and

the Shah reached an all-time low by 1979, but regime change and the Iran-Iraq War reinvigorated Tehran's support for Kurdish rebels in Iraq.

The founding of the Islamic Republic in Iran marked a turning point in Iranian-Iraqi Kurdish relations. After the outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq, the KDP became a major focus of Iran's strategy. The KDP and their new leader, the son of Mustafa Barzani, Masoud Barzani, assisted Iranian forces in capturing several border villages from Iraqi, PUK and KDPI forces. After being caught in a giant vice by two powerful enemies, the PUK changed its tactics and sought better relations with Tehran. The Islamic Republic was equally enthusiastic to ally itself with the PUK and convinced its leader, Jalal Talabani, to stop his support for the KDPI in Iranian Kurdistan. In November 1986, the leaders of the KDP and PUK, Masoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani, met in Tehran with the aim of forming a united coalition against Saddam Hussein's forces. The new alliance was effective, and on March 15, 1988, Iraqi Kurdish and Iranian forces captured the strategic town of Halabja, on the Iraqi side of the border. In retaliation for the joint operation, Iraqi forces attacked the town the following day with poison gas, killing approximately 5,000 civilians.[6] The war ended a few months later, but Iranian, KDP and PUK forces were never able to wrest Iraqi Kurdistan away from Baghdad. The separation of the Kurdish north from Baghdad would have to wait for another war.

<div align="center">The Kurdish Autonomous Zone</div>

The road to Kurdish autonomy began with the resounding defeat of Iraqi forces in the 1991 Gulf War. Opposition to the Ba'athist government arose all over Iraq, and the Kurds seized northern Iraq. With the subsequent autonomy, the Kurds held elections and established a regional government. Despite these accomplishments, the fledgling government was plagued by

infighting. Baghdad and Tehran exploited the discord in Iraqi Kurdistan and engaged in a proxy war by backing opposing sides.

The Kurds, led by the KDP and the PUK, rebelled in March 1991 after Iraqi forces were driven out of Kuwait. The Kurds were able to secure the three northern provinces of Iraq, as well as the oil-rich city of Kirkuk. Saddam Hussein, who was in danger of losing total power in Baghdad, recognized Kurdish autonomy for the three provinces on March 27, 1991. Though Saddam officially accepted Kurdish autonomy, he launched an assault to recapture Kirkuk. His forces pushed on and took back portions of the three provinces, but eventually halted due to the no-fly-zone established by the United States and the United Kingdom. Shortly thereafter, the Kurds held elections to form a new regional government, which divided control of the northern provinces between the KDP and the PUK.

Even though the loss of the Kurdish north was a major blow to Baghdad, the Iranians feared the creation of the autonomous zone. The Islamic Republic feared that the United States would use Iraqi Kurdistan as a springboard to undermine them. In addition to the threat posed by the United States, Iran feared the area would become a safe haven for Iranian dissidents. Their concerns were realized within the first year of the establishment of the autonomous zone, as the KDPI relocated to it and set up several bases just inside the border. In a show of force, the Iranian military deployed as many as 200,000 troops inside Iranian Kurdistan in 1993.[7] These troops crossed the border on occasion and shelled KDPI positions. However, Iran's primary response eventually came in the form of support for the PUK, as the two main Kurdish parties were unable to share power in the new government peacefully.

The prospect for a united Iraqi Kurdistan ended on May 1, 1994 with the eruption of civil war between the KDP and the PUK. Hundreds of Kurds were killed in the first week of fighting alone. PUK fighters stormed the parliament building in Irbil and looted a number of public institutions. The fighting temporarily subsided, and a tenuous ceasefire was signed by the KDP and the PUK in April 1995. After the agreement fell through three months later, Iran held its own mediation talks between the two sides. Saddam Hussein deeply resented Iran's role in the conflict. He responded by courting Masoud Barzani and the KDP, as relations between the PUK and Tehran warmed due to the PUK's break from the KDPI. The stage was set for a Baghdad-Tehran proxy war that ultimately enveloped the Kurdish autonomous zone for the remainder of the 1990s.

The KDP-PUK conflict in Iraqi Kurdistan reached its climax in 1996, as support poured into the area from Baghdad and Tehran. Iran conducted raids against KDPI positions deep inside Iraqi Kurdistan. In the summer of 1996, the Iranian military assaulted a KDPI base at Koy Sanjak, a whole 40 miles beyond the border.   After the assault, the PUK asked the KDPI to give them a written promise stating that they would no longer attack Iranian forces along the border. Tehran was grateful for the PUK's initiative, and gave even more weapons to them as a result. The PUK's leader, Jalal Talabani, used these weapons to great effect by assaulting KDP strongholds. In the face of a stronger PUK, Barzani and the KDP looked to Baghdad for help. Saddam Hussein was more than willing to get involved in the conflict and deployed the Republican Guard to assist the KDP with the recapturing of Irbil, the capital of the autonomous zone. The PUK's fighters were decimated, and the remnants of Talabani's forces fled across the border into Iran. There, the Iranian government rearmed the PUK, enabling it to retake a lot of its former territory by October 1996. Another fragile ceasefire was signed, but the damage to Iraqi

Kurdish solidarity had already been done. Iran took sides in an Iraqi conflict and preserved the

divided status quo. Moreover, they established close ties with the PUK, a party which would

produce Iraq's first president after the fall of Saddam Hussein.

Like Iraq's Shi'ite opposition groups, the PUK and, to a lesser extent, the KDP

participated in Iran's summits on post-Ba'athist Iraq before the US-led invasion. Jalal Talabani

frequently met with Iranian leaders in early 2003 and was interviewed by several Iranian news

reporters. On January 12, 2003, when Talabani was questioned about potential American attacks

on Iran, he replied, "America has asked us to discuss this issue with our Iranian brothers. They

said they are prepared to provide the necessary guarantee to Iran."[8] In addition to its relationship

with Talabani, Iran kept the border with Iraqi Kurdistan open throughout the days just before and

after the invasion. The Iranian government helped numerous Iraqi Shi'ite opposition leaders

enter Iraqi Kurdistan on the eve of the invasion and kept supply routes open to Kurdish fighters.

By the time coalition forces disbanded the Iraqi military in May 2003, the Kurdish irregular

fighting force, which numbered 60,000 soldiers, was the second largest military in the country.[9]

These forces proved useful to fighting Islamist militants who were operating along the Iran-Iraq

border as the invasion got underway.

PUK soldiers fought alongside American Special Forces in Iraqi Kurdistan immediately

after the invasion of Iraq commenced. They primarily targeted an organization called Ansar al-

Islam, a small group of Kurdish Islamists founded in 2001.   This group gained notoriety just

before the 2003 invasion began due to its potential links to al-Qaeda. The United States and

some Iraqi Kurds also suspected that Ansar al-Islam had ties to Iran. Several Iraqi Kurdish

newspapers, including the independent newspaper, Hawlati, reported that the Iranian government

used Ansar al-Islam as a proxy.[10] Fueling this suspicion, on May 20, 2002, the group's leader,

Mala Krekar, made a visit to Iran. It is not known if this was an official or personal visit, but Hawlati reported that Ansar al-Islam received support clandestinely from Iran.[11] In spite of the accusations, though, when Krekar tried to visit Tehran again in September, Iranian officials detained him at the airport and sent him back to Norway, his country of residence.

There is scant evidence that Ansar al-Islam actually had a relationship with the Iranian government, however it is likely that the organization utilized Iranian territory throughout the US-led invasion. On several occasions, while American and PUK forces were battling Ansar al-Islam near the Iranian border, soldiers claimed the group crossed over to escape capture. John Abizaid, a general in the United States Army, told reporters, "We don't know how they're infiltrating. There's some impression that they could be infiltrating from Iran."[12] By 2004, though, Ansar al-Islam became a less contentious issue. The organization eventually extended its operations beyond Iraqi Kurdistan and merged with other guerrillas to form a new group, Ansar al-Sunna. Regardless of the true relationship between Ansar al-Islam and Iran, the controversy demonstrated that Iranian-Iraqi Kurdish relations would become much more complicated in a world without Saddam Hussein.

<u>Kurdistan after Saddam Hussein</u>

The fall of the Ba'athist government provided Iraqi Kurds with an array of opportunities, both inside and outside of the Kurdish autonomous zone. Members of the KDP and the PUK secured prominent government positions and held posts that transcended Kurdish issues in Baghdad. Jalal Talabani, who spent a significant portion of his career colluding with the Iranian government, became Saddam Hussein's successor. In the Kurdish autonomous zone, elections were held once again for the first time since 1992, creating a legitimate regional government

recognized by Baghdad. Iraqi Kurds' fundamental reason for seeking close ties with Tehran was now realized. Nevertheless, in the face of new conditions which challenged Iranian-Iraqi Kurdish relations, Iraqi Kurds elected a group of leaders who saw a close relationship with Tehran as a central component to Iraqi Kurdistan's foreign policy.

On June 14, 2005, Masoud Barzani, the longtime leader of the KDP, was sworn in as the new president of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Barzani's life is particularly important for the Kurds living beyond Iraq's borders, and his election had immediate ramifications in Iran. Since he was born in the short-lived Republic of Mahabad in 1946, Barzani is perhaps the only Kurdish leader in the world to have been born in an independent Kurdish country. In the days following Barzani's inauguration, jubilation and civil unrest shook the streets of his birth place, the city of Mahabad in modern day Iran. On June 15th, the official news agency of Iran, the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), reported that hundreds of Iranian Kurds rioted and fought with police officers in Mahabad.[13] The demonstrations were a direct result of Barzani's inauguration, and they left an indelible mark on the mind of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who faced the first round of the Iranian presidential elections a mere two days later. Although the Iranian government was still on fairly good terms with Barzani, the rioting in Mahabad demonstrated that the conditions which brought the two sides together in the past were now fundamentally altered.

While Barzani headed the KRG in Irbil, the Iraqi Kurds' other major leader, Jalal Talabani, spent a majority of his time in Baghdad representing the central government. Talabani regularly met with Iranian leaders to discuss issues that related to Iraq, as a whole. Talabani wanted to retain strong ties with the Iranian government and supported many of the initiatives of Iraq's pro-Iran Shi'ite parties. On March 19, 2006 at a press conference, Talabani commented

on the proposed US-Iran talks which were put forward by the ISCI's leader, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim:

> I am one of those who support this and worked for this purpose. When I visited Tehran, I met with Iranian officials and raised this issue with them, since I believe that the Iraqi problem has become an international problem… If this action serves Iraq and its sovereignty and independence, provided there is no interference in its domestic affairs, and if it serves security and stability, prevents infiltrations, and ends terrorism… then it is welcome.[14]

By placing Talabani in Baghdad, Iraq's Kurds ensured that their representation in the central government would remain pro-Iran. Talabani wants to retain the friendly relations with Iran which buoyed Iraqi Kurdish nationalism in the past. Talabani, like the Iraqi Shi'ites who hold power in Baghdad, sees Iran as a cornerstone of Iraq's foreign policy. As a result, Iraqi Kurdish leaders have held high-level meetings with Iranian officials on numerous occasions.

One of the first major visits by a member of the KRG to Iran was made in August 2008 by Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, the nephew of Masoud Barzani. The Iranian government invited Barzani to Tehran to discuss the economic and trade issues which linked the two countries. Barzani met an array of Iranian government officials, including President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The top official in the KRG's Department of Foreign Relations, Falah Mustafa Bakir, praised the meeting and said:

> Iran is an important neighbor to Iraq. The visit to Tehran comes as part of a continued KRG policy of reinforcing good neighborly relations, with a view to creating prosperity in the region and mutual benefit for all parties. This includes cooperation in the spheres of joint border security, economic investment, and general commerce.[15]

Trade and other economic issues occupy a large portion of the dialogue in official Iranian-Iraqi Kurdish relations. On February 12, 2009, the Iranian Foreign Minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, made his first official visit to Iraqi Kurdistan. He is the highest ranking Iranian official to visit Iraqi Kurdistan to date. Mottaki met with President Masoud Barzani and discussed investment opportunities and trade partnerships. Trade is a major issue in Iranian-Iraqi Kurdish relations because a large percentage of the KRG's imports come through Iran. A few months after Mottaki's visit, several members of the PUK traveled to Iran in order to form a joint trade committee between the two countries. The delegation met with President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Commerce Minister Mehdi Qazanfari and several other prominent members of the Islamic Republic. The two sides agreed to form a joint trade committee and to establish branches of Iranian universities in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Trade is not the only issue discussed on official visits to Tehran though. On October 22, 2008, Masoud Barzani made his first official visit to Tehran as the KRG President. He spent three days in Iran, meeting with senior government officials. The talks centered on the pending security agreement between Iraq and the United States, as well as the Iranian military's intermittent raids against Iranian insurgents inside Iraqi Kurdistan. Barzani's visit highlighted some of the leading points of contention that exist in Iranian-Iraqi Kurdish relations today. The third parties who operate independently in Iraqi Kurdistan are considered enemies by the Islamic Republic of Iran. So long as they operate freely inside the KRG's sovereignty, they will spoil Iranian-Iraqi Kurdish relations.

The presence of coalition forces in Iraqi Kurdistan has become a major source of controversy between Iran and the KRG. For instance, on January 11, 2007, American forces detained several Iranians who were in a liaison office in the KRG capital, Irbil. The United

States suspected that these Iranians were members of the IRGC and that they were distributing weapons to Iraqi militants. Several prominent Iraqi Kurdish politicians denounced the raid, including the KRG President, Masoud Barzani. A few days after the raid, Qubad Talabani, the son of Jalal Talabani and the KRG Ambassador in Washington DC, said with respect to the presence of Iranians in Iraqi Kurdistan, "Ultimately, we are neighbors, and I think this is something that I hope our American friends understand. They are here, and America is 6,000 miles away."[16] Although coalition forces in Iraqi Kurdistan have created setbacks in Iran-KRG relations, their presence is only temporary and it is not a long-term impediment like Iraqi Kurdistan's other third parties.

Coalition forces are by no means the only fighting force that has strained relations between Iran and the KRG. The Party of Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK) is a Kurdish militant group with strong ties to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in Turkey. PJAK is comprised of leftwing nationalists who want to establish autonomy for Kurds in western Iran. The group is believed to operate primarily along the northern part of the Iran-Iraq border. PJAK started attacking Iranian soldiers and police officers as early as 2005. Like Turkey, Iran's battle with Kurdish nationalist guerrillas has prompted it to conduct operations inside Iraqi Kurdistan. On April 21, 2006, the Iranian military launched its first attack against PJAK positions inside Iraqi Kurdistan by shelling a town north of Irbil. According to a member of the PKK, Iranian forces conducted their first raid into Iraqi Kurdistan on November 25, 2006.[17] This source also claimed that Iranian soldiers engaged PJAK forces for an hour before withdrawing back across the border.

Since this incursion, the conflict between Iran and PJAK inside Iraqi Kurdistan has escalated considerably. On September 21, 2007, the US military detained an Iranian named

Mahmoud Farhady in Suliymaniyah. Farhady was an official guest of the KRG on a trade

mission, but the US government argued that he was a member of the IRGC. The detention of

Farhady prompted a major backlash by the Iranian government against the KRG and PJAK

forces inside Iraqi Kurdistan. On September 24th, Iran shut down the border to Iraqi Kurdistan.

This had a major impact on the Iraqi Kurdish economy, as a significant portion of their imports

come through Iran. Additionally, the Iranian military conducted a massive bombardment of

PJAK positions on the KRG side of the border. In response to the shelling, the KRG issued the

following statement on September 28, 2007:

> During the past few weeks the forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran have been shelling the border
>
> areas of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq. This shelling has resulted in the displacement of thousands
>
> of villagers, the disruption of their lives, and the destruction of several villages. It has also
>
> inflicted great loss and destruction and spread fear among the people of Kurdistan. The KRG
>
> strongly condemns this unjust and unwarranted military action which contravenes international
>
> law and disregards neighborly relations. It is a clear violation of the sovereignty of Iraq, and the
>
> Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) considers it an act of aggression. The KRG calls upon
>
> the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to immediately end this shelling and its threats. At
>
> the same time, the KRG requests that the federal government in Baghdad take a clear position on
>
> this violation of Iraq's borders, which is causing disruption and confusion to the lives of the
>
> people of the Kurdistan Region. We also call upon the Multinational Forces in Iraq and the
>
> United Nations Security Council to address the issue and stop these unjust attacks. The KRG
>
> restates its commitment to good neighborly relations on the basis of mutual respect and common
>
> interest.[18]

The shelling was eventually suspended and the border was reopened, but the clashes

between Iran and PJAK inside Iraqi Kurdistan continued. PJAK militants attacked a group of

police officers in Iranian Kurdistan on April 25, 2009, killing at least ten in the process.[19] Once

again, the Iranian government responded to the shootings by targeting PJAK positions inside Iraqi Kurdistan. Iranian forces shelled the Iraqi village of Penjwin, just east of Sulaymaniyah. Within the next few weeks, Iranian forces also used helicopters to fire at positions from the Iranian side of the border. The central government reacted to the attacks by calling on the Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad and telling him there would be consequences if the shelling did not stop. In a heated response, a spokesperson for the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Hassan Qashqavi, told several reporters that Iran "expects that Iraqi officials pay special attention to movements of small groups which are officially known as terrorist groups even by Western countries."[20] The war of words eventually quieted down, but the threat of another PJAK-initiated crisis still looms in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The fall of Saddam Hussein and the subsequent legitimization of Iraqi Kurdistan's autonomy have removed the two issues which bound Iran and Iraqi Kurds. An Iraqi Kurdistan, with autonomy granted by the central government, no longer needs military support from Iran to keep Baghdad out of its own backyard. Likewise, Iran now faces a much friendlier group of leaders in Baghdad, and it does not want to see an independent Kurdistan causing major problems for the new Shi'ite government, or stirring up an insurrection amongst its own Kurdish population. Iraq's current Kurdish leaders, because of their long history of cooperation with the Islamic Republic, naturally wanted to maintain their friendly relations with Tehran after the US-led invasion. However, the new realities of Iranian-Iraqi Kurdish relations cannot be masked by the positive rhetoric and the cordial visits of PUK and KDP leaders indefinitely. The new focus of Iranian-Iraqi Kurdish relations in post-Ba'athist Iraq is destined to center on issues such as the treatment of Iranian Kurdish populations and border transgressions carried out by the Iranian military and Iranian Kurdish rebels who find sanctuary in Iraqi Kurdistan.

CHAPTER 4

CONTEMPORARY IRAN-IRAQ RELATIONS

Iran-Iraq relations took a dramatic turn after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime. The

United States, which had always been a major factor in Iran-Iraq relations, wedged itself between

the two countries until a new Iraqi government could be established. The United States was

weary of the Islamic Republic of Iran and tried to limit its role in the formation of the post-

Ba'athist government. As coalition forces handed responsibilities back to Iraqi leaders though, it

became apparent that the Iranian and Iraqi governments had entered a new era of improved

relations. The new relationship was underscored by a friendlier rhetoric, a cessation of support

for each others' opposition groups and an unprecedented number of visits made by high-ranking

officials from both countries. Nevertheless, many of the problems which plagued relations for

the past ninety years persist and will continue to produce tension as long as Baghdad maintains a

close relationship with Tehran's main enemy, the United States.

Iran, Iraq and the CPA

After coalition forces toppled the Ba'athist government on April 9, 2003, the United

States assumed most of Iraq's governmental duties. To deal with this daunting task, coalition

forces established the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), headed by a former American

diplomat, L. Paul Bremer III.[1] Ambassador Bremer and the CPA governed Iraq for more than a

year and laid down a foundation for the future Iraqi government. They created new governing

bodies for Iraq which ensured proportional representation for all of Iraq's ethnic and religious

groups, thereby institutionalizing sectarianism. Iraq's religious Shi'ite and nationalist Kurdish

parties, who had been working closely with Iran for many years, thrived in a climate focused

sect. In the context of Iran-Iraq relations, the CPA reported to the Defense Department and was

not allowed to communicate directly with Iranian officials. In spite of the CPA's inability to

correspond with the Iranian government, the CPA addressed a variety of issues pertaining to

Iran-Iraq relations.

One of the first challenges facing the newly-created CPA was the presence of a large,

armed Iranian opposition group in the country called the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization

(MKO), also known as the People's Mujahedin of Iran (PMOI). The MKO is an Islamic socialist

organization which was founded by a group of students at the University of Tehran in 1965. The

organization opposed the Shah, and attacked government installations throughout the 1970s,

killing several Americans in the process. The MKO welcomed the collapse of the Shah's

government, but was banned by Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Republic Party (IRP) from

participating in the new Iranian government. Shortly thereafter, the two sides resorted to

violence and attacked each others' party members. One such attack by the MKO in June 1981

involved the bombing of a Tehran mosque, which killed several important members of the IRP

and permanently limited the use of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's right arm.

Within two years of the Islamic Revolution, the Iranian government forced the majority

of MKO leadership into exile. MKO members found refuge primarily in France until 1986,

when the French government expelled the organization at the request of the Iranian government. Nearly 7,000 members of the MKO then relocated to Iraq, at the invitation of Saddam Hussein.[2] The MKO was armed by the Iraqi military and it collaborated with the Ba'athist regime by becoming a part of its intelligence and translation services. MKO fighters launched dozens of raids across the border into Iran, the largest of which occurred just days after Ayatollah Khomeini agreed to a ceasefire with Iraq. The MKO lost 1,500 of its fighters in that raid alone.[3] After the Iran-Iraq War, the MKO continued to work with Saddam Hussein and conduct raids into Iranian territory. Their close relationship with the Iraqi government alienated the group from Iranians and the international community. In their isolation, the MKO acquired numerous cultic characteristics including the separation of family members, daily submission of personal journals to commanding officers and fanatic devotion to their leaders, Masoud and Maryam Rajavi. Though the United States officially labeled the MKO a foreign terrorist organization in 1997, the CPA did not know what to do with the organization.

On April 15, 2003, the MKO requested a ceasefire from coalition forces. American Special Forces, who were unaware of the MKO's history and relationship with the Ba'athist government, accepted their ceasefire offer and let the organization keep its weapons. A few weeks later, however, coalition forces made the MKO sign a new ceasefire which disarmed and confined the organization's 3,800 members to its largest base at Camp Ashraf, just 40 miles north of Baghdad.[4] Iranian officials suggested that all MKO members, with exception to its leadership, should be returned to Iran and given amnesty. American officials were skeptical of Iran's overture, and they did not want to help the Iranian government by handing over members of an opposition movement on a silver platter. Therefore, the Defense Department designated MKO members to be 'protected persons' and searched for a third country to relocate them. To

the dismay of the CPA, no third country was willing to receive the organization due to its cultic

nature and unreasonable conditions for relocation.

Iraq's emerging leadership was not as patient as the CPA and they were not willing to

wait for a third country to take in MKO members. In order to work more closely with the Iraqi

people, the CPA created the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) on July 13, 2003. All 25 of its

members were selected along sectarian lines by the CPA and it included party leaders such as

Ibrahim al-Ja'afari, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, Jalal Talabani and Masoud Barzani. On December 9,

2003, the IGC unanimously passed a resolution which called for the expulsion of all MKO

members from Iraq within the next six months. One Iraqi official, Entifadh Qanbar, commented

on the IGC's decision and declared, "They can seek refuge in other places… we don't care

where they're going to go."[5] The CPA refused to sign the IGC's resolution though, and as a

result it never became law. The CPA never made a decision on the fate of the MKO members in

Iraq, and the organization languished at Camp Ashraf.

The presence of the MKO in Iraq was not the only issue that the CPA faced with respect

to Iran-Iraq relations. Throughout the summer of 2003, Ambassador Bremer received several

reports which described border transgressions committed by the Iranian military. Most of the

incidents were very minor and did not penetrate deeply into Iraqi territory. However, on one

occasion in July 2003, the Iranian military set up border posts several kilometers inside of Iraq.

Iranian officials deny that the event ever happened, but the incident captured the attention of

several prominent American officials. In Ambassador Bremer's memo from July 9, 2003 to the

Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, he relayed the event: "Iranians have moved some 3 kms

into southern Iraq. I have asked the JTF (Joint Task Force) to investigate. Recommend Iranians

be ordered out immediately."[6] The crisis ended without incident, but border infringement by the Iranian military was an issue that future Iraqi administrations would also face.

For the remainder of the CPA's tenure, Iran-Iraq relations were complicated by the IGC's willingness to unilaterally meet with Iranian officials. Iran was the first of Iraq's neighbors to send a delegation to meet with the IGC. The delegation went to Baghdad on August 4, 2003, just weeks after the CPA selected the council's members. The delegation was headed by Hoseyn Sadeqi, who was the head of the Iranian Foreign Ministry's Persian Gulf desk. In their meeting, the IGC and the Iranian delegation discussed ways to improve future relations and ways to accommodate Iranian pilgrims on their way to the holy cities of Karbala and Najaf. The meeting did not produce anything tangible, but it was symbolic of a new relationship.

A few months later, on November 18, 2003, the IGC sent an official delegation across the border to meet with Iranian leaders. It was headed by Jalal Talabani and ten other members of the IGC. For two days, they met with leading Iranian officials such as President Mohammad Khatami and Foreign Minister Kemal Kharrazi. The Iraqi officials hoped that this meeting would produce more material results than their first meeting with the Iranian delegation in August. Muwaffaq al-Rubay'i, a member of the IGC, explained his comprehensive agenda for the meeting to a reporter:

> We want to establish tourist relations, exchange visits, and have cultural, economic and security
> relations to consolidate the situation at the border. We also want industrial relations to coordinate
> our foreign policies… [We want the] relationship between [the] new Iraq and Iran to be a model
> for Iraq's new relations with its neighbors and the other countries of the world.[7]

The meeting was considered a success, and it fulfilled several of al-Rubay'i's key goals. Iranian officials agreed to help out in the reconstruction of Iraq's industrial sector and the two

sides made several steps towards establishing a future free-trade agreement. They also discussed

future plans to construct railways and highways linking Iranian and Iraqi cities to one another.

The most significant part of the November meeting involved Iraq's derelict oil sector. Iranian

officials said that they would be willing take in 350,000 barrels of Iraqi crude oil per day in order

to refine it and sell it on behalf of Iraq.[8] Even though Iraqis had not regained their sovereignty

from the CPA yet, future Iraqi leaders were already demonstrating how they planned to work

closely with their eastern neighbor.

After the November meeting in Iran, no major developments occurred in Iran-Iraq

relations until the CPA was dissolved on June 28, 2004. Iranian officials repeatedly called for

coalition forces to leave Iraq, and American officials responded with accusations of Iranian

meddling in Iraq. The one instance where Iran, the CPA and the IGC all came together was to

express jubilation over the capture of Saddam Hussein in December 2003. Although this event

can hardly be seen as a high point in the three-way relationship since many Iranian officials

accused the United States of staging Hussein's capture. Iran-Iraq relations were constrained by

the presence of the CPA, and they could only expand once Iraq regained partial sovereignty by

way of an interim government.

<div align="center">The Resumption of Iran-Iraq Relations</div>

After the dissolution of the CPA, Iraqis slowly regained control of their country through a

series of temporary governments. The United States still retained extensive de facto power in

Iraq, but the succeeding Iraqi governing bodies were recognized internationally as sovereign

governments. Despite the international recognition, Iraq's foreign policy initiatives were quite

limited. Most Arab countries failed to engage Iraqi leaders, and they treated the new governing

bodies as pariahs due to their own opposition to the 2003 invasion. This only enhanced Iran's ability to influence events inside Iraq. Besides Turkey, Iran was the only Iraqi neighbor to have an ambassador in Baghdad until July 2008, when Jordan and Kuwait finally named ambassadors of their own. Thus began the most cooperative period of relations since the mid-1950s, when the Iranian and Iraqi monarchies were members of the Baghdad Pact.

On June 28, 2004, Iraq regained its sovereignty via the establishment of the Iraqi Interim Government. The IGC selected the Interim Government's members, including its new prime minister from the Iraqi National Accord (INA), Iyad Allawi. Since the Interim Government was appointed by the IGC, its main members were quite secular and the roles of pro-Iranian Shi'ite parties, such as the Islamic Da'awa Party and the ISCI, were limited. In addition, several of the Interim Government's members were openly hostile to Iran, including the Iraqi Defense Minister, Hazem Shaalan, who called Iran Iraq's number one enemy in December 2004.[9] Nevertheless, Iranian officials engaged the governing body shortly after it assumed power. Within a few months, Iran announced the formation of the 'Office for Iraq's Reconstruction.' Iranian officials also pledged to donate $300 million for reconstruction projects in Iraq.[10] This aid was primarily intended to improve the infrastructure of Iraq's holy cities, Najaf and Karbala, for Iranian pilgrims. Most of the money went to service-based enterprises, such as hotels. By autumn, the two countries exchanged ambassadors and Mohammad Majid al-Sheikh, a prominent member of the ISCI, became Iraq's official representative in Tehran.

The first visit by a high-ranking Iranian official did not come until the Iraqi Transitional Government replaced the Interim Government in May 2005. Unlike the Iraqi Interim Government, the Iraqi Transitional Government was based on elections. In the parliamentary elections of January 2005, religious Shi'ite parties did extremely well and they almost formed

the majority of the new governing body by themselves. Ibrahim al-Ja'afari, the head of the Islamic Da'awa Party, replaced Iyad Allawi and became the new Prime Minister of Iraq. On May 17, 2005, the Iranian Foreign Minister, Kemal Kharrazi, and an entourage drove across the Iran-Iraq border and arrived in Baghdad. Kharrazi came to congratulate Ja'afari personally for becoming Iraq's Prime Minister. Kharrazi's visit was not only significant because he was the first Iranian minister in Baghdad since the 2003 invasion, but he was also the first minister from any country in the Middle East to visit.

Within two months of Kharrazi's visit, Iraqi officials returned the favor and made high-profile visits to Tehran. On July 6, 2005, the new Iraqi Defense Minister, Sa'dun al-Dulaymi, traveled to Iran. Iranian officials took al-Dulaymi on a tour of a helicopter factory and agreed to a security agreement. Ten days later, Prime Minister Ibrahim Ja'afari embarked on a three-day trip to Tehran. His meetings with Supreme Leader Khamenei, President Khatami and the President-elect, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, yielded a series of remarkable agreements. Iran offered to lend the new Iraqi government as much as $1 billion and encouraged the construction of a series of pipelines linking Abadan to Basra.[11] The two countries also agreed to reopen consulates in the predominantly Shi'ite cities of Iraq, such as Basra and Karbala. Adding to the importance of the tangible achievements reached during the meetings, Prime Minister al-Ja'afari himself made several unprecedented statements while in Iran. He and other Iraqi officials claimed responsibility on behalf of Iraq for causing the Iran-Iraq War, something Saddam Hussein vehemently rejected.[12]

Four months after Prime Minister al-Ja'afari's visit, Jalal Talabani made his first visit to Iran as Iraq's president. President Talabani, who is fluent in Persian as well as four other languages, had a cordial exchange with his Iranian counterpart, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The

two discussed border security and the long-term status of coalition forces in Iraq. After his

meeting with Talabani on November 21, 2005, Ahmadinejad expressed his support for the new

Iraqi government to reporters:

> A popular, independent and developed Iraq will be the best friend of the Iranian nation. We
>
> totally support the political process that the Iraqi nation is undergoing that will… guarantee its
>
> territorial integrity, independence and progress.[13]

Following the high-level visits of 2005, Iraq prepared for a new round of elections that

would form the country's first permanent government since the 2003 invasion. Like the January

2005 parliamentary elections, the pro-Iranian Shi'ite bloc, known as the UIA, was poised to win.

Despite the projected success of this coalition, however, there were still numerous allegations of

voter fraud committed by the Iranian government. On December 13, 2005, just two days before

the elections, an official at the Interior Ministry told reporters that Iraqi border police seized a

tanker truck full of forged ballots crossing the border from Iran.[14] This individual also reported

that the Interior Ministry believed several other tanker trucks had successfully crossed the border

before they could be apprehended by Iraqi security forces. In the end, the UIA won

approximately 53% of the seats in the new permanent government, a larger percentage than the

January elections. It is unlikely that tampering by Iranians or Iraqis largely affected the outcome

of the elections.

After the damage caused by allegations of voter fraud, Iran-Iraq relations hit a few more

bumps in early 2006. In January, the Iraqi Coast Guard tried to seize an Iranian ship that they

suspected of smuggling Iraqi oil. The Iranian navy responded by engaging the pursuing Iraqi

ship, killing one and detaining eight Iraqi crewmembers in the process.[15] The eight sailors were

returned a week later, but Iraqi and American officials were outraged by the incident. In an

unrelated event, a suicide car bomber and a group of gunmen attacked the Iranian embassy on January 23, 2006. At least two people were killed in the attack.[16] Though the identity of the assailants remains mystery, it was most likely carried out by elements of the Sunni insurgency. The attack was a reminder that a significant number of Iraqis opposed their government's close relationship with Iran.

In the face of these events, Iraqi and Iranian officials continued to conduct high-level talks with one another. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and President Jalal Talabani visited Iran no less than five times in the first fifteen months of their tenures in the permanent Iraqi government. With President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, they discussed an array of issues including border security, the presence of American troops, Iranian nuclear ambitions and the expulsion of the MKO members who still remained at Camp Ashraf. As the frequency of these meetings increased, Iranian and Iraqi leaders began to address issues that were not exclusive to Iran-Iraq relations. Most notably, Iraqi leaders hoped that they could use their intimate relationship with Iran to settle issues with their other neighbors.

Iraq's western neighbor, Syria, has been Iran's strongest regional ally for the last three decades.[17] Despite the fact that Syria, like Iraq, was ruled by the Ba'ath Party, it was the only Arab country, with the exception of Libya, to support the Islamic Republic in the Iran-Iraq War. Ever since coalition forces invaded in 2003, Iraqi leaders have routinely criticized the Syrian government for their unwillingness to stem the flow of foreign fighters that cross their border to join the Sunni insurgency in Iraq. After Prime Minister Maliki's third trip to Iran in August 2007, the Iraqi Ambassador to Iran implied that Tehran could resolve some of the tension between Iraq and Syria:

We have a common border with Iran, nearly 1,400 km, which is the longest border we have with a

neighboring country. We don't think we're able, or rather we don't have the capabilities, to

control the border. Until our armed forces and border guards are strong enough, we believe we

need the Iranians to help us do that at this stage and to stand by us. We also need them to talk to

some neighboring countries with whom Iran has strong relations to maintain security within Iraq.

As you know, some of the terrorists infiltrate into Iraq from neighboring countries.[18]

 Even though al-Maliki and Talabani made numerous trips to Tehran, no Iranian head of

state visited Baghdad until March 2008. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became the first Iranian leader

to visit Iraq since the Islamic Revolution broke out in 1979. President Ahmadinejad came at the

invitation of his Iraqi counterpart, Jalal Talabani. For the second time since the 2003 invasion,

Iranian leaders offered a one billion dollar, low-interest loan for reconstruction. Iranian and Iraqi

officials failed to reach any new agreements at this meeting, but the visit was an undeniable

symbol of Iran's and Iraq's improved relationship. President Ahmadinejad's trip to Baghdad

was, and still is, the high point of Iran-Iraq relations in the post-Ba'athist era.

Since the March 2008 meeting, Iran-Iraq relations have become more confrontational and

slowly deteriorated. Two months after Ahmadinejad's unprecedented visit, the Iraqi government

sent a delegation to Iran in order to present evidence of Iran's support for various militant groups

in Iraq. The Iraqis, who secretly sought Iran's assistance in getting the Mahdi Army to stand

down in Basra two months prior, asked the Iranians to give them further assurance that they

would reduce their support for Shi'ite militias. Iranian officials responded to the overtures

angrily and censured the Iraqi delegation for being subservient to the United States. One

member of the Iraqi delegation relayed Iran's reaction to their presentation after the meeting and

said, "The Iranians were very tough and even angry with us. They accused us of being

ungrateful to what Iran has done for the Shi'ites during Saddam's rule and of siding with the Americans against Iran."[19]

The delegation was a failure, but Prime Minister al-Maliki tried to save the initiative by personally meeting with Iranian authorities in Tehran on June 7, 2008. Al-Maliki also presented evidence of Iranian support for Iraqi militias, but Iranian officials dismissed the evidence and shifted the focus of the discussions to the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) between Iraq and the United States. Iran wanted assurance that Iraq would make all American forces leave the country as soon as possible. Al-Maliki assured the Iranians he intended to make the US military leave and that he would "not allow Iraq to become a platform for harming the security of Iran and neighbors."[20] Al-Maliki was true to his word, as the SOFA which was eventually signed with the United States stipulated that coalition forces had to leave Iraqi cities by June 30, 2009 and all other Iraqi territory by December 31, 2011. The Iranians got the assurances they sought from al-Maliki, but the dispute over Iraqi militias remains, for the most part, unresolved. The debate regarding Iranian support for Iraqi militias, however, is not the only contentious issue which faces these two countries today.

Problems on the Horizon

Iran and Iraq currently face an array of challenges which will complicate their relationship in the near future. Even though Iran-Iraq relations have clearly improved since Saddam Hussein's reign, many of the issues which historically hindered their relationship still exist. The Iraqi government does not support or fund Iranian dissidents or exiles right now, but at least two major Iranian opposition groups, the MKO and PJAK, are still inside Iraq. Secondly, the border continues to be a contentious issue. After 90 years, the exact location of the border is

still not mutually agreed upon. The new Iraqi government was outraged on several occasions as result of perceived transgressions and double standards in border security. These problems will most likely get worse if the central Iraqi government becomes stronger by ending the insurgency and chooses to maintain a close relationship with the United States.

Every Iraqi government since 2003 has vowed to expel the MKO from Iraq, yet most of the organization's members still inhabit Camp Ashraf. Coalition forces maintained security at the MKO's compound until January 1, 2009, when its jurisdiction was transferred to Iraqi authorities. Just before the handover, Iraqi authorities made it clear that they would oust all of the MKO's members. In December 2008, an Iraqi delegation met with several Iranian officials and told them that the Iraqi government "is keen to execute its plans to close the camp and send its inhabitants to their countries or other countries in a non-forcible manner… staying in Iraq is not an option for them."[21] However, before the transfer of authority took place, the United States demanded that the Iraqi government give them a written statement saying that the MKO would not be coerced into moving to a country where they would face prosecution. Iraqi authorities complied, yet in January 2009 the government announced that the MKO would leave Iraq in the next few months.

Iraqi security forces surrounded and besieged Camp Ashraf on March 12, 2009. On this occasion, Iraqi forces never went into the compound. Subsequently though, on July 28, 2009, Iraqi forces entered Camp Ashraf, attempting to place a police station within the compound. Iranian officials were pleased with the operation and Ali Larijani, the Chairman of the Iranian Parliament, told reporters that, "Although the move by the Iraqi government came late, it is still welcomed that Iraqi territory has been cleared of terrorists."[22] Even though Iraqi and Iranian officials were optimistic about the prospects of the operation, MKO members resisted the

incursion violently. As a result of the clashes, at least seven MKO members were killed.[23] The

Iraqi government still communicates its intent to expel the MKO, but it has not made a

determined effort to do so since July 2009. The Iranian government is visibly growing impatient

with the Iraqi government on this issue and it wants the MKO out of Iraq as soon as possible.

The current Iraqi government, like the CPA in 2003, cannot find a suitable third country for

peaceful relocation of the MKO members. Unless the Iraqi government is willing to use brute

force in order transfer MKO members against their will, the organization will languish in Iraq

and be a point of contention between the two regimes.

Iranian border security is yet another issue that remains unresolved and will potentially

cause problems in future Iran-Iraq relations. Iraqi officials believe that Iran has a double

standard when it comes to people crossing the border. The Iraqi government has repeatedly

accused Iran of being lax on persons traveling across the border from Iran to Iraq. On one

occasion in November 2004, 94 Afghans were arrested in Basra for illegally crossing the Iran-

Iraq border.[24] On the other hand, Iranian forces on the border diligently monitor people crossing

the border illegally in the other direction. The now famous and politically-motivated arrest of

three American college students who were hiking along the Iran-Iraq border on July 31, 2009

underscores this point. The three Americans were walking inside a remote, undefined border

region in Iraqi Kurdistan, but were picked up by Iranian authorities and charged with espionage

nonetheless.

Iraqi authorities have also had to deal with border violations made by the Iranian security

forces themselves. Border infractions have been an issue ever since Ambassador Bremer and the

CPA first governed Iraq in 2003, but the frequency and severity of the incidents has increased

significantly in the past two years. In March 2009, the Iraqi military announced that an Iranian

aerial drone had been shot down over Iraqi airspace. An American airplane engaged and destroyed the drone after it flew 10 km inside Iraqi airspace, where it remained for more than an hour.[25] A spokesperson for the US military said that the intrusion was intentional, but Iraqi officials asserted that it was most likely a mistake. Tehran never commented on it, or even acknowledged that the incident took place.

The drone incident paled in comparison to the border crisis at the Fakkah oil fields in southern Iraq. On December 18, 2009, the Iranian government once again tested the nascent Iraqi regime by sending a handful of troops to the disputed area and hoisting the Iranian flag. The Fakkah oil fields lie on a section of the Iran-Iraq border that had never been properly

defined. Nevertheless, the Iranian troops occupied a location that in the past had clearly been considered Iraqi territory. Iraqi leaders responded to the intrusion forcefully the next day by demanding the complete withdrawal of Iranian troops. On December 20th, Iranian troops lowered their flag, but they failed to pull completely out of Iraq's territory.

ILLUSTRATION 4: THE FAKKAH OIL FIELDS

A multitude of Iraqi leaders were outraged by Iran's refusal to withdrawal. Many thought that this was a clear and intentional message put forward by the Iranian government. The Iraqi Accordance Front, a group of mostly Sunni Arab religious parties which has been a part of Prime Minister al-Maliki's ruling coalition, even called for the expulsion of the Iranian Ambassador to

Iraq. On December 23rd, Ahmed al-Awani, a spokesperson for the Iraqi Accordance Front, demanded a swift and powerful response to Iran's actions:

> The Front demands the intervention of the Americans for protecting Iraq's borders and the implementation of the security agreement concluded by the United States. It's not the first crime committed by Iran against Iraq and its people, but it's the biggest. The government must react firmly to such a serious violation of the country's sovereignty. Otherwise, it will be spineless and content with what happened.[26]

An Iranian delegation, headed by Foreign Minister Mottaki, came to Baghdad on January 7, 2010 to resolve the Fakkah oil fields crisis. Mottaki met with the Iraqi Foreign Minister, Hoshyar Zebari, and agreed to draw a more defined border around the oil fields. Iranian forces finally withdrew from the area completely on January 27th, leaving behind them a series of fortifications and erected barriers. Though the Fakkah oil fields crisis appears to have been resolved, it could prove to be a preview of future controversies.

In spite of the problems on the horizon, Iran-Iraq relations have improved significantly since the fall of Saddam Hussein. Since the US-led invasion of 2003, Iran and Iraq have re-established ties and exchanged ambassadors. The Islamic Republic is also one of the few regimes in the Middle East that has made a major effort to engage the new Iraqi government and offer generous amounts of aid for reconstruction. In fact, the leaders of these two countries meet with one another more frequently now than they ever did in their past. Under the surface though, tension still remains. A significant number of the contentious issues which adversely affect Iran-Iraq relations today stem from the presence of coalition forces in Iraq. Now that Saddam Hussein's regime is gone, the United States is unquestionably Iran's number one enemy in the region. The United States' mere presence in Iraq damages the prospects for friendlier relations

between Iran and Iraq and it intensifies issues that have never been resolved. The future of Iran-Iraq relations hinges squarely upon Baghdad's willingness to retain an intimate relationship with the United States, especially after coalition forces withdraw from Iraq.

CONCLUSION

Iran-Iraq relations have improved significantly since the fall of Saddam Hussein. The 2003 invasion of Iraq made it easy for Iraqi dissidents, who had longstanding ties with the Iranian government, to seize power in Baghdad. By completely dismantling the Ba'athist government, holding elections and stressing sectarianism in institutions like the IGC, coalition forces ensured that parties with strong Shi'ite and Kurdish identities would take control of the new government. Consequently, nearly every Iraqi Shi'ite and Kurdish organization, which opposed Saddam Hussein's regime before the invasion, maintained close ties with the Iranian government. American policy in Iraq eliminated one of Iran's worst regional enemies and inadvertently replaced that regime with a set of parties who had been receiving financial and military aid from Tehran for more than two decades.

Iran-Iraq relations are currently the most cordial that the two countries have seen since the collapse of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958. Tehran and Baghdad have now established official relations with one another, exchanged ambassadors and ended outright support for each others' dissident groups. Furthermore, Iranian and Iraqi leaders have demonstrated their improved

relations by frequently visiting each other. Such symbolic displays of friendship have not been seen in more than fifty years. The current situation, though, is not the most cooperative period of relations in the entire history of Iran-Iraq relations. Baghdad does not perceive the United States or other powerful Arab regimes in the region to be threats, like Tehran does. As a result, the two countries have not entered into any mutual defense pacts, such as the Baghdad Pact which united the two countries against the Soviet Union and Arab nationalists in the 1950s. Unless the new Iraqi government changes its perception of major regional powers, Iran-Iraq relations will not reach the height of their ties in the 1950s.

Iran-Iraq relations are now much less hostile, and thus improved, because it is no longer a relationship of equals. Saddam Hussein boasted one of the world's largest militaries and fought Iran to stalemate in the Iran-Iraq War, despite his country's smaller population size. The decision by Ambassador Bremer and the CPA to completely dismantle the Iraqi army in 2003 ensured that Iraq would not be a military power in the region for many years. The new Iraqi army, which is still mired in the insurgency, in no way poses a threat to anyone beyond its own borders. In addition to Iraq's feebleness, the new government is rather isolated diplomatically in the region. Saddam Hussein's ability to withstand Iranian counter offenses in the Iran-Iraq War was partially attributable to the steady flow of aid from his Arab neighbors, like Saudi Arabia. Most Arab governments opposed the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and thus ostracized the subsequent government. Stemming from the circumstances of its creation, the new Iraqi government never had a real opportunity to establish strong ties with other Arab governments. The dismantling of the military and diplomatic limitations has made the new Iraqi government extremely weak vis-à-vis the Islamic Republic. As a result, Tehran has a much larger capacity to influence events in Iran-Iraq relations in the post-Ba'athist era.

Nevertheless, Iraq's weakened state and its leadership's history with Iran are not guarantees that Baghdad will seek close ties with Tehran in the future. Saddam Hussein was the common enemy of Iraqi Shi'ites, Iraqi Kurds and Iran and was therefore the primary reason why they forged close ties to one another in the first place. In the absence of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, the need for a close relationship disappears. An Iraqi Kurdistan, which has secured its main goal and secured general autonomy from Baghdad, no longer needs aid from the Iranian government. With this legitimacy in hand, Iraqi Kurds will focus more on issues such as trade and the treatment of their Kurdish brethren in Iran. Similarly, Iraq's Shi'ite parties no longer need aid from Iran because they rule the country. Regularly-held elections make these parties more accountable to the interests of Iraqi voters. This is most evident in the recent breakup of the once dominant pro-Iranian parliamentary coalition, the UIA, and the subsequent success of the Islamic Da'awa Party, which allied itself to several Iraqi Sunni parties.

The future of Iran-Iraq relations will be heavily influenced by Baghdad's relationship with the United States. After the 2003 invasion, Iraq's new leaders had no choice but to work closely with the United States. Now that Iraq has regained its sovereignty and coalition forces are leaving the country, a decision to work closely with the United States in the future would be made more voluntarily by Baghdad. If the new Iraqi government continues to work closely with the United States, it will drive a wedge between Baghdad and Tehran. Like relations from the 1920s through 2003, issues like border ambiguity, access to the Persian Gulf and ethnic tensions lie just beneath the surface. These issues have historically been exacerbated when Iran and Iraq sit on different sides of regional and geopolitical conflicts. Baghdad's allegiance in these larger conflicts will determine if these issues will be disregarded in order to meet mutual regional interests, or brought to the forefront of Iran-Iraq relations.

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