P31:20/108

UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE www.usip.org

SPECIAL REPORT

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Islamist Politics in Iraq after Saddam Hussein

About the Report

Two critical political questions arise as the new Iraq emerges. Will the numerically dominant Shiite majority be open to full political collaboration with the Sunni and Christian minorities? What are the strengths and ideologies of Islamist political movements, particularly Shiite, that have asserted themselves since the fall of Saddam Hussein? In order to address these issues the U.S. Institute of Peace hosted on May 21, 2003 a workshop entitled "Religious Politics in Iraq." The presenters were Graham Fuller, author of *The Future of Political Islam* and co-author of *The Arab Shia: The Forgotten Muslims;* Faleh Abdul-Jabar, lecturer at London Metropolitan University and author of *The Shiite Movement in Iraq* and editor of *Ayatollahs, Sufis, and Ideologues: State, Religion, and Social Movements in Iraq;* Rend Rahim Francke, founding executive director of the Iraq Foundation and co-author of *The Arab Shia: The Forgotten Muslims;* and Kenneth Katzman of the Congressional Research Service. The symposium was moderated by David Smock, director of the Institute's Religion and Peacemaking Initiative. This Special Report, focusing on Islamist politics in Iraq, presents a revised version of the paper that Fuller prepared for the May 21 symposium.

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect views of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policies.

Special Report 108 August 2003

Contents

Introduction 2
The Iraqi Shia 3
The Sunni Islamists 8
Iraqi Kurds 12
Conclusions 13

Briefly . . .

- Islamism, as a basic feature of Muslim and especially Arab politics, is destined to play a major role in the future of Iraqi politics. A huge moral and ideological vacuum has now emerged in Iraq, and Islam is tailor-made to provide a new moral compass to the people.
- Neighboring states are, predictably, already moving quickly where possible to establish centers of influence within Iraq to prepare for the day when U.S. power departs. Iran will support Islamist movements among the Shia while Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states will seek to bolster Sunni forces in Iraq—most likely through the vehicle of Sunni Islamists.
- Sunni Islamism, long dormant and suppressed under Saddam Hussein, is highly likely to strongly re-emerge in Iraq, dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, but rivaled in part by Wahhabi groups, partly stimulated by Saudi support, and partly reflecting the growth of more fundamentalist views elsewhere in the Muslim world.
- The emergence of Shiite power in Iraq, rather than giving Iran a major toehold over the new Iraq, is more likely to serve as a rival to Iran over time and pose a basic ideological threat to Iranian hardliners who champion clerical rule.
- Iraqi Shia are much less likely than Iranian Shia to accept clerical rule, even while possibly supporting some kind of Islamic state in which clerics do not dominate.
- The Islamists—Shia and Sunni—are not *automatically* hostile to the U.S. presence, especially since both gained from the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. But they are determined to retain the "Muslim character" of Iraq, especially in the face of non-Muslim occupation, and cannot long support the U.S. presence.
- While the Shia in particular rejoiced at the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, it is now the United States, in their view, that stands between them and the attainment of national power. This will render them more impatient than any other Iraqi group with a prolonged American occupation.

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- It is hard to foresee the emergence of any "secular" Shiite movement to rival clerical influence, even though individual Shia may indeed opt for a secular government, oppose religiously linked movements, and work in cooperation with liberal Sunnis.
- Islamist power inside Iraq will be diminished to the extent there is freedom enjoyed by other political and religious parties within the country to rival the Islamists. As nearly everywhere, repression of political pluralism invariably works to the benefit of the Islamists.

Introduction

What will be the nature of Islamist politics in Iraq after Saddam Hussein? We are moving into quite uncharted waters in examining this question. The ruthless character of the Baath Party dictatorship absolutely dominated decades of Iraqi politics, canceling out the "normal" workings of Iraqi politics, especially among Islamist groups, and forcing their activities, if any, underground. Movements still represented today in other Arab countries such as communists, liberals, and Islamists were barely in evidence in Iraq. But most of these obscured forces are now re-emerging into the light of day. This report focuses upon Islamic (or Islamist) politics as they are likely to emerge and develop in the new post-Hussein period of openness, even while Iraq lies under a U.S.-led occupation administration.

This report makes one major assumption: with the end of Baathist repression and new political openings there are no grounds for believing that newly emerging Iraqi politics will dramatically depart from the many familiar patterns of general politics in the Arab world. To be sure, every country is unique, and Iraq has had its own quite special experience over the past five decades. History, geography, and geopolitics furthermore put their distinctive stamp on any country. Nonetheless, there are some general patterns of politics and aspirations across the Arab world to which a freer Iraq will not likely be a stranger. One of these major characteristics is that in most of the Arab world Islamist movements constitute the most important, if not the sole, segment of opposition to existing regimes. Political Islam will thus strongly emerge in post-Hussein Iraq—indeed, there are clear indications that they already have. But an important qualification is essential here: Islamist parties also benefit immensely from the absence of other rivals—as repressive states close down all opposition groups. In today's Iraq, some degree of political competition will be present that will set some limits to any Islamist monopoly on politics. But what forms will these trends take and how will they interact with other forces in the country?

This report examines three major Islamist trends that operate within Iraq's three major sectarian/ethnic communities: the majority Shia Arabs, the Sunni Arabs, and the Kurds. It is significant in itself that we need to examine each one of these in its own independent right, *since it clearly demonstrates that political Islam in its existing organizational forms has not managed to seriously cross sectarian/ethnic lines,* at least so far. That conceivably could change in the future but more likely will not. This divide is due not primarily to *theological* differences, but rather to social and *communal* issues. The two Arab communities have experienced 1400 years of separation in many respects.

It is true, as Yitzhak Nakash points out in his article on "The Shiites and the Future of Iraq" (*Foreign Affairs,* July 2003) that Sunni and Shia Arabs mostly stem from similar tribal backgrounds with some degree of shared world outlook. Nonetheless, today Shiism is not just a theological vision, but also a psychology and a cultural way of life for Shia around the world. Much of Iraqi Shiite culture has become urbanized and partially influenced by Iranian cultural tradition as well—even while retaining strong Arab consciousness and characteristics. Over time the Shia and Sunni communities of Iraq have thus each grown distinct in many respects and these differences have gradually become embedded in the political and social order. Of course, the borderlines between the two communities are often crossed on the personal, political, and social level, particularly in

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less troubled times. But today, as a result of years of brutal sectarianism and political violence in Iraq, the Islamist movements of the two communities each operate as independent and separate vehicles for the interests of each community—and are to some extent political rivals. This need not be a permanent condition, but it will take a long period of shakedown and normalcy in Iraqi political and social life before these differences can be overcome—as is true with ethnic differences as well.

The Iraqi Shia

The present phase of Iraqi politics is a watershed for the Iraqi Shia, a turning point for a group that after many hundreds of years as a marginalized political group under the Ottomans, British, and Baath can now look to the prospect of becoming the dominant power in Iraqi politics. Their hopes had been raised at the time of the establishment of an independent Iraq that introduced a modicum of democratic process into its Parliament, until it largely came to an end with the 1958 revolution and especially after the 1968 Baath coup. With the fall of Saddam Hussein, the revolutionary new opportunities have galvanized the Shiite community and sparked an extraordinary and rapid wave of identity politics and political activism that was not anticipated by American policymakers or even by most Iraqi Sunnis. The significance of this political turning point cannot be overestimated, either for Iraq or for the region.

In effect, *the Shia are now aware that only the U.S. occupation stands between them and the final attainment of political power so long denied.* It is this realization that will increasingly be a key source of tension between the Shia community and the U.S. presence in Iraq.

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Analysis of Islamic politics today among the Shia is considerably easier than that of the Sunnis. The Shiite Islamists operate far more publicly in Iraq and have been openly active on the political scene, especially from abroad, for a long period of time. Some of its leaders, such as Sayyid Baqir al-Hakim, the leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) have been in regular touch with U.S. policymakers for nearly a decade regarding future regime change in Iraq. The names of the movements, their leadership, and their aspirations are somewhat familiar.

To a major extent, Shiite politics is religious politics. Politics among the Shia in the Muslim world is typically characterized by the central role of the clergy. The dilemma of secular Shia is the reality that religion itself is what mainly distinguishes the Shiite community from other communities. The difference is not merely or even primarily theological. The cultural characteristics of the Shiite community over centuries have created distinctive social practices and its own community psychology that figure decisively in the self-perception of the Shiite community. To be "Shiite" outside of a religious context is difficult since it is primarily religion that makes an individual Shiite. Mere adherence to the culture and community aspects of Shiism is enough to mark one as Shia. In this sense it is hard to be a "secular" Shia. Indeed, "secular" Shia have a problem in entering politics: if they ignore their Shiite background and community as part of their identity they win little favor with other Shia, yet if they actively identify themselves as Shia they brand themselves with that sectarian category to non-Shia. Consequently most Shia tend not to seek a "secular identity" that would imply any break with their own community. Interestingly, it was the search for a non-sectarian political identity that drove a considerable number of Shia to join the Iraqi communist party over the years—one of the few political parties in which sectarian or ethnic background was irrelevant to membership.

Ayatollah `Ali al-Sistani and the "Quietists"

The most important traditional group is the "quietist" tradition currently represented by Grand Ayatollah `Ali al-Sistani, who follows in the tradition established by the towering

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figure Sayyid Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei (al-Khu'i), who died in 1992. Sistani is of Iranian origin, but has resided in Najaf for most of his professional life. Among Iraqi clerics he probably has the largest number of followers, both inside and outside of Iraq. Maintaining a quietist approach to politics was nearly a survival requirement in Iraq ever since the Baath party came to power. Shia clerics who did not were jailed, tortured, and killed.

Quietism—a conscious distancing of oneself from politics—represents a mainstream Shiite tradition in which the clergy remains aloof from participation in routine politics but reserves for itself the role of observer and critic of political and social events.

Quietism—a conscious distancing of oneself from politics—represents a mainstream Shiite tradition in which the clergy remains aloof from participation in routine politics but reserves for itself the role of observer and critic of political and social events, speaking out forcefully only on special occasions of national and social crisis. Indeed, Ayatollah Khomeini's introduction in Iran of the quite radical concept of *Wilayat al-Faqih* (Rule of the Jurisprudent), represented a marked departure from mainstream Shiite tradition—a fateful decision with which large numbers of clerics were not in agreement. Sistani's choice to operate in the quietist tradition in Iraq clearly put him at odds with the ruling ideology of the Iranian regime. This helped protect him from dangerous confrontation with the Saddam Hussein regime as well.

Now that Saddam Hussein and Baath rule are gone, however, the concept and appropriateness of quietism may come under greater scrutiny. Quietism does not mean eschewing politics altogether, but it suggests a fairly constrained approach toward offering opinions or involvement on daily political issues. Given the new freedom of politics in Iraq, both at the intellectual and activist level, the need for restraint from politics as a means of survival has diminished. More important, the urgent need to make important political and social decisions has grown as Iraq embarks on building a totally new political edifice. Clerical leadership or guidance may be more sought after than ever before among those many Shia who look to their *maraji' al-taqlid* or "sources of emulation" for guidance. Thus Sistani will find his position more keenly rivaled in this new period of intense political activism that seeks a dominant role for Shia in Iraqi politics.

The murder in April 2003 of Sayyid Abdul Majid al-Khoei, the eldest son of Sayyid Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei, upon his return to Iraq from exile in London, was a significant blow to the forces representing quietism. It may be that this major wing will find itself eclipsed by more activist elements among the Shia clergy, leading to a decline in Sistani's influence.

The al-Sadr Faction

A second major clerical force is represented by the Sadrists, currently represented by Muqtada al-Sadr, the youthful son of Sayyid Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr who was assassinated by the Hussein regime in 1999, and relative of the great Iraqi jurist Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (executed by the regime in 1980). Muqtada al-Sadr formed the Jama'at al-Sadr al-Thani (Association of the Second al-Sadr) as the key organization of the Sadrists. Muqtada al-Sadr is a shadowy figure, often reported as headstrong, inexperienced, and clearly lacking any clerical credentials except as inheritor of family name. He has furthermore issued statements insisting on the validity of his father's political rulings that, as Juan Cole points out, according to mainstream (Usuli) Shiite theology, should have lost its legal force upon the death of the issuer. Muqtada al-Sadr verbally attacked Sistani in April 2003 and for a brief period issued threats that Sistani as well as two other leading clerics—Baqir al-Hakim and Muhammad Ishaq al-Fayyad—should leave the country, a call denounced by other leading Shiite clerics. There were press reports that Muqtada al-Sadr might have been behind the murder of `Abd-al-Majid al-Khoei in the mob confrontation in April 2003 but this has never been established. Meanwhile, the Sadrists maintain dominance among the large Shiite community in Baghdad's massive "Sadr City" (the former "Saddam City").

Al-Sadr has been the key figure to raise the issue of "foreign origin" of several key Shiite clerics in Iraq, including Sistani (Iranian origin), Muhammad Ishaq Fayyad (Afghan), and Bashir Najafi (Pakistani). These charges are significant in that they rep-

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resent a major effort to promote a "nativist" approach to Shiite politics in Iraq that casts doubts on the appropriateness of religious leaders not of Iraqi blood. Yet, given the cultural intermixing between Iran and Iraq over history, it is hard to find "pure Iraqis."

More important, however, an insistence upon nativist Shiism directly militates against Iranian influence over any future Shiite politics in Iraq—a potentially major turning point in the relations between Iran and Iraq. If the nativist trend in Iraqi Shiite politics grows, it almost certainly guarantees the emergence of a major rivalry between Iran and Iraq for influence over other Arab Shia in the Gulf, Syria, and Lebanon, or among Shia east toward the Indian subcontinent.

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Al-Sadr would seem to be pitted against both the al-Hakim and Sistani circles and the latter two grant him no recognition of standing. As an activist he is directly opposed to the quietist faction of Sistani, and would be a direct rival for power with the activist Hakim faction that is supported by Iran. His lack of religious credentials may be offset by the backing he receives from Iraqi Ayatollah Kadhim Hussayni al-Ha'iri in Tehran. He is staking out an anti-Iranian position that could have some resonance. But Iran will be pragmatic in seeking to maintain good relations with any Iraqi Shiite faction that seems likely to emerge on top.

Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq

Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim is the leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, founded in 1982 and based in Tehran. It enjoys the support of the Iranian government that aided him in establishing the Badr Brigade of some 10,000-man Iraqi exile militia forces. Al-Hakim's greatest strengths are his consistent support from the Iranian regime in terms of financing and materiel; Washington's acquiescence during two successive administrations to his prominence among the Shiite opposition; SCIRI's membership on the exile Iraqi National Council or INC (which enjoyed Washington's support for many years before Saddam Hussein's overthrow) as a key representative of the Iraqi Shia; his leadership of the Badr Brigade; and his lineage from a major Iraqi Shiite family. He reportedly accepts the concept of pluralism in any future Iraqi government.

Al-Hakim's drawbacks include that same close association with the Iranian government from the past, and his siding with Iran during the Iran-Iraq War, which many Iraqis perceived as traitorous. While resident in Tehran, he developed something of a negative reputation among Iraqi exiles in Iran who believed he did not show much sympathy or concern for their plight. He is one of several Shiite figures who remained in exile rather than struggling against Saddam Hussein from within Iraq. He is politically astute as a result of his dealings with both Washington and Tehran over the years and his involvement in the INC, which represented all major political trends within Iraq. He is unlikely to adopt a position of outright confrontation, especially not military, with the United States, unless Washington moves to destroy his movement. While al-Hakim's association with Iran would suggest a preference for the Iranian ideological position of support for clerical rule, conditions in Iraq will lead him to be pragmatic on this issue and Iran itself will be more interested in having direct ties to a major figure of influence in Iran than in his specific ideological stance. Washington, while deeply suspicious of his Iranian ties, also needs his support as an influential Shiite figure.

The Dawa Party

The Dawa (Call to Islam) Party is probably the oldest Shiite Islamist movement in Iraq, going back, according to Amatzia Baram, to 1957, when it was founded by Sayyid Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and others (communication with the author). The movement early on called for the establishment of an Islamic state and, according to R. K. Ramazani reportedly sought cooperation at the time with the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood, a surprisingly open gesture in that period (*Revolutionary Iran,* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins

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University Press, 1986). The development of the radical political agenda of Dawa was a revolutionary turning point in the highly conservative Najaf environment at the time and even preceded Khomeini's 1964 arrival in Najaf (Abdul-Halim al-Ruhaimi, "The Dawa Islamic Party," in Faleh Abdul-Jabar, ed., *Ayatollahs, Sufis, and Ideologues,* London, Saqi Books, 2002).

Dawa rapidly achieved prominence through its use of violence against the Saddam regime starting in the 1970s and was ruthlessly repressed. Its boldness in attacking the regime and the price it paid in blood for this resistance earned Dawa a great deal of respect and legitimacy among Iraqi Shia. Dawa joined in the founding of the SCIRI Council in Tehran in 1982 but a key faction broke with both the Dawa leadership and SCIRI two years later in opposition to the principle of clerical rule—the guiding principle of Khomeini—and against Iranian efforts to control the Dawa Party. Since then Dawa has remained split between a faction in Iran that is part of SCIRI and calls itself Islamic Dawa (Ruhaimi) and a more independent London-based branch that is more "Iraqi" in character. Both branches of the party have remained pragmatic about dealing with the realities of U.S. power for the moment, but that tolerance may be short-lived as more Shia come to view the U.S. presence as the chief barrier to assumption of greater national power by the Shia. In my view, the future role of Dawa is still uncertain since its earlier popularity and legitimacy may have diminished with time and new circumstances. It could, however, bid to be the major contender for a "nativist" Iraqi Shiite movement and thus may join forces with the Sadrists, especially given the role of the al-Sadr family in the movement in the past. The inclusion of Dawa in the governing council of Iraq under the U.S.-led occupation could lead it in more moderate directions, compared to the excluded al-Sadr movement, but Dawa remains a key unknown force for the future.

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Other Groups

The Islamic Action Organization (Jam'iyyat al-`Amal al-Islami) is a smaller Shiite organization whose founding goes back to the early 1980s under Tehran's wing. It reportedly had links with SCIRI in that period when it conducted numerous attacks against Iraqi installations inside Iraq (Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran*). It is currently headed by Muhammad Taqi al-Mudarrisi and remains linked with SCIRI. There is also a less-known Shia Hezbollah Organization led by Abu-Hatim al-Muhammadawi that claimed responsibility for the first Shiite opposition group attacks against Saddam Hussein's forces after the U.S. military operation began (William Samii, Radio Free Europe commentary, April 9, 2003).

Implications for the International Shiite Community

The evolution of Shiite Islamic politics promises to have major geopolitical impact across the Arab world and outside. The watershed event is the transformation of a once downtrodden and marginalized community into a vibrant Shiite political community bidding for power in Iraq. Shia everywhere are taking note of this event and will strengthen their own claims to civil liberties and democratic representation. The state first and foremost affected by this process is Bahrain.

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The Shia of *Bahrain* constitute some two-thirds of the population, but, as in Iraq, have been much excluded from political power by a ruling Sunni elite minority. Recent reforms have introduced some greater measure of representation into the parliament, but Shia are still heavily disadvantaged when it comes to real power. The emergence of the Shia as the major political force in Iraq will be certain to hasten the Bahraini Shia's drive to gain greater voice in the political order and is likely to increase tensions on the island. In a positive sense it could also help bring about greater regime reforms, but the Sunni ruling class in Bahrain is unlikely to yield power in the foreseeable future.

The Shia of *Saudi Arabia* represent only some 5–10 percent of the population—the figures are much disputed. But they have been the object of both *de facto* and even *de*

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jure discrimination for years by a Wahhabi political order that considers the Shia to be in effect non-believers *(kuffar)* and the legitimate object of discrimination. (The Wahhabi sect of Islam, based in Saudi Arabia, promotes a narrow, literalistic, and intolerant form of Islam that rejects all other Islamic schools.) Since the fall of Saddam Hussein and the emergence of Shiite political forces in Iraq, the Saudi Shia have themselves become emboldened to call for greater cultural rights within the Saudi system. The intimate family links between the Shia of Bahrain and those just across the causeway in the al-Hasa region of Saudi Arabia means that Shiite politics between the two regions will be highly interactive. The Saudi regime will soon be required to either lessen discrimination against Shia in the kingdom, or else crack down even more harshly, if it is to avoid increased security problems in the area.

Since the fall of Saddam Hussein and the emergence of Shiite political forces in Iraq, the Saudi Shia have themselves become emboldened to call for greater cultural rights within the Saudi system.

In *Syria,* the heterodox Shiite `Alawi minority rules over a Sunni majority. While the `Alawis are not part of the mainstream Twelver tradition of Iran and Iraq, the Iranian republic after the revolution took the political decision to recognize the `Alawis as Shia. Will there be future interaction between the Iraqi Shia and the `Alawi rulers of Damascus in the years ahead? Amatzia Baram points out that both Dawa and SCIRI have had a presence in Damascus since the early 1980s, working with Syrian support against the Hussein regime (communication with the author). Given the close political ties between Tehran and Damascus, it is quite logical that the new Shiite political forces in Iraq will maintain these same ties. Under these circumstances, might the Sunni Islamists of both countries then seek cooperation against the Shia of both countries?

The renaissance of the Shia in *Lebanon*—the single largest sectarian group in the country—goes directly back to Iranian clerical links between the two communities in the 1960s. Today Iran continues to support Hezbollah, the more radical of the two Shiite political organizations in Lebanon. It is assisted in this by Syria, which finds Hezbollah a useful tool of pressure against Israel. We can easily speculate on a future rivalry between Iran and Iraq for influence among Lebanon's Shia. Shaykh Muhammad Husayn Fadhlallah, the leading Shiite clerical voice in Lebanon, voiced similar thoughts in April 2003 in suggesting that, with Saddam Hussein's fall, Najaf may now emerge as a more important Shiite center than Iran (Azadeh Moaveni, "Fall of Hussein Could Lead to a Shift in Center, Focus of Shiite Muslims," *Los Angeles Times,* April 17, 2003). Significantly, Fadhlallah received his theological training in Najaf.

Outside Iraq, the Shiite minorities in *Afghanistan, Pakistan,* and *India* will likely also develop renewed interest in Najaf as a theological center, further strengthening it as a rival to Iran in these areas.

Rivalry between Shiite leaderships in Iran and Iraq over these external relations will affect the power of the radical clerical line in Iran itself. If Iraqi Shiite leadership should reject the concept of *Wilayat al-Faqih,* or clerical rule, then the concept would come under much pressure in Iran itself, where the policy has been controversial from the outset. Indeed, Ahmed Montazeri, the son of Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri who was a candidate to replace Khomeini in the 1980s, acknowledged recently that open religious debate in Najaf would "definitely question the legitimacy of absolute rule by the clergy."

If Iraqi Shiite leadership should reject the concept of* Wilayat al-Faqih, *or clerical rule, then the concept would come under much pressure in Iran itself.

It is hard to predict how Iraqi Shia will react to the rival clerical groups contending for leadership. Rivalries among clerical leaders are not new in Iraqi history. The degree of popular support the public accords to any leader will be based on diverse factors including the individual outlook of each Iraqi citizen. Sistani might evoke the most respect as a purely religious authority among Shia both inside and outside Iraq, but Hakim may be best positioned due to his strong support from Iran and his past recognition by Washington as a significant Shiite opposition figure. Iran's logistical support can do much to help promote Hakim in ways that cannot be easily circumvented by Washington. Regional and tribal affiliations also matter since some figures are stronger in certain cities than others.

The financial resources commanded by each group play a powerful role in its ability to provide social services to the public, which facilitates the winning of adherents. Here

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Iranian support could be very important. Iran indeed is likely to be pragmatic and lend support to any group that will work to accelerate the U.S. departure from Iraq—Tehran's top priority. The ability of a given Iraqi leader to tithe his followers in Shiite tradition also clearly affects the financial strength of any contender. Acceptability among Sunnis as potential partners for joint governance in the future could also be a factor. Furthermore, ideological positions assumed by each of these movements will also be affected by the tactical positions taken by other groups, that is, a moderate position taken by one group may help impel a rival organization toward a more radical position.

Popular discontent with the U.S. occupation could also force moderate Shiite leaders to move away from current partial cooperation with Washington toward a more uncompromising stand.

Popular discontent with the U.S. occupation could also force moderate Shiite leaders to move away from current partial cooperation with Washington toward a more uncompromising stand. Indeed, views toward Washington could even become the primary ideological touchstone as hardline Iraqi Shiite clerics consider making common cause with Iranian hardliners. And finally, the aggressiveness of the organizing power of each movement within the country will matter.

In short, the ultimate leadership of the Iraqi Shia is up for grabs. I am inclined to think that the "nativists" may ultimately be the stronger force, but their actions may not necessarily be more reassuring to Washington even if they are more distant from Tehran. Indeed, no clear-cut leader may emerge from among clerical contenders, requiring cooperation among several contending forces, each with its own constituency.

Ultimately, however, it is important to remember that the Shia of Iraq are hardly monolithic; typically they are most united when under the greatest pressure and discrimination. Otherwise, they, like all communities, are also divided into various political trends—communist, nationalist, Islamist, liberal—with differing class, tribal, and regional interests as well. Even if they attain dominant power, they will not speak with one voice, and various factions will inevitably find political allies within other, non-Shia communities.

The Sunni Islamists

Unlike Shiite Islamism, Sunni Islamism has been largely out of sight and underground for nearly 30 years. Various trends are quickly re-emerging, but there are far fewer indicators available to outside observers about their leaderships, views, plans, and following.

The leading Sunni Islamist force in Iraq from the outset has been the Muslim Brotherhood or MB (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun), the most important Sunni mainstream Islamist movement in the Arab world.

The leading Sunni Islamist force in Iraq from the outset has been the Muslim Brotherhood or MB (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun), the most important Sunni mainstream Islamist movement in the Arab world, with branches in most Arab countries. The first Iraqi branch of the MB was founded in Iraq in 1948 in the form of the Society for the Salvation of Palestine (Jam'iyyat Inqadh Filastin). Its membership was drawn largely from among Iraqis who had been influenced by Brotherhood writings from Egypt. While Palestine was a central concern of all Arabs even at that time, the Brotherhood also propagated its basic message that the fundamental ills of the Muslim society are due to deviation from the teachings of Islam and that Muslim society can only be cured by a return to those principles. While the Brotherhood regularly excoriated the West for its imperialist policies, a key leader of the movement, Basim al-`Azami, states that it was actually the strong communist movement in Iraq in the 1940s that achieved first rank as the chief ideological enemy of the Brotherhood ("The Muslim Brotherhood: Genesis and Development," in Abdul-Jabar, ed., *Ayatollahs, Sufis, and Ideologues*).

In 1951 a formal Iraqi branch of the Muslim Brotherhood was established. This period was a heyday for political movements in Iraq since politics had not yet fallen subject to nearly five decades of authoritarian suppression that began in 1958 with the coup of `Abd al-Karim Qasim. In the 1950s the Brotherhood was the primary and largest Sunni Islamist movement. Its platform emphasized education and *Dawa* (propagation of the faith or "call to Islam"); it rejected "sectarianism" among the four major schools of Sunni Islam, as well as "westernization," Marxism, secularism, and nationalism, and believed that its role as a political and social movement transcended operation as a political party.

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It strongly supported Muslim causes of national liberation in the Palestinian struggle and the Algerian struggle against the French.

`Azami reports that by 1960 the Brotherhood decided that political action was a "religious and national duty" and hence established the Iraqi Islamic Party, a name the Brotherhood still retains. Its party manifesto emphasized the same points as noted above augmented by the following principles:

- Muslims and non-Muslims must enjoy the same "political, public, and individual rights."
- A democratic order is required in which non-Muslims have the right to elect their own representatives and to vote for a (Muslim) president.
- The legal system should be neither Islamic nor positivist, but society should be ruled according to Sharia law.
- State land should go to the peasants.
- Women have the right to work.
- Trade unions should be established.
- National resources belong to the people.
- National unity must be upheld on the basis of common citizenship.
- National unity is the nucleus of a higher stage of Arab unity that in turn is the nucleus of overall Muslim unity.
- In global terms "the people of all nations are seen as integral parts of a united whole—humanity— irrespective of ethnic origin or religion."

The Brotherhood leadership called for joint Sunni-Shia membership within the Iraqi Islamic Party. Sayyid Muhsin al-Hakim, the ranking Shia cleric, declined and forbad cooperation of Shia with the party.

After the July 1968 Baath coup, `Azami reports, Islamists were deeply opposed to the new secularist Baath power. Very soon Islamist activists were arrested, jailed, and tortured and many fled the country. The Brotherhood believed that the Baath Party had seized power from the pro-communist Qasim regime with CIA backing and concluded that the Brotherhood would not be capable of overcoming Baath power.

The leadership of the Brotherhood remained in exile thereafter. In 1991 with the first Gulf War against Saddam Hussein's regime the Brotherhood decided to revive the party, based in the United Kingdom under its old name of the Iraqi Islamic Party. Even in 1991 the Brotherhood was skeptical about any hopes that the United States would truly eliminate Hussein since it had once been instrumental in his rise. The leadership revived the old platform and publicized four of its leader's names: Usama al-Tikriti, Ayad al-Samarra'i, Faruq al-`Ani, and Basim al-Adhami, and began publication of its periodical, *Dar al-Salaam*.

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Interestingly, even in 1991 one of the stated aims of the party was to save Iraq from succumbing to a "U.S.-led western conspiracy which was plotting to destroy it in the interests of Israel and ensuring oil supplies to the western world" (`Azami, "Muslim Brotherhood"), a commentary with disturbingly current relevance. These same themes were to be broadly cited in 2003 not only by Islamists in Egypt and Jordan but by large numbers of those around the world who opposed the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

The Iraqi Islamic Party's pronouncements additionally emphasized the suffering of the Iraqi people under UN sanctions. The party continued to call for an Islamic state, particularly since Iraq would then draw more sympathy and support from other Muslim states than it would if it struck out in a nationalist direction. The party recognized that any Islamic program could only be implemented gradually after so many years of "deviation" from any kind of Islamic life in the country. It eschewed support for any school of Islam and instead emphasized that all jurisprudential judgments had to be broadly based, transcending the traditional schools of jurisprudence and based on interpretation *(ijtihad)* from all confessions. The party continued to support pluralism, but within the context of respect for Islam and its precepts. It supported democracy, but perceived "flaws in the

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western implementation" of it that often turns "freedom into anarchy, plurality into a sellout of the nation's interests, and the ballot box into an instrument to legalize what is forbidden, which is religiously impermissible." The party eschewed political violence and promoted peaceful electoral practices (`Azami, "Muslim Brotherhood").

While Saddam Hussein's Baath party ruthlessly persecuted the Muslim Brotherhood for the first 20 years of his rule, Hussein's severely weakened status after his huge setback in 1991 led him to publicly embrace Islam as a means of strengthening his legitimacy, a step he had initiated even before the Gulf War in order to draw maximum international support. He opened hundreds of new mosques in the country and established a major new theological school called Saddam University that taught only the Sunni version of Islamic theology but included many of the writings of classic Islamists, enabling its graduates to gain some understanding of contemporary Islamist thinking. Saddam Hussein himself sought to exhibit personal piety at public prayer, and even emblazoned the Islamic invocation "there is no god but God" on a new version of the Iraqi national flag. In his new emphasis on public observation of Islam, he also closed down dancing clubs, casinos, and bars. Twelve tame Islamic scholars were appointed to the Iraqi rubber-stamp Parliament. Public observation of Islam, however, rigorously excluded any hint of political activity or of Islamist activity (Syed Saleem Shahzad, "A Third Force Awaits U.S. in Iraq," *Asia Times,* March 1, 2003).

This same observer reports that in the six month run-up to the U.S. attack on Iraq in 2003, Saddam Hussein began to ease off on persecution of known members of the Brotherhood, ostensibly out of fear that the movement had deep roots in Iraqi society and should not be gratuitously alienated at a time of regime crisis, particularly among his core source of support, the Sunni Arabs.

Given the strength of the Brotherhood in other Arab states—Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and in the Gulf—it is highly likely that the nucleus of an underground Brotherhood remained in place—now free to emerge.

It is of course, notoriously difficult to judge the level and depth of Brotherhood supporters within Iraq during this period of harsh regime crackdown on all political opposition. Any such activity was underground and known best only to the security organs of the regime itself. Nonetheless, given the strength of the Brotherhood in other Arab states—Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and in the Gulf—it is highly likely that the nucleus of an underground Brotherhood remained in place—now free to emerge.

The official Arabic language web site of the Iraqi Islamic Party today (www.iraqi.com) offers the following among the principles that constitute its "values":

"The Islamic Party believes that:

- An enlightened Islamic project is the most ideal for ending the suffering and oppression of our people.
- Coming to power is not an end in itself but rather a means for establishing justice, lifting oppression, and realization of the interests of humanity;
- Open freedom and brotherhood are the best means for realization of sound rule;
- It is in the interests of Iraq and its security that all parties and organizations work to develop the practice of peaceful elections so that they become deeply rooted custom, and to reject political violence and terrorist operations;
- Islam is the source of strength and genuine progress and is the sole factor that unites the sons of Iraq in all their various ethnic and sectarian forms."

In a two-hour interview from London on May 14, 2003 with al-Jazeera TV, the current head of the Brotherhood, Dr. Usama al-Tikriti, noted the intense persecution of the movement under Saddam Hussein but he gave the Brotherhood partial credit for the maintenance of a Muslim environment in Iraq that pushed Saddam Hussein from an outspoken "non-believer" to one of a "hypocritical believer." He acknowledged that the party still faced numerous problems, among them sorting out the relationship between the external leadership—so essential to the movement's survival during the Hussein years—and the internal leadership that can now emerge. He acknowledged that the Sunnis in general were less well organized than the Shia and that the Brotherhood is only

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slowly returning to the political scene. He claimed that the party has 90 branches around Iraq and that it was attracting "enthusiastic youth" into the party.

Other Sunni Islamist groups also exist in Iraq but it is very difficult to gain information about them or gauge their strength. None have anything like the size, importance, international connections, or historical legitimacy of the Muslim Brotherhood.

According to Phebe Marr, the theologically radical but non-violent Hizb al-Tahrir (Liberation Party), originally founded in Jerusalem, had a branch in Iraq in 1960 that unsuccessfully applied for a legal license to form a political party (*The Modern History of Iraq*, Boulder, Westview, 1985). Information about whether it maintains any significant presence in Iraq today, however, is hard to come by.

Other Islamic/Islamist organizations include the Iraqi Islamic Patriotic Front led by Shaykh Muhammad Nadim Al-Taee. This moderate Muslim grouping reportedly met in Washington with U.S. officials prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

Because the Muslim Brotherhood is the most important and largest Sunni Islamist movement across the Arab world, it takes on special importance in regional terms with overt ties among all its organizations. These organizations will almost certainly have some influence upon the Iraqi Brotherhood. The Egyptian Brotherhood, headquarters of the movement, opposed the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, not because of any love for Saddam Hussein—they universally detested him—but because they oppose western and particularly American intervention in the Arab world, particularly if it results in a stronger American presence in the region at the cost of local power. The Jordanian Brotherhood took the same position, as did the Palestinian and Syrian branches.

The Syrian Brotherhood is worthy of special attention here due to its close ties with the Iraqi branch, especially since both have been oppressed by Baathist parties in their respective capitals. Saddam Hussein, however, had at one point supported the underground Syrian Brotherhood, at a time when his relations with Syria were hostile. The Syrian Brotherhood had many years of bloody confrontations with the Syrian Baath Party ever since the Brotherhood was banned in Syria in 1963 after the Syrian Baath Party took power. In recent years, however, the Brotherhood has called for an end to violence against the Syrian regime. The most moderate branch of the Syrian Brotherhood, based in London, remains a key opposition force in Syria, and is undoubtedly delighted at the fall of Saddam Hussein, an event that opens the door to Brotherhood participation in Iraqi politics. These party ties will bear close watch. The probable emergence of a strong Brotherhood movement in Iraq will almost certainly threaten the Asad regime in Syria, since it suggests the possibility of Iraqi Brotherhood support to the Syrian Brotherhood from a neighboring country.

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A yet more complex factor is the view of the Syrian and Iraqi Brotherhoods toward the Shia in their respective countries. It will be important to watch the nature of future connections between Iraqi and Iranian Shia and the ruling minority of `Alawis (a heterodox form of Shiism) in Syria. Will the Iraqi Shia show sympathy for the ruling Syrian `Alawis? And if so, will we witness heightened tension between the Iraqi and Syrian Shia on the one hand, versus the Iraqi and Syrian Sunni Brotherhood on the other? A growth of such ties may greatly elevate tensions between Syria and Iraq in the coming years.

Sunni Resistance

Sunni Islamists have not been idle during the sudden surge of Shiite power in Iraq following Saddam's fall, and there are initial indications that some Arab states may be supporting a bolstering of Sunni power.

According to the *Washington Post*, on April 18, 2003 Shaykh Ahmad al-Kubaysi, a leading Iraqi Sunni, a former professor of Islamic studies at Baghdad University who had been in exile in Dubai for six years, delivered a fiery Friday sermon in a Sunni mosque in Baghdad and unleashed a Sunni demonstration of tens of thousands of Sunnis protesting

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against American occupation. "We fear that sectarianism will be exploited by our enemies," Kubaysi said. "Both Sunnis and Shiites should work for unity. We are all Muslims."

Adel Darwish reported in the *Daily Telegraph* that al-Kubaysi was urged by the United Arab Emirates to return to Baghdad to rally Sunni support in the face of rising Shiite power, and reportedly had the blessings of U.S. authorities to do so ("Returned Exile Rallies Sunnis," April 22, 2003). Al-Kubaysi's affiliation is unclear, but he was a prominent cleric before his exile and almost certainly is affiliated with the Brotherhood.

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What is abundantly clear is that Sunni Islamic leaders are calling for Islamic unity to face the American occupation, both to strengthen the Islamist movement and to preempt any Shiite call to expel the U.S. presence. Indeed, the Sunnis have everything to lose in a Sunni-Shia religious competition, while the Shia undoubtedly perceive that they have the demographic power to act unilaterally. There are some indications that the Sunni Islamists for the moment have found tactical common ground with Iraqi Sunni nationalists and even some Baathists, in arguing for expelling the U.S. presence, despite their deep ideological antipathies. Furthermore, there is no apparent indication that Sunni Islamists were involved in working with Washington prior to the invasion, unlike several key Shiite figures.

On the other hand, it is almost certain that both the international Muslim Brotherhood itself, and many Arab states, have been working to develop a Sunni "alternative" in the Islamic field as well. Certainly the Brotherhood is working to bring back Brotherhood leaders to Iraq from abroad. Gulf states, as suggested by the news report on al-Kubaysi above, also seem interested in helping assert Sunni Islamic power. Saudi Arabia, which has much to fear from a recrudescence of Shiite power in Iraq, almost certainly will be active in trying to strengthen Wahhabi forces within Iraq, and to protect its own interests in Iraq. (The kingdom broke rather dramatically with the Brotherhood in late 2002 when it accused the Brotherhood, and not Wahhabi Islam, of being the chief force behind international Islamic terrorism.) While the kingdom may not seek to use violence against the United States in Iraq, uncontrolled Wahhabi elements in Iraq will almost certainly gravitate to violence against the U.S. presence.

The extent of potential support for Wahhabi views in Iraq is almost impossible to gauge. One can hypothesize that support for Wahhabi views grows with the growth of dissatisfaction with conditions and the intensity of anti-American attitudes. Wahhabism serves more as a vehicle for these feelings than as the cause. Islamist movements also directly profit from the absence of alternative political vehicles for political opposition. Thus Wahhabi views might well have lurked beneath the surface of Iraqi Sunni Islamist life under Hussein, in the absence of other opposition forces. The United States would not, however, have been perceived as the primary enemy by Islamists under Hussein. It is only with the U.S. occupation that anti-U.S. feelings have some initial grounds to emerge, especially if that occupation is prolonged. One can hypothesize that some degree of Wahhabi influence is certainly emerging in Iraq as a natural part of the Islamic spectrum.

Finally, I do not wish to suggest throughout all this analysis that there is some kind of zero sum game between Sunni and Shia forces in Iraq. For many decades considerable social interaction and even some degree of intermarriage has existed between the communities. Furthermore, neither community is monolithic. There are leftists, Islamists, nationalists, and liberals on both sides who may find grounds other than sectarianism on which to agree in developing a new national agenda. Regrettably, since the fall of Saddam Hussein the lines between the two communities have been hardening and is becoming the primary fault-line in the country today, affecting secularists as well as Islamists on both sides.

Iraqi Kurds

The Kurds had their own tradition of Islamist movements long before the creation of the modern Iraqi state, reflecting their ties with the Ottoman Empire. As noted by Sami Shou-

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rush, the Kurdish nationalist movement in the 19th century came to be led by Kurdish shaykhs, including an armed movement against both Iranian and Ottoman power led by a Naqshbandi shaykh. While the Muslim Brotherhood began to influence the Kurds of Iraq in the 1950s, by the 1980s when the Baath repressions against the Kurds reached new intensity, the Kurds felt that the Brotherhood had failed them in not devoting attention to the Kurdish issue and in not supporting an armed struggle against Saddam Hussein ("Islamist Fundamentalist Movements Among the Kurds," in Abdul-Jabar, ed., *Ayatollahs, Sufis, and Ideologues*). As a consequence, the Kurds have tended to form their own Islamist movements that are better designed to meet their own national needs.

This fact is significant in that it suggests that political Islam has not been able to bridge the fault-lines dividing the three major ethnic-religious groups in Iraq. (This same situation exists between Kurds and Turks in Turkey to some degree.) There is no reason why political Islam should not be able to bridge the ethnic gap, especially since Islam and Islamists speak out against any division of the *umma* (community) along ethnic lines. Nonetheless, the reality of Iraqi politics, at least today, demonstrates that the ethnic gap is still meaningful in organizational terms.

The Kurds also produced their own Kurdish jihadist movement, the Ansar, who were linked with the jihadist constellations around al Qaeda, although the movement was dispersed and possibly destroyed—at least for now—by U.S. forces during the February 2003 war that overthrew Saddam Hussein. The U.S. occupation will not permit its return if at all possible.

It is unlikely that we will see a serious merging of Kurdish and Sunni Arab Islamist movements in the foreseeable future as long as Kurdish aspirations have not been met and a distinct "nationalist cause" remains among the Kurds. This does not rule out possible cooperation as distinct organizations on selected issues within Iraqi politics, including in all likelihood, a call for an early end to the U.S. occupation.

According to Shoroush, the largest Kurdish Islamist movement today is the (Sunni) Islamic Movement of Iraqi Kurdistan, which has been part of the umbrella Kurdistan Front and has run in several elections, placing well behind the two dominant Kurdish political parties, the Kurdish Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan. It has established good working relations with other Islamist movements in other countries but is not anti-western. A very small Kurdish Shiite movement (among so-called Fayli Kurds) exists, primarily in exile, and is not a factor on the Kurdish political scene in Kurdistan. A point of speculation is the possibility of Kurdish Islamists in both Turkey and Iraq joining forces in some meaningful way in the future. Such a development would produce immense anxiety in Ankara and Tehran. What is a near certainty is that Kurdish Islamists will have little reason to adopt anti-western positions as long as the West is perceived as supportive of Kurdish aspirations for autonomy.

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Conclusions

A number of key issues emerge in this overview of the future prospects for Islamist parties in the new Iraq:

- Islamism, as a basic feature of Muslim and especially Arab politics, is destined to play a major role in the future of Iraqi politics, now liberated from the Saddam Hussein straitjacket. While Iraq has had a long secular tradition, the Baath regime has created immense resentments within Iraqi society that will seek expression. More important, in the wake of the brutal and corrupt Baath regime, a huge moral and ideological vacuum has emerged in Iraq, and Islam is tailor-made to provide a new moral compass to the people.
- There has already been a resurgence of Islamic norms in dress and public decorum that functions at a societal level entirely outside the purview of the U.S.-led occupation administration and its policies.

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- Neighboring states are, predictably, already moving quickly where possible to establish centers of influence within Iraq to prepare for the day when U.S. power departs. Iran will support Islamist movements among the Shia while Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states will seek to bolster Sunni forces in Iraq—most likely through the vehicle of Sunni Islamists.
- Sunni Islamism in Iraq will be dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood. Wahhabi influence from abroad will also be present, although largely as a result of foreign funding, primarily from the Gulf by those who wish to bolster Sunni power in Iraq. The growth of Wahhabi power in Iraq will most likely stem from any growing hostility to the U.S. occupation and they will probably take the lead in armed opposition to the U.S. presence. It will be difficult for the Brotherhood to remain outside this resistance to occupation, even if they are otherwise non-violent.

The emergence of Shiite power in Iraq, rather than giving Iran a major toehold over the new Iraq, is more likely to lead to rivalry with Iran over time.

- The emergence of Shiite power in Iraq, rather than giving Iran a major toehold over the new Iraq, is more likely to lead to rivalry with Iran over time and pose a basic ideological threat to Iranian hardliners who champion clerical rule.
- While the Shia in particular rejoiced at the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, it is now the United States, in their view, that stands between them and the attainment of national power. This will render them more impatient than any other Iraqi group with a prolonged American occupation.
- Divisions between Sunni and Shia communities are regrettably hardening among both secularists and Islamists on each side.
- Nativist trends among the Shia may emerge strongly, reflecting elements of Iraqi nationalism even within religious circles. In that case, the Sadr group, possibly augmented by the independent Dawa group, might emerge as the most powerful forces, and possibly as the most hostile to the United States. Both Iranian and U.S. policies could weaken the Sadr group's bid for power, but that would leave the United States working with elements close to Iran.
- It is hard to foresee the emergence of any "secular" Shiite movement to rival clerical influence, even though individual Shia may indeed opt for a secular government, oppose religiously linked movements, and work in cooperation with liberal Sunnis.
- Iraqi Shia are much less likely than Iranian Shia to accept clerical rule, even while possibly supporting some kind of Islamic state in which clerics do not dominate.
- Saudi Arabia and Bahrain have the most to lose from resurgent Shiite power in Iraq.

The Islamists—Shia and Sunni—are not* automatically *hostile to the U.S. presence, especially since both gained from the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. But they are determined to retain the "Muslim character" of Iraq.

- The Islamists—Shia and Sunni—are not *automatically* hostile to the U.S. presence, especially since both gained from the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. But they are determined to retain the "Muslim character" of Iraq, especially in the face of non-Muslim occupation. They will pursue a policy of opposition to the U.S. presence, building a consensus against any cultural changes in Iraqi society. Both Sunni and Shiite Islamists are strongly nationalist in outlook and will cooperate fully with secular nationalist forces to speed the end of the occupation. At what point non-violent opposition to the occupation might transform into violent opposition is unknowable, but such a transition seems almost a certainty the longer the occupation is maintained, with all its inevitable stresses and shortcomings.
- Sunni Islamists among the Muslim Brotherhood will likely be more open to cooperation with the Shia than the converse. Iraqi Sunnis lost heavily with the fall of Saddam Hussein and need cooperation with the ascendant Shia power to maintain a voice. However, the demographic strength of the Shia makes it easy for them to ignore cooperation with Sunni groups.The Wahhabis are not likely to cooperate with the Shia.
- Islamist power inside Iraq will be diminished to the extent there is freedom enjoyed by other political and religious parties within the country to rival the Islamists. As

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nearly everywhere, repression of political pluralism invariably works to the benefit of the Islamists.

- Any U.S. administrative presence in Iraq will have to reckon with the abiding force of Iraqi geopolitics that can be temporarily suppressed, but never eliminated. Iraq as a state will almost certainly continue to see itself as a leader of the Arab world. It will see itself as the "natural" protector of the Gulf against Iranian power, and possessed of a mission to change what it perceives as the dated, corrupt, pampered, and pro-western character of Gulf regimes. It will continue to have sympathy for the Palestinian cause. Islamists and secularists alike will support these goals.

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