

The Iraqi Shiites

On the history of America's would-be allies

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The ambitious aim of the American war in Iraq—articulated by Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, and other neoconservative defense intellectuals—was to effect a fundamental transformation in Middle East politics. The war was not—or not principally—about finding weapons of mass destruction, or preventing alliances with al Qaeda, or protecting the Iraqi population from Saddam's terror. For U.S. policy makers the importance of such a transformation was brought home by the events of September 11, which challenged U.S. strategy in the region by compromising the longstanding U.S. alliance with Saudi Wahhabis. In response to this challenge, the Bush administration saw the possibility of creating a new pillar for U.S. policy in the region: a post-Baathist Iraq, dominated by Iraqi Shiites, which would spark a wave of democratization across the Middle East.

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But the Bush administration badly neglected the history of the group they wanted to claim as their new ally. Who are the Iraqi Shiites? And how likely are they to support democracy or U.S. goals in the region? To address these questions, we will first need some background.

Anti-Communism and the Pillars of U.S. Policy

From 1970 until the end of the Cold War, U.S. policy in the Middle East was based on three principles and two key alliances. The principles included fighting against Communist and other radical anti-American influences; supporting conservative religious and authoritarian political elites; and ensuring access to Middle Eastern petroleum supplies. The two principal allies were Israel and Saudi Arabia.

The centrality of the anti-Soviet pillar to regional policy is often ignored, but it helps explain the others. Saudi Arabia, an absolute monarchy, was a crucial pivot of U.S. policy from the 1970s forward. U.S. officials viewed its deeply conservative Wahhabi form of Islam as a barricade against Communism and—after the 1979 Iranian Revolution—against Iran's Shiite Khomeinism. Israel, too, battled leftist and pro-Soviet forces, though its determination to annex much or all of the territories it captured in 1967 made it a problematic partner for a United States seeking Arab friends. The United States could maintain an alliance with both the Zionist state and the Wahhabi kingdom, even though the two did not care very much for one another, because both disliked the Soviets and leftist Palestinians.

Because the Cold War was a contest of economic systems, winning it depended crucially on the

prosperity of Western Europe, Japan, and South Korea. Inexpensive energy was essential to their prosperity. And the Saudi alliance was one key to inexpensive energy. Because of its small population and unusually large capacity, Saudi Arabia had enormous influence on the price of petroleum. By pumping extra oil, the Saudis kept the price lower than other members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), such as Algeria and Iran, would have liked. Moreover, Riyadh supported Western European prosperity by investing ("recycling") its petrodollars back into the West.

The Saudis also bolstered regional conservatism, in particular by aiding the anti-Communist Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt from the 1950s forward. In this period the Brotherhood—formed in 1928 and precursor to contemporary fundamentalism—was increasingly persecuted by Abdel Nasser's secular Arab socialist state. With Egypt tilting toward the Soviet Union in the 1960s, Saudi support for the Brotherhood was implicated in the U.S.-Soviet struggle. In the 1970s dictator Anwar El Sadat shifted Egypt from the political left to the right and allied with the United States. With U.S. advice he sought a new, positive relationship with Saudi Arabia and with the Muslim Brotherhood. When Sadat made peace with Israel, key pieces of U.S. policy fell into place. (That Sadat was assassinated for taking this direction, by the very Sunni radicals he had unleashed, was irrelevant to the outcome, since his new foreign policy remained in effect).

Saudi Arabia remained central to U.S. policy in the 1980s. It took the lead in the Gulf in opposing Iran's Khomeinist revolution and backed Saddam Hussein's war against Iran, with Washington's blessing. When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan the United States pressured Saudi Arabia to support the efforts of the Muslim fundamentalist mujahidin (holy warriors) who volunteered to fight Moscow's troops. In a breathtaking lapse of judgment, the Reagan administration gave billions of dollars to these groups. The administration misunderstood the difference between Muslim traditionalism and conservatism, and the virulent new strands of Sunni radicalism that were proliferating in the 1980s.

While the United States was consolidating an alliance with Saudi Arabia, policy toward Iraq fluctuated wildly—though here, too, anti-Communism was always the fundamental principle operating in the background. In the mid-1950s the United States and the British pushed the Baghdad Pact (signed in 1955), which grouped Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan in an anti-Soviet alliance. This strategy collapsed in 1958 when Colonel Abdel Karim Qasim staged a bloody coup in Iraq against the government of Nuri al-Said. Washington saw Qasim, who had Communist allies, as a dangerous radical. It has been alleged that the United States supported the 1963 failed coup attempt by the Arab nationalist Baath Party against the officers, receiving guarantees in return that the Iraqi Communist Party would be disbanded.

The Baath Party finally came to power in 1968, and though it did ban the Communists it went on to have indifferent relations with the United States until the Iranian Revolution and the Iraqi invasion of Iran in 1980. During the 1980s the United States threw its support behind Saddam Hussein and the Baath to combat Khomeinist radicalism, whose rabid anti-Americanism it saw as aiding the Soviet Union. The U.S.-Saddam alliance, of course, ended with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

September 11 and the Iraq Option

With the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Paul Wolfowitz and other national security hawks later grouped in the Project for a New American Century saw two principal security challenges to the United States: the remaining Communist powers in Asia, especially North Korea but also China, which they wished to see contained or, if possible, broken up; and the anti-American

Middle Eastern states, including Iraq, Syria, and Iran. The two problems were linked because the East Asian Communists and the Middle Eastern radical states were suspected of proliferating missile and nuclear technologies to one another. Pakistan, for instance, is suspected of helping North Korea's nuclear program. Wolfowitz likened Chinese sales of intermediate missiles to Saudi Arabia in the 1980s to the Cuban missile crisis. Many of them also saw threats to Israel's power as necessarily menacing to U.S. security.

The attacks on September 11 should have made it clear that the hawks had been looking for threats in all the wrong places. Iran and Iraq had been effectively contained, and China was too busy making money off the West to think about harming its economies. At the same time—and in significant part as a result of U.S. support for Muslim fundamentalism as an anti-Communist bulwark—Sunni radicalism had emerged as a much more powerful threat than either East Asian Communism or Baathism and Khomeinism. Mujahidin who had trained in Afghanistan fanned back out to their home countries in 1989, victorious, and determined to establish Islamic states in places like Algeria and Yemen. Sunni radicals fought a virtual civil war in Algeria with the secular military government in the 1990s, waged a less bloody but still highly disruptive campaign against the Mubarak government in Egypt, and pioneered new militant political movements such as the Taliban in Afghanistan and the neo-Deobandis in Pakistan. Once the Soviets had fallen the Sunni radicals abandoned their alliance of convenience with Washington and turned against the United States, which they now saw as a bulwark of the secular governments that they were trying to overthrow, in addition to resenting its role in supporting Israeli expansionism. The more radical of these groups coalesced into al Qaeda and decided to hit the “far” enemy rather than only the “near” one.

After September 11 the national security hawks, many of whom who had actively fostered the jihadis in the 1980s, attempted to link new the forms of Muslim terrorism to their longstanding preoccupations with Iraq and Iran. The anti-American Middle Eastern states were now even more dangerous, they alleged, because they either had joined up with the terrorists already or might in the future share weapons of mass destruction with the jihadis for use against the United States. But the Iraqi Baathists were devoted to secular Arab nationalism, and the Shiite ayatollahs in Iran despised al Qaeda and the Taliban. It was implausible that Khomeinist Shiites, Baathist Arab nationalists, and Sunni al Qaeda would collaborate closely with one another and share deadly technology. Nor was there any good evidence for it, though plenty was manufactured by innuendo.

The pillars of policy were now trembling. Some within the Bush circles, especially Secretary of State Colin Powell, sought a reduced American tolerance for Israel's expansionist policies in the Occupied Territories, among the main sources of Muslim anger at the United States. Fearful of this outcome, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon accused George Bush in October 2001 of trying to appease Arab countries by forsaking Israel in the way that Europe had tried to appease Hitler in 1938 by abandoning the Czech Sudetenland. Sharply rebuked, Sharon backed off quickly, and by late fall of 2001 the Bush administration had been convinced, by a combination of domestic political calculations and geopolitical judgments, to remain committed to acquiescing in substantial expropriations of Palestinian land by Israel.

But the other central pillar remained in doubt. Some analysts associated with the administration criticized the Saudi alliance of monarchy and Wahhabi Islam as dangerously unstable and destabilizing. At the very least, some wealthy Saudis had given monetary support to al Qaeda or al Qaeda-linked charities. Wahhabi missionizing in the Muslim world had spread the distinctively Wahhabi ideas that Muslims who are not strict in their observance are actually infidels and that non-Muslims are threats to Islam. Some suspected members of the royal family of having radical sympathies. Richard Perle, then chairman of the Pentagon's Defense Policy Board, led the charge in arguing that Saudi Arabia should be abandoned as America's chief ally in the region. He arranged for a former associate of conspiracy theorist Lyndon LaRouche, Laurent Murawiec of Rand Corp., to

address the Defense Policy Board. Murawiec's PowerPoint presentation painted Riyadh as the source of all America's problems, saying, "The Saudis are active at every level of the terror chain" and "Saudi Arabia supports our enemies and attacks our allies." Although Perle attempted to distance himself from the more extreme of Murawiec's allegations once a whistle-blower had publicized the secret briefing, he clearly viewed Saudi Arabia as a problem. In February he told Chris Matthews, "I think at the moment, popular sentiment in Saudi Arabia is very negative toward the United States." The Independent reported him as saying, "The Saudis are a major source of the problem we face with terrorism." Even more pragmatic thinkers such as Wolfowitz decided that it was impractical to continue to base U.S. troops on Saudi soil, given the resentments this presence had caused among the Sunni radicals, and that therefore a new ally would have to be found or created to anchor U.S. military interests in the Persian Gulf. The increasing sympathy among the Saudi public for the Palestinians and the Saudi commitment to Israel's return to its 1967 borders reinforced neoconservative doubts about a continuing close alliance with the House of Saud.

The hawks came to see an Americanized Iraq as a replacement for Saudi Arabia. The plan was risky, not least because the secular Baath government had been among the main ramparts against Sunni and Shiite religious radicalism in the Gulf. The hawks argued that a liberated Iraq would kick-start a wave of democratization in the Middle East, paralleling events in Eastern Europe when the Soviet Union weakened and then fell. (They did not explain why the United States, if it wanted democratization, did not start with places like Egypt and Jordan, which were more plausible candidates, being allies, developed civil societies, and recipients of substantial aid). They believed, incorrectly, that Iraq's petroleum-producing capacity—while not at Saudi levels—was significant enough to offset Saudi dominance of the oil markets. And unlike Saudi Arabia, Paul Wolfowitz thought, Iraq did not have holy cities such as Mecca and Medina that would make the stationing of U.S. troops there objectionable: Iraqis, he said, "don't bring the sensitivity of having the holy cities of Islam being on their territory." (He apparently did not then know about the Shiite shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala). The hawks were aware that a democratic Iraq would have a Shiite majority, but their client, Ahmad Chalabi (head of the expatriate Iraqi National Congress), convinced them that Iraqi Shiites were largely secular in mindset and uninterested in a Khomeinist theocracy. In the short term, they thought, Chalabi and his Iraqi National Congress would run Iraq in at least a semi-democratic fashion.

This plan proposed an almost complete reconfiguring of the old pillars of American Cold War policy in the region. The two key alliances were now to be with Israel and a Shiite-majority "secular" Iraq. Saudi Arabia would be marginalized and the allegedly pernicious effects of its Wahhabism fought. Cheap and secure petroleum remained important, but Iraq would emerge as its principal guarantor. Iranian Khomeinism was still seen as an enemy, along with its allies, the Hezbollah in Lebanon and the remaining wing of the Baath in Syria. All three were seen as threats to Israeli expansionism, so their elevation in the firmament of evil dovetailed with the U.S. decision to acquiesce de facto in hard-line Israeli policies of settlement expansion. Iran and Syria were to be forestalled from developing biological or nuclear weapons, from cooperating in this endeavor with the East Asian Communists, and from interfering in a final settlement of the Palestine issue on whatever terms Israel found favorable. Fighting al Qaeda, which one would have thought would have the highest priority in the new policy, actually appears as a minor and subordinate consideration, relegated to a sort of police work. And mollifying outraged Muslims by pressuring Israel to return to the 1967 borders was out of the question.

It is a plan. And like other ambitious plans it makes many assumptions. But perhaps the largest is that the Iraqi Shiites are plausible allies.

The Iraqi Shiites

Shiites in Iraq were radicalized and brutalized by two major events: the Baath crackdown on Shiite political activity in the late 1970s and 1980s, and the crushing of the 1991 uprising and subsequent persecution of and even genocide against Shiites in the South. As a result of the cruel 1990s, Khomeinist ideas gained far more purchase with the poverty-stricken and desperate younger generation than a secular middle-class expatriate like Chalabi could have dreamed. Indeed, Chalabi left Iraq in 1958 and the beginnings of organized Shiite politics coincide more or less exactly with the time of his departure.

Shiite religious politics in Iraq largely date from the founding of the [al-Dawa Party in 1957](#). [Al-Dawa](#) sought to establish an Islamic state in Iraq. Among its major theorists was Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, a prominent cleric and intellectual who dedicated himself to developing a modernist Shiite ideology that could compete with Marxism.

Although Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini developed his theory of clerical rule (*vilayat-i faqih*) while in exile in Najaf (1964–1978), it did not become immediately popular among most clerics there. Najaf had long been a center of seminary education and clerical jurisprudence, and lay Shiites generally followed its leading scholar, called an Object of Emulation, in matters of religious law. Shiites of this branch believed that the Prophet Muhammad's successors or vicars were his cousin and son-in-law, Ali, and the eleven lineal descendants of Ali and the Prophet's daughter, Fatima. The twelfth of these vicars or "Imams" was held to have disappeared into a supernatural realm, from which he would one day return. In the absence of the hidden Twelfth Imam, the mainstream of the Shiite tradition gradually turned to trained clergymen as their leaders. Although scholastic Twelver Shiism (the branch practiced in Iran and Iraq) had as its ideal that the laity would follow the rulings of the single most learned and upright Object of Emulation, in fact there were always several contenders for the position. Religious authority was thus multiple. There was no Shiite pope, even if the theorists of clerical authority sometimes seemed to wish for one. Moreover, the Shiite tradition of thinking about political power did not envisage that clerics would exercise direct political power. In the medieval and early modern periods most clerics heaped fulsome praise on Shiite monarchs who defended the faith. Khomeini's thought was revolutionary. He maintained that monarchy is incompatible with Islam, and he insisted that in the absence of the Hidden Twelfth Imam, the clergy should rule. Khomeini taught the "guardianship of the jurispudent." At the top of the Islamic government, as head of state, should stand a clerical jurisprudent who would safeguard the interests of Shiite Islam. Laypersons could serve in parliament and even as president, but supreme power would be in clerical hands. This vision differed deeply from the lay versions of Muslim fundamentalism, which wanted a medieval interpretation of Islamic law to become the law of the land but did not give any special place in the governmental system to Muslim clergymen.

While many clerics in the Najaf tradition wanted a state governed by Islamic principles, they rejected Khomeini's idea that clerics themselves should rule. Moreover, Iraq's own theorist of Islamic government, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, envisaged an elected assembly that need not be made up of clerics. Thus, the initial Iraqi Shiite idea of an Islamic state was at odds with the Khomeinist theory that came to dominate Iran in 1979.

In response to the large Shiite demonstrations of 1977 and the Islamic Revolution in Iran of 1979, the Baath repressed Shiite religious parties and leaders relentlessly. They hanged al-Sadr in 1980 and made membership in the [al-Dawa Party a capital crime](#). Many [al-Dawa](#) members were arrested and the party went deep underground, expanding its cell organization even as it dispersed geographically.

In the 1980s and 1990s al-Dawa had several bases. One group of members and leaders took refuge in Iran. Another was based in London. Inside Iraq, the organization remained strong in the Middle Euphrates region (in southern Iraq), especially around Nasiriya. The Basra branch, called Tanzim al-Dawa, rejected Khomeinism. These branches were not in good contact with one another and developed quite differently with regard to ideology and organization.

The pro-Khomeini "Islamic Jihad" group, linked to al-Dawa and based in Lebanon and Iran, blew up the U.S. and French embassies in Kuwait in late 1983 and hijacked a Kuwaiti airliner a year later. (In this period of the Iran-Iraq War, the United States and Kuwait were backing Saddam Hussein). Islamic Jihad may have been a splinter group or it may have been a covert paramilitary operation of the Tehran-based al-Dawa Party. But to the extent that al-Dawa itself engaged in violence and took credit for it, the target was the Baath in Iraq. As many as 200,000 Iraqi Shiites ended up in political exile in Iran over the course of the 1980s and 1990s. Many of these exiles joined the Iran-based al-Dawa, which tended to accept Khomeini's idea of clerical rule. But the organization was riven by internal fighting over the party's relationship to the Supreme Jurisprudent. Clerical leaders of the al-Dawa seemed especially attracted by Khomeinism, while the lay leaders insisted on maintaining the party's autonomy from the Supreme Jurisprudent. The question had implications for al-Dawa's future. Was it to become a mere appendage of Tehran or remain an Iraqi party with a distinctive ideology? Some clerical members of the party's central committee, such as Muhammad Mahdi Asefi and Sayyid Kazim al-Haeri, wanted the party to put itself under the direct authority of Khomeini and then his successor, Ali Khamenei. This step would have entailed dissolving the party into the Iranian Hezbollah. Khomeini himself reportedly showed no enthusiasm for this step, and the lay members of the executive committee were also unwilling to subordinate themselves to the religious institution. The issue festered inside the party throughout the late 1980s and into the 1990s in Iran. In 2000 Asefi was forced to resign as party leader over his continued attempts to put it under the authority of Iranian Supreme Jurisprudent Ali Khamenei.

The al-Dawa branch in London (led by Abo Ali and Ibrahim Jaafari) had a more lay cast. It also had the greatest freedom of movement, and so the center of gravity of the party moved away from Iran. The circumstances for al-Dawa were worst within Iraq. During and after the post-Gulf War uprising of 1991, thousands of al-Dawa members or alleged members were arrested, executed, and buried in mass graves. Of course, al-Dawa was not the only Iraqi Shiite group, and in 1982 Shiite activists in Iran, attempting to create an umbrella movement for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, founded the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), with al-Dawa as one of the constituent organizations. In 1984 Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, member of a leading Iraqi Shiite family and an associate of al-Sadr, became the head of SCIRI (also called SAIRI). The same year, al-Dawa broke with SCIRI in order to maintain its independence. Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim accepted Khomeini's theory of clerical rule. SCIRI took credit for bombings and assassination plots against the Baath in Baghdad. It organized a militia, the Badr Brigade, which carried out attacks across the Iranian border into Iraq. This paramilitary, trained and armed by Iran's Revolutionary Guards, over time grew to become the Badr Corps, consisting of 10,000 fighters by the late 1990s. In the 1990s, SCIRI and the Iranian al-Dawa developed a deadly rivalry, to the point that (according to rumors) al-Dawa members targeted Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim himself.

The London-based branch of al-Dawa was drawn into the Iraqi National Congress (INC) in 1992–1995. Iraqi financier Ahmad Chalabi had founded the INC as an

umbrella group after the Gulf War, with CIA help and funds (via the Rendon Group). Chalabi had had to flee Jordan for London in the late 1980s under suspicion of massive embezzlement from the bank he headed there. A secular Shiite, he worked in London in the 1990s to unite 19 organizations grouping religious Shiites, their secular coreligionists, Sunni Arabs (including ex-Baathists), and Kurds. The INC managed to include both al-Dawa and al-Hakim's SCIRI for a while.

But al-Dawa left the INC in 1995, in part over disputes with the Kurds, who wanted to see Iraq transformed into a loose federation, whereas al-Dawa favored a strong central state. The Kurds in turn fell into a bitter civil war around the same time, and the INC was torn apart by infighting. The CIA and the State Department gradually distanced themselves from it, because of unaccounted-for monies, though the INC and Chalabi remained in the good graces of Paul Wolfowitz and other American neoconservatives. The INC's fortunes improved when the hawks took back the Defense Department in 2001. In the aftermath of September 11 Chalabi managed to put back together a coalition of SCIRI, the Kurdish groups, and others, though al-Dawa generally kept its distance. In the meantime, inside Iraq, Saddam's government appeared determined to wipe out Iraqi Shiism. It tried to draw Shiites away to secular Baathism and launched cruel attacks on recalcitrant villages in the south. Some 500,000 marsh Arabs of the Madan tribes—fishermen, farmers and smugglers—employed their swamps to hide from the Baathist troops and to conduct hit-and-run guerrilla operations against them. They were organized by the Iraqi Hezbollah, or Party of God, and received some Iranian help. They also sometimes coordinated with SCIRI's Badr Corps, which infiltrated the swamps from Iran. In response Baath engineers built dams and irrigation works that drained the swamps. By the early 21st century only 10 percent of the swamps survived; the rest had turned to dust. The marsh Arabs were scattered, some to nearby villages and towns as dirt-poor laborers, others to exile in Iran. Many Shiites with a village-tribal background had also settled in East Baghdad's al-Thawrah township, which had been founded by military dictator al-Qasim in 1962. Dwelling in grinding poverty and largely deprived of the benefits of Iraq's petroleum bonanza, they often rioted against the Baath, with particular force in 1977 and 1991. In each case they met vicious repression. By the 1990s their population had swelled to some two million, nearly 10 percent of the country. They retained some tribal ties and organization in their new urban environment and began turning away from folk Shiism to a more scholastic urban religious outlook. In scholastic Shiism each believer must choose a prominent clergyman and follow his rulings on the minutiae of religious law, such as "Since perfume has alcohol in it, and alcohol is forbidden, may a Shiite wear perfume?" The most popular and authoritative such clergyman, or Object of Emulation, had usually been the foremost scholar in the shrine and seminary city of Najaf. In the 1960s it was Muhsin al-Hakim, and then the torch passed to Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei. After al-Khoei's death in 1992, however, a generation gap developed. Older Shiites tended to follow al-Khoei's disciple, Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, who was originally from Iran. A quietist, he rejected involvement in politics and rejected Khomeini's theory of clerical rule. The new generation, however, was attracted to a younger, activist scholar named Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr. A cousin of the martyred theorist of Islamic government in Iraq, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, Sadiq emerged as a political organizer of some genius. He established networks of believers loyal to him

in Basra, East Baghdad, Kufa, and the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala. Although he did not have Sistani's seniority, he also lacked the elder man's timidity. In the 1990s Sadr II, as he became known, repeatedly defied Saddam. Saddam had attempted to outlaw Friday prayers among the Shiites. Sadr II insisted on leading them, and established a network of mosques in the slums of East Baghdad where congregants furtively gathered on Friday afternoons. Sadr II compared Saddam to a tyrannical medieval caliph who persecuted the Shiites of his day. He organized informal Shiite religious courts throughout the country and tried to convince tribal Shiites to come under the sway of formal jurisprudence. He denounced women, including Christians, who dared go out unveiled. He lambasted his followers if they wore clothing with Western labels. He preached against Israel. He accepted Khomeini's theory of the rule of the jurist, and may have had his eye on the position for himself in Iraq. Sadr II gained some two million followers for his militant, Khomeini-style Shiism. Then, after warning him to fall silent, Saddam's secret police assassinated him and two of his sons in February of 1999. The South erupted in riots, which were, predictably, put down by the jackboot. {{{The Shiites Under Occupation}}} Sadr II's young son, Muqtada al-Sadr, was heir to a family tradition of martyrdom. Married to the orphaned daughter of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (Sadr I), he went underground in Kufa and East Baghdad, continuing his father's networking and organizing among young Shiite slum dwellers. The American invasion of Iraq in the spring of 2003 proved to be a windfall for him. Even before the Baath fell on April 9, his followers had expelled the party from East Baghdad, which they renamed Sadr City. Muqtada's young clerical devotees reopened mosques and other Shiite institutions, established neighborhood militias, captured arms and ammunitions from Baath depots, took over hospitals, and asserted local authority in East Baghdad, Kufa, and some neighborhoods of Najaf, Karbala, and Basra. They engaged in crowd politics, calling for frequent demonstrations against the Anglo-American occupation in Baghdad, Basra, and Najaf, sometimes managing to get out crowds of 5,000 to 10,000. In the meantime, the al-Dawa Party reemerged in Nasiriya, Basra, and elsewhere, though not nearly on the scale of the Sadr II bloc. The London-based branch of al-Dawa, which had been willing to cooperate with the Americans, emerged as the most prominent, hooking back up with cell members in Nasiriya and Basra. Many figures associated with the Iranian branch remained in Tehran, unwilling to return to an Iraq under American dominance. The attempt of the heir to the al-Khoei name, Abd al-Majid al-Khoei, to come back and assert authority in Najaf (probably with U.S. backing) failed when he was cut down by a Sadrist mob in April. SCIRI leaders returned to Iraq in April and May, and their Badr Corps fighters slipped back into the country from Iran, establishing themselves in eastern cities, such as Baquba and Kut, near the Iranian border. They failed to get much purchase in East Baghdad or other Sadrist areas, however. Although SCIRI proved willing to work with the Americans, the Badr Corps often clashed with U.S. troops in Baquba and elsewhere. Both the Sadr II bloc and SCIRI sought a clerically dominated Islamic republic in Iraq, though with different announced strategies. Muqtada was plain-spoken about the goal and refused to cooperate with the United States in attaining it. SCIRI, in contrast, thought in terms of a two-step process. Badr Corps commander Abdul Aziz al-Hakim articulated the process in a television interview, saying that Iraqis would first choose a pluralistic government, but in the long term the Shiite majority would opt for an Islamic

republic. This plan resembled the machinations of Communist parties in the early 20th century who collaborated with the national bourgeoisie to establish postcolonial states but aimed for ultimate Communist dictatorship. The destruction of the Baathist regime did not end the longstanding fights among its opponents. SCIRI, the Sadr II Bloc, al-Dawa, and followers of Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani conducted an underground war against one another, struggling for control of key symbolic spaces. Chief among these were the shrine of Imam Husayn (martyred grandson of the Prophet Muhammad) in Karbala and the shrine of Imam Ali (the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law) in Najaf. Sadrists fought followers of Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani for the right to preach sermons at the mosque of al-Husayn. In late July Sadrist mobs demonstrated in front of the Karbala shrine against U.S. presence in the city, and the Marines responded to gunfire by firing into the crowd, killing at least one and wounding nine. The Sadrists, knowing the power of the martyr's shrine as a symbol of resistance to outsiders, provoked the clueless Marines. In Najaf reports surfaced throughout the summer of Sadrist thugs beating up aides and relatives of Sistani and the clerics around him and taking over many of the city's seminaries. In July Sadrists invaded the religious properties administration of the Sunnis in Basra, raising alarms among that minority that the Sadrists intended to usurp mosques and other property. Some 15,000 Sunnis demonstrated against this threat. Sadrists were also implicated in fomenting anti-coalition rioting in Basra on August 9-10.

Muqtada al-Sadr called in mid-July for the establishment of an alternative Iraqi government and army to compete with the U.S.-appointed body. But both SCIRI and al-Dawa, despite their own deep differences, accepted posts on the Interim Governing Council appointed by U.S. civil administrator Paul Bremer on July 13. Indeed, persons with al-Dawa ties gained four of the 25 seats, and SCIRI was given a seat as well. When Iraqis go to the polls, if the Sadrists are willing to field candidates they are likely to do very well. SCIRI and al-Dawa seem to have fewer enthusiasts and may be challenged in translating their tactical alliance with the United States into parliamentary clout. On August 29 a huge truck bomb in Najaf killed SCIRI leader Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim and nearly 100 others. Most suspicion fell on remnants of Saddam's Baath Party or on Sunni radicals affiliated in some way with al Qaeda. Badr Corps militiamen came out into the streets of Najaf and some other cities, insisting on mounting armed patrols. Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, the slain ayatollah's brother, became the head of SCIRI and angrily called for an immediate American withdrawal from Iraq, given that it had failed so miserably to restore security. Muhammad Bahr al-Ulum, a moderate cleric with ties to the Khoei Foundation and the al-Dawa Party, immediately suspended his membership in the Interim Governing Council in protest. The leader of the Council of Sunni Clergymen charged that in the aftermath, the followers of Muqtada al-Sadr were fomenting anti-Sunni violence and had usurped Sunni mosques in Najaf and Karbala. The potential for serious Shiite-Sunni clashes down the road cannot be ruled out.

To be sure, "secular" Iraqi Shiites also exist, and in fair numbers. But the years of Saddam's terror have helped to generate a powerful Khomeinist current in Iraqi Shiism. Al-Da'wa, SCIRI, and the Sadrists all want an Islamic republic, and two of the three endorse Khomeini's "rule of the jurisprudent." Ironically, Wolfowitz visited Najaf and Karbala in the second half of July and inadvertently set off a riot in Najaf. The U.S. Marines increased their security for his visit, which came a day after Muqtada's fiery sermon calling for the establishment of a shadow government and popular Shiite militia. The increased security raised fears among Sadrists that the United States planned to arrest him (which is, after all, what Saddam would have done). The rumor of such an attempted arrest provoked demonstrations by thousands of Sadrists late on a Saturday, after Wolfowitz had left. They were repeated on Sunday, until the crowds were convinced that Muqtada

had not been bothered.

Conclusion

In removing the Baath regime and eliminating constraints on Iraqi Islamism, the United States has unleashed a new political force in the Gulf: not the upsurge of civic organization and democratic sentiment fantasized by American neoconservatives, but the aspirations of Iraqi Shiites to build an Islamic republic. That result was an entirely predictable consequence of the past 30 years of political conflict between the Shiites and the Baathist regime, and American policy analysts have expected a different result only by ignoring that history.

To be sure, the dreams of a Shiite Islamic republic in Baghdad may be unrealistic: a plurality of the country is Sunni, and some proportion of the 14 million Shiites is secularist. In the months after the Anglo-American invasion, however, the religious Shiite parties demonstrated the clearest organizational skills and established political momentum. The Islamists are likely to be a powerful enough group in parliament that they may block the sort of close American-Iraqi cooperation that the neoconservatives had hoped for. The spectacle of Wolfowitz's party heading out of Najaf just before the outbreak of a major demonstration of 10,000 angry Sadrists, inadvertently provoked by the Americans, may prove an apt symbol for the American adventure in Iraq. The August 29 bombing in Najaf deeply shook the confidence of Shiites in the American ability to provide them security, and provoked anger against the United States that will take some time to heal.

In addition, the Saudis cannot be pushed out of the oil picture so easily. It will be years before Iraq can produce much more than three to five million barrels a day. A good deal of that petroleum, and much of the profit from it, will be needed for internal reconstruction and debt servicing. It would take a decade and a half to two decades for Iraqi capacity to achieve parity with that of the Saudis (11 million barrels a day), and even then they will not have the Saudis' low overhead and smaller native population. The Saudis can choose to produce only seven million of the 76 million barrels of petroleum pumped in the world every day, or they can produce 11 million. That flexibility, along with their clout in the OPEC cartel, lets them exercise a profound influence on the price, and Iraq will not be able to counterbalance it soon. Neoconservative fears about Saudi complicity with al Qaeda are also overdrawn, since the Saudi elite feels as threatened by the Sunni radicals as the United States does. High Saudi officials have even expressed regret about their past support for the Muslim Brotherhood, which they now see as dangerous in a way that mainstream Wahhabism is not. (Would that Reaganite supporters of the mujahidin were similarly contrite!) So the U.S. alliance with the House of Saud, however badly shaken by September 11 and Wahhabi radicalism, will provide an essential foundation for world petroleum stability into the indefinite future.

For now, the United States is back to having two footstools in the Middle East: Israel and Saudi Arabia. Iraq has proven too rickety, too unknown, too devastated to bear the weight of the strategic shift imagined by the hawks. And far from finally defeating Khomeinism, U.S. policy has given it millions of liberated Iraqi allies. Their new Iraqi Interim Governing Council has declined to recognize Israel, citing Iraq's membership in the Arab League and lack of genuine progress toward a Palestinian state. Al Qaeda and allied terrorist threats were not countered by the invasion of Iraq.

Whether Iraq's Sunnis will turn to radicalism and reinforce al Qaeda is as yet unknown. But what does seem clear is that the Iraq war has proved a detour in the War on Terror, drawing away key resources from the real threat of al Qaeda and continued instability in Afghanistan. The old pillars have proven more resilient than the hawks imagined. What really needs to be changed are U.S. support for political authoritarianism and Islamic conservatism, and acquiescence in Israeli land

grabs on the West Bank. Those two, together, account for most of the trouble the United States has in the Muslim world. The Iraq war did nothing to change that.

P.S.

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