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Charity Registration Number: 208223

Middle East and North Africa Programme Workshop Summary

Iraqi Foreign Policy: Actors and Processes

November 2012

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INTRODUCTION

This is a summary of discussions held in Washington, DC on 26 and 27 November 2012 during a Chatham House organized workshop on Iraqi foreign policy. The workshop was a part of the research project, *Iraq on the Regional and International Stage*, which analyses Iraq's foreign relations as it emerges from a decade defined by war and conflict.

Roundtable discussions were held on the following themes:

- Identifying key foreign policy actors
- Varying priorities of political parties
- Ethnicity, sect, and nationalism
- Re-examining analytical frameworks
- National interests and policy resources
- Future scenarios: Iraq's regional position in the next decade.

Main findings from the workshop include:

- Hampered by years of war, sectarianism, and corruption, Iraq has yet to develop a coherent foreign policy within the central state institutions. The high degree of factionalization in Iraq's government has led to several competing foreign policy agendas.
- The varying foreign policy agendas are aligned with the different parties that dominate the Iraqi political landscape. Those parties have in turn sought support from different regional powers to boost their own domestic political fortunes.
- Ethnic and sectarian identities remain in competition with a more national Iraqi identity, in turn affecting Iraqi foreign relations.
- Traditional foreign policy analysis frameworks that focus on a unitary state actor are less applicable to the case of Iraq today.
- Increased oil production and revenues will be a significant factor in the development of Iraq's foreign relations in the next decade – particularly with Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.
- A more national foreign policy could be triggered by Iraqi decisions that are more reactive to political developments in the Middle East, rather than proactive positions, in an attempt to bolster the country's regional influence.

The workshop was held under the Chatham House Rule and the views expressed are those of the participants. The summary is intended to serve as an *aide-mémoire* to those who took part and to provide a general summary of discussions for those who did not.

The Chatham House Rule

‘When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.’

Identifying key foreign policy actors

This session discussed the key individuals and government institutions that are critical to foreign relations and policy-making in Iraq. Article 110 of the Iraqi Constitution outlines the exclusive authority the central government has over Iraqi foreign policy. Individuals within the central government have been critical in the execution of Iraqi foreign relations, and significant contributors to Iraq's incoherent foreign policy.

Given that Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki is perhaps the most important driver of Iraqi foreign policy decisions, participants agreed that it was essential to identify his key advisers whom he has both trusted and empowered. One influential figure close to Maliki is his National Security Adviser (NSA), Falah al-Fayadh. Fayadh was allied with the Ibrahim al-Ja'fari's Islah Party during the 2010 national elections before being named as NSA after Maliki secured the premiership for a second time in late 2010. In June 2011 Fayadh was appointed as Acting Minister of State for National Security. Participants agreed that Fayadh is an important surrogate for the Prime Minister and is responsible for taking significant foreign policy decisions on behalf of the central government. Fayadh met with Syrian president Bashar al-Assad in December 2011 when the Arab League was pressuring Syria to agree to a peace plan that would end a government crackdown on Syrian protests in an attempt to avert violent civil conflict.

Another influential adviser to Maliki is Abd al-Halim al-Zuhayri. He became a more significant player when he was dispatched to Syria in 2010 to mend ties between the two countries; relations between Maliki and Assad had been strained for years owing to the entry of foreign fighters and arms into Iraq through its border with Syria. Workshop participants identified Zuhayri as handling intra-Shia political relationships on behalf of Maliki, such as during the political crisis earlier in 2012 that threatened to bring down Maliki and his government.

Acting Minister of Defence Sa'adun al-Dulaymi is another influential member of Maliki's circle; he was appointed to the position in August 2011 after serving as Minister of Culture. However, participants said his influence might be waning after he directly contradicted Maliki in early November after the Prime Minister's Office announced the cancellation of a \$4.2 billion arms deal with Russia because of concerns over graft and corruption.

Iraqi Kurdistan and the figures within the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) were discussed as a distinct node of power in how the semi-

autonomous federal region within Iraq manages its own foreign relations with regional and global powers in attempting to address increasing tensions and differences with the central government. Acknowledging Iraq's history of competing foreign policy centres, participants noted that Kurdish representatives such as KRG President Massoud Barzani have long sought foreign support for Kurdistan independent of the Iraqi government; Mustafa Barzani, Massoud's father, served as leader of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) from 1946 until his death in 1979, during that time building ties with outside powers such as the Soviet Union.

Although Kurdish relations with Turkey have been generally positive, participants spoke of heightened Kurdish apprehension regarding the relationship with Turkey, primarily owing to uncertainty over the ongoing conflict and insecurity in Syria. Gains made by the Syrian-Kurdish rebels in Syria have worried Turkey, which continues to manage its own Kurdish opposition led by the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), and as a result has put pressure on the KRG to limit support for the rebels. On Iraq, some workshop participants noted it was perhaps premature to speak of a 'Kurds versus Baghdad' foreign policy dynamic; however, this may already be a reality given deepening divisions between Barzani and Maliki and tensions between the two camps. Though escalation of recent military skirmishes seems unlikely, Turkey's consideration of deepening its relationship with the KRG – particularly oil exploration and production in Iraqi Kurdistan – seems likely to drive the KRG further away from the central government in Baghdad.

Participants also pointed to a growing role for the Iraqi parliament in defining Iraq's foreign relations. Recent moves by the Chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, Humam Hamoudi, to increase parliamentary engagement with foreign policy matters was noted as a significant development; insofar as the Iraqi state apparatus becomes more engaged in the country's affairs, institutions may play a more active role in foreign policy decisions. This could potentially also include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is currently headed by Hoshyar Zebari of the KDP.

There was a consensus among participants that foreign policy in Iraq was currently driven by specific individuals and their calculation of their own domestic interests. As one participant claimed, rather than adhering to a strong ideology, Prime Minister Maliki is fundamentally a 'Malikist' whose primary desire is to maintain power. Nevertheless, the important personalities surrounding Maliki today could later be replaced, and that in turn could contribute to unpredictable shifts in foreign policy decisions.

Varying priorities of political parties

This session focused on specific political parties and their respective interests in relation to their foreign policy positions. Commenting on the interplay between local, domestic politics and regional state-power interests, one participant noted that in Iraq and the Middle East region more widely, all local politics are regional politics.

Participants discussed the evolution of party politics inside Iraq. Though certain parties are affected by regional politics and alliances with states outside the country, blocs within Iraq are becoming increasingly responsive to local pressures. This was seen as a positive development for the progress of the Iraqi political system. One participant pointed out that the Sadrist bloc, for example, epitomized a cohesive party with local popular roots and a certain degree of legitimacy that had been demonstrated in elections; but that the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), perhaps because it was seen as more partial to the interests of Iran, had been less successful at the polls.

This perspective was contested by some participants, who argued that many Iraqis do not feel particularly connected to political parties as they are simply mechanisms for political elites to control the rentier state apparatus and engage in patronage politics with their supporters. This was acknowledged by other participants who said that in Iraq popular support did not decide who was in power, but rather those in power created popular support for themselves through patronage. Others shared a more nuanced opinion, according to which the relationship between control of resources and power existed on a sliding scale in all democracies, including in Iraq.

The two key Kurdish political parties, the KDP and the Patriotic Union for Kurdistan (PUK), are representative of this complexity. Participants expressed the view that many would not challenge the popular legitimacy of these parties, yet their respective positions on domestic issues as well as their interactions with regional actors exemplified the complex and interwoven influences they faced – which often varied from issue to issue. Participants identified the political divide between the KDP and PUK, such as the effort by KRG President Barzani, leader of the KDP, to oust Maliki from the premiership; that effort was ultimately resisted by Jalal Talabani, leader of the PUK and President of Iraq. Also discussed was how the KDP and PUK seek and maintain different alliances with outside powers – Turkey and Iran, respectively.

Participants commented on the divide between parties on constitutional matters. It was noted that in key constitutional disputes a lack of trust

between political elites was preventing progress towards resolution on big issues such as the status of Kirkuk. It was suggested that smaller confidence-building measures should be undertaken between parties on issues where there is likely to be greater consensus – for example, on a national interest such as the need for adequate water supply from bordering countries.

Participants agreed that the power and influence of the parties corresponded with the power and influence of individual leaders. Maliki's State of Law coalition was considered to exemplify this; one participant noted that his governing bloc had proved to be quite cohesive; but without Maliki, State of Law might not be seen as a viable or influential coalition. Iraqiya too was seen as a party built on its component personalities, such as Ayad Allawi, a former prime minister, and the Speaker of the Parliament, Osama al-Nujaifi. Because of the various personalities inside Iraqiya it was difficult to conceive of the party as a cohesive political bloc.

There was a broad consensus among participants that local elections scheduled to take place in Iraq in 2013, and the national elections in 2014, would be of great significance for contesting political parties, their priorities and the power of the elites that dominated them. A change in government at the regional or national levels could affect foreign policy positions taken by the state – for example, a more hostile position towards the Syrian government, one more in line with Turkey and the Gulf countries than with Iran and Russia.

Ethnicity, sect, and nationalism

This session focused on how ethnicity, sect and nationalism factor into the debate about Iraqi foreign relations, and to what extent ethno-sectarian cleavages are more powerful identities than Iraqi nationalism. These issues are particularly salient given the violent conflict occurring in Syria, and the possibility that an escalation of sectarian divisions there could spill over into Iraq.

With the withdrawal of US forces in 2011, one participant noted that many Iraqi Shia in the political elite were left feeling vulnerable, and some had made their peace with the idea that the country would eventually disintegrate along ethno-sectarian lines. This participant added that one contributory factor would be the percentage of Shia making up the majority population of Iraq; this figure is officially unknown as the national census scheduled for 2007 has been postponed indefinitely, in part owing to fears of stoking ethno-sectarian tensions (the last nationwide census was taken in 1987). If the Shia

majority is close to two-thirds then the Shia political elite could conceive of the country remaining united; if the majority is less, perhaps just over 50%, then a split would be more likely as control of the state would be less assured.

Another participant added that the Shia political establishment was behaving as if the Shia were a minority in the country; despite some years in government, their mindset was still shaped by decades of being a persecuted opposition. It was further noted that Shia politicians in Iraq dread the financial muscle of Sunni Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar, a fact that looms large in their thinking. With their immense wealth, these states have the ability to finance Sunni Islamist groups – already alleged to be the case in the conflict in Syria – that are likely to be hostile to the Shia population in Iraq.

One participant said that Speaker Nujaifi had been working to project Mosul as the centre of Sunni Iraq. Furthermore, an alliance with Maliki was seen among Nujaifi's constituency as more damaging than having a strong relationship with Kurdish parties. Another participant added that rather than there being any single 'Sunni' perspective, there were three main competing narratives within the Sunni community on the nature of identity, between: a primarily Sunni identity that is in coalition with the Kurds standing against a Shia government; a primarily Arab identity allied with segments of the Shia Arabs; and a distinctly Arab Sunni identity that is separate from both the Kurdish and Shia Arab populations. Participants also noted that intra-sectarian conflict was a significant factor, particularly among Shia political factions.

Nevertheless, it was agreed that sectarian narratives are being helped along by a trend of growing sectarian polarization in the region today, fuelled by the competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran, above all over Syria. Since dispatching his close adviser Zuhayri to mend ties with Bashar al-Assad in Syria in 2010, Maliki has been forced to take a more ambivalent position towards Syria as the uprising has turned more violent, in his attempt to pacify opposing regional and international pressures. For example, after a warning from the US, earlier in 2012 Maliki approved the searching at random of Iranian aircraft en route to Syria to ensure no weapons were passing through Iraqi airspace to the Syrian government. At the same time, Maliki has not backed calls by Western countries, Turkey and Gulf states for President Assad, a key ally of Iran, to step down.

There was disagreement over the extent to which sectarianism precluded the establishment of better relations between Iraq and the Gulf countries. Some argued that Saudi Arabia was not willing to accept Iraq with an elected Shia

government. Conversely, others argued that the personal dimension was extremely important, noting that Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah bin Abdel-Aziz Al-Saud believed Maliki had made him a personal promise to integrate Sunnis into the new Iraqi government and limit the scope of de-Baathification efforts, which he had then reneged on. The Saudi perception of Maliki was extremely negative; he was typically portrayed as being a proxy of Iran. However, this did not necessarily mean that Saudi relations with another elected Shia leader would be equally strained.

Against the sectarian discourse, participants noted a disconnect between political elites and popular sentiment. In the 2010 elections there was an expressed desire to move beyond sectarianism and a real appetite for political figures who could present a vision for national unity. Yet the final political result led to the same government despite a different set of votes. It was asked how political parties such as Iraqiya could go about creating a coalition that was more inclusive of Shia nationalists.

One suggestion was for political figures to focus on issues that could unify disparate political blocs – primarily a national oil pipeline and other badly needed infrastructure projects. The pipeline would run from Basra and the southern oil fields through Haditha and Salahuddin, connecting through Turkey. The pipeline could pay for itself and create an incentive for disparate identities to rally around a common project for the national benefit. Others added that this could help counteract the Turkey–KRG relationship and bring the central Iraqi government into a mutual dependency agreement with its neighbours. Yet others were sceptical of assumptions that economic development would necessarily calm tensions; rather there was a risk that increasing oil revenues would simply raise the stakes between competing factions.

Individual political elite dynamics were also discussed, particularly the behaviour of Prime Minister Maliki and President Barzani. A mutual lack of respect was noted as a potent factor in the division between the two leaders. Thus, if there was to be a change in leadership on either side, the dynamic could be different.

Of particular relevance during the workshop was the prospect of war between Iraq and Kurdistan. The recent escalation of tensions has led to the aggressive repositioning of Iraqi armed forces and Kurdish *peshmerga* fighters. Heightened rhetoric between the two sides has also given cause for concern. The Iraqi government continues to provide the bulk of the Kurdish government budget through oil revenue transfers to the KRG; the threat of

halting these transfers could greatly affect Kurdish decision-making in a prolonged stand-off with Baghdad. The role of the *marja'iyā* (Shia religious authorities) in Najaf was also discussed, primarily how and to what extent the Shia in the Najaf leadership would engage with these political divisions, and the belief that they are not pleased with the escalating Baghdad–Erbil dispute. One participant noted that the natural coalition of the Shia and the Kurds is being tested in this conflict to the displeasure of the *marja'iyā* in Najaf. But despite increasing tensions between Baghdad and Erbil, many participants were sceptical of full-blown military conflict developing, in part because of the incentives to resolve their dispute – particularly for the KRG, which depends on stability in Kurdistan to continue to attract foreign investment – and in part because of the logistical difficulties and challenges in executing effective military action.

Re-examining analytical frameworks

This session questioned the relevance to Iraq of existing frameworks for analysing foreign policy decision-making at the state level. Participants expressed the view that the state of Iraq's foreign relations today cannot be represented in a coherent framework, given the countless and varying actors and influences that are currently in contest, both domestically and internationally. One participant stated that Iraq now exists in an area that is not unknown in history yet is problematic for the political theory conceptions of the world that foreign policy analysts are most comfortable using. More specifically, in asking what Iraq's policy is on a specific issue, one must go through each and every political power player and explain how he or she is positioned and why.

Other participants said Iraq remained a weak state, where the government had been failing in both functional legitimacy (failing to provide basic state functions and services such as electricity and security) and normative legitimacy (as its narrative was failing to sufficiently include the various ethnic and sectarian constituencies). This meant that not only did the government lack a monopoly over the coercive use of power, but subgroups were able to capture more legitimacy, resulting in a situation where it was very unclear who spoke for Iraq. The case of Lebanon showed that it would hardly be impossible to imagine Iraq continuing down a path where different factions pursued separate and mutually antagonistic foreign policy agendas; Lebanese factions backed different sides in Syria.

Some participants expressed a more optimistic view of Iraq in 2012, particularly when compared to the state of the country in 2004 or 2005. For example, in the earlier years there was a significant dearth in electricity supply and no money for people to purchase generators and fuel. Today entrepreneurs in the country are producing and selling electricity to citizens who can and do purchase it. Militant groups that once roamed the streets of southern cities are no longer present and security risks and threats to average citizens have significantly decreased. However, electricity being sold by private citizens through home generators remains extremely expensive for average Iraqis, and a source of frustration for many citizens who hope their oil-rich country can provide them with a certain level of basic services – at least matching pre-2003 provisions. This has not been achieved by the state's home electricity allocation. Though security has improved, the threat of car bombings, kidnappings and terrorist attacks remains across the country.

Participants regarded as a positive development the presence of a strong sense of nationalism and national identity, despite deep social divisions. Evidence from the 2010 elections seems to confirm this, with the secular Iraqiya coalition winning the most seats in parliament. However, the political manoeuvring that ensued led to the same government leadership as before the elections, an arrangement that was to provide for a reconciliation between the government and opposition – known as the Erbil Agreement – that was never fully implemented and to which involved parties were not completely committed; there has since been a re-emergence of ethno-sectarian conflict among the political elite.

Some participants said there was a need to shift the focus away from cultural relativism and to appreciate that the governing structures inside Iraq were working through post-war challenges that included conflicting priorities of individuals and parties. They asserted that the systems put in place in the past decade were fundamentally working and would continue to progress, if slowly and imperfectly, towards stability and an increasingly coherent national position in the region. It was remarked that Iraq was currently in a period of extreme uncertainty and thus analysts engaged in Iraq must focus on facts and data as much as possible.

However, others argued that expecting foreign policy to naturally become more institutionalized was a very Western-centric approach, and that in resisting cultural relativism in order to avoid the 'clash of civilizations' trope, one risked ignoring the social nuances needed to understand a country such as Iraq. They asserted that the sense of competing victimhoods in Iraq had yet to be addressed adequately among the different ethnic and religious

groups. Kurdish people in the north of Iraq had experienced decades of persecution – perhaps most severely under Saddam Hussein, as exemplified by the Anfal campaign in the 1980s. Shia Iraqis had been the persecuted majority in Iraq, as well as a religious minority in the Islamic world; now in government the Shia political elite in Iraq feel a need to avoid past horrors. Despite being identified as ruling Iraq for decades, Sunni Iraqis too had experienced the authoritarian hold of the previous regime, and many today feel new threats under a Shia-led government they view as determined to seek retribution against them. Other minority populations, such as Iraqi Turkmen, do not fit neatly into the wider ethno-sectarian divisions often discussed. Thus, the lack of any national reconciliation initiative has led to a deepening sense of splintered and antagonistic identities that will continue to compete with the Iraqi national identity that some are seeking to promote. Participants warned that to resolve this would take leadership from the political elites, both inside and outside government.

National interests and policy resources

This session dealt with the national priorities of Iraq and what aspects of Iraqi foreign policy would be unlikely to change regardless of who was in power. Much of the discussion focused on natural resources and how oil shapes Iraqi foreign policy. It was noted that Iraqi oil production had received renewed attention with the release of a report earlier in 2012 by the International Energy Agency that identified Iraq as capable of contributing 45% of the anticipated growth in global output of oil over the next two decades, more than any other country. Many participants saw increased Iraqi oil production as a net loss for Iran as it felt the further impact of the economic sanctions that have contributed to Iraq's surpassing Iran in oil production for the first time in three decades.

A consensus emerged among participants that how oil and oil revenues were managed by political elites was of singular importance for the interplay between domestic and foreign relations in Iraq. Participants discussed elites capturing the state apparatus in an attempt to control oil revenues. A recent decision by the Iraqi government to give 100,000 barrels of oil as a gift to Jordan to help overcome its current economic difficulties was regarded as further evidence of the vital role oil plays in Iraq's foreign relations. It was added that political figures desire to be inside the government first and foremost in order to have access to the revenues and patronage, as exemplified by the fact that 98% of the parties represented in parliament have some role in the government, and thus a stake in its operations and revenues.

It was added that the relationship between the people and elites was distorted by this patronage. Once people have obtained power, they have a strong incumbents' advantage in future elections because they can access significant state resources to support their bid for power; it was asserted that this dated back to the selection of specific elites to be a part of the Iraqi Governing Council by the Coalition Provisional Authority in 2003 and 2004.

Currently there are two visions for managing the Iraqi state and its resources: central control over oil, or decentralization with revenues going to provinces and regions. Yet there could be a third option, one that allows for a relevant and functioning central government that has a mandate over national concerns such as foreign policy, including a say over national resources, while at the same time devolving certain power and control of revenues to provinces and regions, thereby enabling the emergence of a more functioning federal system. The lack of debate about how to change the patronage-based system was noted; elites are competing to obtain greater control of the system rather than fundamentally reforming it.

Some participants criticized the belief that the country could be unified by the reconstruction of a national pipeline. It was further added, however, that the future of Iraq depended on how pipelines in the country developed. The extent to which the KRG could build on its relationship with Turkey in terms of oil exports would be significant in the near future; if the KRG proceeded with its desire and plan to extract and sell its own oil via a pipeline through Turkey, then the design of the Iraqi nation-state could fundamentally change. The Iraqi government might respond by halting transfer payments to the KRG, which could fuel Kurdish desires for Iraqi Kurdistan to secede from Iraq altogether.

Also discussed was the role played by the United States in Iraq today. It was argued that the US has never been deeply committed to building up Iraqi state institutions, something that was consistently seen through both the Bush and Obama administrations; what was of most concern to them was ultimately stability, particularly in the oil markets, with no evidence that US policy took any position to encourage the development of institutional structures in Iraq. This was identified as a fundamental mistake of US policy. An example offered was the perceived US consent to the arrest warrant issued by Prime Minister Maliki for Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi on charges of operating a Sunni militia.

This argument was countered by other participants, who expressed doubt that the US had the ability today to make a significant impact on domestic Iraqi

politics and decision-making. One participant stated that it was very easy to both overstate the influence of the past and understate that of the present. It was asked how the US could go about bringing particular desired outcomes in Iraq to fruition. Suggestions focused on diplomatic and economic pressures that could be applied, such as public, high-level calls from the US government for Iraqi politicians to resolve internal political disputes, and tying deeper economic partnership with Iraq to political reconciliation.

On the issue of Vice President Hashemi, it was noted that inside Iraq no Sunni leaders had stated that Hashemi was innocent; and that while Hashemi's bodyguards were arrested at the airport as his delegation was leaving Baghdad, Hashemi was permitted to fly out. If Maliki wanted to arrest Hashemi he could have done so; this suggested a compromise was reached – perhaps under US pressure – where Hashemi would be charged with murder *in absentia*, rendering him unable to return to Baghdad without facing imprisonment or the subsequent death penalty that was handed down to him. Also discussed was the inability of the US government to convince the Iraqi authorities they should keep Hezbollah operative Ali Mussa Daqduq imprisoned. On this issue, it was noted that Iraq seemed to be attempting to pacify both the US and Iran by holding Daqduq until after the US presidential election before ultimately releasing him. Some argued that Iraq would be best advised to hedge its foreign policy bets and to keep a low profile on some issues in view of the increasingly polarized political atmosphere in the region.

While some participants asserted that US interest in Iraq would inevitably diminish in the years ahead, others argued that this would depend on the state of the international oil market.

Future scenarios: Iraq's regional position in the next decade

This session discussed the future of Iraq in the next decade and how Iraq might respond to various possible developments within the region.

In asking where Iraq belongs and where it identifies itself in the context of the wider region, participants discussed whether Iraq positions itself as a part of a largely Shia axis that includes Iran, Syria and Hezbollah (with the position of Hamas in this self-styled 'resistance axis' now under question). While 2011 was dominated by the narrative of people rising up for justice and dignity, in 2012 this narrative of sectarian polarization was seen as re-emerging – above all over the conflict in Syria.

On Syria, it was stated that Iraq seemed to have attempted to triangulate between competing demands, taking a minimalist position rather than being an antagonist – a stance that was largely due to overwhelming internal complications inside Iraq. There had not been one Iraqi government position on Syria, and there is no clear articulation of national Iraqi interests regarding the neighbouring country.

Another participant expressed the view that although Iraq would not become a beacon of democracy for the region in the foreseeable future, there were still opportunities for the country to develop into a significant regional actor and even lead the way on some issues. In economic terms it could do this by developing and expanding port facilities in southern Iraq that would allow for a more efficient global trade route. Increased economic activity might lead to the emergence of a new middle class that would be independent of the state and its largesse. Others agreed that Iraq would not be a model for democracy, but noted its primary role in meeting global oil output forecasts. This type of soft power could increase its regional and global standing and help it rival emerging Gulf states such as Qatar, as well as regional powers such as Turkey and Iran. On oil, it was noted that if prices stayed high, there could be a surge of investment from Asia that might create new jobs in engineering.

A participant said there was a serious risk of the post-Ottoman Empire state system in the region unravelling. The Kurds had consented to federalism in Iraq; if this system of government remained dysfunctional, the alternative was Kurdish secession. However, the extent to which Turkey would consent to this type of action would heavily affect any outcome. It was added that part of the notion of competing foreign policies within Iraq was that the Kurds did not see themselves as a minority but rather as a people with a right to self-determination; they were self-identifying as a people stuck in a state.

The discussion included exploring various scenarios that could occur in the region, and Iraq's possible responses. One possible scenario was an Israeli attack on Iran. It was stated that Iraq's response would depend on whether its own airspace was breached by Israel. It was also asked what Iraq's national interests would be in engaging in the conflict, and whether a response was even required. One participant noted that under the Bush administration Iraq had received explicit assurances from the US that Iraqi airspace would not be used for a possible military strike on Iran. Other participants stated that in the event of an attack, despite the likely rhetoric from the Iraqi government, lack of significant retaliatory capability would ultimately dictate that Iraq would not engage militarily.

A second scenario discussed was NATO intervention in Syria. Many participants stated this was highly unlikely, but saw increased arming of rebels inside Syria as possible. In that case, the Iraqi government under Maliki would not be pleased and the US government would likely try to tamp down any possible Iraqi reaction. It was posited that an arms supply route from Saudi Arabia to Syria could go through Anbar province in Iraq, which could result in arms remaining with non-state actors inside Iraq. It was added that in Syria currently, 'the wrong people are arming the wrong people'.

Two scenarios relating to Saudi Arabia – an uprising in its Eastern Province, and a Muslim Brotherhood takeover of the country – were also discussed. The former might be supported by Iraqi Shia groups, but further Iraqi reaction was not considered likely. Participants noted that a successful Muslim Brotherhood movement in Saudi Arabia could stoke sectarian tensions inside Iraq, particularly given the ongoing conflict in Syria. It was noted that in such a scenario Saudi Arabia's status quo-oriented foreign policy would shift to one that was much more activist.

A fifth scenario envisaged China becoming a guarantor of oil security and supply for Iraq. It was noted that this would be a hard sell to both the Iraqi populace and the political elites; China would not be enough of a substitute for the US to ensure Iraqi political actors shifted their orientation. Another participant added that the rational Iraqi policy in the US–China geostrategic battle would be to steer clear of choosing sides by having good relations with both states.

It was noted that these scenario discussions had brought forth more decided views on Iraqi national interests than previous sessions.

The workshop closed by noting that Iraq certainly has foreign relations, but not necessarily a comprehensive foreign policy. As it strives to assume a position of prominence in the region, that may begin to change. Future areas for discussion and analysis were identified: to what extent institutional state structures will seek to affect Iraqi foreign policy; the patronage systems in place in the Iraqi state today; and the wider narrative of the Iraqi state as it grapples with the relationship between internal divisions that are primarily based on ethno-sectarian cleavages, and an Iraqi national identity that associates itself with the territorial integrity of the nation-state and its related resources.

IRAQ ON THE REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL STAGE

Nearly a decade after the US-led invasion of Iraq, Chatham House's MENA Programme is researching the varied foreign policy interests, influences and actors inside Iraq. The project *Iraq on the Regional and International Stage: National Interests and Foreign Policy Determinants and Dynamics* aims to map how Iraq's relationships with regional and global state powers are formed in order to gain a deeper understanding of the processes underlying Iraq's foreign policy motivations and decisions.

Through primary, in-country research interviewing key figures in Iraqi politics, external interviews, and workshops in Washington, DC and London, the research explores how foreign policy in Iraq is developed and implemented. Key themes that will be addressed include identifying actors and their influence over state foreign policy, the national interests that most guide foreign policy decisions, to what extent Iraq has a coherent foreign policy and how it is formed, and what primary interests will affect Iraq's foreign policy decisions in the next decade.

This work on Iraq is led by Jane Kinninmont, Senior Research Fellow, with Professor Gareth Stansfield, Project Consultant, and Omar Sirri, Research Assistant, and is undertaken in partnership with the United States Institute of Peace.

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The Middle East and North Africa Programme, headed by Dr Claire Spencer, undertakes high-profile research and projects on political, economic and security issues affecting the Middle East and North Africa. To complement our research, the MENA Programme runs a variety of discussion groups, roundtable meetings, workshops and public events which seek to inform and broaden current debates about the region and about UK and international policy. We also produce a range of publicly available reports, books and papers.

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