

Chapter 1

The Future of Iraq

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Introduction

What is the future for Iraq? What and who will determine that future and Iraq's position in and impact on the global order? Will there even be an Iraq? Predicting a particular outcome with any confidence is beyond our grasp due to the massive uncertainties involved. Getting futurology right is more luck than judgment, with failed predictions quietly forgotten as somehow not counting and with successful predictions trumpeted. Today's reliable assumptions can become tomorrow's fallacies; or they can be tomorrow's reliable assumptions but next year's fallacies. Timescales matter but are even harder to identify than trends, and the further into the future one attempts to peer, the more speculative the analysis. Specificity matters too: the more specific the attempted prediction, the more useful it will be but the more difficult it is to be right. For example, any society includes diverse social forces which cooperate and compete with each other and in so doing generate new social forces that in turn produce patterns of cooperation and competition that previously would have been regarded as unrealistic or impractical. Futurology suffers from the need to predict — never mind expect — the unexpected. Furthermore, key aspects of the unexpected dimensions of Iraq's future may originate outside Iraq, such as the global financial crisis that began in 2007. Iraq is also part of a feedback loop: the “lessons

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of Iraq” are being debated globally, and whatever lessons are drawn will have political, economic and military implications for Iraq and its future. Iraq and Iraqis are not merely acted upon. They are also taking actions with significance beyond Iraq’s borders.

A more useful way to think about Iraq’s future than trying to predict a most likely outcome is to take a thematic approach and in particular to explore pairs of contrasting perspectives on those themes. The value of a prediction lies in whether or not it proves to be true or false, whereas the value of thinking thematically is that one is engaging with the issues that have, at least up to that point, played a role in shaping events. The contrast between predictive and thematic approaches should not be overstated. After all, setting out themes implies an expectation and hence prediction that they will continue to play a role in the future. Equally, predictions about Iraq’s future rest on assumptions about those themes and those assumptions are often controversial and some are better grounded than others. A similar caveat applies to the pairing of perspectives on each theme. Although they are set out as contrasting or competing perspectives, it would not be difficult to find elements they share.

The thematic perspectives which will be explored in this discussion of Iraq’s future are historical continuity and change; the relative importance of ethno-sectarian and programmatic politics; armed conflict and peace; and poverty and prosperity. The conclusion will then consider the relationships between these themes and ways in which they might interact in relation to Iraq’s possible futures within the global order. The overall trend in the world is towards increasing globalization, that is, the various parts of the world are becoming more deeply connected and are increasingly shaping each other in all spheres (military, cultural, economic and political). This means that the future of the local is increasingly tied to the global and vice versa. The global order is the entire set of ideas and practices that structures relations at a worldwide level due to the deliberate choices of actors (states, international organizations, businesses, non-state armed groups, individuals, etc.) and due to the shaping of actors in ways that go beyond their deliberate choices. Globalization is highly uneven and can go into reverse (such as when local or regional interactions

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intensify and global ones decline), overall or in particular respects. As these are ongoing processes rather than a single event, it makes sense to start with a historical perspective.

History: Continuity and Change

The question of the extent to which the past shapes the future is a perennial one. Mesopotamia, the historic site of what became Iraq, has for thousands of years been the location of the confluence of and conflict between and within civilizations. Its importance to successive global orders has flowed from its strategic location between Europe and Asia, its resources, its religious significance and the advanced nature of its ideas such as the invention of writing. Many empires have fought over its territory. What became modern Iraq emerged gradually from the integration of the provinces around Mosul in the north, Baghdad in the center and Basra in the south under Ottoman rule. Britain occupied this territory during the First World War, which among other things ended the Ottoman Empire based in what became modern Turkey. Britain exercised a League of Nations mandate to run this territory in 1920, the League being the forerunner of the United Nations but without the US as a member. However, the League collapsed at the beginning of World War Two. Britain then created a monarchy through which it sought to retain control indirectly, and Iraq attained formal independent statehood in 1932. British forces invaded Iraq again in 1941 during the Second World War to secure oil supplies, and withdrew again in 1947 while still attempting to retain indirect control. There followed a series of coups — in 1958 by Brigadier General Abdul Karim Qassim; in 1963 by Colonel Abdul Salam Arif who, after his death in 1966, was succeeded by his brother Abdul Rahman; and in 1968 by the Baath Party, which nationalized the Iraqi Petroleum Company in 1972 and hence had huge resources at its disposal.

Within the Baath Party, Saddam Hussein gradually consolidated his power and became president in 1979. He conducted a bloody, expensive and inconclusive war with Iran throughout the 1980s and ordered the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, only to be expelled by force

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by a US-led UN coalition in 1991. The UN economic sanctions which were maintained between 1990 and the US-led invasion in 2003 had devastating economic and social effects. These negative effects were exacerbated by some of the regime's responses to them. Before the invasion Iraq was characterized by a ruling elite that, due to its oil income, was able to rely on varying mixes of extensive social welfare programs (destroyed by the sanctions and the regime's priorities), bribes, extreme repression and, towards the end, increased tribalism and religiosity to stay in control. The state was to a great extent run by a set of shadow networks of patronage and corruption that was more important than the state's formal institutions.

The expectation of the administration of then US President George Bush, Jr., was that it would be able to take control of a strong, functioning state that it could hand over quickly to pro-US elected Iraqi exiles. This expectation was fundamentally misconceived. The state had been distorted, weakened and bypassed by Saddam Hussein's regime such that there was little loyalty to it, and when the regime was toppled most of what remained of the state collapsed. When the US realized its mistake after the invasion in March 2003, it sought to run Iraq itself to transform it top-down into a liberal democracy with an open market economy which would also be a close ally. However, this extraordinarily ambitious vision was not matched with anything like the resources necessary to achieve it, if indeed it was ever achievable. The collapse of most institutions of the state plus the dismantling by the US of much of what remained in order to try to eliminate opposition contributed to the emergence of armed opposition to the US presence and the new state it was trying to create.

In many respects the US-led occupation looks like many other episodes in Iraq's history, with the interaction of internal and external alliances, the extensive use of violence and struggles over political authority and resources. However, nationalism, the delegitimation of formal empire and the new weight being given to the notion of the sovereign national state with at least formal final say over its own territory have proven influential. These ideas, which are part of the global order, are obstacles to the installation by a mix of force and consent in Iraq by the United States of a client state (that is, one that

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is generally deferential to the preferences of the invader). Another obstacle to the US achieving its goals is that many groups and leaders dispute where overall political authority lies and procedures for resolving such disputes are often not accepted, so there have been numerous armed power struggles. This is an inherently unstable situation. The interaction of ethnic, religious, sectarian, tribal, class, strategic and political factors in the context of fundamental disagreement over political authority and opportunistic action by those motivated by private gain means that there is strong propensity to resort to organized violence in Iraq.

Politics: Ethno-Sectarianism and Policy Programs

In identity politics, support for and the legitimacy of leaders are based on who they are. Ethno-sectarian identity politics refers to politics focused on the boundaries and markers of groups which combine perceived or actual shared ethnic and sectarian characteristics. Sect is the sub-division of a religion (for example, Sunnism and Shiism within Islam), while ethnicity involves a diverse set of cultural elements that can include sect. In programmatic politics, the support for and the legitimacy of leaders are based on what they propose to do and actually do. Identity politics and programmatic politics overlap, especially when policy programs focus on what leaders have done or will do in relation to identity politics. Furthermore, in a sense, all politics is identity politics: what you do says a lot about, and shapes, who you are. Nevertheless, there are important differences between the two, most noticeably when policy programs emphasize the delivery of material and status benefits to all citizens of a society rather than strengthening the boundaries and markers of particular ethnic and/or sectarian identity groups within them.

Much media and political commentary on Iraq assumes that there are in effect no Iraqis — that Iraq is composed of around 55% Shia, 25% Sunnis, 15% Kurds and various others; that the population identifies mainly with these groups; and that the violence is mainly between the Shia concentrated mainly in the south, Sunnis in the center and Kurds in the north. This perspective is known as

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primordialism, meaning that the markers and boundaries of identity are seen as more or less fixed, natural, objective and obvious and as the main determinant of politics.

The Sunni–Shia divide in Islam has its origins in the dispute over the succession to the Prophet Muhammad after his death in 632. Muhammad said he was merely God’s messenger in passing on the commandments that formed the basis of the Quran to which people should submit (in Arabic *islam*). Muhammad said that Jesus was not the son of God, but was the closest of all men to God, much closer than Muhammad himself, and communicating the same message. The partisans (in Arabic *shia*) of Ali favored as Muhammad’s successor Ali ibn Abi Talib, who was son-in-law and cousin of Muhammad and who was killed in 661 by a former supporter. In contrast, the other Muslims supported succession via a line of caliphs (meaning successors), including Ali as the fourth of these, after Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman. These Muslims became known as Sunnis, in reference to the Arabic for tradition, *sunna*. The fifth caliph, Muawiyah, ensured that his son Yazid would succeed him, and this occurred in 680. A revolt was led by Ali’s son (and hence grandson of Muhammad) Husain. He was soon killed by Sunnis, but the Shia have continued to dispute the succession ever since and regard the failure of many Shia to rally to Husain’s side, thus ensuring what they see as his martyrdom, as a matter of everlasting, intense regret and sorrow. In the centuries since, the Shia sect has evolved to have a much more hierarchical and formal authority structure than Sunni Islam.

While the word “Iraq” has been in existence in Arabic (*al-Iraq*) for many centuries (possibly having its origins in a Persian word meaning lowlands), Iraq’s creation as a modern state was a product of the British occupation and then its League of Nations mandate. Seen by primordialists as being forced together by Britain and then held together by repressive externally-backed rulers, the toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003 meant, according to this view, that the lid was taken off the pressure cooker containing ethno-sectarian divisions: Sunnis went from being the rulers of Iraq to a subordinate minority ruled by Shia, with Kurds managing to carve out semi-independence.

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From the primordialist perspective, the central issue for Iraq's future is whether or not there can be compromise between these supposedly historically antagonistic groups. The most common suggestion is the idea of soft partition involving a relatively weak central government in Baghdad and three powerful regions with an agreed share of oil revenues. Less commonly, the argument is made for the hard partition of Iraq into separate sovereign, independent states — either an independent Kurdistan and a Sunni and Shia Arab Iraq, or three states, Kurdish, Sunni and Shia. Primordialists assume that once boundaries are lined up with ethno-sectarian identity, internal peace will be much more likely although conflict between these new entities could still occur. This view is a staple of Western news media coverage and has been articulated by then US Senator and now US Vice-President Joe Biden and to a lesser extent by US President Barack Obama.

Despite the popularity in the West of this primordialist application of an ethno-sectarian framing to the point that it is mostly seen as common sense, it is misleading. To begin with, even the categories being used are confusing. The labels Sunni and Shia refer to religious sects within Islam, whereas Kurdish is an ethnic category. Most Kurds are Sunnis (some are Shia), and so it makes no sense to refer to Kurds versus Sunnis. The majority ethnic group in Iraq is Arab and its language is Arabic, an identity marker shared by most Sunnis and Shia. The next biggest ethnic group in Iraq is the Kurds, whose first language is generally Kurdish (which has two main dialects, Sorani in central Kurdistan which uses Arabic script and Kurmanji in northern Kurdistan which, like English, uses Latin script) though many can also speak Arabic.

Far from having a historic inability to coexist, Sunni and Shia Arabs have had few episodes of violence between them in the territory of what is now Iraq, and outside powers have generally been involved in those episodes. Saddam Hussein provided material benefits or inflicted repression according to his assessment of who was a threat and what he thought would control them. Many Sunni Arabs suffered while some Shia and Kurds benefited, even if Shia and Kurds suffered disproportionately. In other words, Saddam Hussein did not simply

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run Iraq for his fellow Sunni Arabs. The predominantly Kurdish northeast of Iraq has been effectively autonomous since the Gulf War of 1991 when Iraqi forces were forcibly expelled from Kuwait by a US-led UN coalition. However, this Kurdish Autonomous Region (KAR) is not inhabited by a unified Kurdish identity group seeking independence. Since 1991, two secular political parties — the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by Massoud Barzani and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led by Iraqi President Jalal Talibani — have controlled separate parts of the KAR. They fought each other intermittently throughout the 1990s and especially in 1994. Even though Saddam Hussein ordered the use of chemical weapons against the Kurds of Halabja in 1988 as part of his brutal Anfal campaign to crush potential Kurdish opposition permanently, the KDP allied with Saddam Hussein's forces in 1996 to help them in their fight against the PUK, while the PUK in turn allied with Iran against them. Cooperation between the KDP and PUK in the running of the KAR has increased since 2005, but the KAR is a long way from having a fully unified regional government. Despite an underlying preference for a unified independent Kurdistan, the dominant view among Kurds is that a move towards formal independence is far too risky due to the potential for military action by Turkey, Iran or even Syria as well as Arab Iraq to try to stop it or to ensure that major oilfields and the cities of Kirkuk and Mosul are not part of it. In much of the center of Iraq, as indicated earlier, the fighting is mainly among Sunni Arab groups with different objectives, strategies and tactics grouped loosely around the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), Reform and Jihad Front (RJF) and the Awakenings Movement. These groups are discussed further in the next section of this chapter. In Baghdad, parts of central Iraq and all of southern Iraq, the main fighting since late 2007 has been among Shia Arabs, principally Iraqi government forces loyal to the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI, which was known until May 2007 as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq or SCIRI) and those claiming loyalty to the Mahdi Army nominally headed by Moqtada al-Sadr and also the Fadila Party, a splinter from the Sadr Movement. The Iraqi public overwhelmingly rejects ethno-sectarian politics. For example, in an opinion poll in August

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2007, 98% said they were opposed to ethno-sectarian separation and 89% said the separation that had occurred had been mainly forcible. In the same poll, 62% of Shia and 15% of Kurds as well as 92% of Sunni Arabs said that they were in favor of attacks on US-led Coalition forces. In February 2007, 61% of those polled said they saw themselves as just Muslims rather than Shia or Sunni Muslims.

The prominence of parties and militias that are almost exclusively Sunni or Shia in central and southern Iraq since the invasion is not a historically consistent feature of Iraqi politics (for example, Iraqi tribes, which are effectively extended families and still play an important role in Iraq, often have Sunni and Shia elements) and does not reflect the views of most Iraqis. Nevertheless, the dominant political parties and groupings are within sects rather than being non-sectarian. The main reason for this paradox is that when the Iraqi state effectively ceased to function after the invasion (in part it collapsed, in part the US abolished it and sought to rule directly whilst trying to create a new state), the social movements which had the most economic power and organizational capacity and which were therefore best placed to step in and replace the state and then establish political parties were ethno-sectarian in character. These social movements have been quite localized and have found sectarian identity to be a valuable legitimizing discourse less because of its inherent appeal than because of a perception of the need to engage in self-defence from those carrying out persecution at least ostensibly on the basis of sect.

Desire for revenge and escalating cycles of revenge further fuelled the explosion of sectarian violence in 2006 and 2007, and local sectarian separation (which was itself usually a product of violence or fear) as a consequence helped to reduce the violence from late 2007 onwards. It can be difficult to distinguish between violence motivated by a commitment to ethno-sectarian politics and gangsterism flying a sectarian flag of convenience. Opportunist thugs who murder their neighbors or terrorize them into fleeing and then take control of their property with a sectarian justification are more likely to be allowed to keep their ill-gotten gains. Fear of persecution on either basis has forced many to vote reluctantly for the lesser of two evils. Even then,

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the mobilization has not been straightforwardly sectarian, which is why, for example, Shia have lent their votes to a range of parties according to their policies on many issues such as whether to work with or fight against the US-led occupation and whether to have a strong or weak central government. Although a natural affinity between Iraqi and Iranian Shia is often asserted in commentaries by some Iraqis as well as by some outsiders, the possible binding effects of shared sect is mostly over-ridden by a mutual suspicion between Iraqi Shia and Iranian Shia produced by nationalism, rivalry, memories of the horrors of the Iran–Iraq War in the 1980s and commitments to Arab identity politics (most Iranians are ethnically Persian, not Arab).

The notion that there is no going back — that people cannot live together — once there has been ethnic or sectarian mobilization and violence is excessively negative. Most Iraqis have shown limited and usually secondary commitment to ethno-sectarianism, and the political trend since late 2007 has been back towards pragmatic politics. This can be seen most clearly in efforts to build a nationalist coalition favoring rapid and full US military withdrawal from Iraq and a strong central government with control of oil revenues. Those trying to develop this coalition have included supporters of Moqtada al-Sadr (Shia Arab), Fadila (Shia Arab), the National Dialogue Front (mainly Sunni Arab but also including Christians) and the Iraqi National List (non-sectarian but mostly Arab). In contrast, the KDP and PUK (Kurdish) and ISCI (Shia Arab) have favored a slower US military withdrawal and more power to regional governments, including control over much of the oil revenues. The more nationalist, centralist coalition has not managed to develop much in the way of unity, but the point is that, however messy, Iraqi politics is not reducible to ethno-sectarianism and the pragmatic perspective is an indispensable part of the picture. Hence, the question for Iraq's future is not how to separate or reconcile the members of supposedly fixed, distinct and antagonistic ethno-sectarian groups, but how fluid, overlapping and ambivalent ethno-sectarian identities and programmatic politics will shape each other. However difficult it may be to answer this question, at least it is the right one. A central element of

that answer will relate to decisions about whether and how to resort to armed conflict or to pursue goals through peaceful means.

Armed Conflict and Peace

Since the invasion in 2003, Iraqis have been at dramatically increased risks of death, injury and other serious harm from indiscriminate violence and persecution by a wide range of parties using a multitude of means. The small, voluntary civil society group Iraq Body Count (IBC) which gathers data daily on civilian deaths reported in the news media has counted over 91,000 violent civilian deaths since the invasion phase to the end of April 2009. Many other deaths have gone unreported, and estimates of the total number of additional deaths of Iraqis (including disruption of health care) are many times, including ten times or more, higher than the IBC count. What is certain is that Iraqis have also suffered from many human rights abuses and when the people have suffered injury or physical or mental ill-health, they have been at severe risk, increased since the invasion, from the consequences of insufficient medical care. These risks from the actions of US-led Coalition forces, Iraqi government forces, private security forces, insurgents, militias and criminals and from inadequate infrastructure are not evenly distributed geographically. Iraq is divided administratively into 18 provinces (also known as governorates). Attempting to relocate to a relatively safe province of the country without legal authorization for entry and residence has involved problems in relation to securing food and shelter, and creates the risk of arrest, arbitrary detention, torture or death by Coalition, Iraqi government and militia forces, especially when lack of legal status leads to the suspicion that the person might be an insurgent. Despite this, around 2.7 million Iraqis have fled to other parts of Iraq since 2003 and another two million-plus have fled abroad, mainly to Syria and Jordan. Although a small number have returned to their homes since late 2007, some displacement has continued to occur. The sharp fall from late 2007 onwards of the rate of deaths counted by IBC has been broadly maintained, but this still amounted to 484 violent civilian deaths in April 2009.

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Serious risks of one form or another exist throughout Iraq for the population. Even in the KAR, the most peaceful part of Iraq, the KDP and PUK run their own security forces which routinely engage in torture and denial of due process. There is great potential for escalation over the future of the city of Kirkuk and the province of the same name. With 750,000 people, it is Iraq's fourth largest city after Baghdad, Basra and Mosul. The largest group in Kirkuk is the Kurds, followed by the Arabs and Turkmen and a relatively small number of Assyrians and other Christians. A provincial referendum mandated by the Iraqi constitution on whether Kirkuk with its great oil wealth should become part of the KAR, as most Kurds want, or remain outside it, as the others want, has been postponed repeatedly. This delay is sensible until there can be confidence that the losers, or indeed the winners, will not turn to violence or until a compromise can be found. Furthermore, the issue of what constitutes the legitimate voting community has been complicated by the fact that under Saddam Hussein, the province and especially the city of Kirkuk had been partially Arabized, with hundreds of thousands of Kurds forced out and replaced by Arabs, mainly Shia, and this Arabization has been only partly reversed since the invasion.

Trying to assess possible futures for Iraq is made more difficult by the fact that Iraq has been the site of multiple evolving armed conflicts since 2003 rather than a single conflict between two distinct sides. The combatants have included Coalition and Iraqi government forces; private commercial security forces; the Kurdish *pershmerga* (as the PUK and KDP fighters are known); ISCI's Badr Organization; the Mahdi Army; the Fadila Party militia; the tribal, insurgent and local militias that make up the Awakening Councils; the groups in the RJF; and the groups under the ISI umbrella. Many of the groups are internally divided or are so loose in their structure that local forces supposedly under central command are actually autonomous.

The difficulty of considering possible futures is further exacerbated by the fact that the line between government forces, insurgents, party militias, tribal militias, neighborhood militias and criminal armed gangs is blurred. Hence, trying to strengthen the state by providing weapons, training, intelligence and other support may actually

strengthen militias, insurgents and criminals who will use these resources for their own ends. Cooperation with and integration into the state by these groups may turn out to be tactical and short-term.

The fluid and unpredictable patterns of armed conflict in Iraq can be seen in the changes within the mainly Sunni Arab aspect of the insurgency (an insurgency being an armed attempt to overthrow a state, in this case one being established in cooperation with foreign invaders). There has been a nationalist Sunni Arab insurgent trend aimed at creating a new Iraqi state within its present borders and a more salafist Islamist Sunni Arab trend aimed at creating an Islamic caliphate, that is, a confederation of territories ruled not by a modern state according to a constitution but by clerics ruling on the basis of the Quran and related Islamist thought. For these *salafi* (meaning ancestors, emphasizing their claim of the purity and unity of early Islam before the Shiism), the Shia branch of Islam is a betrayal of the true Islam. They engage in *takfir* (excommunication) of Shia, declaring them to be *kuffar* (unbelievers in or concealers of the truth) who may be expelled or killed. The decision of the salafists to announce the formation of an Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) in 2006 and to attack other Sunni Arab insurgents was a huge miscalculation (so much for the ISI's attempt at futurology) and produced a further split. The Awakenings Movement — referred to as the Sons of Iraq by the US government — of tribal and neighborhood militias emerged to a great extent from within the insurgency. It offered to cease its attacks on US and Iraqi government forces in exchange for their financial and military support while the Awakenings Movement fought the ISI. In contrast, the Reform and Jihad Front (RJF) of Sunni Arab insurgents which emerged in 2007 is officially as opposed to the US and Iraqi government forces as to the ISI, although it has turned out to be willing to engage in some cooperation with the US and its Iraqi allies. These types of twists and turns can be explained in retrospect but cannot be predicted with any confidence. The heavy defeats that the ISI have suffered since 2006 suggests that there will be a reduced emphasis on disputes over religious ideology between and within Islamic sects in the near future in the dynamics of Iraqi politics, but beyond that its significance is unclear and that trend may be reversed.

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On the basis of violent civilian deaths confirmed in the news media and collated by IBC (and as pointed out earlier, the real death toll among Iraqis from violence and indirect costs of violence could be multiples of this figure), the violence in Iraq has fallen a great deal since the last quarter of 2007. IBC's figures peaked at around 26,000 civilian deaths in 2006 and at around 23,000 in 2007 to around 8,000 in 2008, and an extrapolation of the count for the first quarter of 2009 to the whole year would produce a figure of around 5,000. In most cases of the deaths in 2008 and 2009 it is not possible to be clear who caused them, although it seems that fewer than 10% are caused by US or other Coalition forces. At least a substantial minority of the killings have been anti-occupation in motivation, that is, aimed at trying to drive out US forces and to inflict harm on those working with the United States. With US forces scheduled to leave Iraq anyway, the attacks seem mainly aimed at hurting Shia and Kurds for their domination of the Iraqi government by Shia and Kurdish parties, with little hope that the government can be brought down or altered much. Although the formal occupation ended in 2004 with legal sovereignty transferred to the Iraqi government, the US has continued to play a major military and to a lesser degree political and economic role in Iraq.

The reduction in violence since the last quarter of 2007 had a limited relationship to the Bush administration's new security strategy known as the "surge" of providing additional troops whilst increasing controls on freedom of movement to make attacks more difficult and pressing for political reconciliation. There has been limited progress on political reconciliation. The surge had its greatest impact on the Mahdi Army, which decided to suspend armed operations officially and agree to a ceasefire with ISCI in late 2007 but was then targeted by a US-Iraqi government (and hence ISCI) offensive in 2008. The two other main factors underlying the reduction in violence is that there has been a massive amount of forced sectarian separation and also that many Sunni Arabs decided to turn their guns away from the US and its Iraqi allies in order to deal with the greater immediate threat from the ISI. This development, which the US has been happy to encourage and about which the Iraqi

government is much more suspicious, is fortuitous rather than a deliberate product of US strategy.

The United States, meanwhile, had been hoping for a long-term military presence in Iraq and had insisted that its withdrawal of troops would be dependent on conditions (Iraqi state security forces being strong enough to cope) rather than a fixed timetable. However, in late 2008 the US had to accept a vote by the Iraqi parliament requiring all US combat forces to leave Iraqi cities, villages and localities and withdraw to their bases within Iraq by the end of June 2009, and requiring all US forces of any kind to leave Iraq completely by the end of 2011, with this decision to be put to a national referendum for approval before the end of July 2009. Some, notably the Sadr Movement, are pressing for a more rapid US withdrawal. The US also had to agree that it would not in the meantime use Iraqi territory to attack other states — there had been a concern that the US would attack Iran using bases in Iraq — and that all military operations would have to have Iraqi approval.

Public opinion polls show that most Iraqis are of the view that the US presence is making security worse rather than better and that security will improve when US combat forces leave. Most would be happy to have the US provide training for Iraqi security forces. However, there is disquiet among some Iraqis over the elite Iraq Special Operations Forces (ISOF) because it has US advisers at every level of command and it is outside the normal Ministries of Defence and Interior command structures, answerable directly to the office of Prime Minister Nour al-Maliki. The concern is that it is being used as al-Maliki's personal paramilitary force or to serve the interests of the United States. In addition, the al-Maliki government now has formal control of the Awakenings Movement forces and arrests Awakenings militia members it claims are disloyal. It remains to be seen whether truly national, non-partisan security forces are emerging in Iraq or whether the US is effectively backing one faction in an ongoing civil war now operating at a lower intensity than in recent years.

The Obama administration is trying to maximize its military influence and presence within the terms of the withdrawal agreement and also by seeking to alter its terms. The Commander of US forces

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in Iraq, General Ray Odierno, indicated in June 2009 that US forces would still be deployed in 320 outposts throughout the country to give combat support and technical advice, despite the agreement for all US forces to withdraw to their bases by the end of June 2009. He also indicated that US combat troops might still operate in Iraq, subject to Iraqi government approval. The Obama administration plans to have at least 100,000 US troops in Iraq through fiscal year 2010 and up to 50,000 until the end of 2011. The Obama administration has sought to discourage the Iraqi government from holding the agreed referendum on the withdrawal agreement because the agreement states that, if the Iraqi public vote to reject it, US forces will have to withdraw within one year of the vote. The Iraqi government wants to postpone the referendum and some within it want US forces to stay for at least another five years, but any delay would be unpopular with most Iraqis.

Iraq is still unstable and the patterns of armed conflict and peace have been shifting rapidly and in major ways. Although the overall trend has been for violence to build to a peak in 2006–2007 and decline thereafter, it could easily intensify again or shift to places that have been relatively peaceful. There could also be major shifts in the international dimension in that neighboring states (in particular, Turkey and Iran) might decide to intervene in a much more open and large-scale way. Central to such outcomes will be the political context, in particular with regard to arrangements for the balance of power between central and regional governments, including control of oil revenues, and whether armed groups are integrated into the state or remain outside its control. These trends in violence and politics have influenced, and have been influenced by, the patterns of poverty and prosperity in Iraq discussed next.

The Economy: Poverty and Prosperity

The huge rise in the price of oil that preceded the global financial crisis which began in 2007 and the crash in oil prices that has accompanied it are significant for a state which receives nearly all of its revenues from oil exports. This will have implications for the

rampant corruption within the Iraqi political system as well as for its formal spending programs.

The dominant economic ideology of our time, neo-liberalism, which involves deregulation of business, the opening of economies to external competitors and the reorientation of the state and welfare provision to promoting economic competitiveness, has faced a major setback as global recession resulted in many governments taking a much more strongly regulatory role, nationalizing many banks (at least for the time being) and increasing their spending. This means that a new and unexpected question mark hangs over whether Iraq's future, along with that of the rest of the global order, will be a neo-liberal one. Neo-liberalism has gone through a number of phases already, so perhaps it is not dying but retrenching and changing in form. Liberalism is somewhat different, being a commitment to individual rights and responsibilities in the context of equality of opportunity (something that can at most be approximated in reality), the rule of law, freedom of expression and association, a mainly market economy (again, something that is routinely undermined by things like government subsidies to weaker industries) and governments chosen in multi-party, more or less free elections.

Some see neo-liberal economics and liberalism as closely related, but neo-liberalism is often, sometimes deliberately and sometimes inadvertently, associated with illiberal ideas and practices. This is because neo-liberal policies are often unpopular and so are sometimes imposed, including by force. This has certainly been the case for most Iraqis, who have shown a strong preference for their own control over their economic future rather than having it chosen for them by the United States during the occupation and for extensive state welfare and involvement in the economy. It is significant that the oil contracts offered in 2009 by the Iraqi national government to foreign private and state-owned oil companies are contracts to provide services for a fixed fee as opposed to a percentage share of profits. The KRG, which favors more neo-liberal contracts in which profits are shared between the Iraqi government and oil companies, has asserted that the new contracts are unconstitutional.

When the US occupied Iraq formally, the Bush administration openly pursued the goal of making Iraq one of the most neo-liberalized states in the world through deregulation, privatization, low taxes on companies and opening up the economy to foreign companies. However, this project immediately ran into deep trouble for many reasons. The numerous nationalized industries were mostly on the brink of collapse due to their inefficiency and mismanagement under Saddam Hussein and many years of economic sanctions; looters caused an enormous amount of damage; criminal gangs, smugglers and corrupt state officials stole a substantial portion of Iraqi oil, oil revenues and other state funds; insurgents were determined to wreck any attempt at economic reconstruction as part of their efforts to drive out the occupiers; reconstruction was so inhibited by security concerns that not much was carried out in comparison with the scale of need; the Bush administration was more interested in appointing people who were politically loyal than competent; the Bush administration put US companies in charge with the result that those companies benefited more than Iraqis did; and anything other than the slow, piecemeal privatization of Iraqi oil was regarded by the US as too dangerous politically to attempt.

There is still much in the way of neo-liberalization in Iraq (in particular, deregulation, low taxes and opening up the economy). Iraq's economic policies need to meet with the approval of global bodies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organization (WTO), and these bodies — both international organizations with their own bureaucracies and made up of states — have a broad commitment to neo-liberalism. IMF approval is an important part of a country's ability to create confidence among international investors even if that country is not seeking IMF loans. The IMF is based in Washington, DC. Its 185 member states, nearly all the states of the world (North Korea, Cuba and a few others are not members), make funds available to the IMF and have votes proportional to the size of their economy. In the case of the WTO based in Geneva, 151 countries are members of it and Iraq is in the process of trying to join. The importance of the WTO lies in the fact that it manages the rules of global trade and so if one country thinks that another country's

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policies (such as putting taxes on imports to make them less competitive than domestic products) are in breach of WTO rules, it can take its case to the WTO. The WTO can rule one way or another and can require states to change their policies. Hence, even if the direct imposition of neo-liberalism via US occupation has had major setbacks, Iraq is being socialized into the operation of what is in many ways a neo-liberal global order.

The question of development is central to Iraq's future in the global order, and its economic dimensions are strongly bound up with its political and military ones. By the 1980s, Iraq had achieved a great deal of industrialization with widespread health care and education as long as you were not a person or part of a group perceived to be a threat to the regime. War, mismanagement and sanctions turned the clock back significantly even before the invasion, but the disruption since the invasion has been so extreme as to make the poverty in Iraq deeper and more widespread than at any other time in the last 40 years. Displacement, unemployment, malnutrition, loss of access to education and every other measure of the effects of poverty have become the lot of a substantial minority of Iraqis, especially in the center and south where armed conflicts have been most intense. The big question for many Iraqis is whether or not there will be any serious attempt to involve them in dramatically raised levels of prosperity in the future. It may be that they will effectively be left behind by development, seen as entitled to, at most, basic needs for physical survival in a relatively short lifespan as those basic needs are often not met and also to be disciplined by force if necessary to maintain inequality and suppress any rebellious tendencies. This analysis sees the world as divided into the global North (those whose relatively high levels of consumption and welfare provision are defended through measures such as limited aid, border controls and military intervention) versus the global South (those with relatively low levels of consumption and welfare who are treated as potential threats). The word "global" matters here because there are those in the geographical South that are integrated into the network of people benefiting from the current global order, just as there are those in the geographical North that are among those losing out from the current global order.

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Conclusion

It should be clear from this analysis that any attempt at predicting a very specific outcome for Iraq's future would be rash and little more than speculation. Instead, what can be identified are general themes which are focal points of conflict and cooperation. The themes explored in this chapter could be tied together into two competing scenarios, with a long-term pattern of ethno-sectarianism, violence and poverty set against an alternative future of programmatic politics, peace and prosperity, with each element of the two scenarios being mutually reinforcing. This is a possibility, but reality is already rather messy in terms of there being elements of both in play. There are elements of historical continuity and change, ethno-sectarianism and programmatic politics, violence and peace, and poverty and prosperity. Furthermore, it is not necessarily the case that violence and poverty are strongly associated with each other. In armed conflict, there can be winners as well as losers in material terms, and peace can be a product not of prosperity but of acquiescence in poverty through lack of ability to effectively take up arms to challenge it.

Iraq's future will reflect the interaction of Iraq's own distinctive dynamics, regional dynamics and the wider global order. The evidence suggests that Iraq's future will involve violence, struggles over the control of oil and numerous actors pursuing their own interests by working outside the state or through it. Nevertheless, conscious human agency plus the fluidity of the situation within Iraq and right up to the global level reinforce the sense of the future being open-ended and uncertain in many respects.