AAAS Barcelona

Alternative Futures for Iraq: implications for regional security

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1. Introduction

The future of any country must lie, to some degree, in its past. This is no less the case with Iraq and it is important to bear in mind whilst speculating about its future government. It is in the recent past that one can discern the patterns of belief and activity which constitute political reality in Iraq. This will shape the responses and the size of the constituencies which seek to work within or radically to restructure the present political dispensation. Furthermore, neither the Ba'thist regime, nor Saddam Hussein's ascendancy within it, nor indeed the impulses to war and to rebellion which Iraq has witnessed, came out of nowhere. They were all to some extent the product of forces which had already been at work in Iraqi society for some time. Consequently, in debating the future of Iraq, account must be taken of the degree to which these same forces will continue to be influential in shaping Iraqi regimes and their policies.

This caution is perhaps particularly necessary in the light of two contrasting tendencies in thinking about Iraq's future - tendencies encouraged by the present political regime and by the opposition forces, respectively. As far as the former is concerned, no alternative to the rule of Saddam Hussein can be contemplated. It is very much in his interest to suggest that, in the event of his overthrow, chaos, civil war and foreign intervention would ensue, throwing the very future of Iraq into question. From this perspective, the people of Iraq are fated to be ruled by Saddam Hussein (or, according to some interpretations, by the blood-line of Saddam Hussein in the shape of his son Uday) for the foreseeable future. By way of contrast, much of the opposition, particularly that portion of it represented in the Iraqi National Congress, is trying to convince the world that - with a degree of outside assistance - it can overthrow Saddam Hussein and replace his regime with its complete antithesis: a democratic, pluralist political order within the framework of a decentralised, federal Iraqi state.

Both of these visions of the future of Iraq may be genuinely held by the parties concerned, but they are strategic visions, aimed not at disinterested speculation

about the future of the country, but rather at seeking to promote a particular kind of future. Saddam Hussein is trying to convince the Iraqis themselves - and perhaps **certain** outside powers - that, whatever their opinion of him and his clan, the uncertainties and the social disruption which would attend his overthrow would be far worse. For the opposition parties, the task is, of course, to persuade both the Iraqis and outside powers of the exact opposite. Domestically, the promise is that the overthrow of Saddam Hussein will open up the opportunity for a dramatic liberation of the Iraqi people from the various forms of oppression under which they have been suffering. As far as the outside powers are concerned, the Iraqi opposition is keen to persuade them that political change in Iraq is possible with a minimum of violence or social disruption and that the regime established on the ruins of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship will be a peaceful one, intent more on creating the conditions for internal freedoms than on foreign adventures.

There is, of course, no way of saying with certainty what Iraq will look like two, five or ten years from now. However, it is worth thinking about the degree to which the two contrasting visions referred to above may shape its future, in the sense of being symptoms of forces presently at work in Iraqi society which will have a decisive impact on its future. That is, an effort should be made to understand the degree to which the vision of a strong, centralised, authoritarian state, based on a mixture of patrimonialism and coercion, presently articulated by Saddam Hussein and his supporters, may have a grip on the imaginations of those who are in a position to shape the future in Iraq. Equally, the social weight of the alternatives to such a vision should be assessed, in order to understand whether a very different principle of power can in fact be instituted in Iraq and can be expected to last in the teeth of the opposition which any radical departure is likely to provoke in various sectors of society and state.

In the specific context of regional security, the questions to be asked concern the degree to which such changes as have taken place or might yet take place in Iraqi political society may be associated with changing perceptions of Iraq's neighbours. The danger here is that, precisely because of the dire record of the present regime in Iraq, the belief will grow that any future government will conduct itself in a way that is diametrically opposed to the adventurist and violent policies of Saddam Hussein. In order to temper this, some effort should be made to understand the degree to which similar impulses - if not necessarily

identical reactions - will run through any government of Iraq which wishes to retain sufficient domestic authority to govern the country.

In order to examine these questions, it is necessary firstly to look at the foundations and the potential of the forms of power in Iraq. Such an examination will try to determine the most likely general form of the future government of Iraq, in the sense that it will be assumed that it must use the social and the cognitive "material" of Iraqi political society to remain in power, allied to the resources of the state itself. Secondly, an assessment will be made of the role likely to be played in these developments by major internal groupings within Iraq, as well as their reactions should disillusionment set in regarding the order they may help to create. Thirdly, the implications of these possible outcomes must be assessed as far as the neighbours of Iraq are concerned.

2. Foundations and Possibilities of the Forms of Power in Iraq

Perhaps the best way to start thinking about the nature of power in Iraq and the relevant divisions of its political society, is with the idea of the "community of trust" - that is, the group of people who have sufficient trust in one another to act collectively as a political unit. Often linked to, or associated with a dominant leader, it is a structure closely intertwined with the processes of patrimonialism, whereby both patron and clients sustain each other in some - if not in equal - measure. It does not imply that this trust will be unquestioning or absolute - there have been too many cases in Iraqi history of close associates falling out and coming into severe conflict with one another. Nor does it mean that the individuals concerned may not have potentially conflicting ambitions. Rather, it should be seen as delineating those who are more likely than not to cooperate on some of the fundamental questions of Iraqi politics and public life. In addition, it refers to the unquantifiable ties which often bind the followers or clients to the patrimonial leader, supplementing the more material rewards which they derive from association with a powerful individual.

In Iraq, these groups have almost overwhelmingly been based on kinship ties, either in the form of imagined common tribal ancestry, or in the more immediately identifiable form of members of the extended family. Given the pattern of Iraqi social development, this has also been reinforced by common origins, in the sense of geographical locality and, to some extent socio-economic position, often supplemented in both cases by common ethnic or sectarian identities. It has been common knowledge that the present regime of Saddam

Hussein has been heavily weighted in favour of his immediate and distant relatives in the inner circles of power. Just as the key elements of the coercive apparatus at his command - the Special Forces, the Presidential Guard and the two key divisions of the Republican Guard - are largely recruited from his tribal and/or regional homeland. This does not mean that all the people favoured by Saddam Hussein come from this background, but only that those who are placed in positions which give them a degree of unsupervised power have been largely from this "community". It is a community defined by the leader and maintained by him, but its origins lie in the roots of Iraqi society. Equally, as the crises besetting Iraq have built up, it constitutes a community of people so closely identified with Saddam Hussein that he can have some confidence that the fear that they may share his fate, gives them a strong incentive to work to preserve his rule.

Even a cursory glance at Iraqi political history will make it clear that such an organisation of power has been prevalent, in one form or another, since the foundation of the state. For many Iraqis, the disillusioning experience was that which followed the overthrow of the monarchy in 1958. With the revolution of that year and the series of fierce and bloody conflicts between the various members of the anti-monarchical alliance in the years that followed, it became abundantly clear that the universalist forms of identity had little grip on Iraqi society. Although they could boast their fierce adherents, neither Communism, nor Iraqi Nationalism, nor Arab Nationalism, nor Ba'thism were able to forge communities of trust based on ideas of common political identity and purpose sufficient to dominate Iraqi society and to create the institutions of a public state. Instead, the tried and tested forms of conspiracy amongst those who trusted each other implicitly, largely because of common background, led to the overthrow of regimes, the splitting of political parties and the bypassing, or simple suspension, of state institutions.

Under the Aref brothers, and then under the leadership of the men from Takrit, or more accurately from the Al Bu Nasir, the governance of Iraq passed into the hands of patrimonial leaders who, nevertheless, saw some utility in maintaining a facade of ideological conviction. Some Iraqis took the ideals of Ba'thism seriously. The vast majority, however, saw it simply as a new language which had to be learned in order to get ahead. By and large, the latter have proved to be the survivors - the ideologues having been picked off in successive purges.

The outcome of this for the organisation and the potential organisation of forms of power in Iraq has been manifold. In the first place, it is evident that the apparent public institutions of power are only as solid as their underlying social bonds of trust and patronage. Thus, it is not the formal institution which matters in the organisation of power, but the informal networks underlying it. This is the way in which the power of the regime is organised and it is also likely to shape, if not to dictate the patterns of opposition. In other words, successful, rather than merely principled opposition, will perforce have to adopt some of the characteristics of the regime if it is not to be dispersed at its first appearance. In some circumstances, this may mean the successful recruitment of members of Saddam Hussein's inner circle, or at least of those with access to that circle and to the person of Saddam Hussein himself.

Secondly, the logic of patrimonialism means, of course, that he is the target. To break the networks of reward and punishment which sustain his regime, his death is required. This concentration on the elimination of Saddam Hussein has a number of consequences which clearly affect the opposition, but may also affect the kind of regime which is likely to come to power in Iraq. The most obvious effect is to encourage the belief that, with the removal of Saddam Hussein, the most important obstacle will have been removed from the path to the creation of whatever image of a future Iraqi political order various opposition parties hold. However, his centrality to the kind of the political order which his regime represents should not be exaggerated. There are many in socially, as well as politically powerful positions in Iraq, who may have no illusions about Saddam Hussein's competence or qualities, but who nevertheless would probably agree with him that his form of patrimonial, authoritarian rule is the kind which the country in some way or another "needs".

This is particularly important in view of the role which violence must play in the installation of any new government in Iraq. The present regime has organised things in such a way that its removal can only be contemplated by those who are mentally prepared and actually equipped to use considerable force. As the rebellions of March 1991 demonstrated, such force would have to be both better organised within the Iraqi military and less ethnically or communally specific than the Kurdish and Shi'i uprisings. In other words, a substantial or a key part of the Iraqi officer corps and armed forces would have to be able to act to remove Saddam Hussein and to take on in armed combat the forces which he has organised specifically to protect the regime. Thus, any opposition move to

establish a new government in Iraq would only be able to come to power owing a considerable debt to the members of the officer corps whose assistance will be fundamental to their undertaking.

It is clearly impossible to say what the precise motivations or indeed the political outlooks of these officers would be. Nevertheless, it is in the nature of the Iraqi armed forces officer corps, and indeed of Iraqi political society, that any successful coup would have to be organised by a community of trust or communities of trust, as outlined above. That is, conspiracy on this scale could only succeed where the conspirators were linked to each other in some way which encouraged the implicit belief that they would not be betrayed and, furthermore, that the future political order for which they were clearing the way, would not be one which radically placed in jeopardy the interests of that community of trust, its identity or its social allies. This does not mean necessarily that they would share any particular identity, although the part that would be played by Sunni Arab officers in any such coup would undoubtedly be decisive. Rather, it means that, given the present structure and attitudes of the officer corps, two particular features would almost certainly be visible.

The decisive structural feature would be the tribal nature of the heart of any conspiracy, quite possibly bringing together both Sunni and Shi'i officers from significant military clans. Equally, given the alternative focus of the Kurdish zone and the difficulties faced by Kurdish officers in the Iraqi armed forces, these conspirators are more likely to be Arab than Kurdish. It is probable that such officers would share a sense of Iraqi nationalism, as defined by the dominant Arab sector of the population. It is equally probable that they would share, in some measure, a feeling of the appropriateness of the way in which they had operated, reinforcing the patrimonial and particularistic logic of the community of trust. The concept of *al-Intisab*, with all its many overtones in an Iraqi context, would be something which such officers could share and which would, in large measure, shape their view about the proper handling of power. It is against this background that one should realistically expect any future government of Iraq to be formed.

The problem of the prominence of the officer corps in determining the success of any group or coalition which wishes to constitute itself as the future government of Iraq is also likely to show itself in a number of ways. Firstly, the Iraqi officer corps has been deeply implicated in the adventurism and the repression

associated with this regime. Clearly, many of its members have also become disillusioned with the competence and wisdom of Saddam Hussein and some have defected to the opposition, or have sought to kill him. The fact remains, however, that the bulk of the officer corps remained loyal, even at the most critical moment of the regime's existence, following the defeat in Kuwait, regardless of their ethnic, regional or sectarian background.

Secondly, there is the question of status, in the sense both of the status of the officer corps in the future of Iraq, and also the status of the various informal groupings which link members of the officer corps to larger social formations, providing the recruiting ground and the political culture on which generations of Iraqi officers have drawn. In this respect, the problem for future Iraqi governments may lie in any determined attempt they might make to re-instate a clear political distinction between the civil and the military. Regardless of whether they will in fact do so, the perception of the opposition forces at present is that they are determinedly civilian. Indeed, the great majority of them have made this part of their public identity. This will evidently present something of a problem in the future.

Thirdly, it seems almost certain that each opposition grouping will already have their own particular connections and objects of cultivation within the officer corps. The special relationships thus forged in opposition will be expected to bear fruit once a coup d'etat has succeeded and a new government is formed. The question which will arise, once the fragile unanimity of opposition has broken down, will be whether the groups concerned can avoid the temptation of seeking to settle the argument by force, or by the threat of force by calling upon their officer allies once again. Given the past record of Iraqi governments and of countries where people have sought to make a similar transition, there is a very evident danger here of the re-emergence of someone, or some group able to command effective force and to use it in pursuit of their political vision.

Lastly, some account must be taken of the irregular forces at the disposal of various Iraqi opposition groupings. These, most notably the Sadr Brigade of SCIRI [Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq] and the substantial forces under the command of the Kurdish parties, are objects of suspicion - and will remain so - for the bulk of the Iraqi officer corps. Quite apart from their ideological or party-political affiliations, they represent a principle which conflicts with the status of the Iraqi armed forces as the monopolisers of the

means of coercion in Iraq. Again, unless these forces are dispersed and lose their association with any particular political grouping, the suspicion will remain that they will be used as a form of militia to boost the political fortunes of their patrons. Not only would this alienate much of the Iraqi officer corps, as military men, but it would also tempt other political actors, who had no such militias at their disposal, to look for allies within the armed forces who might be able to neutralise such groups. This holds up the ominous prospect of a return to the early years of Iraqi independence, or of the unsettled period following the revolution of 1958.

This is the background of the potential, but also of the limitations of the forms of power in Iraq. It is on these foundations and under these particular conditions that any future government must be constructed and the dynamics at work are those which will, in general, shape both its future course and its survival. Given these conditions, it seems realistic to think of three possible forms of future government in Iraq. The first would be the result of a move from within the present structure of clannish, military power to dispose of Saddam Hussein and to replace him with another member of the clan, better able to convince the interntional community of the "normalisation" or Iraq and to oversee its readmittance into the community of nations. The second would be the mobilisation of other clans within the military apparatus which would work in combination to overthrow the rule of Saddam Hussein and the Al Bu Nasir clans, but to keep the principle of patrimonial order and of the existing hierarchies of privilege more or less intact. The third would be the result of an alliance between a combination of external opposition forces, such as the INC, and well placed military commanders within Iraq, specifically intended to bring about a radically different kind of political order in Iraq, founded on the publicly declared principles of the opposition coalition.

There is, of course, a fourth possibility: a period of bloody military civil war as one aspiring group of conspirators took on others who were seeking to defend the present regime or to look after their own interests. Given the military infrastructure, this cannot be ruled out. However, on the face of it, it seems unlikely that such a period would last for long., let alone that it would lead to the dismemberment of the state, as some have suggested. It is more probable that it would lead to some kind of temporary truce as the various army factions came together to try to work out what would be in their best collective interest, even

minimally defined. In other words, the analogy would be with the Syrian officers' conference of Homs in 1962.

Precisely because it seems inevitable that any change of regime in Iraq must be brought about by conspiracy and by violent military action through the participation of a substantial part of the officer corps, there is little purpose in speculating further upon the exact personnel or identities of the officers concerned. Evidence of the kind that would make such speculation moderately plausible is simply unavailable. Instead, the three scenarios postulated above should, in general terms, frame the discussion of the nature of the future government of Iraq. It is in the light of these possibilities - and of the limitations of the kinds of political regime which might emerge - that some effort can be made to think of the implications of such developments both for the future of the major internal groupings in Iraq and for the kinds of relationships which can be expected to develop between Iraq and its neighbours.

3. Implications for the Major Internal Groupings

It seems fairly obvious that whatever government succeeds that of Saddam Hussein will seek initially to take a more conciliatory line towards the various communities, political parties and groupings which constitute Iraqi society. Even if Saddam Hussein's successor turns out to be someone from his own clan, it would clearly be politic for the new government to proclaim amnesties, congresses of national reconciliation, dialogue with all Iraqis and so forth. Not only would it give the government a certain breathing space before disillusionment set in, but it would also be a signal to the international community that things had changed in Iraq and that the sanctions, the debt and the punitive reparations bills should no longer be imposed on the "reformed" government in Baghdad. Given Iraq's present plight and the motivation underlying any possible "insider" coup, the rehabilitation of Iraq in the international community would be a driving imperative.

How long such conciliatory moves would last or what they would actually achieve in reshaping the domestic balance of power is a much less certain prospect. An "insider" coup which kept power firmly in the hands of the Al Bu Nasir, or, at a stretch, in those of the clans of the Takrit region, would obviously produce a regime which would have no desire to see the political order of Iraq

changed in any substantial way. The people who might carry out such a coup and form the heart of the new government would, after all, have acted pre-emptively: they would have taken the risk of removing Saddam Hussein in the belief that the longer he stayed at the helm, the greater would be the danger to the political order and privileges from which they had so substantially benefited. It would scarcely be their intention, therefore, to pave the way for a radical reconstruction of the political order of Iraq or of the socio-economic order which has both sustained and been promoted by that dispensation of power. This does not necessarily rule out tactical concessions to various groups, if it were thought prudent for reasons of domestic or international acceptance to make such concessions. However, as with similar concessions made in the 1970s, the regime would both be on the look-out for an opportunity to claw them back, and would be fierce in refusing to yield anything which might permanently alter the balance of forces within Iraq.

Nor would the situation be very different if other military clans seized power on their own initiative. Although not part of the immediate kinship structure which has sustained Saddam Hussein, they are nevertheless very much pillars of the social structure which has enabled him to rule Iraq. Equally influential under the Aref brothers and under the monarchy, the only time when these men felt that their social standing was being seriously threatened was under the rather quixotic figure of Abd al-Karim Qassem and under the brief and chaotic Ba'thist rule of 1963.

Whilst it is true that at various times during the past twenty years, clans from the districts of al-Rawa, Sammarra, Mosul and al-Dur have occasionally come under suspicion and have, therefore, fallen into disfavour, leading to the arrest and execution of some of the officers connected with them, the clannish structure as a whole has proved a major beneficiary of Saddam Hussein's rule. By all accounts, this has extended as well to members of the nominally Shi'i clans of the middle and lower Euphrates and from the rural districts east of Baghdad. Consequently, it seems highly improbable that such men would make so dangerous a move as to conspire to overthrow Saddam Hussein unless they felt fairly confident that the kind of order they were aiming at would be sufficiently similar to that of the past twenty or so years as not to alarm - and to cause to resist - all the other military clans on which they might have to rely. In other words, the motivation for such men to destroy the present regime would have more to do with securing their own position of privilege than with

opening up the country to radical new possibilities in its political and socio-economic structures.

However, they too would probably consider it necessary and desirable to enter into dialogue with all the other factions of Iraqi society in the early months of the new regime. The purpose of such a dialogue, after all, would be not simply to impress upon the world community the reformed nature of power in Iraq, but also to gauge the strength and the intentions of these groupings. The crunch would come when substantial power had to be yielded up, or when one grouping or another made significant reform of the political structure of the state a condition for continuing in such a dialogue. It would be then that one would begin to see the true colour of the regime, in the kinds of alliance it would seek to make and the groups it would seek to patronise in order to outflank those whose demands it found incompatible with its own vision of power. This vision, in any detail, is impossible to predict. However, it seems fairly certain that, given the initial - and perhaps the ultimate - location of power in Iraq in the hands of the armed forces and security services, there will be an underlying concern to preserve the patrimonial system. This is the system with which they are familiar: they know how to operate it and, furthermore, it forms part of their moral universe. That is, in general, the patrimonial system accords with their self-image, with their ideas about how people should conduct themselves and about the proper and honourable way of handling public affairs. When new principles are introduced - such as in the period 1958-1963 - they can become dangerously insecure and their reaction is likely to be violent.

In fact, this will be one of the major obstacles which the third possible form of government would have to overcome. Any government which came in under the flag of some form of civilian coalition, such as the INC [Iraqi National Congress] would have had to rely upon connections and conspiracies within the officer corps. Only such an organisation of military force would have been able to carry out the coup which would allow the return of the largely exiled public opposition figures to Baghdad. On their return, the difficulties they would face would be similar to those faced by other exile groups, able to take up office only with the assistance of the real power brokers. In other words, they would be uncertain of their own bases of support and, given the legacy of the various regimes which have ruled Iraq, the methods of mobilising and capitalising upon such support as they might enjoy would not necessarily be clear or straightforward. Secondly, a coalition grouping, such as the INC, which

nominally brings together parties, factions and individuals of very diverse views and which is, in any case, unable to impose any kind of discipline on its members, would undoubtedly fall apart into its constituent elements once the task of overthrowing Saddam Hussein was achieved.

As an expression of the plurality of views in Iraqi society, this would not necessarily be a bad thing in itself. In fact, it would be a necessary process of self-definition and political argument, if Iraq were ever to achieve any kind of more open political society. The danger comes, rather, from the context in which this might be occurring. Some of the views cherished in exile - and no doubt within Iraq as well - for a better Iraq, for a country that can escape from the kinds of legacies which have made the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein possible, will have radical implications for the re-ordering not simply of the formal political, institutional structure of the country, but also of the social and economic relationships which have, in the last analysis, determined where political power should lie in Iraq. It is these implications, whether they are secular or Islamic in inspiration, which may alarm the power brokers in the army and among the sectors in society which have benefitted from and wish to see a continuation of the largely patrimonial system of reward and privilege. Equally, some of these visions and plans for the future of Iraq may be mutually exclusive. The fear of exclusion may lead one faction or another to seek an alliance with those in the armed forces or security services who are troubled by the prospect of their own exclusion from the reward system of the Iraqi state. If the country is not to lapse into the factionalism and the violence of the years following the revolution of 1958, both the army officer corps and the leaders of the various political parties and factions will have to demonstrate a good deal more self-discipline and self-restraint than they did at that time.

The implications of these various scenarios for the major internal groupings in Iraq will partly depend upon how those groupings are defined and, of course, on the part they may play in bringing about the scenarios in question. The most obvious and certainly the best defined, politically and territorially, are the Kurds. Although many Kurds remain outside the northern security zone, the length of time which that region has existed, the forms of political life taking shape within it and the generally representative nature of the Kurdish Front mean that any future government of Iraq will have to face up to a well-defined and organized Kurdish "problem". The problematic element is likely to lie in the Kurdish Front's demands for a large degree of autonomy, within clearly defined

boundaries. In the light of the Kurds' previous experiences, such demands are likely to focus not simply on the institutional and educational arrangements within Iraqi Kurdistan, but also on the economic (oil) resources and the security arrangements which would ensure the reality of any agreement on autonomy.

It is difficult to envisage any Iraqi regime which formed itself out of the remnants of the present ruling elite agreeing to measures which would place the oil wealth and the coercive control of Iraqi Kurdistan exclusively in the hands of an autonomous Kurdish leadership. It is clear from the record of the 1970s that a regime such as this might be able to grant a measure of symbolic autonomy to the Kurds, but it would rather go to war than allow the Kurds genuine political or economic autonomy. This seems to be a feature common to any regime dominated by the Arab tribes and networks of military-patrimonial rule. They might not have any ideological objection to expressions of Kurdish cultural identity, but they are highly intolerant of any attempt by the Kurdish nationalist parties to take over what they regard as properly their own functions: collecting the oil revenues of the state and monopolising the means of coercion within the state. Consequently, whilst some tactical agreement might initially be possible between the Kurdish Front and some new regime in Baghdad, a point is almost certain to be reached when the demands of the Kurdish Front will be regarded not simply as unacceptable, but also as subversive of the unitary nature of the Iraqi state. Furthermore, with the growth and reinforcement of democratic experience in Kurdistan, the room for manoeuvre of the traditional Kurdish power brokers and leaders will become narrower. A critical eye will be kept on them as they seek to do deals with the government in Baghdad and it will be hard for them to return with anything less than the full autonomy which the peoples of Kurdistan are increasingly likely to demand.

The public aspiration of the Kurdish Front is that the future government of Iraq should take the form of the third option outlined above. The hope is that some coalition, such as the INC (of which the Kurdish Front is a member and for which the Kurdish leadership has provided a base in the Kurdish zone of Iraq), should come to power in Baghdad, pledged to oversee the transformation of Iraq into a democratic, federal state. In such a framework, it is believed, the demands of the Kurds would be easily accommodated and the aspirations for real autonomy could be realised. This might well be the case. However, as has been indicated above, the problem lies not in articulating such a possible future for Iraq, but in making it come about.

The concern lies in the fact that the very nature of the federal, democratic regime demanded by the Kurdish Front to give reality and security to the autonomy of Kurdistan represents precisely the kind of radical transformation both of the formal and the informal structures of Iraqi political society that it will provoke a formidable opposition. Whilst one can imagine that such opposition will have one focus in the - overwhelmingly non-Kurdish - officer corps of the Iraqi armed forces, there may be many others who might possibly be truly alarmed by the notion of Kurdish autonomy, or who might use the fear of this to put paid to any democratic experiment in Iraq. It is in such circumstances, that the temptation to mobilise such a combination of anti-democratic and anti-Kurdish forces will be so strong - bringing with it, however, the danger of a lapse back into cycles of military intervention and clannish, conspiratorial politics.

As far as the leaders of the Kurdish Front are concerned, they are faced by a series of unenviable choices. Either they can press home their demands for full autonomy, with such single-mindedness that they provoke substantial opposition in Baghdad. Alternatively, they can back pedal on those demands, in the hope that this will not panic the new and possibly fragile coalition in Baghdad. However, this will cause them considerable difficulties in their own constituencies. Should they prove unable to influence the shape of government in Baghdad (which is highly likely), they can only take such defensive measures as have served them in the past: negotiating tactical deals with the Baghdad government in the hope of buying time and in the hope that a new and more amenable governing coalition might come to power through conspiracy; playing what part they can in such conspiracies, precisely to keep the government of Baghdad off balance, in the hope of preventing the emergence of a second Saddam Hussein; lastly, there is the appeal to outside protection, whether regional or exra-regional. Some of the implications of this latter option will be explored in the next section, but it should be obvious that, as far as the Kurdish Front is concerned, there is going to be no easy option in finding a place for Kurdistan within Iraqi politics for the foreseeable future, whatever the initial optimism that might attend the establishment of a new regime in Baghdad.

The case of the Shi'i in Iraq is quite different, although the activities and the programmes - as well as the regional connections - of some of the largely Shi'i based political organisations have a similar capacity to provoke strong reactions from considerable and still powerful sectors of Iraqi political society. Unlike the

case of the Kurds, there is no political organisation, or even coalition of organisations which could be said to represent the bulk of the Shi'i. Forming, as they do, something like fifty per cent of the population of Iraq, it is not surprising that they should themselves be divided among various organisations and tendencies, reflecting the very different histories and socio-economic experiences of the different Shi'i communities. One could, in fact, say that all the possible political tendencies are reflected among the Shi'i of Iraq and each can command some following, although under present circumstances, it would be impossible to put a figure to the size of constituency that any one of them is able to command.

Members of prominent Shi'i families have been conspicuous both among the secular liberals associated with the exile opposition movement and in the leadership of a number of the Islamic organisations calling for a radical reshaping of the political order in Iraq. The latter certainly have their adherents within Iraq itself, but most of their public activity must perforce lie outside the reach of the Iraqi regime, generally among the Iraqi exiles and former prisoners of war in Iran. At the same time, however, it should not be forgotten that there are significant numbers of Shi'i who have benefited from and who have supported the present regime of Saddam Hussein. These are the people of middle rank who have made a career within the Ba'th party during the past twenty years, or who have been able to exploit to their own advantage the economic opportunities of the patrimonial system.

There are also those members of Shi'i tribes who may feel that they have more in common with their fellow provincials, be they Sunni or Shi'i, than they do with their urban coreligionists from Najaf or Karbala. Many of these men have been the mainstay of the Iraqi army and its officer corps and, in that capacity, have often been the recipients of the same forms of patronage as those which Saddam Hussein has showered on the better known clans of the Sunni Arab northwest. These Shi'i clans may have as few illusions about Saddam Hussein as most of the Sunni tribesmen, but, like them, they are wary of alternatives. Certainly, the kinds of alternative represented either by the exiled secular liberals, or by the radical Islamicist parties, even though both may be largely Shi'i in composition, do not appear to have any natural command of their loyalties. For many, in fact, it is not simply the programmes of these organizations which makes them unattractive, but also their association with foreigners and their reliance on foreign aid, whether this comes from the West or from Iran.

As a result of this natural fragmentation of the Shi'i, it is difficult to say how the Shi'i, as a whole, would fare under the three possible forms of future government in Iraq. A regime which came out of the present dispensation and which shared many of the prejudices and personnel of the present regime would clearly find it difficult to give any ground to organisations such as SCIRI [Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq] or Al-Da'wa. The bloody history of persecution and conflict which has marked the relationship of the present regime and these organisations would not be regarded as having changed significantly. There might be amnesties and there might be some effort initially to blame the late Saddam Hussein for the persecutions, but the lack of trust and of credibility would effectively negate this. In short, there is no way in which these organisations could be reconciled with such a successor government and it is probable that, regardless of initial professions of a truce, the conflict would continue.

Because of the degree of international sensitivity, the active military campaign against alleged "agents" of these organisations in the southern marshes would be discontinued. However, despite the horrors of that campaign and the toll in human life which it has exacted, there is a large element of political theatre in the kind of the campaign initiated in the region by Saddam Hussein - a political theatre, the need for which would probably disappear with the disappearance of Saddam Hussein himself. There are other, more discreet and probably more effective ways both of the guarding against the possibility of an insurrection instigated by Al-Da'wa and of ensuring the security of the frontier with Iran.

A broadly similar logic would apply to the second possibility of a successor government formed by rival military clans to those of the present dispensation. Whether exclusively Sunni Arab, or as a coalition of Sunni and Shi'i Arab officers, such a government would be able to claim with more conviction that it had no particular quarrel with the Islamicist organisations. An amnesty and certain basic freedoms might, therefore, be granted initially. However, this would depend upon the degree to which SCIRI, Al-Da'wa or other organisations sought seriously to implement their programme of transforming the Iraqi state into an Islamic republic of some kind - or upon the degree to which it was feared in many sections of the population that this was what they were trying to do. In these circumstances, just as in the case of the Kurdish Front pressing for democracy, federalism and autonomy, the likelihood is that that new rulers of

Iraq would feel sufficiently alarmed to suppress these organisations once more. They would, no doubt, seek as wide an alliance as possible in society with all those who feared either the sectarian message of these groupings, or indeed the radical Islamicist thrust of their programme - or the suspected power of Iran at their back.

In some respects, this is the spectre which hangs over the future of these organisations, even in the third possible scenario of a government initially formed by a coalition of forces such as those which presently constitute the INC. The main Shi'i based organisations of SCIRI and Al-Da'wa are both nominally members of the INC. In this capacity, it is clear that there has been a conscious effort in both organisations - but with more conviction in Al-Da'wa than in SCIRI - to reassure their fellow Iraqi allies that they are neither anti-democratic nor agents of the Iranian government. It is certainly true that there has been some resentment of the role of Iran in both organisations, but the nature of SCIRI's support base, in particular, makes it impossible to dissociate it from Iranian patronage in some form. As for their declared intention to work within the framework of a liberal, democratic Iraq, this may be sincerely meant, or it may be a strategy of coalition building in opposition. The aim, after all, is to gather as many allies as possible, not to scare them off. Regardless of these declarations, however, a good deal of suspicion remains about the true nature of these organisations and the identity of their backers.

This may be something which it will never be possible for them to shake off. However, should some form of INC coalition government come to power, there will be a limit to the extent to which either of these parties would be able to submerge their own programmes and priorities in a coalition as varied as that of the INC. If nothing else, their own constituencies - should they be able to mobilise them openly - will begin to demand a distinctive Islamicist thrust to the policies of political organisations which have staked their claim to a distinct identity on that basis. Toning down or subordinating their programmes of radical Islamic reform to the demand for "national unity" would be to commit the very sin of secularism and of the separation of politics and religion which they have been vehemently denouncing all these years. Given the present membership of these organisations, it is quite conceivable that splits will indeed occur along these lines. However, there is also a danger that this fragmentation and the fragmentation of the former INC will be reflected in the pattern of military politics in Iraq, contributing - precisely because of the fears of radical

restructuring - to the reassertion of the control of the military clans and their various allies, all of whom might be terrified by the prospect of Islamic government and of the leverage which this would be expected to give Iran over Iraq.

In sum, the case of the Shi'i parties appears to epitomise the dangers faced by any future experiment with pluralism in Iraq. These dangers seem to be of two kinds. The first is the effect of "pluralism" on and in the military establishment. In such a context, where the capacity to use force becomes the chief criterion of political power, the risks of fragmentation and factionalism are obvious. The second is the identification of pluralism with national disunity and the meddling or intervention of foreign powers. Clearly, in a society such as that of Iraq, where fundamental differences exist about the nature and organisation of the state, providing a framework for the expression of a multiplicity of conflicting opinions, backed by distinct and sometimes powerful social constituencies, has grave risks. If anything, the experiences of Iraqis during the past twenty five years, will have heightened these risks.

4. Implications for Iraq's Neighbours

Both of the above concerns must rank high among the fears of Iraq's neighbours when contemplating its future government. In the first place, the continued pre-eminence of military officers as power brokers in Iraqi politics suggests that the kinds of divisions, insecurities and fears which permeate Iraqi political society are such as to oblige people to mobilise the means of violence to protect themselves or to advance their cause. In such circumstances, there will be a perennial danger that Iraq's neighbours will be drawn into the fray in some form. Secondly, the forms of some of Iraq's most fundamental political cleavages are such that there is often an assumed identity of purpose between domestic and regional enemies. Not only does this delegitimise opposition movements and sanction their violent repression, but it also sharpens relations between the Iraqi government and those of most of Iraq's neighbours. Where these relations are already tense for other reasons - to do with frontier demarcations, economic relationships, oil production disputes or water allocation fears - the impact of such fears can be explosive.

Interestingly, these fears have remained remarkably constant for most of the recent history of the state. A common theme has been the sensed vulnerability of Iraqi political society to the machinations of Iraq's regional neighbours,

working through groups in Iraqi society which are taken to be disaffected with the existing dispensation of power. The opportunism of their imagined relentless hostility to the existing political order is presumed to combine with the malign intentions of international forces, facing Iraqi governments in each decade with coalitions of internal and external enemies. Regardless of whether this has actually been the case, it has been the chief way in which domestic political opposition has been portrayed by the government of the day. This has either been part of a conscious strategy to discredit domestic opposition forces, or because it faithfully reflects the way in which the Iraqi government and those who rely upon it tend to regard the rest of Iraqi society and the world beyond the borders of Iraq. Nor are such deep rooted - and historically well-founded - suspicions likely to dissipate with the passing of the present regime.

All the rulers of the state have had to face two central questions concerning the very existence of Iraq. These tend to emerge sharply in the public debate or the public discourse of the regime, whenever a crisis looms in domestic, as in regional politics. The two questions are part of Iraq's historical-political legacy, as well as of its geopolitical situation. In the first place, there is the realisation that the state of Iraq was created by British imperial design, prior to any sense of an Iraqi national community. The second feature is a result of Iraq's status as a "frontier state" in which larger identities - Arab to the West and South, Shi'i Muslim to the East and Kurdish to the North - have other centres of gravity and may pull the communities within the state apart. This fear of social and political disintegration may well have contributed to the notorious violence of Iraqi political conflict. The present regime may have developed this aspect to a new degree of intensity, but Iraqi political history has always been dogged by violence born of insecurity - an insecurity, the roots of which lie in the belief that the very future of the state may be at stake in any given political dispute.

At the same time, in addition to these "subjective" security fears, there are a number of what might be called "situational" or "objective" security concerns, stemming from Iraq's geographical situation. Regardless of the regime in power in Iraq, one glance at the map will make it clear that Iraq is heavily dependent upon the goodwill of its neighbours for its economic and strategic security. It is a virtually landlocked state, and its only access to the sea, at the head of the Persian Gulf, depends upon the cooperation of Iran, on one side, and of Kuwait on the other. In addition, the two great rivers which run through Iraq, the Tigris and the Euphrates, and which lie at the heart of the successive civilizations of

Mesopotamia, have their origins outside the borders of the state in Turkey and Iran, respectively. Furthermore, Iraq's enormous natural wealth of oil is only realisable if it can be exported from the country. In order to do so in substantial quantities, it must pass either through the sole Iraqi sea outlet at al-Faw, or through pipelines across the neighbouring states of Turkey, Syria or Saudi Arabia.

Thus, crucial psycho-social insecurities feed into what might be called the "situational" or objective insecurities which derive from more conventional concerns regarding the vulnerability of the state's resources to regional disruption or exploitation. It seems quite probable that these will continue to shape the policies of successive Iraqi governments. The more clannish and authoritarian the government - as in either of the first two possible forms of future government in Iraq - the sharper will be these fears, precisely because of the gradual alienation of a number of the significant communities in Iraq. However, even in the more optimistic scenario of a relatively open, pluralist system, the fear must remain that such insecurities may act as the catalyst for its overthrow by military men with a more restrictive notion of security.

As long as Iraq is governed by authoritarian regimes, relying on a mixture of force and bribery, as well as on networks of the *Ahl al-Thiqa* [people implicitly trusted by the rulers, usually, but not exclusively on account of their common origins], then the insecurities outlined above - that is, the fears of the potential disintegration of the state due to social disaffection - will be amplified among the rulers at any given moment. This is all the more likely to take the specific form visible at present, but long festering in Iraqi politics, as long as the dominant ruling network continues to come almost exclusively from clans of the Sunni Arab minority. Fear of the unknown networks, impulses and ambitions among other sectors of the population will clearly exaggerate or lend a certain sharpness to the suspicion that they may form a conduit for regional hostility.

There can be little doubt that, whatever Iraqis feel about their government, the events of the past ten years have tended to sharpen their fears about the regional threats to their security. Firstly, there was the war with Iran of 1980-88 which also witnessed an anti-Iraq alliance between Iran and Syria. Secondly, there was the rising tension with the Gulf oil producers and Iraq's major creditors, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, which resulted in Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. This, in turn, produced the international and regional alliance which unleashed

operation Desert Storm and drove Iraq from Kuwait. Thirdly, these events sparked the Kurdish and the Shi'i rebellions, resulting eventually in the loss by Baghdad of control over much of the north of the country. Meanwhile, for the past three years or so, Iraq has been under a strict UN sanctions regime, as well as having been subjected to an enforced disarmament programme. Lastly, there were the air and missile attacks of January and of June 1993, carried out by the United States, with assistance from some of its allies in the former instance. The civilian casualties which resulted from both of these raids can only have served to heighten the general sense of vulnerability of many Iraqis and may have assisted the Iraqi government in some measure. Even with the passing of this government, the experiences of these years, whatever blame may be assigned to Saddam Hussein by his successors, will have left a legacy, both in the objective situation of Iraq and in the attitudes of many Iraqis towards the region.

As far as the objective situation is concerned, borders will have been re-drawn in favour of Iraq's regional enemies. In the case of Iran, the Iraqi government - once more under the great pressure of regional events - conceded in August 1990 that it would recognize again the border settlements of the 1975 Algiers Agreement. Consequently, the attitude of future Iraqi governments to the Algiers Agreement - as an unjust settlement forced upon a vulnerable Iraq - is unlikely to change. In addition, the territorial concessions involved have been portrayed by Saddam Hussein (when he thought he was in a position to reverse them) as a shameful infringement of Iraqi sovereignty. They have thus made themselves known to an Iraqi public which had probably hitherto been relatively oblivious to them. To have been obliged, under duress to cede territory once again to Iran is not a stable foundation for future relations. The probability is that this will simply have reinforced the tendency in Iraq to link regional and international enmity with designs on Iraq's geostrategic security.

Much the same must apply with regard to the UN decision on the demarcation of the Iraqi border with Kuwait. It was inevitable that this border should have received particular attention in the aftermath of the Gulf war. The result of the UN commission's findings was to redraw Iraq's de facto southern frontier wholly in Kuwait's favour. For roughly the 200 kilometres of the Iraqi-Kuwait border, the frontier line was shifted northward by 600 metres in Kuwait's favour. This meant not simply that Iraq lost six of the oil wells in the disputed Rumaila oil-field, but, more seriously for Iraq, that it had to give up a substantial portion of the naval base it had constructed during the previous decade at Umm Qasr.

At a stroke, therefore, the UN had inflamed two sensitive nerves in Iraq. Quite apart from the general humiliation of the settlement, Iraq had been weakened in an economic sense by losing oil fields and in a strategic sense by having its access to the waters of the Gulf further restricted. The sensitivity of the issue was visible not simply in the furious Iraqi government reaction to the UN findings, which was to be expected, but also by the initial protest of the Iraqi opposition at the terms of this settlement. Once again, the question must arise of the effect of this on general Iraqi perceptions of its neighbours, whatever government comes to power in Iraq.

Another consequence of recent developments which clearly places most Iraqis in the same situation is Iraq's economic situation. Iraqis in general have to cope with the consequences both of the international trade embargo which remains in force, as well as, in the longer term, the massive Iraqi debt, accumulated during the years of war with Iran and augmented by the reparations bill associated with that war and with the invasion of Kuwait. For the Iraqis, their plight will undoubtedly be seen as part of general enmity against Iraq, particularly as the circumstances of the institution of the sanctions begin to recede into the past. This resentment could only be dissipated in the future, if mitigating arrangements for the debt and reparations can be negotiated with an Iraqi successor to Saddam Hussein. If Iraq's neighbours are concerned that this resentment should not have a regional focus, they will clearly have to play a prominent role in providing financial assistance to the new government. This would apply particularly to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Despite their own relative financial problems, the governments of these two countries will have to attend to this aspect of post-Saddam Iraq, if they are ever to weaken their association in the minds of many Iraqis with the events which led to the destitution of Iraq.

It is not difficult to believe that the shared adversity of most of the inhabitants of Iraq will have left its mark on the collective imagination of Iraqis. The memory of war with Iran in which perhaps 120,000 Iraqis lost their lives and the memory of the widespread destruction and hardship caused by the military operations of Desert Storm, in which most of Iraq's regional neighbours participated directly or indirectly, are not going to fade quickly. They will tend to colour the images of the destructive power which lurks in the region, reinforcing the sense of peril and insecurity on which authoritarian Iraqi governments have relied so successfully to achieve their own leadership ambitions.

This is, in sum, the troubling legacy of the past fifteen years, overlaid on an already **heigh**tened sense of insecurity. It is not that Saddam Hussein has created a new set **of** security fears - rather, that the very violence and disruption of Iraq under his leadership has provoked the hostility of precisely the forces which were wary of Iraq in the first place. In doing so, however, the impression may well have been created that these forces were hostile to Iraq all along and had simply been looking for an excuse to mount an attack on Iraq's national interests and there is reason to suppose that this is regarded as a plausible version of events within Iraq.

In response to this legacy, with which any future government of Iraq will have to deal, a number of strategies are conceivable, although certain forms of government might find it easier to pursue some than to pursue others. Specifically, in the context of this paper, it is worth thinking about the possibility that the kinds of fears outlined above, combined with particular reasons for dispute with a neighbour, might lead to armed conflict. This involves, firstly, seeking to gain an impression of the utility of force in the eyes of the imaginable governments of Iraq. Secondly, insofar as the management of disputes is concerned, it is worth thinking about the degree to which any Iraqi government might be expected to be willing - or to be permitted - to join some form of collective or regional organisation for the settlement of disputes.

In connection with the first question, it has always been noticeable that, until the attack on Iran in 1980, successive Iraqi governments had been extremely cautious and sparing in their use of the armed forces of the state beyond its borders. Instead, the history of the Iraqi armed forces has largely been one of suppressing rebellion and maintaining internal order. The change came about in large measure **because** of the changed circumstances of Iraq itself and its neighbour. These **presented** the government of Iraq with both the means to build up the armed **forces of the** state on the basis of Iraq's vast oil revenues, and the perceived opportunity - perhaps even the need - to curb the power of the new Iranian regime. The invasion and occupation of Kuwait in 1990 was itself an indirect product of the eight year war with Iran - a move which reflected both the desperation of those years and the military might which Iraq had accumulated. Of course, the decision to use war as the instrument of opportunity was one taken by the particular regime of Saddam Hussein, on the basis of specific (if sometimes obscure) calculations of threat and advantage.

For any future government of Iraq, even one that comes out of the circles of clansmen and kinsmen who constitute the present regime, the disastrous results of those decisions will be all too clear. Indeed, their corrosive effects on the hierarchies of privilege within Iraq will have probably been the catalyst which brings about the decisive coup. Such considerations will almost certainly rule out the regional use of force in the way it has been used by Saddam Hussein. This does not mean, however, that Iraq's military potential will be neglected. On the contrary, in a government which is installed and/or run by the military clans of the Iraqi officer corps, any decision to downgrade the armed forces would be a difficult one to take. Precisely because of the many other claims there will be on the state's resources in the period of economic recuperation and reconstruction which would be certain to follow the demise of Saddam Hussein, the share to be allocated to the armed forces would be a subject of controversy. It is almost certain that this controversy would be heightened by the fact that for every Iraqi who might think that it was the exaggerated belief in the capacity of the armed forces which had been responsible for the mess the country is now in, there would be several who would believe that the crises of the past fifteen years had re-emphasised Iraq's need for a powerful military establishment.

The impulse to continue enhancing the capacity of the armed forces of Iraq would, therefore, be a strong one, regardless of which government were to come to power. However, it is probably safe to say that all of the three possible future regimes suggested in this paper would avoid committing those armed forces in any foreign adventure, if they could possibly help it. The old caution, born of the knowledge of the potential vulnerability of the state, seems likely to reassert itself. Caution does not necessarily imply conciliation, however. There may be any number of means of pursuing one's regional enemies. The preceding pages have indicated that a number of difficult issues are going to characterise Iraq's relations with most of its neighbours for some time to come. Some of these issues can be negotiated or "frozen". Where it is not possible for an Iraqi government to take such a low-key stance, military posturing, political subversion and cross-border infiltration may be tactics used to respond to what the Iraqi government may regard as a threat in kind.

As far as the second question - that of conflict management - is concerned, it seems highly unlikely that any Iraqi government would be willing to allow others to dictate its security policy and requirements. In this, of course, the Iraqi government has much in common with most of its neighbours, undermining

the idea of collective regional security organisations with or without Iraq, whatever outward forms are adopted. However, more specifically, too much has passed between Iraq and its neighbours during the past twenty or so years for any trust to exist that, in a collective security arrangement, the other parties would have the security of Iraq or of the Iraqi regime at heart. Even without such a wounding string of experiences and the mistrust it has helped to foster, the nature of Iraq's security concerns are such (as outlined above) that it would be extraordinarily difficult for an Iraqi government to surrender any power of decision or arbitration to an organisation which it did not itself dominate in some form. This remains true of any of the foreseeable governments of a post-Saddam Hussein Iraq.

For all of them, conflict avoidance would seem to be the key strategy, but in such a way regionally - as in domestic politics - that nothing is given away which would permanently alter the balance of power. The ability to avoid conflict will depend in part upon the condition of the regime in Iraq. In this connection, it is perhaps worrisome that there were probably many in the upper echelons of the Iraqi political and military establishments, who shared most of Saddam Hussein's illusions in 1980 and in 1990, before they were so rudely shattered. However, these illusions were also in part fostered by the behaviour of the governments of Iran and Kuwait, respectively, and by the condition of the region. These factors will also be influential in persuading or dissuading a future Iraqi government from pursuing its aims by overt military force. Only by examining the possible futures, therefore, of Iraq's neighbours will one be able to make an estimate of the balance of threat and opportunity which they might represent for the Iraqi government of the day - possibly persuading yet another leader in Iraq to decide, as in 1980 and 1990, that the potential advantages of initiating conflict far outweighed the possible risks of doing so.

5. Conclusions

In such a hypothetical paper, it may seem presumptuous in the extreme to arrive at any conclusions. Nevertheless, it should be clear by now that although the preceding pages have been pessimistic about the possibility of non-coercive politics within Iraq, there are grounds for believing that this may not be translated into Iraqi military aggression within the region. There are certainly a fair number of issues which will continue to trouble Iraq's relations with a variety of its neighbours, and some of these will have greater salience and "bite" within Iraqi politics than others. Nevertheless, regardless of the *revanchisme*

which may be simmering within the present regime, its successor, however, strongly it may feel about the issues concerned, will have the memory of the past fifteen years weighing down upon any calculation of the utility of military force in achieving Iraq's regional objectives.

The reliance upon coercion as the ultimate arbiter of politics within Iraq is in part a product of the peculiar history and development of Iraqi political society. It is also, in some measure, a testimony to the depth of the divisions which may exist on some of the fundamental questions facing the Iraqi state and the political community it is supposed - but does not in practice - represent. However, the fact that it has been used so frequently and openly, and has been, in one form or another, a crucial pillar of every Iraqi government since the foundation of the state, should not obscure the fact that the practice is taking place within a moral universe which is complaisant about its use, at the very least.

This is not due to some intrinsic love of violence (although, clearly, it has provided some individuals with the opportunities to act out their disturbing fantasies). Rather it is due to the fact that virtually every regime in Iraq, regardless of its ideological colouration, has been founded on forms of structured inequality within the society. These maintain the networks of patronage, which are sometimes beneficent, sometimes harsh in their effect upon the wider society. Consequently, the violence underlying the system may not need to be made manifest. This will depend upon the effectiveness of the informal networks and upon the degree to which the very existence of such networks is accepted as being the norm. In the last analysis, however, the people who benefit most from this system require force to maintain themselves and their privileges, either in the face of specific "take-over" bids by other, similar aspirants to the resources of the state, or by those who are advocating the wholesale dismantling of the very system of unequal patronage.

It is perfectly possible to imagine that there are large numbers of Iraqis who want to see an end to such a system, but it also seems that there is a significant number who do not. The problem facing the former at the moment is that the latter are well entrenched in the structures of power within Iraq. Indeed, they could be said to define those structures of power through their innumerable networks, clientelist groupings and access to resources. For the most part, these are not the die-hard supporters of any specific leader or regime. However, having formed the social foundations of power for successive leaders of the Iraqi state, they

constitute the kinds of people whom any successful opposition movement must win over, if the personnel of the regime are to be eliminated. If successful, the debt owed to them and the part they will continue to play in the dispensation of power, would make it extraordinarily difficult for any new regime to uproot or to make irrelevant the system they have made so effective.

The implications of the durability of such a system of authoritarian, patrimonial power for Iraq's neighbours are not necessarily alarming. A number of them, after all, operate similar systems. The impulses are not, therefore, wholly alien to them and there are grounds for believing that, whilst they may irk each other at times, they are aware of how to manage their disputes well short of open warfare. Equally, the memory of the consequences of war, as experienced during the past fifteen years, will continue to act as a deterrent within Iraq to its initiation. This consideration may not soften the memory of how Iraq's neighbours have treated it, or the continuing affront of some of the penalties imposed on Iraq, but it seems almost certain to limit the range of instruments through which a future Iraqi government might seek to efface those memories and eliminate those affronts.

Nevertheless, much the same might have been said of the government of Saddam Hussein prior to his decision to invade Iran in 1980. Crucially, of course, there was no significant memory of destructive war in Iraq to deter him from initiating so blithely a war with a neighbouring state. However, even with that proviso, the ways in which the structures of authoritarian government in Iraq contributed to the decisions of 1980 and 1990 should alert one to some of the dangers for the future, even if - fortunately - it cannot be assumed that all the other contributory circumstances will come together in similar fashion. The clannish concentration of power in the hands of a few like-minded people from very similar - and generally quite circumscribed - backgrounds may have peculiarly distorting effects on their perception of the world and the region. This will largely depend upon the people concerned and, until they are identified, it makes little sense to generalise about their perspectives. Clearly, however, something about the confidence and myopia of a ruthlessly successful oligarchy in Iraq contributed to Saddam Hussein's massive miscalculations in 1980 and in 1990/91.

Even without such dire consequences, it seems certain that the longer these forms of power exist in Iraq, the harder it will be to incorporate it into any

meaningful framework for collective or regional security. Iraq is not alone in the region in displaying this particular feature of its politics. In the absence of any agreed domestic consensus on the nature of the order or of the community whose interests are to be secured, the chances of participating seriously - rather than simply cosmetically - in a regional security organisation are slight. The very fundamentals of agreement would be missing. Complicating things further would be the enduring suspicion that Iraq's partners might be trying in some way to secure their own interests at the expense of Iraq. Again, the absence of such an organisation does not mean necessarily that conflict will ensue. Nevertheless, it does mean that efforts at conflict management may not easily be pre-emptive and may have to be the result of ad hoc and sometimes risky decisions.

There is a widespread hope that more open forms of government would dilute all of these elements - elements which in combination with regional circumstances made Saddam Hussein's regime so dangerous. The fear is that, given the structures of Iraqi political society and the recent experiences of the Iraqis, those who tried to organise such forms of government would not be allowed the opportunity to do so. Alternatively, they might begin to do so, but might discover - as far too many of their predecessors in Iraqi history have done - that there exist too many determined and well-placed enemies of democracy in Iraq for them to succeed. In such circumstances, the most that could be hoped for, as far as regional security is concerned, would be a relatively benevolent patrimonial regime, turned in upon the material reconstruction of Iraq and eschewing the kinds of regional adventures which had so damaged the country during the past few decades. This might not be much of a consolation for those within the country who wanted to see a radically transformed Iraq, but it would no doubt be readily accepted by those regional states which are looking, above all, for an Iraq that possesses neither the will nor the capacity seriously to disrupt the region.