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**UNDERSTANDING IRAQ'S SHI'IS:
EVOLVING MISPERCEPTIONS WITHIN THE U.S.
GOVERNMENT FROM THE 1970s TO THE PRESENT**

by

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June 2005

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THE 1970s TO THE PRESENT**

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This thesis explores shifting perceptions within the U.S. government regarding Iraq's Shi'i majority, and their impact on the decision to remove Saddam, and on current U.S. endeavors in post-war Iraq. It explains how perceptions of Shi'is as a radical, monolithic, anti-American sect, were formulated during the late 1970s and 80s, as the U.S. government assumed a dominant role in the Middle East following Britain's withdrawal. During that time, Shi'is were viewed as a significant threat to U.S. regional interests, and for over 20 years U.S. policy had sought to contain them. These perceptions changed dramatically prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom, in a manner that seemed to support U.S. objectives for a post-Saddam Iraq. The Bush administration now believed that Iraq's Shi'is were unified, supportive of a long-term alliance with the U.S. government, and amenable to an imposed secular democracy that would be friendly with the West. In the aftermath of the war, such misperceptions are becoming increasingly obvious. This thesis will identify and correct these errors, and will explain how these shifts in viewpoint occurred. Furthermore, the importance of understanding Iraq's Shi'is will be underscored by positing that the Shi'i are an essential element to any viable, long term solution for post-war Iraq.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BIA	Beirut International Airport
CENTCOM	U.S. Army Central Command (Tampa, Fl)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DOD	Department of Defense
DOS	Department of State
GCC	Gulf Cooperative Council (States)
GWOT	Global War on Terror
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Association
INC	Iraqi National Congress
LAF	Lebanese Armed Forces
LF	Lebanese Forces (Christian Militias)
MNF	Multinational Force
NCA	National Command Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPT	Non-Proliferation Treaty
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
OIF	Operation Iraqi Freedom
ORHA	Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
PNAC	Project for the New American Century
RFF	Requests for Forces
SAIRI	Supreme Assembly for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq
SCIRI	Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq
TPFDD	Time-Phased Force Deployment Data
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. CENTRAL THEMES

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the decision to invade Iraq and remove Saddam Hussein from power was based on many factors, which were primarily focused on strategic significance and operational feasibility. Remarkably, the Bush administration began the march to war with incomplete information in both of these areas. Given the lack of solid data, many questionable assumptions drove the administration's decisions. With respect to feasibility, perhaps the most questionable assumptions revolved around Iraq's majority Shi'i population. The administration's conventional wisdom suggested that the Shi'is would unanimously support a long-term alliance with the U.S. government and would embrace a secular, democratic form of governance. The administration also assumed a Shi'i-dominated government would be friendly to the West, and would serve as a "beacon of democracy" to other Middle Eastern states struggling with reform. Surprisingly, these assumptions appear to have differed sharply from those held within the U.S. government just a decade prior.

Through most of the 1980s and indeed into the early 1990s, the U.S. government held markedly different view of Shi'is—it considered them radical, revolutionary, and decidedly anti-Western. As a result, for over 20 years the U.S. government set about containing the perceived Shi'i threat. This was evident by U.S. policies toward Shi'is in the aftermath of Desert Storm, and the new "dual containment" strategies implemented in May of 1993. While focus shifted increasingly toward Sunni-based terrorism in the 1990s, and particularly toward al-Qaeda, what caused perceptions toward Shi'is to shift so drastically within the U.S. government?¹ How did the U.S. government stop viewing Shi'is as a radical band of militant Islamists dedicated to exporting the revolution in Iran worldwide, and start seeing in Iraq a monolithic community of democracy-hungry, pro-Western supporters? How did this shift occur in less than a decade?

¹ Perception – used to represent both the degree of "understanding" within the U.S. government, as well as referring to the "spin" placed on information to accommodate the political and strategic context of a given point in time.

This thesis seeks to answer these questions, tracing the twisted genealogy of the U.S. government's ideas about Shi'is, and focusing on how and why these perceptions changed. For the most part, perceptions within the U.S. government toward Shi'is have been largely incorrect, leading, among other things, to a post-war environment in Iraq that is far different from what the U.S. government expected. It is an environment now littered with tremendous obstacles, costly setbacks, and uncertain outcomes. Now, as the U.S. government relies increasingly upon the Shi'i to restore order and bring stability to post-war Iraq, it is essential that this "community" is adequately understood. This thesis presents a more historically accurate view of the Shi'i, and thus aids in a greater understanding of Iraq's Shi'is and their historical relationship to the U.S. government and its policies.

Neither Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) nor Desert Storm represented America's first exposure to Shi'ism. In the 1970's the U.S. government inherited significant strategic challenges in the Middle East as a result of Britain's withdrawal. It also inherited many British perceptions, themselves created through decades of experience in the region. As the U.S. government became increasingly involved in Middle Eastern affairs, the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and U.S. involvement in Lebanon in the early 1980s further shaped its early perceptions of Shi'is as radical, revolutionary, and anti-western.

However, as the U.S. government prepared to invade Iraq in 2002, these perceptions shifted dramatically to accommodate its visions for a post-war Iraq. The strategic dilemma of terrorism combined with the attacks of September 11, created a revised paradigm that manipulated the way information was both received and processed. The result were decision-making and planning processes that became selective, prioritizing information that supported the objectives of the U.S. government in Iraq, such as the anticipated Shi'i reaction, while discrediting and ignoring information that did not. This environment facilitated the development of a series of erroneous underlying assumptions by the administration about Iraq's Shi'i majority, assumptions that became increasingly vital to the success of the war plan as it evolved.

The remainder of this chapter provides a necessary context for linking perceptions and common understandings of the Shi'is to U.S. foreign policy. This relationship is established by summarizing the strategic framework that governed the decision to invade Iraq. After September 11, the administration felt compelled to take preemptive action in the Middle East. It is therefore important to understand the perceived necessity for “success” in Iraq within the overall strategic context. Altered perceptions of Iraq’s Shi’is prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom were a decisive factor in that foreign policy decision.

B. THE STRATEGIC DILEMMA

The U.S. government inherited its security role in the Gulf following Britain’s withdrawal from the region in 1971. Initially, this role was managed by leveraging the capabilities of regional allies to assure stability, and introducing military force only in those cases when this was not enough. In the 1970s the U.S. government relied on the “twin pillars” of Saudi Arabia and Iran to achieve these goals. However, in 1979 the Islamic revolution in Iran led to a major shift in this policy. Containment of radical Iran became the priority, and the U.S. government found a useful ally in Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. In August of 1990, this policy came to an abrupt end with Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, and the subsequent military response from the U.S. government, which led a coalition against Iraq. Through the 1990s U.S. policy attempted to maintain a careful balancing act between “dual containment” with respect to Iran and Iraq, and shaky regional alliances, such as the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC). For many U.S. policymakers, the events of September 11 indicated the failure of these previous policies of containment and regional alliances.² New threats had emerged. They were threats that had a solid ideological and social foundation—decades of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, such as U.S. support for Israel and the Saudi regime, as well as the socioeconomic malaise that spread across the region and stalled growth.³ These events also suggested that limited forward deployed U.S. forces, which had increased throughout the 1990s, could not contain emerging terrorist threats.

² From a “neoconservative” perspective, which will be further discussed in this thesis.

³ Nader Fergany et al., *The Arab Human Development Report 2002: Creating Opportunities for Future Generations* (New York: UNDP, Regional Bureau for Arab States, 2002), 6,41-50.

The U.S. government's strategic interests in the region are twofold: oil and the nonproliferation of WMD. Though the United States relies on the Middle East for less than 25% of its oil needed to meet its demand, oil from the region still forms a crucial and irreplaceable part of its energy equation.⁴ More importantly, the U.S. economy is inextricably tied to that of the globalizing nations of the world; shocks to any part of this integrated economy resonate throughout the whole. Unstable oil prices thus create enormous instability throughout the world economy, and with projected demands for oil rising exponentially, this region will remain a principal strategic interest for the foreseeable future.⁵ In the late 1980s and 1990s, the U.S. government also made the nonproliferation of WMD a strategic interest.⁶ The acquisition of such capabilities by regimes intent upon using them as instruments of coercion is an obvious threat to U.S. interests. In addition, the threat of WMD complicates the increasing forward presence of the U.S. military within the region by expanding the threat environment in which these forces operate. This threat in turn could weaken or impede the ability of U.S. forces to respond effectively to regional aggression or instability.⁷

The U.S. government's previous containment strategy for Iraq emphasized three components: economic sanctions; forced disarmament of alleged WMD programs and stockpiles (to include subsequent inspections); and "no-fly" zones. The decision to remove Saddam Hussein can be attributed to the failure of this policy, the events of September 11, as well as the successful removal of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which became a model for strategy vis-à-vis Iraq. The rising neo-conservative component of the Bush administration also developed a fourth justification.⁸ If Saddam's regime could be replaced by a thriving secular democracy friendly to the West, then perhaps Iraq could serve as a model for successful reform throughout the region.

⁴ International Energy Outlook 2004, www.eia.doe.gov/oiaf/ieo, 11 Oct, 2004.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, September 2002.

⁷ Andrew Rathmell, Theodore Karasik, and David Gompert, *A New Persian Gulf Security System* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2003), 4-8.

⁸ Faleh A. Jabar, *The Shi'ite Movement in Iraq*, (London: Saqi Books, 2003), 16-17.

The neo-conservatives are an increasingly powerful faction within the administration influenced by the works of Samuel Huntington and Bernard Lewis in viewing conflict in the post-Cold War era as a “Clash of Civilizations.”⁹ They also believe that future policy should advocate an aggressive unilateralist approach to assure, by whatever means necessary, continued U.S. hegemony by countering alliances that could threaten it. One of the leaders of this group is Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, who in May of 1990 briefed President George Bush Sr. on such an approach. While Wolfowitz’ ideas were initially received with much enthusiasm, they were largely dismissed during the Clinton administration which instead advocated multilateral engagement, akin to Powell’s strategy.¹⁰ However, in 2000, the “neocons” were catapulted to power with the election of George W. Bush, and they currently hold influential positions within the administration, especially the Department of Defense.

September 11 strengthened the neoconservative position. The question of regime change in Afghanistan became a relatively easy sell domestically. In the following months, public support for the President and the Secretary of Defense rose to unprecedented levels (87% and 82%, respectively). An emboldened administration began a dramatic shift in foreign policy. Although regime change in secular Iraq would prove to be a more challenging case to make to the American public, the idea progressed under the justification of removing state-sponsored terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. As the U.S. government struggled to respond to the events of September 11, an alternative strategy began to appear, one that could potentially replace the Saudi support for Wahabbis, now viewed by many administration officials as an association irredeemably infected with a dangerous Islamism, similar to that which fueled the Afghanistan jihad.¹¹ As Professor Juan Cole, head of the Middle East Studies Association at the University of Michigan, described it:

⁹ Samuel P. Huntington, “A Clash of Civilizations,” *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, v72, n3.

¹⁰ Nicholas Lemann, “The Next World Order,” *The New Yorker*, 01 April 2002, 2-3. Wolfowitz’s brief was so well received that Colin Powell’s scheduled brief for an alternative option was postponed.

¹¹ Jihad – Religious struggle. The term can be used to reflect internal conflicts or tests of faith, or external contests with the enemies of Islam.

In response to this challenge (September 11) the Bush administration saw the possibility of creating a new pillar for U.S. policy in the region: a post-Ba'athist Iraq, dominated by Iraqi Shi'is, which would spark a wave of democratization across the Middle East.¹²

This perspective has been promulgated by Ahmad Chalabi and throughout the Pentagon, the office of the Vice-President, and the National Security Council, as well as by members of Congress who envision a secular and democratic Iraq.¹³

This scenario, however, has been constructed upon a series of erroneous assumptions and misperceptions, many of which relate to Iraq's Shi'i majority. The U.S. government based the feasibility of the regime removal option on three principal assumptions about Iraqi Shi'i.¹⁴ First, the administration believed the Shi'i represented a tightly-knit, monolithic community, unified toward common social and political reforms.¹⁵ Second, it thought the Shi'i would welcome and support a long-term alliance with the U.S. government¹⁶ Third, the administration assumed a U.S.-imposed, secular democracy would succeed and endure in Iraq.¹⁷

These misperceptions were instrumental in shaping views within the United States, both within the administration and in the public at large, regarding the feasibility and expense of the "liberation" of Iraq. After the war, the implications of these erroneous assumptions have come to light, resulting in tremendous setbacks on the ground in terms of shaping reform and rebuilding Iraq. The ramifications for the administration and our policy makers are important as they attempt to understand and reverse these costly mistakes. To complicate the issue, withdrawal is not an option, since there is no other power to fill the vacuum created by a U.S. departure. A U.S. withdrawal from the region would undermine regional stability and weaken U.S. national interests.

¹²Juan Cole, "On the history of America's would be allies." Available from <http://www.juancole.com>, 1. Accessed Sept, 2004.

¹³ Jabar, 16-17.

¹⁴ Cole, 4-5.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

This thesis will explain how the U.S. government's perceptions of Shi'is were formulated and how they shifted to accommodate its visions for a post-war Iraq. Chapter II analyzes the origins of U.S. perceptions toward Shi'i Islam. It explains how early perceptions were inherited from the British, and were later solidified through the U.S. government's experiences in Iran and Lebanon. Chapter III explains how the U.S. government transitioned from viewing Shi'is as a significant threat to considering them potential allies. It discusses the impact of September 11 on the decision-making and planning processes which created an environment that tended to prioritize information based on how well it supported the evolving war plan. Perceptions of Shi'is that supported this plan were no longer viewed objectively under scrutiny, and became part of the foundation that its success was contingent upon. Chapter IV offers a revised view of Shi'is in Iraq that conflicts with U.S. perspectives at the start of OIF. It challenges the notions of the Shi'is as monolithic and the appeal of a long-term alliance with the U.S., under an imposed secular democracy. It will summarize the history of Iraq's Shi'is, and will demonstrate that a careful analysis of this history over the past three decades would have disabused many of the misperceptions held by the U.S. administration. Finally, the conclusion reinforces the importance of cultural, historical, and ideological knowledge of Iraq's people, of which accurate assessments cannot be taken lightly. It asserts that these factors can create their own realities "on the ground," realities with which U.S. policy must come to terms. The U.S. government cannot impose a "solution" that is not desired by the Shi'is, or the Iraqi people. It will conclude by positing that only through greater understanding and cooperation with the Shi'is can U.S. goals and objectives be realized in Iraq.

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II. FIRST IMPRESSIONS

A. WESTERN ORIENTALISM

This chapter explores the origins of initial U.S. perspectives regarding the Shi'i. It will explain how these perceptions were inherited from the British in the 1970s, and were later shaped by the U.S. government's experiences in Iran and Lebanon. The end results were lingering perceptions that promulgated throughout the United States from the 1980s through most of the 1990s, of Shi'is as a monolithic, radical, anti-western movement.

Western perspectives toward Arab culture have often been influenced by "Orientalism" which manifests itself in literature, film, and other forms of popular culture, such as *Arabian Nights*, *North American Review*, and *Mahomet and His Successors* as examples. In Orientalist frameworks, the Arab is often portrayed as the double-dealing, sword-wielding miscreant, while the hero, perhaps while even being portrayed as "Arabic," exhibits Western cultural norms. Michael Hunt argues that Anglo-Saxon racism and Social Darwinism have become fused in the American mind. In other words, Americans believe the "civilized" powers—the United States and Western Europe—are somehow in control of or responsible for, lesser races in a descending social ladder of underdeveloped and even primitive cultures.¹⁸ Edward Said suggests that this perspective has often rationalized the imperial ambitions of "superior" civilizations at the expense of the "inferior." British Orientalists juxtaposed Ottoman despotism, Islamic obscurantism, and Arab racial inferiority to create an image of an inferior, backward civilization in desperate need of Western tutelage and modernity.¹⁹

Western perceptions of Islam are also laden with radical, revolutionary, and anti-American overtones, particularly when the media refers to "fundamentalism," "Islamic terror," and "jihad." Shi'is have often been further stereotyped as a revolutionary

¹⁸ Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina, 2002), 10.

¹⁹ Ibid.

minority within the Islamic faith, both within the Arab world as well as abroad.²⁰ Shi'i theology professes a different perspective than Sunni Islam on the development of authority within the faith. It holds that all true Muslims are equal before the eyes of God, and that mortal man has no legitimate authority over other men. Over the centuries, this has often been a source of concern for ruling classes, whose authority was apparently threatened by the Shi'i *imams*.²¹ In addition, despite these strongly-held beliefs, throughout history Shi'is have at many times been a subjugated minority. In order not to defy the will of God, the doctrine of *taqiyya*, or religious dissimulation, enabled Shi'is to endure such periods without a declaration of jihad. At times, this required a denial or concealment of their true faith.²² Such defensive measures, in turn, made Shi'is appear to be deceptive to other Muslims.

In addition to these stereotypes, the U.S. government's views toward Shi'is were also shaped through a series of significant events. As the U.S. government inherited the Western imperial mandate following Britain's withdrawal from the Middle East in the 1970s, the legacy of British occupation served as a base of knowledge for later American endeavors. The Iranian Revolution and ensuing hostage crisis later exposed America to the potency of political Islam. Khomeini's threats to export the radical ideology of the revolution through Islamist militancy opened a new era in the 1980s, one sometimes thought of as "religious terrorism."²³ Finally, Lebanon exemplified not only Iran's willingness to support and encourage revolutionary terrorism abroad, but also signified new dimensions of state involvement fueled by religious justifications.²⁴

B. THE GREAT IRAQI REVOLUTION

When entering World War I on the side of the Axis powers, Turkey made a fatal decision that led to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The British, upon learning that

²⁰ Juan Cole, *Sacred Space and Holy War* (New York: I. B. Tauris & Co, 2002), 173-188, and Bruce Leroy Woodyard, "Revolution or Realism: United States-Iran Relations in the Post-Cold War Era" (Master's Thesis, Naval Post Graduate School, 1993), 45.

²¹ Imam – A religious leader among the Shi'i, appointed by Allah to act as both a religious and social leader in all aspects of life.

²² Andrew Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practice* (London: Routledge, 2001), 119-121.

²³ Martha Crenshaw, "Why America? The Globalization of Civil War." *Current History*, December 2001, 426-427.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Turkish neutrality had finally caved under significant political pressures, landed an expeditionary force at al Faw and began an overland advance toward Basra. The provinces of Basra and Baghdad were significant to the British for several reasons. They were centrally and strategically located, were key terrain in controlling the overland trade routes, possessed tremendous oil reserves, and represented a new front for the war with which the British sought to check any advance by the Axis.²⁵

By the fall of 1915, Britain had seized Basra from Ottoman forces and controlled the majority of the provincial cities. However, hasty attempts to seize Baghdad by General Charles Townsend failed, and Turkish forces laid siege to the British held up in al Kut for over 140 days. A successful assault on the province of Baghdad was finally organized in the spring of 1917 under General Stanley Maude. The fall of Baghdad was a decisive victory. Although it took British forces over a year to consolidate their gains, a successful campaign launched in the spring of 1918 resulted in the seizure of Mosul by the following fall. The British proceeded to occupy Iraq as a “liberating force” against Ottoman occupation, simultaneously proclaiming that Arabs would soon regain control over much of their own affairs.

Iraq was subsequently created on 10 August 1920, by combining the Ottoman provinces of Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul.²⁶ Even under former Ottoman rule, these provinces, among the most ethnically and religiously diverse regions of the empire, had been notoriously poor and unstable. Within Iraq, for example, lies Karbala, an ancient city that witnessed the birth of Shi’ism that sparked the historical feud against Sunni Islam during the seventh century. The arbitrary manner in which territorial borders were selected during the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 demonstrated that Europe had little concept of such divisions.²⁷

²⁵ At the beginnings of World War I, the British Navy was rapidly transforming its fleet from coal to oil burning. In addition, British industrialization at the turn of the century created unprecedented demands for energy sources.

²⁶ This followed formal assignment in 1919 at the Paris Peace Conference of a Class A mandate entrusted to Britain under Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant. This was later finalized during the San Remo Conference in Italy on 25 April 1920.

²⁷ The delineated borders for the mandates reflected the interests of the European countries, but ignored the significance of historical trade routes, tribal borders, and cultural divisions.

British policy in Iraq proceeded through several stages.²⁸ The first centered upon strategic and economic considerations, and from the beginning of the war until 1918 Britain was intent upon the annexation of these provinces. However, American participation in the war and the growing influence of President Wilson's liberalism undermined this option, and thus initiated the formal mandate processes through the League of Nations.²⁹ The mandate resulted in a conflict of interests for Britain: while pursuing regional interests, namely access to oil and trade routes, it had no real stake in investing in the long-term viability of the Iraqi state.

The post-war Iraqi government was placed under the control of high commissioner Sir Percy Cox and a deputy, Colonel Arnold Wilson, who subsequently inherited a plethora of preexisting social and economic problems. These problems were only exacerbated by the war and subsequent occupations. Before the mandate was even planned there were already significant protests and grievances. In addition, one of the most troubling trends for the British was the rising sense of nationalism in post-war Iraq.

In May of 1920, a confluence of events resulted in a massive uprising against British occupation. The death of an influential Shi'i *mujtahid*, Sunni/Shi'i collaboration at political rallies against the occupation, the celebration of Ramadan, and the arrests of several religious leaders at protests and political rallies, all set the conditions for revolt.³⁰ News of the mandate rallied additional supporters and synergized protests. Many Iraqis considered the mandate a ruse for colonial imperialism. They also believed that increased self governance would lead to independence. Although a local delegation met with British officials to demand independence, they were dismissed as being a "handful of ungrateful politicians."³¹ This further exacerbated social tensions and combined with the growing political fervor of nationalism. Imam Shirazi, a grand *mujtahid* in Karbala organized the political and social dissent, distributing flags,

²⁸ Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 9-11.

²⁹ Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 9-11.

³⁰ Mujtahid – An Islamic scholar specifically trained and experienced in the application (or *ijtihad*) of Islamic law.

³¹ Ronald L. Kuipers, "Entrance to the Ruins of Babylon." <http://www.geographic.org>, accessed 12 Dec 2004.

pamphlets, and later organizing the insurgents with the help of his son Mirza Muhammad Riza. Later Shirazi issued a fatwa, or religious edict, condemning British rule as the hegemony of non-Muslims over Muslims. He called for formal jihad against the British. The revolt spread rapidly down the Euphrates River Valley and into the marshes and southern provinces of Iraq. Here, the Shi'i eagerly rose against this new form of centralized government that challenged their tribal and patrimonial social structures.

Ath Thawra al Iraqiyya al Kubra, or "The Great Iraqi Revolution" was an unprecedented event and united the various tribal, religious, and cultural groups in a common cause. It took British forces almost six months to extinguish the remaining resistance, at a cost of over 40 million pounds and 450 British soldiers.³² On the opposing side, the revolt claimed the lives of over 10,000 Iraqis. The immense cost, coupled with a war-wearied public, initiated a third phase in the political evolution of Britain's mandate.

Toward the end of 1920, the British faced a significant political dilemma in Iraq. They desired to pursue regional interests, yet they needed to do so with minimal costs and responsibilities for the crown. At the same time, however, they needed to meet the minimum requirements of the mandate. When searching for representatives to fill key governmental roles in the emerging state, recent events had a tremendous impact on the decision-making process. The British sought Ottoman administrative and military elites who were displaced during the war to fill government positions, because they were experienced, and understood the relationship that Britain expected to have with Iraq. That is, they understood the need to secure Iraq's power base in the region, while simultaneously not hinder Britain's pursuit of other regional goals. These Ottoman elites were predominately Sunni, and they were instrumental in shaping Sunni dominance in Iraqi politics despite the Shi'i majority.³³ They also reflect emerging views within the British administrative council toward Iraq's Shi'is.

³² William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 201.

³³ This appointment was largely a consolation price to appease pre-war promises by the British government to Husayn Ibn Ali, sharif of Mecca, whose aspirations to rule an independent Arab kingdom were leveraged by the British to garner support against the Ottomans.

British attitudes toward Iraqis were influenced by the Orientalist discourse that prevailed at the time. British understanding of Iraqi society was contingent on establishing rigid boundaries between ethnic, religious, and social groupings. Orientalism provided the rhetoric necessary to fill in the gaps and rank various groups according to work ethic, progressive thought, and most importantly their willingness to cooperate with British administrators. In addition, Orientalism determined how Islam was perceived—it was thought to be a constraint on the development of Iraqi society.³⁴

The Jews and the Christians...are the most progressive of the inhabitants of the country. Although they number only about 7 percent of the population, the proportion of wealth in their hands must be very much greater. They are more interested in the development of the country.³⁵

From the British perspective, Islam thus hindered development, and of the two principal Islamic divisions, the Shi'is were viewed as the more "Islamic," and hence the most backward. Following the revolution, the British increasingly came to view the Shi'i *mujtahids*, who represent the core of Shi'i Islam, as promoters of a philosophy fundamentally opposed to progress. Furthermore, as icons in pursuit of a theocratic state, the *mujtahids* were blamed for inciting and prolonging the Iraqi uprising, particularly in the Shi'i dominated south. Gertrude Bell, who at the time was considered one of the most authoritative writers on the Middle East,³⁶ compared the Shi'i *mujtahids* to "alien popes" who in "exercising real temporal authority ...obstructed the Government at every turn."³⁷

When the British sought a more advisory role consistent with the tenets of the mandate system, a principal consideration became the costs and resources involved in modern state building. Encumbered by significant economic burdens in the aftermath of World War I, Britain searched for a cost effective way to secure regional interests while still meeting the minimum requirements and responsibilities as outlined in the mandate. As a result, Britain replaced the existing decentralized Ottoman model with a more

34 Dodge, 65-66.

35 Foreign Office (FO) 371/5227, E8267, Copy of Sir H. Dobb's memo on the proposals from Sir E. Bonham Carter's Committee, 14 July 1920, 2.

36 David Fromkin, *A Peace To End All Peace* (New York: Avon Books, 1989), 449.

37 Gertrude Bell, *From Her Personal Papers, 1914-1926*, Vol. 2, August 1920, ed. Elizabeth Burgoyne (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1961), 157.

centralized government. This new model resulted in a disproportionate Sunni influence within the central government that exacerbated Sunni/Shi'i conflict.

The British experience in Iraq created the initial Western perceptions, perceptions that propagated through pervasive Orientalist thought in Western media. As the United States began to exert greater influence within the region following World War Two, many of these perceptions came to be adopted by the new power. They were strengthened by the cultural and political affinities between the United States and Great Britain. This collection of ideas and attitudes laid a foundation for perspectives towards Iraq within the U.S. government. Furthermore, subsequent revolutionary movements in the broader Shi'i world would continue to shape how the West related to Shi'ism.

C. THE 1979 IRANIAN REVOLUTION

The Iranian Revolution fundamentally altered the regions politics and security. The 1979 revolution transformed a pro-Western monarchy under the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, into a radical, Islamist theocracy under the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. During this period, the principal U.S. policy objectives were the containment of Soviet expansion, the steady and secure flow of Middle East oil, and the safeguarding of Israel.³⁸ Unfortunately, as the end of the Cold War would reveal, the emphasis on Soviet containment effectively overshadowed the numerous smaller conflicts. Such was the nature of the U.S. government's support to the Shah, placed on the Iranian throne in 1953 with the help of a CIA engineered coup to thwart the possibility of a Communist takeover. U.S. policymakers perceived that the most critical challenges facing Iran at the time were economic modernization and land reform. The U.S. government sought to defend Iran from internal Communist threats by encouraging the Shah to facilitate prosperity and stability through reform. The Shah however, became increasingly concerned with external threats and the expansion of Iranian influence in the region. A CIA report to President Eisenhower on 7 April, 1960 darkly warned that the Shah's reforms "have alienated new groups of people without causing any groups already opposed to the Shah to come over to his side."³⁹ Furthermore, in a later reevaluation of U.S. policy toward Iran, NSC 6010 concluded that without significant reforms the

³⁸ Woodyard, 1.

³⁹ Little, 218.

monarchy would probably collapse.⁴⁰ It also revealed the conundrum facing U.S. policymakers: there were few viable pro-Western alternative leaders who could mitigate internal dissent. Thus, while the Shah was slow in undertaking the necessary reforms, Eisenhower had no option but to keep U.S. aid flowing in hopes of containing a possible revolution.⁴¹

The Kennedy administration took more aggressive actions, eventually pressuring the Shah to initiate internal reforms subsequently known as the “White Revolution.” The Shah’s reform package proposed land and labor reforms, nationalization of forests and pastureland, profit sharing in both industrial and private sectors, amendments to electoral law, and the creation of a Literacy Corps.⁴² However, these reforms also created new challenges for U.S. sponsorship in Iran. The U.S. government had to ensure that reforms progressed at a pace sufficient to garner lower-class support while preventing economic collapse. In addition, the U.S. government needed to encourage the Shah to develop effective counter-insurgency and police forces necessary to maintain internal stability.⁴³ Kennedy’s Middle East experts prophesied:

The success of the Shah’s program over the long run may well rest on the extent to which it is identified as an indigenous effort...the Shah’s greatest liability may well be his vulnerability to charges by both reactionary and radical opposition elements that he is a foreign puppet.⁴⁴

On 3 June, 1963, this is precisely what occurred. The Ayatollah Khomeini openly denounced the Shah, labeling him an American puppet in response to the Shah’s earlier denouncement of the clergy as “parasitic agents of black reaction” with whom “progress was synonymous with blasphemy.”⁴⁵ Through his fiery sermons and rhetoric laden with Islamist appeal, Khomeini quickly became a leader for groups opposed to the Pahlavi dynasty. With U.S. diplomatic support, the Shah began an aggressive campaign of brutal crackdowns that resulted in thousands of deaths and the house arrest of

⁴⁰ NSC-6010, “Statement of U.S. Policy toward Iran.” 6 July 1960, 680-688.

⁴¹ Minutes of the 449th NSC meeting, 30 June 1960, w/ James Lay, memo, 6 July 1960, 676-681.

⁴² The Literacy Corps enabled young men to be exempt from military service in exchange for working at the village level as literacy teachers.

⁴³ Little, 220.

⁴⁴ “U.S. Strategy for Iran” in memorandum from Secretary Dean Rusk to JFK, 20 April 1963.

⁴⁵ Little, 220.

numerous clerics and opposition leaders.⁴⁶ By the end of 1964, Khomeini was exiled from Iran. At the time, the Kennedy administration did not understand the implications of Khomeini's rising popularity and continued to support and encourage the Shah's reforms. Under the Johnson administration, the Shah's "White Revolution" was again viewed positively. Such optimism also prevailed during both the Nixon and Ford administrations. These administrations repeatedly overstated the positive impact of the White Revolution. Completely unaware of fervor rising from below, Ford and Kissinger even pondered the application of the "Iranian model" to the neighboring state of Afghanistan.

Despite considerable growth in the Iranian economy between 1963 and 1967, heavy inflation persisted and the middle class saw few positive effects. The Shah expended this new found oil wealth on the pursuit of personal ambitions, investing heavily in weapons systems such as tanks, aircraft, and other hardware purchased primarily from the United States. The Western-focused elite consumed conspicuously, angering those outside such circles, including the religious leadership.

President Carter was not convinced of the viability of the Shah's regime and grew increasingly concerned about the effects of massive social reforms enacted in a relatively short span on a very traditional society. The White Revolution had done much to raise societal expectations at all levels, but provided only an illusion of political freedom. Carter strongly advocated democracy and human rights, encouraging the Shah to open the political process in Iran and ease some of the authoritarian measures. In 1977 the Shah conceded to pressure from Carter, which included a threat of reduced arms sales, and released over 300 political prisoners, reduced censorship, and initiated several judicial reforms. But the measures backfired, as the various opposition groups became increasingly emboldened against the regime.

Prior to 1978 most opposition to the Shah came from the urban middle classes, which were most affected by the White Revolution. They were predominately secular in nature and could conceivably support a constitutional monarchy. One of the leading opposition leaders was Mehdi Bazargan, a liberal secularist who by default became the

⁴⁶ James A. Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relation*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 152-153.

backup plan for U.S. policy makers in the event of a regime collapse. Washington overlooked the rising force of political Islam, which coalesced under such leaders as Ali Shari'ati. As Zbigniew Brzezinski, National Security Advisor to Carter, recalled, "Islamic fundamentalism, a phenomenon largely ignored in our intelligence reports, was now openly challenging the existing order."⁴⁷

It was the Islamists who represented the greatest potential for social mobilization. Despite being in exile, Khomeini continued exert tremendous influence in Iran through a support network that smuggled audio-taped sermons and lectures into the country. Although previously divided, the Shi'i *ulama* unified as the Shah adopted more repressive measures to save his regime.⁴⁸ In January of 1978, an official press story attacked Khomeini, which galvanized support amongst students and religious leaders, and resulted in protests against the Shah in the city of Qom. In a series of such events, the regime adopted increasingly brutal measures to quell the opposition. The Shah's repressive measures only heightened social unrest. In September of 1978 the Shah declared martial law. On 8 September he unleashed the full potency of the modernizing military, killing 400 and wounding over 4000 demonstrators, a day remembered as "Black Friday."⁴⁹

Though U.S. Ambassador William Sullivan doubted the regime could survive, the United States refused to abandon its ally despite the urging from several advisors to explore alternative pro-Western coalitions. This represented a missed opportunity for the U.S. government. By not engaging or supporting Mehdi Bazargan earlier, since he was later appointed Prime Minister by Khomeini, the U.S. government contributed to his eventual marginalization and lost a potential ally. He resigned allegedly in response to the crisis. It was not until the beginning of December that the administration realized the gravity of the situation. George Ball, a Democratic advisor, summarized the situation in a report given to President Carter on 11 December:

⁴⁷ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Advisor 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1983), 394.

⁴⁸ Ulama – The learned, knowledgeable people within Islam.

⁴⁹ Little, 224.

We made the Shah what he is to become. We nurtured his love for grandiose geopolitical schemes and we supplied him with the hardware to indulge his fantasies....Once we had anointed him as protector of our nation's interests in the Persian Gulf, we became dependent on him. Now that his regime is coming apart under the pressure of imported modernization, we have so committed ourselves as to have no ready alternative.⁵⁰

On December 12 two million protesters filled the streets of Tehran. As the Shah ordered the army to respond, several units disintegrated and refused to fire on unarmed civilians. Facing increasing pressure from Washington, and the rapid loss of military control, the Shah placated the protesters with a constitution and by appointing the moderate Shapour Bakhtiar as Prime Minister. However by this time the regime could not be saved and the Shah fled on 16 January 1979.

The Shah's departure represented the collapse of almost three decades of diplomatic efforts to reinforce a highly valued pro-Western regime, which also served as a bulwark toward Soviet expansionism, one of the "twin pillars" at the height of the Cold War. As a result, the Carter administration focused on damage control and attempted to salvage relations with the emerging post-Shah regime. Conflicting strategies emerged from Washington. Carter insisted on supporting the existing government, but preventing the inclusion of Khomeini, while Secretary of State Cyrus Vance wanted to include Khomeini as a means of widening Bakhtiar's base of popular support. Meanwhile, Brezezinski aggressively pursued the option of a military coup. By mid-February all three strategies had failed. Khomeini refused to be co-opted into the existing regime, the army began to disintegrate from within, and as a result of losing his military base, Bakhtiar resigned and fled into hiding.⁵¹

Khomeini's return on 1 February 1979 began the second phase of the revolution, often referred to as the "Islamic Revolution." In the aftermath of the Shah's departure, the religious scholars successfully re imposed order. This was achieved by organizing local revolutionary cells, what later became the Revolutionary Guards, Hezbollah, and a

⁵⁰ George W. Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), 455-459.

⁵¹ Richard C. Thornton, *The Carter Years: Toward a New Global Order* (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 271.

volunteer force known as the *Baseej*.⁵² During the next several months, two centers of power emerged within Iran. Mehdi Bazargan, who was appointed as Prime Minister by Khomeini, led the Freedom Movement and tried to establish a liberal and secular government. Khomeini, who was gaining increasing leverage and legitimacy amongst the clerics, formed the Islamic Republic Party. While the parties initially cooperated, tensions arose due to Khomeini's efforts to expand the role of the clergy within the government in a system of *velayat-e faqih*, or the guardianship of the religious jurist.

Attempting to come to terms with the revolution, the Carter administration tried to pacify Khomeini by disassociating itself from the Shah, and reducing public criticisms of Iran's human rights abuses.⁵³ However, Khomeini continued to condemn openly the United States as the "Great Satan" and to denounce the Shah as a "vile traitor." Deliberate attempts by the administration to engage the Bazargan government through a series of arms sales, intelligence, and diplomatic exchanges, while generating some interest, were used by Khomeini to wrest greater control from the Freedom Movement. Thus the decision in October of 1979 to allow the Shah entry into the United States for medical treatment drew considerable concern from Bazargan. Khomeini also recognized the opportunity to further marginalize Bazargan, while Foreign Minister Ibrahim Yazdi publicly criticized both the Shah and Bazargan for collaborating with the U.S. government, and urged his people to demonstrate against the U.S. government. Through the same mechanisms used to establish the Revolutionary Guards, Khomeini gained control of the judicial tribunals, and achieved greater control over the state infrastructure. After rejecting a draft constitution proposed by the Freedom Movement, a new constitution was enacted the following December which appointed Khomeini the *faqih*, or supreme decision maker for life.

The seizure of the U.S. embassy in Tehran was allegedly aimed at capturing evidence of U.S. government espionage activities. In the aftermath, however, students claimed it was done in retaliation for the U.S. government's support of the Shah and his totalitarian rule. The imprisonment of sixty-six Americans was effectively endorsed by Khomeini, who continued to denounce the United States. The ensuing 444-day hostage

⁵² Thornton, *The Carter Years*, 444.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 445.

crisis not only signified the total defeat of the U.S. government's policy toward Iran, but also served as a stark reminder of the nature of the new regime. The U.S. government perceived the crisis as a terrorist attack endorsed by a state in complete defiance of international norms. Within Iran, the crisis signaled the regime's anti-Western stance, and also the successful defiance of the United States by the new Islamic regime. The inability to secure the timely release of American citizens, including a failed rescue attempt in 1980, further eroded American prestige and influence and undermined Carter's reelection bid.⁵⁴

While the U.S. government may have been slow to recognize and respond to the rising challenges of Islamism before the fall of the Shah, in the aftermath the implications of Khomeini's emerging ideology became clear. Khomeini personified the regime's new character. His ideology quickly enveloped Iran's foreign policy, in what became an even more expansionist threat than that previously proposed by the Pahlavis.⁵⁵ In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, a series of Shi'i uprisings erupted in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Pakistan.⁵⁶ Although most were minor and quickly quelled, they seemed to indicate a growing solidarity amongst Shi'is inspired by the Iranian model. Perhaps nowhere was this perceived threat more grave than in Iraq, with its majority Shi'i population and shared borders with Iran. This perception prompted Iraq to preemptively invade Iran in 1980. Khomeini's broadcasts and trips by his emissaries throughout the Gulf in support of other Islamist movements further enhanced the perceived threat of revolution at a time when the Muslim world was already infused with a sense of Islamic revivalism.⁵⁷

For Shi'is and Sunnis alike, Iran exemplified the power of Islam as a vehicle for social mobilization and state building.⁵⁸ At the time, however, Sunnis were less receptive to the revolutionary doctrine than their Shi'i counterparts. This shaped

⁵⁴ Operation Eagle Claw, 24-25 April 1980, was intended to recover American hostages from Iran.

⁵⁵ Woodyard, 44.

⁵⁶ John L. Esposito, *The Iranian Revolution: Its Global Impact* (Miami: International University Press, 1990), 5.

⁵⁷ Esposito, 5.

⁵⁸ Lewis B. Ware, *Some Observations on Islamic Revolution* (Maxwell: Air University Press, 1985), 1.

Western perceptions toward Islam, with Shi'is increasingly viewed as the "revolutionary minority." Dr Lewis B. Ware, writing for the Air Force Center of Doctrine, Research and Education in 1985 observed that:

As a consequence, (of Iran) the messianic, anti-imperialist, reactionary, and highly activist temper of Iranian Shi'i sectarianism gained the attention of the world community.⁵⁹

The Iranian Revolution and ensuing hostage crisis thus solidified U.S. perceptions toward Shi'i Islam as a monolithic, violent, and anti-Western sect. These perceptions were reinforced by the prominent position of Khomeini and his active attempts to export the revolution to Shi'is throughout the Muslim world. While the perceptions of Shi'ism as a monolithic faith have been tempered considerably in recent years, they have not disappeared completely. Graham Fuller notes that the Iranian model is perceived as a model for Islamist regimes that come to power, including Sunni regimes such as Sudan; it is thus difficult to imagine an Islamist regime that is friendly to the West.⁶⁰ This has interesting implications for Iraq and the role Islam will inevitably play in a post-Saddam government, particularly as Shi'is gain unprecedented levels of influence and representation within the emerging government.

D. U.S. MILITARY INTERVENTION IN LEBANON

In retrospect, despite significant apprehension within the United States toward the threat Iranian ideology posed toward the region and to U.S. interests, Iran was largely unsuccessful in replicating the revolution abroad. Moreover, Iran's promotion of other revolutionary movements may have been less aggressive than previously thought. The one exception, however, was Lebanon. Estimates suggest that between 1982 and 1989 Iran spent at least half a billion dollars in attempting to increase Iranian influence among Lebanese Shi'is.⁶¹ Nonetheless, Augustus Norton suggests that while "many if not all, Shi'i Muslims revere Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini as the central contemporary system of Islam," only a fraction of Lebanese Shi'i had affiliations with groups

⁵⁹ Ware, 1.

⁶⁰ Graham E. Fuller and Ian O. Lesser, *A Sense of Siege: The Geopolitics of Islam and the West* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 22.

⁶¹ Esposito, 126.

receiving direct Iranian support.⁶² He also notes that Shi'i views of the revolution were not universal. While it served as a viable example of how Islam could topple and replace an illegitimate government, many Shi'is recognized that "Iranian solutions would not necessarily solve Lebanese problems."⁶³ As such, the Iranian Revolution did not radicalize many Shi'is in Lebanon; instead, it capitalized on the frustrations of a people politicized well before the fall of the Shah in 1979. Nonetheless, Lebanon reinforced previous perceptions within the U.S. government, not only of Iranian influences, but of Shi'i culpability in general, that is, it demonstrated a growing rejection of America and the West. These trends were seemingly exemplified by the terrorist attacks in Beirut in October of 1983.

Lebanon had a much more profound impact on U.S. perceptions toward the Shi'i, as it seemed to have opened the floodgates for generalizations and stereotype. The U.S. blamed the bombings on policy mistakes, force protection, intelligence reporting, rules of engagement, viability of peacekeeping missions, and diplomatic failures. What was inadequately addressed was the rationality from the Shi'i perspective. The answer that evolved by default, irrational, radical terrorism, is less problematic than is the wider acceptance it generally garnered. The tough questions were not being asked and "terrorist and terrorism" became labels increasingly easier to apply toward Shi'is in general. Nabih Berri has spoken at length about the dignity of the Shi'i struggle being tarnished by terrorism, stating:

The name of the Shi'i has become synonymous with terrorism, whereas it really is a crown of the struggle and resistance. A very fine thread separates terrorism and the struggle, and we must not cut it.⁶⁴

U.S. military involvement in Lebanon was predicated on the historical successes of 1958, when U.S. Marines were deployed to calm civil disturbances and facilitate the election of President Shihab. Within three months the Marines were redeployed without significant incident, sustaining only a single casualty. Shihab's government brought both stability and the realization that compromise was an absolute necessity in order to

⁶² Esposito, 116.

⁶³ Ibid., 122.

⁶⁴ Nabih Berri, Remarks in Tyre on the 9th anniversary of Musa al-Sadr's disappearance, Beirut Voice of National Resistance, December 21, 1988, translated in FBIS, December 22, 1988, 43.

make the confessional system function.⁶⁵ The action established a precedent for U.S. success in Lebanon. The Lebanese government also established a precedent of relying on outside powers during domestic crises.

On the eve of U.S. intervention in 1982, Lebanon was substantially different than in 1958. In 1982 Lebanon's population approached three million. The religious, social, and political fabric of this populace was extremely complex. At the time there were over seventeen religious organizations officially recognized, with many more sub categorizations and unofficial bodies.⁶⁶ Sandra Mackey described it as a mosaic of varied groups less interested in state formation than their own interests.⁶⁷ These domestic cleavages were exacerbated by external factors as well. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees added considerably to the social strife in southern Lebanon. In addition, Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) guerillas routinely launched attacks into Israel from southern bases, drawing the Israeli military into southern Lebanon. Finally, Lebanon's military weakness invited, both intentionally and unintentionally, participation from greater powers, such as Syria, that were concerned with the larger geopolitical context. Mackey concluded that the Lebanese civil war "was not fought with armies...over many square miles but by armed militias...in combat from urban block to urban block."⁶⁸ With upwards of 25,000 Syrian troops in the Bekaa valley, and numerous guerilla and paramilitary units engaged in urban combat, Lebanon was the proverbial powder keg that exploded when Israel invaded on June 6, 1982.

On 20 August 1982, 800 U.S. Marines were sent into Lebanon to reduce tensions and facilitate the evacuation of PLO and Syrian fighters from Beirut. The initial success of the operation was met with tremendous approval, and by 14 September, U.S. Marines effectively withdrew. However, in less than two weeks, the Marines would be sent back in to respond to escalating violence resulting from the assassination of president-elect

⁶⁵ Confessional – Lebanon's parliament uses a "confessional" system by which the parliamentary seats are divided amongst the various religious groups or affiliations.

⁶⁶ John P. Murtha and John Plashal, *From Vietnam to 9/11: On the Front Lines of National Security*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 32-33.

⁶⁷ Sandra Mackey, *Lebanon: Death of a Nation* (New York: Congdon & Weed, 1989), ii.

⁶⁸ Mackey, 224.

Bashir Gemayel, and the subsequent retaliation which killed 700 Palestinian and Lebanese civilians.

The decision to commit U.S. forces in Lebanon was unpopular with Congress, and the Department of Defense, which had expressed concerns with the anticipated length of operations and whether viable objectives could be clearly translated into military terms. What eventually emerged through President Reagan's justifications to Congress was a series of loose objectives:

- The permanent cessation of hostilities
- Establishment of a strong, representative central government
- Withdrawal of all foreign forces
- Restoration of control by the Lebanese Government (throughout the country)
- Establish conditions by which Lebanon will no longer be used as a base of operations against Israel

But it was unclear whether the deployed forces had either the muscle or latitude to accomplish any, let alone all of these objectives.⁶⁹

The first several months of the deployment the MNF mission were fairly smooth. But after the initial calm, a time which various factions used to rearm, violence again escalated. On 18 April 1983 the U.S. embassy in Beirut was bombed, killing 63 people. By mid-summer Marines were sustaining increasing casualties from artillery and gunfire and began to employ greater firepower in self defense. In September, the U.S. National Command Authority (NCA) determined that the security of U.S. forces was contingent upon the active defense of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). This gave U.S. forces an active role in an increasingly violent civil war. The marked increase in U.S. firepower brought to bear on Shi'i and Druze militias resulted in a series of retaliatory attacks. These attacks culminated in the bombings of the Marine and French barracks on 23 October 1983 which claimed the lives of 241 U.S. service members.

Amidst new Congressional hearings in January of 1984, the Reagan administration continued to defend the U.S government's mission to secure the peace in Lebanon. On 22 January, in a televised interview, Secretary of State George Shultz,

⁶⁹ Murtha, 38-39.

when asked if the Syrians believed they could simply outwait the U.S. government, replied by quoting Syrian Foreign Defense Minister Abdel Halim Khaddam stating, “The United States is short of breath. You can always wait them out.”⁷⁰ On 7 February, amidst continued violence, Reagan announced his intentions to redeploy U.S. forces. On 26 February the last Marines left Beirut, less than three months later the Lebanese government cancelled the treaty it had previously signed with Israel on 17 May 1983.

The U.S. government’s experience in Lebanon has arguably fueled the fires of political Islam and terrorism, and adversely affected stability in the following years. One of the most troubling questions posed in the aftermath was whether anything was learned from the experience. On 7 November 1983, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger convened the DOD Commission on the Beirut International Airport Terrorist Act of 23 October 1983. Assigned to the commission were various military and civilian assistance experts. The report was completed on 20 December 1983. The report detailed ten areas of concern, including: the mission, command relationships, intelligence, security, casualty handling, terrorism, and conclusions.

The report also details the culpability of Iran in the attacks, claiming that “Iranian operatives in Lebanon are in the business of killing Americans” regardless of what role they play in the reconciliation process.⁷¹

The only development which would seriously impede the terrorist activities of Iranian-dominated Shi’i groups in Lebanon, short of a change of regime in Tehran, would be a decision by Syria to shut down the basing facilities in the Bekaa valley and sever the logistical pipeline.⁷²

The report describes the strong family and clan relationships among sectarian rivals, particularly problematic amongst “radical Shi’is.”⁷³ With respect to the bombing of the Marine barracks, the report surmised:

⁷⁰ Kelly, 14, Referencing: Department of State *Bulletin*, April 1984, 29-30.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁷² Admiral USN (Ret), Robert L. Long, Report of the DoD Commission on Beirut International Airport Terrorist Act, October 23, 1983. Washington D.C.: Department of Defense, 1983, 62.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 62.

...the 23 October 1983 bombing of the BLT Headquarters building was a terrorist act sponsored by sovereign states or organized political entities for the purpose of defeating U.S. objectives in Lebanon.⁷⁴

That the report failed to scrutinize the causative factors from an opposing perspective is not surprising. Although evidence suggested the implications of Shi'i militants, at the time the emerging entity of Hezbollah was largely unknown. In addition the report was commissioned on behalf of the Marine Commandant, and formed part of an analysis of the shortcoming and lessons learned from a DOD perspective. The problem was lack of input from the Department of State, Congress, the National Security Council, or even the White House. The Long report prescribed corrective action for how the military could better defend itself from terrorism, which by implication was a seemingly inescapable byproduct of U.S. foreign policy. The role of U.S. policy in exacerbating the terrorist threat was downplayed as a cost of doing business, and no real effort was made to understand the logic of such terrorism or its perpetrators. The report dismisses the grievances of Syrian and Druze spokesmen toward LAF perceptions of them as traitors, opportunists, or unwitting dupes of the Maronite establishment, the report states, "the factual basis of this perception is moot."⁷⁵

As the months passed following the U.S. military's withdrawal from Lebanon, the tragedy of the attacks reinforced perceptions within the United States of the violent nature of radical Shi'is and the danger they posed to U.S. interests. The Lebanese experience removed both the desire and reason to study the root causes of such extremism and solidified previous perceptions of the Shi'i behind a veil of irrationality.

E. CONCLUSIONS

The British experience in the Middle East established the foundation for initial U.S. perceptions toward the region. Significant events such as the Iraqi Revolution of 1920 focused these perceptions on specific groups, especially the Shi'i who proved to be most problematic during the British mandate period. These perceptions would persevere as Britain withdrew from the region in the 1970s, and influenced the manner in which the U.S. government both perceived and responded to the Shi'is in the 1980s and 90s.

⁷⁴ Long Report, 14.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 59.

The fall of the Shah's Iranian regime in 1979 to an Islamic revolution both signified the failure of U.S. policy and the loss of a prized Cold War ally. As the U.S. government struggled to come to terms with the revolution, the emergence of political Islam cast new shadows over the region, as Khomeini threatened to export the revolution abroad. This event not only solidified previous perceptions of the radical and revolutionary nature of political Islam, but also exaggerated the appeal of Khomeini's ideology to the Shi'i.

The U.S. government's experiences in Lebanon, while reinforcing the viability of Khomeini's threats, further exemplified perceived collaboration amongst the Shi'is as a monolithic entity. In addition, Lebanon also established parallels between Shi'i Islam and terrorism. The experience effectively removed the notion of a rational, goal-oriented movement, and replaced it simply with irrational terrorism. In the aftermath, the U.S. government focused on the proximate and logistical causes of the bombings, but overlooked the root causes of Islamist terrorism. Such a myopic and expedient reading of political Islam contributed to a dramatic shift in U.S. perceptions of the Shi'is in the 1990s, when the U.S. government began to view Iraq's Shi'is as potential allies.

III. SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS

A. MAKING REALITY FIT EXPECTATIONS

Chapter II explored the origin and evolution of the U.S. government's early perceptions toward Iraqi Shi'is. In their early form, U.S. opinions of Shi'is would not have supported even the most basic cooperation with them. Yet in 2002, these perceptions shifted completely. The Shi'is were no longer perceived as an obstacle, instead the U.S. government began to view them as a potential allies in its attempt to remove Saddam Hussein. In fact, the evolving war plan relied upon this assumption. This chapter explains how and why this shift occurred. It begins by examining general shifts in perception toward Shi'is during the 1990s, which were influenced by an increasing focus on Sunni-based terrorism. It then explains two emerging hypotheses, each of which partially explains these shifting perceptions within the current administration. The first concerns the influence of non-state actors such as Ahmad Chalabi, and the related shortfalls within the U.S. government's intelligence gathering and vetting processes. The second is a paradigmatic shift in the way the problem of Saddam was perceived, especially the need to remove his regime, and the resultant impact this had on the U.S. government's plans for Iraq. This chapter concludes by discussing the effects of September 11 on the interagency process, a process that eventually broke down, and facilitated the aforementioned changes in the manner in which the U.S. government viewed the Shi'i.

B. THE SUNNI/SHI'I SWITCH

Existing Western perceptions of Islam, and the Shi'is in particular, were reinforced by the increasing religiously-inspired violence of the 1980s and 90s. From 1982 to 1989 Shi'i affiliated terrorist groups were allegedly responsible for over 247 terrorist incidents, resulting in 1,057 reported deaths.⁷⁶ Such attacks became increasingly lethal. Whereas between 1982 and 1989 these attacks represented less than 8% of all recorded terrorist activity, they were nonetheless responsible for over 30% of the resulting casualties.⁷⁷ These observations reveal an interesting corollary between the

⁷⁶ Bruce Hoffman, "Terrorism, Trends, and Prospects," in Edited by Ian O. Lesser and others, eds., *Countering the New Terrorism* (Santa Monica: Rand Publishing, 1999), 17.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

number of occurrences, lethality, and corresponding perceptions of specific groups. The lethality of these attacks enabled their perpetrators to influence public opinion disproportionate to the size of their groups or the number of their attacks.

1979 was a watershed for Islamist terror. The significance of the Iranian Revolution in rallying radical Shi'i groups has been previously explored. However that year also witnessed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the beginning of a guerilla war which lasted until 1989. The war in Afghanistan was responsible for not only rallying, but also training and equipping many radical Sunni Islamist operatives. With the expulsion of the Russians from Afghanistan, and subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, many *jihadis* remained abroad with renewed convictions in both their ideologies and methodologies.⁷⁸ These fighters later contributed to the spread of violent and radical Islamist ideas.

The rise of Sunni-based terrorism in the 1990s continued previous trends in religiously-inspired terrorism, but expanded the target selection list. Specifically, terrorists now selected targets beyond the Middle East—the threat had now truly become global. With respect to Western perceptions, no group has been more representative or responsible for this evolving ideology than al-Qaeda, with bin Laden's "Declaration of War." To the West, much as Shi'i ideology did during the eighties, the expansion of political Islam or "fundamentalism" is seen as particularly violent and anti-Western. Thus, through a combination of rising lethality, sophistication, and the increasing ability to identify and focus responsibility on a comprehensive threat (bin Laden and al-Qaeda), the Shi'i have been effectively overshadowed by Sunni-based terror.

David Plotz, bureau chief for Slate.com, suggests for example, that Shi'is were increasingly seen as the moderates against a backdrop of extreme Sunni Wahhabism symbolized by al-Qaeda and the Taliban.⁷⁹ This has been reinforced by diplomatic overtures from Iran in the wake of September 11, who has consciously curtailed support

⁷⁸ Jihadis – Active participants in a religious struggle (jihad).

⁷⁹ David Plotz, "The Sunni/Shiite Switch." *MSNBC*, November 16, 2001. Before assuming his current assignment as bureau chief of Slate.com (www.slate.msn.com), he was a writer and editor for the Washington City Paper.

to Islamist extremists. In addition, Iran is strongly opposed to the Taliban and bin Laden, the former having murdered Afghan Shi'is as well as Iranian diplomats.⁸⁰

Following the Gulf War in 1991, the regime of Saddam Hussein effectively replaced Iran as America's number one threat in the Middle East. Despite abandoning the Shi'is militarily during Iraq's intifada in 1991, America sympathized with the plight of Iraq's Shi'is under Saddam Hussein. The southern Shi'is have posed the greatest internal threat to the regime. The U.S. government seemed to follow a loose application of the Arab axiom of "the enemy of my enemy." That is, Saddam's regime repressed the Shi'i, the Shi'is must oppose Saddam, and therefore they are aligned with our interests.⁸¹ This transformation of general perceptions has been referred to as the "Sunni/Shiite switch."⁸²

After the war, the decision to topple Saddam's regime has received increasing amounts of attention in the media, in interagency reports and investigations, and in scholarly monographs. With respect to prewar assumptions pertaining to Shi'is, two hypotheses explain these shifting perceptions. The first is the suspected influence of Ahmad Chalabi with neoconservative elements in the U.S. government, both in terms of shaping policy toward regime removal and in formulating basic assumptions during the planning phases of OIF. The second suggests the U.S. government assumed that the post-war environment could be effectively shaped in the aftermath, and was therefore not a decisive factor to the overall objectives of regime removal.

C. THE INFLUENCES OF AHMAD CHALABI

Ahmad Chalabi was born in October of 1944 to a wealthy Shi'i family in central Baghdad. He left Iraq with his family in 1958 and has spent the majority of his life in the U.S. and in Great Britain. In 1977, he established the Petra Bank in Jordan, which soon collapsed following charges of fraud and corruption. Although he has adamantly denied these charges, he is still wanted in Jordan and faces a possible twenty-two year prison sentence. In 1992, he formed the Iraqi National Congress (INC) an opposition

⁸⁰ Plotz.

⁸¹ Joshua Micah Marshall, "Bomb Saddam: How the Obsession of a Few Neocon Hawks Became the Central Goal of U.S. Foreign Policy." *Washington Monthly* (June 2002), 3.

⁸² Plotz.

group which was dedicated to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. In 1993 he presented the Clinton administration with a plan entitled “The End Game,” suggesting that Saddam’s hold over Baghdad was tenuous at best and could conceivably be overthrown via an internal insurrection, but one amply supported by the U.S. government. At the time, the CIA was in the throes of a paradigmatic shift in intelligence collection that favored technical methodologies over more traditional human intelligence (HUMINT) sources. Robert Baer, who was later directed to support these endeavors as the “agent in charge” described that there was not a single HUMINT asset in either Iraq or the neighboring countries that could confirm or deny any of Chalabi’s assertions.⁸³ Nonetheless, the Clinton administration provided funding, and with CIA support a small base of operations was established in Northern Iraq in 1994. Less than two years later the INC failed to produce any significant results and Chalabi’s operators were driven out by the Northern Iraqi Army. Over 130 of its members were subsequently executed.⁸⁴

Despite these failures, as well as charges of mismanagement and corruption, Chalabi was nonetheless able to retain control of the INC and effectively transformed the organization into a political rallying point for those advocates of regime removal. Although the dynamics of the relationship are not clear it is widely believed that Chalabi formulated numerous political contacts via the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), a controversial “think tank” in Washington. Among the most notable alleged contacts of Chalabi were Paul Wolfowitz, Albert Wohlstetter, and Richard Perle. Seymour Hersh describes a “close personal bond” between Chalabi, Wolfowitz and Perle, and argues these ties extended to other members of the current administration, including Donald Rumsfeld, Douglas Feith, and Lewis Libby.⁸⁵ The aforementioned 1998 letter to President Clinton, signed by many of these same men reiterated the persistent threat of Saddam’s regime, pointed out the regime’s weaknesses, and again suggested the viability of a popular uprising, all points that were made in Chalabi’s 1993 plan. The end result was the signing of the Iraqi Liberation Act which allocated \$97 million in training and operational funding for regime removal. Although the INC

⁸³ Robert Baer, See *No Evil: The True Story of a Ground Soldier in the CIA's War on Terrorism*. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2002). 179-215.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Seymour M. Hersh, *Chain of Command* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), 168.

received less than \$1 million due to continued skepticism within the administration, it nonetheless continued to receive operating funds from the Department of State in excess of \$10 million.⁸⁶

The perceived successes in Afghanistan indirectly improved opinions of Chalabi in the U.S. defense community.⁸⁷ The neoconservatives, it seemed, had won the battle over Afghanistan despite considerable opposition, which resulted in a “euphoric mood of cockiness” among neocons in Washington.⁸⁸ Thus, when they turned their attention to Iraq, neoconservatives wanted a similar “smaller, lighter, faster” approach, which was precisely what Chalabi offered to the Joint Chiefs of Staff through Wolfowitz. Such a plan assumed there would be a Shi’i-supported uprising in southern Iraq. Coupled with an intense bombing campaign and the insertion of several thousand special forces, Iraq’s oil infrastructure could be captured, the neocons argued, the regime isolated in Baghdad, and sufficient internal dissent created to facilitate regime collapse. Many neoconservatives were thus well aware of the majority Shi’i populace in Iraq, and were reassured by Chalabi and his supporters that Iraqi Shi’is were “largely secular in mindset and uninterested in a Khomeinist theocracy.”⁸⁹ The neocons assumed the INC would run post-war Iraq with some semblance of a democratic government.⁹⁰

The dissemination of Chalabi’s proposal among the service components immediately generated much opposition to the plan. It also weakened support for regime change. One of the most influential critics of the plan General Anthony Zinni, (retired), who formerly commanded CENTCOM prior to General Tommy Franks (retired), raised the principal concern: What should be done after Saddam’s regime fell? The Sunni/Shi’i/Kurdish mix and underlying social and political conditions under Saddam’s rule made Iraq ripe for civil war. Zinni suggested that relying on foreign fighters without significant U.S. military forces would result in “a Bay of Goats.”⁹¹

86 Seymour M. Hersh, *Chain of Command*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004), 166.

87 *Ibid.*, 171.

88 *Ibid.*, 170.

89 Cole, *On the History of.*, 5.

90 *Ibid.*

91 Hersh, 174.

Others disagreed, however. Former CIA director James Woolsey, for example, thought Iraq possessed a “very sophisticated and intellectual infrastructure of highly educated people” and suggested “there is no reason they could not establish a federalized...democracy.”⁹²

Thus, despite considerable support and confidence from civilian leaders inside the Pentagon, Chalabi faced considerable opposition from many corners. In the long run, such opposition may substantially limit future roles he will play in Iraq. Nonetheless, Chalabi had much to gain from a U.S. led invasion to topple Saddam. The means were far less important to him, provided he could still get his foot in the door in the aftermath. As the prospects for a war with Iraq seemed increasingly likely, Chalabi assumed an expanded role that serves to highlight additional problems with the U.S. intelligence process.

D. CHERRY PICKING AND INTELLIGENCE STOVEPIPES

In the summer of 2001, Seymour Hersh interviewed a senior Pentagon official assigned to evaluate Chalabi’s assertions and influence with respect to Iraq.⁹³ While not intended as a direct attack on Chalabi’s credibility, the report poked several holes in the existing planning assumptions. When this report was disseminated throughout the Pentagon, however, the unnamed source was informed that they should not focus on what could go wrong, but rather what could go right.⁹⁴ Although uncorroborated, there are numerous similar allegations that cast significant doubt on the lack of objectivity within the administration toward such sources.

Given the paucity of information, it is difficult to discern the extent of Chalabi’s personal networks within the U.S. government or his ability to pass intelligence directly to the Pentagon or Vice President. However, new information suggests several indirect methods that Chalabi has used to communicate to the administration. Specifically, as the Bush administration tried to gain U.N. support for operations against Saddam, Chalabi appears to have provided scripted intelligence through intermediaries. Chalabi “leaked” dubious sources to the media, including to *The New York Times* in December

⁹² Hersh, 175.

⁹³ Ibid., The official’s name was withheld by Seymour Hersh due to the sensitivity of his position.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 168-169.

2001 and to *Vanity Fair* later that spring, as part of a strategy of deception. When published, Chalabi's misinformation "softened up" bureaucratic resistance in Washington.⁹⁵ One of the most controversial cases was a source appropriately named "Curveball," that Chalabi provided to the Germans. Curveball supposedly had information regarding Saddam's intentions to build mobile, bio-weapons labs. A corroborating source was then provided to the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and although Curveball was labeled a fabricator in a highly classified intelligence assessment, the publication of his allegations enhanced Curveball's claims. Secretary of State Powell has privately blamed Chalabi for providing much of the faulty intelligence that he presented to the UN Council in February of 2003 to build the case against Iraq's alleged WMD programs. In May 2004, a *Newsweek* article effectively summarized Chalabi's role in the intelligence process:

With his clever sense for bureaucratic gamesmanship, Chalabi fed the neocons' hunger for raw intelligence. If the CIA and other spy services were not going to come up with the goods on Saddam, than Chalabi would.⁹⁶

Chalabi endeavored, by whatever means necessary, to keep the Bush administration on course with respect to its plans for regime removal.

Though Chalabi is an attractive scapegoat to some members of the current administration, others doubt he had much clout. Douglas Feith, the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, found the assertions ludicrous.

The common line is, nobody planned for security because Ahmad Chalabi told us everything was going to be swell...so we predicted that everything was going swell, and we did not plan for things not being so swell.⁹⁷

Feith suggested that Rumsfeld and the other senior members of the administration "would have to be complete simpletons" to put so much faith in a single source. Of course this begs the question of why Secretary Rumsfeld was so adamant to reduce U.S. troop strength, particularly when doing so contradicted the advice of his most senior

⁹⁵ Evan Thomas and Mark Hosenball, "The Rise and Fall of Chalabi: Bush's Mr. Wrong." *Newsweek*, 31 May 2004, 21-23.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ James Fallows, "Blind into Baghdad," *Atlantic Monthly*, January/February 2004, 53.

military advisors. OSD was clearly planning on a different post-war environment than that which was encountered. To what extent did Chalabi's lingering influence and assumptions, such as the anticipated Shi'i reaction to an invasion, shape this belief?

E. NECESSITY VS. FEASIBILITY

It is implausible that Chalabi could single-handedly be the root of all evil that plagues post-war efforts in Iraq. But Chalabi may have had significant influence within the administration and in shaping pre-war intelligence. This is the premise of the second hypothesis. Moreover, it also suggests that the strategic implications and rationale for removing Saddam Hussein were so great that it perpetuated a "come what may" attitude, that is, it assumed that what followed in the aftermath of the invasion would be manageable. To put it simply, OSD became transfixed on the removal of Saddam and focused on winning the conventional fight.

Feith also described a leadership philosophy that prevailed through the Office of the Secretary of Defense; it was a philosophy that accepted uncertainty. Operating in an uncertain environment is a familiar task to any officer who has served on a planning staff. There is also a fine line, however, between a manageable risk and a blind leap of faith. As military planners put it, "hope" is neither a plan nor a course of action.

Following the first Gulf War in 1991, U.S. policymakers assumed that Saddam Hussein would never be fully accepted in the international community, and that he was actively attempting to develop WMD capabilities.⁹⁸ From 1991 to 1997, under the Clinton administration's policy of "dual containment," the U.S. tried to keep Iraq strategically weak and politically isolated through U.N. weapons inspections and limited trade embargos.⁹⁹ The administration initially believed that such efforts would sufficiently weaken the regime so it might be toppled from within. Neoconservatives within the administration, however, actively fought for more aggressive actions. This culminated in an open letter to President Clinton¹⁰⁰ advocating regime change. The letter was drafted by Richard Perle and signed by over 40 "neoconservative luminaries,"

⁹⁸ Marshall, 4.

⁹⁹ Established via U.N. Resolutions 687 (April 3, 1991) and 661 (August 6, 1990), respectively.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Perle, A Letter to President Clinton, January 26, 1998.

many of whom would later become advisors to President Bush, including Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz.¹⁰¹

As early as 1997, the United States realized that not only had Saddam's regime proved to be exceedingly resilient, but it had flourished under the imposed sanctions, albeit at the expense of the Iraqi people. With the help of Saddam, the international community became increasingly aware of the humanitarian crisis purportedly "exacerbated by the sanctions." As a result, international support for sanctions deteriorated.

To make matters worse, Saddam begrudgingly cooperated with U.N. weapons inspectors because he thought that a favorable ruling on the absence of any WMD programs would effectively remove restrictions on Iraqi oil exports. When it became clear to Saddam that the chances of such a ruling were unlikely, he became increasingly uncooperative and ultimately expelled U.N. inspectors from Iraq in November of 1998. The Clinton administration responded by launching Operation Desert Fox, a precision bombing campaign designed to destroy suspected WMD sites and other military installations. It also shifted U.S. policy from containment toward an active pursuit of regime change, resulting in the Iraq Liberation Act.¹⁰² From 1998 until 2002, despite limited IAEA inspections over NPT compliance, there was little effective oversight of alleged Iraqi WMD programs.

The neoconservative "hawks" also tried to place "regime change" at the top of the Bush administration's foreign policy agenda.¹⁰³ However, early efforts were effectively stymied by the Department of State, especially Colin Powell and Richard Armitage, even though Armitage had signed the Clarke letter to President Clinton.¹⁰⁴ The tragic events of September 11 changed that—the demonstrated vulnerability of the United States suggested that the threat of a WMD attack on U.S. soil was increasingly high. Iraq was back on the table and neoconservatives drafted a new letter emphasizing

¹⁰¹ Marshal, 5.

¹⁰² P.L. 105-338, October 31, 1998.

¹⁰³ Marshal, 5.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 5.

the need to take preemptive action against Iraq. The ability or inability to directly link Saddam with September 11 became an ancillary consideration.¹⁰⁵

Montgomery Meigs has described the attacks of September 11 as the idiosyncratic application of a conventional resource.¹⁰⁶ Rather, by “weaponizing” a common facet of everyday life in the United States to produce mass casualties, terrorists effectively shattered previous notions of what was formerly considered “safe.” Suddenly, everything from delivery trucks to model airplanes became a potential threat. While this categorization is accurate, it is also difficult to conceptualize and next to impossible to defend against, because our tactics, doctrine, and procedures are all designed to respond to more conventional tactics. Thus as the nation struggled with the apparently large security dilemma exposed by the attacks, WMDs became a principal threat to be reckoned with because they are tangible, and we can conceptualize and model attacks based on their anticipated use. We can also take the offensive and preemptively remove them by targeting those countries and organizations with known WMD capabilities. With respect to Iraq, the intent to procure WMD had been previously established, and in the absence of viable oversight after 1998, a significant dilemma was created for the administration: Should the administration attempt to remove Saddam preemptively, or wait, and potentially face an even greater challenge in mobilizing domestic and international support at a later date? NSC advisor Condoleezza Rice summed up the conventional wisdom in the administration, noting, “we did not want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud.”¹⁰⁷

By illustrating the domestic strategic paradigm, in consonance with the international aspects as introduced in Chapter I, we can reconstruct a baseline of thought introduced at very early stages. As planning unfolded to address how the U.S. would remove Saddam’s regime, feasibility and consequences became ancillary concerns. Senior administration officials did not ask “can this be done” or “what happens if,” they instead focused on the essential task of regime decapitation. Joshua Marshal described a

¹⁰⁵ Letter to President Bush, September 20, 2001.

¹⁰⁶ Montgomery C. Meigs, General, US Army, “Unorthodox Thoughts about Asymmetric Warfare.” *Parameters* (Summer 2003), 4-18.

¹⁰⁷ Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 179.

very “linear logic” that is difficult to challenge, a checklist approach that drives one to the foregone conclusions that feasibility is not the issue and preventing Saddam’s acquisition and future use of WMD was of strategic necessity.¹⁰⁸

F. REGIME CHANGE OR REGIME REMOVAL?

Generally speaking, war plans usually follow four distinct phases: diplomatic engagement; initial shaping operations; decisive combat operations; and transition to post-war/peacekeeping environments. While the timelines for the first three are largely controlled by the superior military force, the transition from combat to peacekeeping operations is often murky, convoluted, and contested. It is thus often the hardest, most difficult, and potentially most open-ended part of the plan. What exactly constitutes success? Ironically, it also receives the least amount of attention from military planners, who tend to focus on offensive operations planning. This is how they are trained and it becomes their comfort zone. Thus, in almost every case an A-Team/B-Team mentality occurs, the general perception being that the “heavy hitters” get to plan for combat, while the “other” team plans for peace. In addition, the planning timelines for each phase are often out of balance. For example, General Franks had almost one year to plan Operation Iraqi Freedom. Any officer assigned to Central Command (CENTCOM) during that period would confirm that it was an incredibly accelerated timeline.¹⁰⁹ Although planning efforts were initially organized around a pre-existing war plan (1003), it needed extensive revisions because it had not been revisited since 1998. In addition, significant resource constraints imposed both by the Secretary of Defense, who initially wanted to execute the plan with less than a quarter of the specified troop strength, but also in order to meet other operational requirements, significantly complicated the planning process. In contrast, General Jay Garner (retired), who was appointed to head the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance, had just two months of planning time prior to the commencement of offensive operations in Iraq. His office was in charge of implementing transition (phase IV) operations in Iraq, but it was assigned a fraction of the planning and operation staff received by the other phases.

¹⁰⁸ Marshal. 3-4.

¹⁰⁹ Tommy Franks, General (retired), *American Soldier* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 2004), 321-478.

In some ways this was unavoidable, because the State Department lacked the significant personnel necessary to implement such plans. Although armed with the Department of State's "Future of Iraq Project report," over thirteen volumes of information that has proven exceedingly accurate in forecasting post-war difficulties, the State Department offered more concerns than solutions. Given the accelerated timeline of an approaching war, and with senior DOS leadership increasingly embroiled with the U.N. council, many have argued that the ORHA mission was doomed from the start.

Another factor, now commonly cited as evidence of OSD's preoccupation with winning the offensive fight, was the troop-to-task ratio that was begrudgingly authorized. With heavy emphasis on special operations and precision guided munitions in lieu of a more robust ground presence, OSD became convinced, based on early successes in Afghanistan, of the viability of that model. This approach proved extraordinarily effective in surgically removing Saddam's weak conventional force structure, while preserving existing Iraqi infrastructure. Following combat operations, however, Special Forces and precision guided munitions could not effectively patrol neighborhoods and streets. Moreover, early misperceptions regarding the potential reactions of Iraq's indigenous populace lingered among U.S. planners. Thomas White, former Secretary of the Army stated that:

The planning assumptions were that the people would realize they were liberated, they would be happy that we were there, so it would take a much smaller force to secure the peace than it did to win the war.¹¹⁰

Planning under this assumption has significantly hampered the ability of the U.S. military to effectively control the security situation in post-war Iraq.

Arguably the problem that most fuels the insurgency today is a lack of security. There are simply not enough coalition forces to saturate effectively the "hot zones," nor are Iraqi security forces being trained at a rate fast enough to replace coalition forces. The situation on the ground will not improve until effective security is established. In retrospect, it is clear that OSD became myopically focused on quickly removing the regime, which left the considerably more difficult task of replacing it unaddressed.

¹¹⁰ Fallows, 68.

G. OTHER AGENCY RIFTS

By the spring of 2002 there were considerable disagreements within the Bush administration over how to remove Saddam.¹¹¹ Nonetheless, agencies such as the DOD and State Department were given a deadline of 15 April 2002 to quell interagency disputes and devise a cohesive plan to achieve this goal. As a result of the ultimatum, the normal planning procedures became marginalized.¹¹² For example, several preliminary studies were not included in the formal planning process because they had not been completed due to resource constraints or were deemed unimportant. The indirect effect of accelerating this timeline was that OSD began to sideline the information and concerns coming from other agencies.

Not surprisingly, the Department of State had been working on a comprehensive project entitled the “Future of Iraq” since early 2002, but which only really began to circulate within DOD at the eve of war in 2003. In addition, using the “Future of Iraq” plan CIA planners began a series of war gaming exercises in late May.¹¹³ In the early stages these exercises were also attended by DOD representatives who were later reprimanded for their involvement.¹¹⁴ Interestingly, two of the recurring themes in these scenarios were early regime collapse and mass disorder or civil war.

A multitude of supporting agencies became engaged in similar endeavors. In August of 2002 the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hosted a discussion on the case for war in Iraq. One of the principal themes to come from the conference was the need to commit adequate resources and have a viable plan for post-war operations.¹¹⁵ Nearly all in attendance agreed that the occupation of Iraq would prove to be much more difficult than ousting Saddam. Through the fall and winter of 2002 the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), who developed response plans for identified “hot spots” and also serves as an interagency coordinator, met with groups such as the International Rescue Committee, Refugees International, the Red Cross, and other

¹¹¹ Franks, 321-478

¹¹² Hersh, 177.

¹¹³ Fallows, 61.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Report of Day Two Hearings, August 01, 2002, Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

NGOs concerned with Iraq. In the course of studying numerous recent humanitarian assistance operations in the 1990s, USAID concluded that the loss of security, even for a short time, could have serious long-term effects.¹¹⁶ Finally, the Army War College published a study in February of 2003 detailing the lessons learned from post-war operations in Germany and Japan. In consonance with the internal DOD opposition, the War College echoed the importance of a robust security presence.¹¹⁷ Advocates for increased troop strength argued that although war time objectives would be met, it was highly likely that the U.S. could become “bogged down” in the aftermath.¹¹⁸ Remarkably, the endeavors of these agencies had little impact on the evolving plan within DOD. Their findings of were viewed by OSD as mere impediments to an inevitable war of strategic necessity.¹¹⁹

H. CONCLUSIONS

The aforementioned hypotheses represent widely disparate views toward the U.S. government. The first suggests that the U.S. government was merely misled. The second implies that it did not care if it was misled. Each has some degree of explanatory power. As is often the case, the truth lies somewhere in between.

In the absence of the tragic events of September 11, the U.S. would have taken much longer to remove Saddam Hussein, if it did so at all. However, the attacks set a chain of events into motion. In “Plan of Attack” Bob Woodward demonstrates that these events began to take on a life of their own. Few people outside the administration really know when the decision was ultimately made to remove Saddam. Specifically, when did events move beyond the point of no return? Clearly, the answer to this important question would vary across the agencies and through the ranks.

In any case, the timeline was accelerated considerably in the wake of the attacks, which created new obstacles. As a result, the various agencies became isolated, narrowly focused on their respective tasks and responsibilities. The DOD focused on an offensive campaign to topple Saddam, one that would do so with minimal casualties and

¹¹⁶ Fallows, 65.

¹¹⁷ Conrad C. Crane and Andrew W. Terril, *Reconstructing Iraq: Insights, Challenges, and Missions for Military Forces in a Post-Conflict Scenario* (Carlisle: Army War College, 2003).

¹¹⁸ Fallows, 67-68.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

troops, emphasizing the technological and tactical advantages of U.S. forces. The DOS, although initially resistive and challenging many DOD assumptions, made the case to the U.N. security council for Iraq's alleged WMD and terrorist linkages. The CIA and other intelligence agencies roles were limited to searching for and providing select intelligence to support the other agencies, while the "facts on the ground" exceedingly fell on deaf ears. Meanwhile, the administration actively sought to build domestic and international support for U.S. endeavors. At the same time, many prewar assumptions, such as those promulgated by Ahmad Chalabi and the INC in the late 1990s, escaped scrutiny at the higher levels. Such misinformation became increasingly important as war plans evolved. Lack of effective oversight created conflict not only within the various agencies, but among them as well. As a result, the interagency process broke down. Without good interagency communication, the planning process became more susceptible to dubious information and the messengers of misinformation, such as Ahmad Chalabi, who capitalized on these conditions to circumvent the normal intelligence vetting process and to ensure U.S. plans for regime removal remained on course.

With respect to the Shi'is, the end result may be judged by history as one of the greatest ironies in the new millennium. For over 20 years, U.S. policy has sought to contain the perceived threat of Shi'i Islam to regional interests. Now, for the first time, the U.S. government is relying on them to create a stable and prosperous Iraq. The necessity to achieve this post-war vision was predominately responsible for the drastic shift in U.S. perceptions regarding the Shi'i.

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IV. REVISING PERSPECTIVES TOWARD IRAQI SHI'IS

A. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter explained how perceptions toward Iraqi Shi'is within the U.S. government shifted during the 1990s. A series of misperceptions were formulated and promulgated throughout the administration preceding OIF. By 2003, the Shi'is seemed conducive to the administration's goal of regime change. This chapter challenges the previously articulated pre-war assumptions with respect to the Shi'is, demonstrating that a careful study of Iraq's history would have alleviated much misunderstanding. It begins by examining Shi'i history in Iraq and significant events that have defined Shi'is today. It then challenges the notions that the Shi'is are monolithic, decidedly pro-American, and open to Western forms of secular democracy. The intent is to create a revised perspective of Iraq's Shi'is, one that more accurately reflects the realities on the ground in post-war Iraq.

B. A BRIEF HISTORY ON THE RISE AND FALL OF SHI'IS IN IRAQ

The conversion of Iraq's nomadic tribes to Shi'ism is a relatively new phenomenon. Shi'ism gained momentum in the 19th century following Ottoman attempts to settle the nomadic tribes as a means of cultivating increased agricultural production. The success of this policy reflects the increased effectiveness of governments throughout the Middle East during this period. From the beginning, a demographic split was created between Iraq's Sunni's, increasingly concentrated in the urban centers of influence, such as Baghdad, and the recently converted Shi'is who settled largely in the countryside near Najaf and Karbala.¹²⁰

The conversion of the nomadic tribes to sedentary agriculture practices inevitably fractured their former political and social infrastructures. Shi'i rituals and religious practices not only filled many of these gaps, but also provided the means by which the *mujtahids* attempted to unify the tribes and organize political structures.¹²¹ In addition, the proliferation of *sayyids* throughout the tribal villages helped ease the

¹²⁰ Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 43-45.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

transitions to Shi'i law.¹²² The relationship between *sayyid* families and tribal shaykhs was strengthened through intermarriage and a new social order emerged led by the larger tribal shaykhs and grand *mujtahids*.

Following the Ottoman surrender in 1918, Britain occupied three diverse Mesopotamian provinces in Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul.¹²³ These provinces were artificially joined into a new state under the British mandate system in 1920. The challenges of statehood were immense. Not only was the Arab majority divided along religious lines (Sunni's and Shi'is), but the provinces were deeply riven, with a countryside dominated by tribal federations, large Kurdish and Assyrian Christian minorities, as well as a significant Jewish population in Baghdad. The challenges of such diversity were clear and Britain's attempt to impose a more centralized government was met with revolt.

The 1920 revolt divided Iraqi Sunni's and Shi'is along political lines. Mirza Muhammad Taqi Shirazi, following the death of Kazim Yazdi on 29 April 1919, emerged as the leading *mujtahid* among the Shi'is.¹²⁴ Shirazi and his son Muhammad Rida were very influential in setting the religious agenda amongst the Shi'i *ulama*. The revolt was largely a response to British socio-economic policies in both Iran and Iraq, which were seen as a direct threat to the power and influence of the *mujtahids*. Specifically, British endeavors to control pilgrimages to the shrine cities adversely affected the principal means of income in those areas, which in turn reduced popular support for the *mujtahids*. Despite their religious differences, Iraq's Sunnis and Shi'is shared many tribal and cultural traditions. As such, in the early 1920s it was not difficult to unify behind a common goal of removing the British. However, the Sunni's did not support Shi'i political agendas or their aspirations for greater political influence. The revolt failed to achieve either an end to British occupation or an improved role for Shi'is in Iraqi politics. As a result, in the future Iraqi Sunni's became increasingly distrustful of any autonomous and politically active Shi'i religious activity. The 1920

¹²² Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 28. Sayyids - Descendants of the prophet in the Shi'i faith.

¹²³ Cleveland, 201.

¹²⁴ Amal Vinogradov, "The 1920 Revolt in Iraq Reconsidered: The Role of Tribes in National Politics." *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 3, 1972, 124-126.

revolt thus created the initial rift between Iraq's Shi'is and Sunnis.¹²⁵ Later attempts by Shi'is to gain influence within the political realm would be seen as threatening and hostile to Sunnis.

The 1920 revolt cost the British dearly, economically and politically, as well as in terms of domestic support for continued presence.¹²⁶ As a result, Britain pursued strategies that would secure their interests in the region, principally by opening lines of communication with India and securing access to Iraq and Iranian oil fields, while minimizing direct involvement local governance.¹²⁷ Local rule was left instead to the British established Sunni monarchy under King Faysal.

Najaf and Karbala became less important as Baghdad emerged as the new political center of the state. While the British-imposed Sunni government patronized the tribal shayhks in an ongoing effort to secure their loyalties and cooperation, the *mujtahid* were becoming isolated as the state became secularized. Unlike the Iranian Shi'i *ulama*, who retained much of their traditional power under Pahlavi's regime, in Iraq the state removed much of this power from the *mujtahids* by controlling Shi'i institutions, specifically *madrasa* and *waqf* properties.¹²⁸

Much of the conflict between Iraqi Sunni's and Shi'is can thus be reduced to a power struggle for the rights to rule the state and to shape the emerging nationalism. While Shi'is tended to promote Iraqi nationalism, this was seen as contradictory to the greater Sunni goals of Pan-Arabism. This is an important distinction, since later Sunni efforts to discredit Shi'is politically were centered upon the notion of Shi'ism as a heresy motivated by Persian hatred of Arabs.¹²⁹ In fact, prior to coming to power in 1968, the Ba'ath party began to denounce Shi'is by referring to them as "*shuubi*," a

¹²⁵ Nakash, 270.

¹²⁶ Cleveland, 201.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 202-203.

¹²⁸ Asaf Hussain, *Islamic Iran: Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 160-164. Madrasa – School. Waqf – An organization that “owns” religious properties and institutions.

¹²⁹ Yitzhak Nakash, “The Struggle for Power in Iraq.” *Dissent Magazine* (Summer 2003). Available from <http://www.dissentmagazine.org>. Internet. Accessed May/2004.

historically derogatory term which referred to Persians and Aramaeans that cursed the privileged positions of Arabs in the eighth and ninth centuries.

In 1958 the monarchy was overthrown and replaced with a Shi'i ruler Abd al-Karim Qasim. Qasim promoted Iraqi nationalism and borrowed much from the Egyptian nationalist party lines by advocating the preservation of national identities and resisting affiliations with other states, unlike Pan-Arabism. Because of his politics Qasim was a prime target for Ba'athists who labeled him both a separatist and *shuubi* despot. He was assassinated in 1963 by Ba'athists, ostensibly for his refusal to join the United Arab Republic. He is remembered by Shi'is as the nationalist leader who attempted to reform the state by removing the sectarian divisions and subordination of Shi'is to the ruling Sunni minority. His legacy marks the apogee of Shi'i influence in Iraqi politics and the beginning of its rapid decline.

C. THE DIVERSIFICATION OF IRAQI SHI'IS

The Ba'ath party came to power in 1968 and continued to preserve a system that marginalized Iraqi Shi'is politically and economically. In the years following World War Two many Shi'is migrated to Baghdad, joining the urban labor force as well as civil and government service sectors. Their interests diversified and any misgivings toward the regime were usually manifested in economic and political issues rather than matters of religion.¹³⁰ William Cleveland describes these urban Shi'is as having "become diversified, as they were not a monolithic community with a common attitude toward the government."¹³¹ They had in fact become partially assimilated within a modernizing urban culture.

Religious identity remained important in the south and the influence of the Shi'i *ulama* remained strong within Shi'i circles at the tribal level. The Shi'i *ulama* and their followers opposed the Ba'ath regime on three principals: 1) the secularism of the regime, 2) the exclusion of Shi'is from the higher echelons of government, 3) and Sunni's incessant attempts to dominate all social and religious organizations within Iraqi society.¹³² The Dawa Party (Islamic Call) was created in secret by the *ulama* in 1957,

¹³⁰ Cleveland, 399.

¹³¹ Ibid., 399.

¹³² Ibid., 399-400.

and advocated the removal of the regime in exchange for an Islamic government. Iraqi Shi'is, frustrated by diminished opportunities and the lack of equivalent political representation, united behind the party's ideology. Recruitment into the party surged from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, and resulted in major revolts in 1977 and 1979 during the pilgrimage rites of Karbala and Najaf.¹³³ The Ba'ath regime became alarmed at the growing level of resentment and organized protests, and arrested several persons with alleged affiliations to the party. In addition, in 1979 the Ayatollah Khomeini took power in Iran. The connection between Iranian and Iraqi Shi'is was a tremendous "unknown" for the regime and became one of the principal Iraqi justifications for the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988).¹³⁴

To some degree, the regime's suspicions of Iran were correct. The Iranian Revolution fostered strong anti-regime sentiments among Iraqi Shi'is, ultimately leading the Dawa party to challenge the regime.¹³⁵ However, although pressing for an Islamic government, the party's leader Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr acknowledged that the conditions for an Iranian-style revolution did not exist in Iraq.¹³⁶ Iranian Shi'is advocated the "rule of the jurist," a spiritual-juridical figure who commanded absolute religious and political authority, which did not find much favor with Dawa members in Iraq.¹³⁷ In addition, many Iraqi Shi'is were nationalistic and were not interested in a potential merger with Iran. Nonetheless, following the execution of Baqir al-Sadr by the Ba'ath, the Dawa party was effectively fractured into several groups, which until Operation Iraqi Freedom were largely based abroad, primarily in Iran, Syria, and Britain.¹³⁸

Throughout the Iran/Iraq War, Saddam Hussein faced the challenge of securing the loyalties of Shi'i that constituted the bulk of his armed forces. The Iraqi government pursued several strategies that stressed an Iraqi Shi'i. However, these policies had the

¹³³ Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 216-217.

¹³⁴ Cleveland, 399.

¹³⁵ Yitzhak Nakash, "The Struggle for Power in Iraq." *Dissent Magazine* (Summer 2003). Available from <http://www.dissentmagazine.org>. Internet. Accessed May/2004.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

unintended effect of reinforcing a distinct Shi'i sense of self.¹³⁹ Another means by which Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath party fractured Shi'i unity in the south was through kinship and tribalism, or what Amatzia Baram describes as "neo-tribalism."¹⁴⁰ After completely denouncing tribalism in favor of Iraqi unity and nationalism, the Ba'ath completely switched polices following the intifada in March of 1991.¹⁴¹ In many such cases Ba'ath policies regarding tribalism conflicted. Initially, cooperation with tribal shaykhs was an effective tactic that Saddam used to achieve control and influence. Later, tribal values became important considerations for young men recruited into Saddam's elite Republican and Special Republican Guard units. In addition, Saddam's patronage to his own al-Tikriti tribe was so pronounced that he insisted the "al-Tikriti" be removed from his name, lest it raise the specter of nepotism.¹⁴²

During the Intifada several loyal tribal shaykhs refused to participate, a point we will return to later, which greatly facilitated the suppression of the uprising. Based on this experience, Saddam quickly realized the potential of cultivating the tribal shaykhs. It would be through this unequal patronage, based on loyalty and affiliation with the Ba'ath regime that the Shi'is in the southern Iraq would be further isolated and marginalized.

D. THE INTIFADA OF 1991 AND THE SEEDS OF DISTRUST

The presumption that Iraqi Shi'is would welcome a prolonged alliance with the U.S. government overlooks a legacy created during the Intifada following the first Gulf War in 1991. As discussed earlier, Saddam tried to gain legitimacy and support through his tribal policies in the Shi'i south. Those who were loyal to the regime were rewarded; others were crushed mercilessly.¹⁴³ Loyalty did not necessarily mean taking up arms against fellow Shi'i, simply refusing to participate was enough in many cases. That the uprising occurred during a harvest season did not help foster participation either,

¹³⁹ Tripp, 246.

¹⁴⁰ Amatzia Baram, "Neo-Tribalism in Iraq: Saddam Hussein's Tribal Policies 1991-96." *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 29, 1997, 1-31.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ United Nations Economic and Social Council Commission on Human Rights, Reports on the situation of Human Rights in Iraq, Prepared by Max Van Der Stoel, Special Report on Human Rights (1992-9). <http://www.fas.org/news/iraq/1995/a-50-734.htm>. Accessed April 2004.

because the local harvest determined the survival of many southern Shi'i families. Finally, many Shi'is resisted participation in the uprising based on their personal morality and sense of nationalism.¹⁴⁴ Thus, there were tremendous perceived and real costs associated with participating or even being affiliated with the uprising. Joining the uprising was a tremendous risk, and the decision to do so was often heavily influenced by U.S. promises of support.

The Intifada, though disorganized and spontaneous, was stimulated by outside influences as well as internal opposition and spread widely.¹⁴⁵ One of the earliest events prior to the formal insurrection occurred in early February near Diwaniyya, when several Shi'is protested Saddam's refusal to evacuate Kuwait. The protest grew in intensity and ten Ba'ath party officials were killed.¹⁴⁶ Several days later President George Bush Sr. made the first of several public calls for Iraqis to stage an internal revolt to topple the regime. The ground war began on 24 February. Within days, the Iraqis withdrew from Kuwait and the U.S. military and coalition forces occupied large portions of southern Iraq. By this time, the insurrection was spreading rapidly across Shi'i towns in southern Iraq, including Basra, Amara, Nasiriyya, and Kut.¹⁴⁷ On 7 March, faced with large protests and demonstrations in the shrine cities of Karbala and Najaf, the Iraqi government publicly acknowledged that it was facing an internal revolt. The Kurds in the north also began to commit to the cause and joined the revolt within a few days. Fueled by years of repression and hatred for the regime, the rebels summarily executed dozens of Ba'ath party officials and collaborators.

Along with several exile groups and opposition parties, Iran expressed cautious support for the rebellion. On 8 March the Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani publicly denounced Saddam Hussein, openly calling for his resignation.¹⁴⁸ Publicly, Iranian support consisted of little more than an aggressive campaign of media propaganda. However, the head of the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in

¹⁴⁴ United Nations, Human Rights Report, 274-276.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Tripp, 255.

¹⁴⁸ Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, 275.

Iraq (SCIRI), Baqir al-Hakim, who was exiled and operating from Iran, sent several thousand rebels from SCIRI's private army, known as the Badr Brigade, across the border to assist the opposition.¹⁴⁹ In addition, several allegations were made by Kuwaiti and other allied officials that Iran was providing additional humanitarian and military aid.¹⁵⁰ Iran later admitted that this aid was intended to facilitate the formation of a friendly Shi'i Muslim government.

The U.S. government's position toward the uprising became increasingly convoluted. On the one hand, President Bush still called upon the Iraqi people to rebel against Saddam. U.S. intelligence estimates, however, questioned the uprisings viability.¹⁵¹ The U.S. government was faced with a difficult choice, since a successful uprising seemed to require considerable aid and security support. Senior Iraqi military officials were also concerned by the possible social disintegration in Iraq. Former President Bush's "call to arms" ironically caused an uprising that may have actually prevented the military coup the U.S. government was trying to incite. As the Iraqi military subsequently became involved with controlling the rebellion and preserving law and order, the military leadership rallied around Saddam.¹⁵² A second miscalculation by occurred during the first week of March 1991. Faced with such a rapid and concise defeat, which surprised even the U.S. government, many Iraqi commanders nonetheless considered joining the rebellion. The costs for being on the "losing team" were of course severe. However, some analysts believe that if the U.S. government had supported or even encouraged the rebels in the weeks that followed, a military coup might have been feasible.¹⁵³ In any case these opportunities were lost and Saddam was able to crush the rebellion and isolate remaining pockets of resistance within weeks.¹⁵⁴

The consequences of failure were severe for the Shi'is in the south. Saddam's violent reprisals, which contrasted markedly with the response to the Kurdish resistance,

¹⁴⁹ Tripp, 256.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 257-258.

¹⁵¹ Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, 275.

¹⁵² Andrew Cockburn and Patrick Cockburn, "We Have Saddam Hussein Still Here." Micah L. Sifry and Christopher Cerf ed., *The Iraq War Reader* (New York: Touchstone, 2003), 97.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

were motivated in part by his sense of Shi'i betrayal.¹⁵⁵ For days, Saddam loyalists shelled Shi'i shrines and mosques in Najaf and Karbala. The southern marshes thought to be hiding Shi'i insurgents were completely drained, an unparalleled environmental catastrophe. During the sanctions period immediately after the war, average annual per capita income sank from \$4,083 to \$485-\$300 in the years that followed 1991.¹⁵⁶ Over 60% of the country sank below the poverty line, and much of southern Iraq became a barren wasteland with Shi'is incurring the greatest costs.

The Shi'is historical memory toward the U.S. government is thus one of betrayal and mistrust. As one rebel put it, "Bush said that we should rebel against Saddam. We rebelled against Saddam, but where is Bush?"¹⁵⁷ In contrast, with growing pressure from Riyadh and concerns over fundamentalist Iranians, the U.S. government switched from support of the uprising to a "hands off" approach. The U.S. military even provided some tactical support to contain the Intifada.¹⁵⁸ There were several reports, for example, that the CIA actively denied rebels access to weapons and ammo caches and rerouted several shipments of arms to Afghanistan to aid the *jihadis*.¹⁵⁹

Iraqi Shi'is are anxious for a fair share of power and political influence in the new Iraq, and the new political landscape holds tremendous opportunities. However, experience has made the Shi'is wary of U.S. government actions and interests, especially with regard to oil. While Um Qasr, Safwan, Basra, and others all fell into civil disorder following the ground offensive, for example, some of the coalition's first security actions during Operation Iraqi Freedom were to seize and protect the oil fields. Safwan and Um Qasr were border towns that swelled with refugees and civil unrest, yet daily the Iraqi citizens witnessed a parade of convoys passing through from bases in Kuwait, each carrying the apparatus of security and support to "more important" objectives. Based on these experiences, the Shi'is are extremely hesitant to engage in

¹⁵⁵ Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, 278.

¹⁵⁶ Jabar, 271. Measured in U.S. dollars.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 276.

¹⁵⁸ A Pentagon report suggested that "any Iranian occupation of any part of Iraq will improve prospects for Iranian domination of the Gulf and remove a restraint on Syria." Andrew Cockburn and Patrick Cockburn, "*We Have Saddam Hussein Still Here*," Micah L. Sifry and Christopher Cerf (ed.), *The Iraq War Reader* (New York: Touchstone, 2003), 97.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 98.

long-term commitments or partnerships with the U.S. government. In fact, cooperation with the U.S. military has had the indirect effect of discrediting many tribal and religious organizations amongst both Shi'is and Sunnis.¹⁶⁰

E. WHY THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S PLANS FOR A SECULAR DEMOCRACY MAY NOT SUCCEED IN IRAQ

Two of the most troubling assumptions the U.S. government has made is that a liberated, democratic Iraq would result in a “wave of democratization throughout the Middle-East” and that a friendly Iraqi government could effectively replace the faltering Saudi alliance, and ensure continued U.S. presence and influence within the region. One of the more troubling matters is the influence Chalabi has had in shaping these perceptions within the U.S. government and the resultant effects this had on the decision to remove Saddam.¹⁶¹ Chalabi convinced the national security “hawks” that despite the Shi'i majority in a democratic Iraq the Shi'is would be “largely secular in mindset and uninterested in a Khomeinist theocracy.”¹⁶² However, nothing could have been further from the truth. Chalabi left Iraq in 1958. Since that time, Iraqi Shi'is have been continuously repressed and brutalized by a regime focused on minimizing their political and religious influence. As a byproduct of this environment, radical Islamism has emerged in greater strength, as have increasing numbers of poverty stricken youth influenced heavily by Khomeinist ideas.

Recent history seriously undermines Chalabi's assertions. In response to the Shi'i uprisings of 1977 and the Iranian revolution in 1979, the Ba'ath Party implemented several policies to restrict and repress Shi'i religious activities. Membership in the Dawa party became illegal and their leading theorist, Baqir al-Sadr, was executed in 1980. As a result, the party became an underground movement. Many members left Iraq to promote and expand party interests abroad. During the 1980s and 1990s over 200,000 Iraqi Shi'is with al Dawa affiliations, fled to Iran, while another major Dawa base of operations was established in London.¹⁶³ From 1992-1995 the London based Dawa branch become involved with the Iraqi National Congress (INC), founded and

¹⁶⁰ Nakash, *The Struggle for Power in Iraq*.

¹⁶¹ Evan and Hosenball, 22-32.

¹⁶² Juan Cole, *On the History...*, 5.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

financed by Ahmad Chalabi, which also received funding and support from the CIA.¹⁶⁴ In 1982, Shi'i activists in Iran created the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI, also referred to as SAIRI), a movement designed to promote the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.¹⁶⁵ These groups have been extremely active over the past decade in formulating plans for the future of Iraq.

Within Iraq a division has occurred over the past decade within the Shi'i populace, resulting in two opposing factions. Iraq's Shi'is rejected traditionally Khomeini's ideas regarding clerical rule. Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr became one of the leading theorists for the Dawa party in Iraq and advocated government by an elected assembly.¹⁶⁶ These ideas were effectively transmitted during the 1970s and 80s through the senior clergymen or the "Object of Emulation," the senior, most experienced Shi'i scholar. Following the untimely death of Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei in 1992, however, a split emerged between the elder Shi'is and the youth who grew up during the decades of repression. The older Shi'is continued to be influenced by one of al-Khoei's principal disciples, the Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, while the younger generation found favor in Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, a distant cousin to Baqir al-Sadr. Sadiq al-Sadr made up for his lack of religious credibility and authority by his ability to mobilize a disenfranchised youth, and for his aggressive actions in defiance of the regime. Unlike Ali Sistani, Sadiq al-Sadr accepted Khomeini's theories of divine rule of the jurispudent, and felt capable of serving in this capacity.¹⁶⁷ His appeal won him over two million followers.¹⁶⁸ After being warned on numerous occasions to tone down his religious rhetoric, however, he was assassinated by Saddam's secret police in February of 1999. While two of his sons faced a similar fate, a third, Muqtada al-Sadr, became an heir to his father's legacy. With the increasing threat of war in 2003, Muqtada and his followers were already performing a remarkable job pursuing their own versions of "debaathification" in East

¹⁶⁴ Evan and Hosenball, 22-32. In 1995, these groups diverged yet again over irreconcilable differences regarding the Kurds.

¹⁶⁵ Juan Cole, *On the History...*, 5. The SCIRI was an umbrella organization that initially included the Dawa branches in Iran. However, Dawa soon broke away to preserve its independence.

¹⁶⁶ Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, 269-272.

¹⁶⁷ Juan Cole, *On the History...*, 7-11.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

Baghdad, subsequently renamed “Sadr City.” He continues to be a powerful political force in Iraq today.

As the regime fell during the spring of 2003, the Dawa party reappeared in Nasiriya, Basra, and other southern cities. While many members of the Iranian branch were unwilling to return to an Iraq under U.S. occupation, members of the London branch, who had former ties to Chalabi and the INC, won the U.S. favor through cooperation, and have subsequently returned from exile with their political agendas in tow. The SCIRI also returned to Iraq in April and May, along with thousands of Badr Corps soldiers who slipped across the Iran/Iraq border and settled in the border towns. Despite the party’s cooperation with the U.S. government, American and British troops had been involved in several unintended clashes with Badr Corps elements.¹⁶⁹ The SCIRI and al-Sadr factions both advocate a form of clerical rule in Iraq. While Sadr is much more confrontational with the U.S. government, the SCIRI had adopted a more passive, two-step approach: cooperate and then win by majority. The destruction of the Ba’athist regime has thus opened a “Pandora’s Box” as Shi’i factions compete for political and religious legitimacy in the new Iraq. Not only was the U.S. government woefully unprepared to counter the expansion of Islamist movements in Iraq, it certainly did not expect to face several entrenched political agendas over thirty years in the making.

While secularism is certainly present in Iraq, with over 14 million advocates by some estimates, religion often finds a larger audience in times of hardship and despair, as it has throughout much of the Middle East.¹⁷⁰ The absence of a thriving middle class has fostered the spread of Islamist movements.¹⁷¹ The current environment in Iraq is ripe for Islamist politics and many view the U.S. government led occupation as a golden opportunity to Islamize power and redress communal grievance.¹⁷² While a Shi’i

¹⁶⁹ Juan Cole, *On the History...*, 7-11.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Nazih N. Ayubi, *Political Islam: Socio-Economic Bases*, SO 4830 Reader, 158-161.

¹⁷² Jabar, 18.

Islamic republic in Iraq is not a certainty, in the months following the U.S. military's occupation it was the Shi'is that consistently represented the "clearest organizational skill and established political momentum."¹⁷³

The question is not so much whether democracy can flourish in Iraq, but rather what version of it is being imposed, and what will emerge. There have been several recent opinion polls that suggest many Muslims favor democratic values and principles. However, the general opinion of the U.S. government and its policies toward the Middle East is also at an all-time low.¹⁷⁴ Thus, the message itself may not be to blame if the messenger lacks sufficient credibility. If a democratic model is to succeed, it must originate in Iraq and will most certainly reflect Islamic ideals and religious law. In addition, many Americans forget the tumultuous path of our own democratic system. The blessing and the curse of the American model is its ability to change, and to be reflective of the current issues and concerns of the modern world. However this poses many ideological problems for Islam. Vali Nasr, a Professor at Naval Post Graduate School in Monterey, California, argues the divergence between Islam and democracy is over "truths." While Islam is concerned principally with absolute truths, democracy consists of relative truths based on the majority.¹⁷⁵ While potentially supportive of democracy, Islam could translate into "one man, one vote, one time."¹⁷⁶ Thus, a democracy reflective of Islamic values may become, by definition, infallible and resistant to change, which in turn affects future popular support for the regime, for the nation's stability, and its people's prosperity. Finally, even should it succeed, democracy may present some unintended consequences and challenges for U.S. policies within the region. With respect to current Arab sentiments with Israel, how can a government more representative, i.e. democratic, in the Middle East be viewed as anything but increasingly threatening to Israelis or even to the Saudis?¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Juan Cole, *On the History..*, 12.

¹⁷⁴ Gallup Polls, American University of Sharjah Online, Middle East Polls.Com, Middle East Pulse Online, Harvard University Center For Middle Eastern Studies.

¹⁷⁵ Professor Vali Nasr, Lecture Notes: 3 June 2004.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

The truth is, that the majority of Iraq's Shi'is generally fall into one of three broad political/Islamic movements, each one vying for an Islamic government, with perhaps a fourth capturing the secularists. With or without democratic elections, the future Iraq will most likely be an Islamic state, with Shi'is gaining unprecedented levels of power and influence. The revised perspective offered in this chapter challenges the pre-war assumptions made by the U.S. government regarding the Shi'is, and implies that to accomplish its previously articulated goals, the U.S. government will need to adjust its current strategies that pertain to the Shi'i.

V. CONCLUSIONS

A. SUMMARY

For over 20 years, U.S. policy attempted to contain the perceived threat Shi'ism posed to regional interests and objectives as a cohesive, violent, radical, and anti-Western movement. These perceptions arose as a result of early British experiences in Iraq during the 1900s, and were inherited by the U.S. government when it assumed a dominant role in the Middle East during the 1970s. They were later solidified through the U.S. government's experiences in Iran and Lebanon, and intensified during the 1980s with the emergence of Islamist terrorism.

However, as the U.S. military prepared to invade Iraq in 2002, such perceptions shifted to accommodate U.S. visions for a post-war Iraq. The U.S. government began to believe that Iraq's Shi'is would support efforts to remove Saddam's regime and would welcome a Western-oriented, secular democracy. This transition was neither immediate nor deliberate, and it occurred over an extended period, beginning with passive attempts at regime removal in the 1990s under the Clinton administration. Lacking effective intelligence assets throughout the region, the U.S. government relied on Iraqi exiles to facilitate these endeavors. Exiles who stood to gain much from Saddam's ouster, such as Ahmad Chalabi, went to great lengths to convince the administration of the viability of an externally-supported revolt. Such a revolt assumed the support of the southern Shi'i majority, who, having suffered for decades under the regime's repression, would presumably back the revolt.¹⁷⁸ Although these endeavors failed to produce the desired results, the assumptions about the Shi'i lingered and were perpetuated by emerging neoconservative ideologues within the U.S. government who also wanted to remove Saddam. Despite the implementation of the Iraqi Liberation Act in 1998, further attempts at regime removal by the U.S. government in the late 1990s were replaced by diplomatic efforts, including the Oslo Peace Process and other regional endeavors.

The neoconservatives dominated the new Bush administration, and the events of September 11 2001 provided them with a justification to implement a more "pragmatic

¹⁷⁸ The Shi'i were thought to be more willing to join an uprising than the Iraqi Kurds. The original plan sent by Chalabi to the U.S. government suggested an invasion from Iran into southern Iraq.

solution” to deal with the perceived threats poised by Saddam. Due to the severity of the attacks, and the existence of regimes with an expressed desire to threaten U.S. interests, the doctrine of “preemptive” attacks seemed justified. The implementation of this doctrine accelerated efforts to remove Saddam Hussein by force. This acceleration, necessitated by both the urgency of the perceived threat and the need to consolidate international and domestic support, had adverse effects on the interagency process. Regime removal instead of regime replacement became the focus of the neoconservatives, and prior assumptions that supported this endeavor indirectly became the foundation for the evolving war plan. These assumptions have proved incorrect and resulted in a post-war environment very different from that which was planned. The views and attitudes of Iraq’s peoples, including the Shi’i, are much more diverse than anticipated, and their distrust and fear of America persists. Thus, imposing democracy has proved to be a significant challenge. As the U.S. government struggled to repair the state and civil infrastructures, which were in far greater disarray than previously estimated, security became a secondary consideration. As prior planning assumptions began to unravel, political, social, and confessional cleavages were revealed and the security situation began to worsen.

B. IMPLICATIONS

While many factors well beyond the scope of this thesis have contributed to the deteriorating post-war environment, the U.S. government missed a major opportunity in its quest to promote stability in Iraq when it did not consult with Shi’i leaders at an earlier stage. The U.S. government was hesitant to engage with religious leaders and underestimated their influence and control over the southern Shi’i populace, preferring instead to identify and foster relationships with secular leaders. This contributed to initial problems in many southern Iraqi cities such as Basra, Nasiriyah, Najaf, and Kut, problems that worsened during uprisings involving followers of al-Sadr.

The media has also propagated misunderstandings about the post-war environment and the nature of the insurgent threat. In early 2004, reports of Shi’i uprisings in Sadr City and other areas suggested a monolithic insurgency, when the truth is, that there remains significant internal political conflicts amongst the Shi’is. Many commentators failed to notice, for instance, when Moktada al-Sadr moderated his

opposition in an effort to participate in the political process. Recent reporting generally labels the insurgency as a Sunni-based movement that groups al-Qaeda sympathizers, former Ba'athists, and those attempting to reestablish Sunni dominance. This perspective is dangerous since it masks and mislabels underlying social currents. While the generalization may hold true for the most violent groups, increasing numbers of Iraqis, including the Shi'is, are becoming openly frustrated by the lack of progress. Many Iraqis, in turn, are now tolerating insurgent activity.¹⁷⁹

The emergence of a second Shi'i state seems likely, given the Shi'is large majority in Iraq. In and of itself, Shi'i political ascendancy has tremendous implications for the region, U.S. relations within the Middle East, and the larger Islamic world. The extent to which these implications, had they been acknowledged, would have impacted the decision to remove Saddam is now of secondary importance. Suffice it to say, a secure and stable Iraq, instead of one plagued by insurgency and civil war, will be more conducive to U.S. interests.

Shi'i opposition in post-war Iraq has been minimized, largely as a result of the Shi'i clergy who seem willing, for the moment, to allow the political process to proceed. If this should change, the results could be disastrous. A forced withdrawal by the U.S. military from Iraq would be akin to rolling the dice on the potential outcome. The absence of a moderating force in Iraq leaves the nation at the mercy of the neighboring countries, including Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Turkey.

C. CONSIDERATIONS

Any hope of success in Iraq requires a radical transformation in the way the U.S. government perceives both the abstract problem and the messy realities of the country's political, social, and spiritual geography. With respect to the Shi'i, the lesson that must be taken from the initial blunders is the need to engage Shi'i leaders at all levels, including the religious hierarchy. The U.S. government cannot begin to discuss emerging forms of democracy without accepting to some degree the presence and integration of political Islam. To complicate matters, the Shi'is are not monolithic with respect to these views. Numerous Shi'i religious groups are now vying for political

¹⁷⁹ International Crisis Group, et al, "What Can the U.S. Do in Iraq?" Crisis Group Middle East Report N°34 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2004), 5.

representation and influence. It is essential to understand what these parties represent at multiple levels, politically, socially, and ideologically. This will challenge previous U.S. tendencies to stonewall organizations with alleged terrorist affiliations. The U.S. government tends to apply such labels carelessly, but it cannot afford to let crude generalities impede progress. Ibrahim al-Jaafari is a prime example of the subtle evaluations and ideological compromises that U.S. policymakers will need to make in coming years. Appointed Iraq's transitional Prime Minister in April of 2005, al-Jaafari is also a leading spokesman for the Iraqi Dawa party, a party with known affiliations with Hezbollah. Despite these affiliations, it is nonetheless essential to maintain as many conduits for diplomatic engagement as possible, including with potential leaders like al-Jaafari. It is unclear if U.S. leaders are willing to understand and accept the complexity and multidimensional aspects of such relationships.

Another challenge for the U.S. government will be to maintain open dialogues with popular leaders, while not appearing to support or condemn them directly because of their political stance toward the United States. The U.S. government must focus on the domestic context of the problem. Domestic security, stability, and progress must come first; attempts to shape international relations with an emerging state are premature. With respect to potential leaders, if faced with the choice of what is good for Iraq versus what is good for the United States, in the long run the former may be the only way to achieve the latter.

By the same token the U.S. government must acknowledge that its political favorites face an uphill battle, precisely because of the U.S. support that they enjoy. Some potential leaders who advocate moderate and tolerant agendas have been effectively marginalized because of their affiliations with the United States. Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, for example, was politically weakened during Iraq's first elections amidst accusations of being a "pro-Western puppet." In contrast, early U.S. support of Allawi, himself a former Ba'athist who was rumored to be an *ex-Mukhabarat* agent under Saddam, may have puzzled many Iraqis.¹⁸⁰ Our support of select individuals clearly sends a message to the populace about both our favorites and us.

¹⁸⁰ Mukhabarat – Intelligence organization.

The Shi'is also have many perceptions about the U.S. government based on their own historical memories. When the U.S. government assumed the trust and cooperation of the Shi'is, it naively overlooked its own history with these long-oppressed Iraqis, especially the failed uprising of 1991 when the U.S. government abandoned the Shi'i to Saddam's reprisals.

A willingness to engage with the Shi'i at multiple levels will help correct previous mistakes. Currently, many Shi'i are suspicious of the U.S. government's policies and future plans for Iraq. One of the principal concerns is the nature and length of the proposed occupation. For many Iraqi's the size of the U.S. "Green Zone" and its central location in Baghdad suggests a permanent U.S. presence in Iraq, as has the magnitude of reconstruction and expansion of select military facilities, such as Talil Air Base in central Iraq. In addition, many Iraqi's have noted the remarkable and unprecedented effectiveness of America's military power, but are confused by our inability to control the insurgency. Many feel that this is of deliberate design, a scheme to assure a long term American presence in the region.¹⁸¹ Such ideas have become one of the primary recruiting tools used by many of the opposition groups.¹⁸² The U.S. government simply must do a better job of clarifying and publicizing its long-term objectives and milestones. Encouraging and promoting active contact among the Shi'is will reinforce the U.S. government's claims, with respect to its stated objectives, increase its legitimacy, and foster understanding and trust with the Iraqis it purports to liberate.

D. CONCLUSIONS

The U.S. government's chronic misreading of the Shi'is has not been responsible for all the problems and setbacks in post-war Iraq. There are much larger strategic and operational obstacles that must be overcome before Iraq can be construed as any sort of successful "model" for U.S. intervention in the Middle East. However, one of the principal lessons of post-war Iraq is the need for greater understanding of the Shi'is, as difficult and complex as this task may be. Fostering cooperation with the Shi'is is the only way for the U.S. government to achieve security and stability in post-war Iraq.

¹⁸¹ ICG, 3.

¹⁸² Ibid, 5-6.

Regardless of what Iraqi government emerges, Shi'is will no longer be politically marginalized, but will play a central role. The U.S. government will be forced to work with Iraq's Shi'i, but first it must understand them.

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