

Competing Interests: The United States, Iraq, and Iraq's Neighbors

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The U.S. Steps Away

“Americans planted a tree in Iraq. They watered that tree, pruned it, and cared for it. Ask your American friends why they’re leaving now before the tree bears fruit.”

—*Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to Iraq’s foreign minister*

“Saddam Hussein’s Iraq was a regional menace that sent shudders through its neighbors. Today’s Iraqi leaders are struggling to restrain the ambitions of countries that share Iraq’s porous borders.... With American troops preparing to withdraw from Iraq by the end of 2011, the meddling threatens to aggravate the sectarian divisions in the country and undermine efforts by Iraq’s leaders to get beyond bitter rivalries and build a stable government.”

—*New York Times, Dec. 5, 2010*

Outline

- U.S. interests
- Iraq
- Iran
- Saudi Arabia
- Turkey
- Yemen
- Kuwait
- Syria
- Jordan
- Other Gulf States



Key Questions

- What is each country's *grand strategy*?
- What is each country's *desired outcome* in Iraq?
- What *strategic interests* is each country pursuing in Iraq?

U.S. Interests in Iraq

- National Security Strategy, May 2010: “In Iraq, we are transitioning to full Iraqi sovereignty and responsibility—a process that includes the removal of our troops, the strengthening of our civilian capacity, and a long-term partnership with the Iraqi Government and people.”
- Three core components:
 - *Transition security* to Iraqi responsibility; U.S. troops out by end of 2011.
 - *Civilian support*. Designed to help resolve differences in Iraq, integrate refugees, develop democratic institutions.
 - *Regional diplomacy and development*.

Iraq

- One-time regional strongman; now neighbors interfere in its affairs
- Does Iraq want to be a regional strongman again? Could it be?
- Internal rifts
- Diffusion of power: Shia militias, AQI, Awakening, clerical influence



New Government

- Iraq's national elections held Mar. 7; eight months of political deadlock followed.
- Nouri al-Maliki ended up as prime minister after Sadr decided to support him for a second term. Deal brokered by Iran.
- Result: increased Sadrist power.



Muqtada al-Sadr

- Fled to Iran in early 2007; feared he would be pursued according to 2004 arrest warrant.
- Power of Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM) declined as U.S. surge showed signs of success.
- “Sadr left Iraq because his political influence was waning and he thought he could regain that by achieving religious authority. Now things have changed. He’s already gained that influence.” —*Babak Rahimi, UC San Diego*



Shia Militias: Asaib Ahl al-Haq (AAH)

- “League of the Righteous,” largest and most dangerous Shia militia
- Split from JAM, eclipsed it during period of Sadr’s ineffectiveness.
- Received training, money, weapons from Iran.
- AAH masterminded the kidnapping of Peter Moore (British contractor), and Issa Salomi (pictured).



Approaches to AAH

- U.S. attempted reconciliation.
- *July 2009*: Senior commander Laith Khazali and more than 100 other members freed.
- *December 2009*: Founder Qais Khazali freed in apparent swap from Peter Moore.
- *January 2010*: AAH suspended talks with Iraqi government, kidnapped DOD contractor Issa Salomi.
- “We’ve been had. Anyone who closely followed the League of the Righteous should have known this was inevitable.” —*Senior U.S. military officer*

Source: Bill Roggio, “Iran Sends Another Dangerous Shia Terror Commander Back to Iraq,” *Long War Journal*, Oct. 18, 2010

The Awakening/Sons of Iraq

- Awakening began in Anbar province; localized Sunni opposition to al-Qaeda.
- Expanded via “Sons of Iraq” throughout country: 94,000+ fighters.
- Created a challenge: diffusion of military power. What do you do with the Sol?



Are Sol Members Joining al Qaeda?

- Lack of incorporation: only 9,000 hired for security forces, less than half offered government jobs.
- *NYT*: “Much of the employment has been temporary and involved menial labor.”
- Pattern of attacks targeting Sol.



Are Sol Members Joining al Qaeda?

- “At this point, Awakening members have two options: Stay with the government, which would be a threat to their lives, or help al Qaeda by being a double agent. The Awakening is like a database for al Qaeda that can be used to target places that had been out of reach before.” — *Former Awakening leader Nathum al-Jubouri*
- NOTE: Much of the reports of Sol defections come from Diyala, where the Sol has had the most problems with the government.

Sol Perspectives

- “I don’t understand America’s policies. The generals supported us, but the politicians in Washington sold us out.... The Americans left too quickly. They butchered our country, cut it into pieces and served it to Iran on a plate.” —*Sol leader Ali Hatim*
- “The Americans did not betray us. They sentenced us and our families to death. They supported us in fighting al-Qaeda, but then suddenly they left us caught between two enemies—al Qaeda and Iran. That is America’s legacy here.” —*Sol member Sheikh Hussam*

Al Qaeda in Iraq

AQI tactics:

- Outbidding Sol monthly salary
- Kidnappings to raise money: estimated income has fallen drastically, to around \$300,000 per month
- “Sticky bombs”: Fastening magnetic explosives to parked cars, later detonating them remotely.
 - “It saves on suicide bombers.” —*Der Spiegel*, Jan. 7, 2011



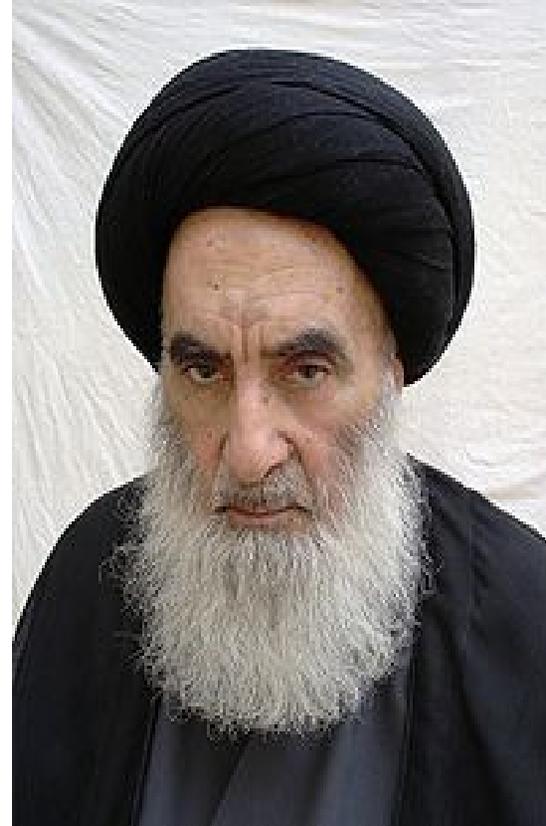
Fun with Sticky Bombs

“It is here [al-Baghdadia television] that the first post-withdrawal reality show was produced. Its title: ‘Put Him in Bucca.’ Camp Bucca was one of the toughest US prisons in Iraq, and closed in 2009 following a variety of scandals. ‘Put Him in Bucca’ is similar to ‘Candid Camera,’ except that the victims have fake bombs attached to their cars, causing them panic and fear when they are stopped at real roadblocks that are in on the joke.”

—*Der Spiegel*, Jan. 7, 2011

Succession: Ayatollah Sistani

- Stabilizing force; most prominent *marja-e taqlid* amongst Iraq's Shias.
- Michael Rubin: "While he advocates Shia empowerment, he tempers populist anger, discourages Iranian-style clerical political control and eschews violence."
 - "Leaders' Mortality May Sway Iraq's Health," Apr. 17, 2009.
- 79 years old. When he dies, no clear *marja-e taqlid* for his followers.



Self-Rule for the South?

- Provincial council voting on Jan. 31.
- The Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council “is hoping for a big win across the oil-rich south to jump-start its campaign for a self-ruled region.”
- Self-rule means:
 - Ability to write own constitution
 - Ability to amend federal laws that conflict with local laws
 - Power to open representative offices abroad
 - Primary responsibility for own internal security



Islamic Republic of Iran

- What outcome does Iran want in Iraq?
- In 2001, Iran was surrounded by hostile Sunni regimes: Iraq, Taliban-run Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan.
- No longer faces “Sunni wall.”



Iranian Military Policy

- Has spread its aid to insurgent factions across the spectrum.
 - Natural affinity for Shia groups, but recipients included Sunnis.
- Training, weapons (EFPs).
- U.S. military began to seriously address Iranian influence in 2007, capturing Iranian operatives and disrupting supply routes.
- Late summer 2010: Iran dispatches Abu Mustafa al Sheibani (commander of Sheibani Network) back to Iraq.



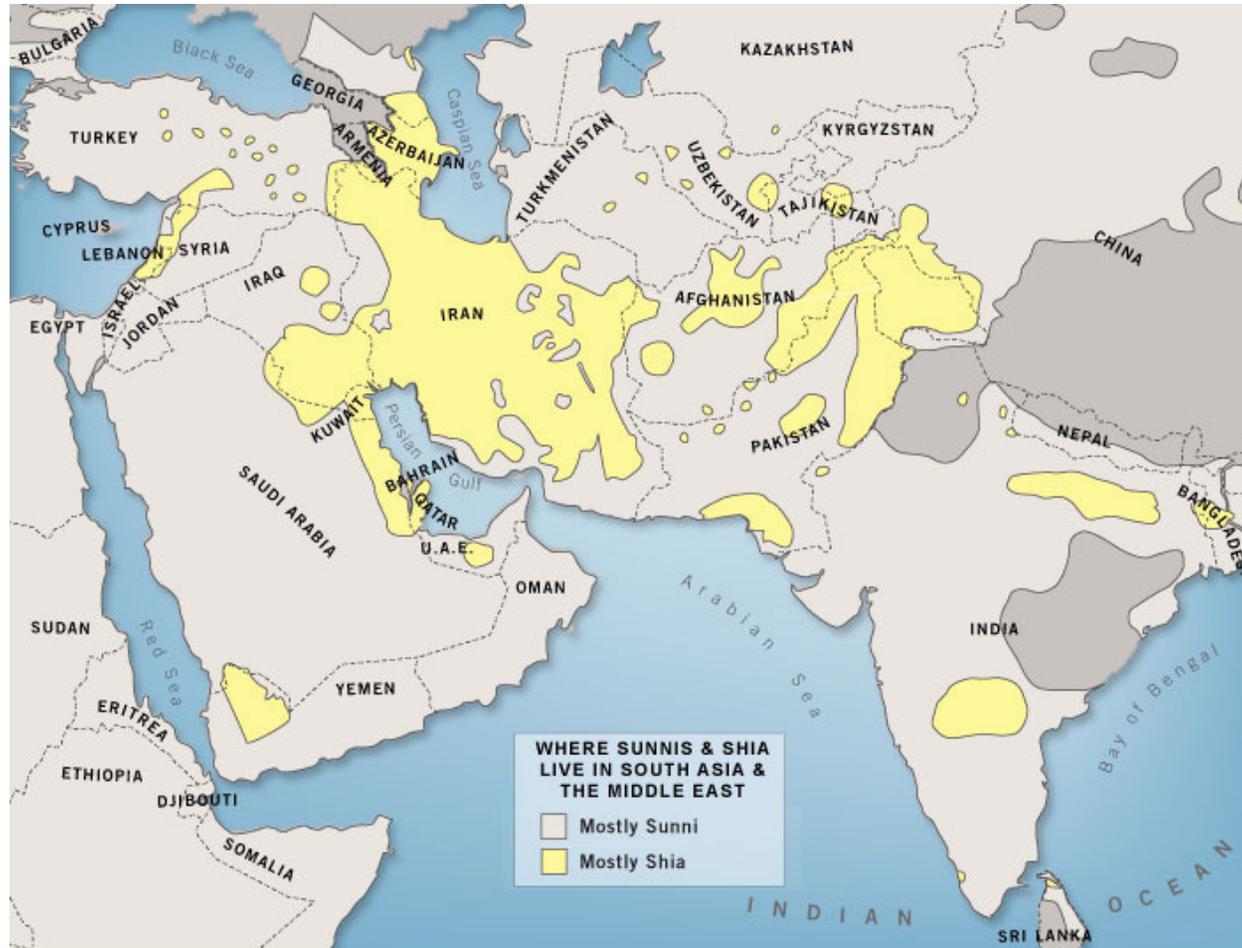
Iranian Soft Power

- U.S. planners underestimated Iranian soft power, focusing on the Iran-Iraq war.
 - Numerous links between the countries forged through waves of Shia immigration.
 - Early 1970s: Saddam expelled tens of thousands of Shias as part of his Arabization campaign.
 - 1980s and 1990s: 100,000 Iraqi Shias took refuge in Iran.
 - 1990s: Only Iran supported Iraqi Shias during dark times.

Iranian Soft Power Policies

- *Economic.*
 - Iran is one of Iraq's largest trading partners; around \$10 billion in annual exports to Iraq.
 - Iran-dominated projects: tourism companies, hospitals, construction projects.
 - Funneling cash to Iraqi political factions (tried to influence 2005, 2009, 2010 elections).
- *Social.*
 - Many Shia parties were based in Iran during the Saddam years.
 - Arabic language news and entertainment broadcasts into Iraq via al-Alam (launched at time of U.S. invasion).
- *Religious.*
 - Trying to insure Qom's dominance over Najaf as Sistani fades from the scene.

Rise of the Shia Beyond Iraq



Rise of the Shia

- 140 million Shias in Persian Gulf region.
- Situation in Iraq replicated, on a lesser scale, elsewhere: Shias who were marginalized from power are looking for greater rights, influence.
 - Mobilization in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Lebanon.
- *Sunni anxiety*. King Abdullah (Jordan) warned of a new “Shiite crescent” stretching from Beirut to Tehran.

Iranian Nuclear Program

- Centrifuge program, unlike Osiraq.
- Dec. 2010: head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization announces that Iran is now producing its own yellowcake.
- Iraq has been a possible theater for retaliation in case of a strike against Iran's nuclear program.



Saudi Arabia

- Saudi Arabia is the world's largest oil exporter
- Militarily weak; fearful of internal divisions.
- Does Saudi Arabia fear a strong Iraq?
- Does Saudi Arabia fear a Shia-dominated Iraq?



Pursuit of Influence in Iraq

“For now the Saudis are using their money and media power (al-Arabiyya, al-Sharqiya satellite channels, and other various media they control or influence) to support Sunni political aspirations, exert influence over Sunni tribal groups, and undercut the Shia-led Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and Iraqi National Alliance (INA).”

—*Amb. Christopher R. Hill, “The Great Game, in Mesopotamia” (cable)*

Wahhabism

- Historical relationship between House of Saud and Wahhabism.
- Not an organic term. Wahhabis call themselves al-Muwahhidun, salafis, etc.
- Progenitor: Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab
 - Expulsion from Uyaina, alliance with Muhammad ibn Saud
- Wahhabism and jihadism: OBL, al Qaeda
- Jihadi use of Wahhabi institutions
 - Ideological (Somalia, Bosnia, Pakistan)
 - Operational (Al Haramain Islamic Foundation)

Operational Impact

- Disproportionate number of Saudi suicide bombers in Iraq
 - Many suicide bombings aimed at Shia. Strategic *and* ideological reasons?
- Continuation of dual-use charities
 - Designation of Al Haramain mentions this
 - No extradition of known members of the “golden chain”

Terrorism and Oil

- Oil facilities are one of AQAP's key targets
- OBL reversal : 1996 declaration of war (off limits) vs. Dec. 2004 audiotape (endorsing attacks on oil)
- Saudi Arabia produces almost 10 million barrels per day; swing reserve.
- *Vulnerability*. Production depends on a limited number of hubs.
 - Two-thirds processed at Abqaiq. Two main export terminals: Ras Tanura and Ras al Ju'aymah.



Attacks on Saudi Oil

- Sept. 2005, al-Dammam. Prince Nayef: “There isn’t a place that they could reach that they didn’t think about.”
- Feb. 24, 2006: AQAP terrorists attack the refinery at Abqaiq. Neil Partrick: the terrorists either “had inside assistance from members of the formal security operation of the state-owned energy company,” or else “security was sufficiently [lax] that these items could be obtained and entry to the site obtained.”
- Apr. 2007: Saudi interior ministry announced that it had “foiled an al-Qaeda-linked plot to attack oil facilities and military bases.”
- 2008: S.A. arrests over 700 suspected militants; officials allege the arrestees had been plotting to attack oil installations.
- Mar. 2010: Saudi Arabia announces arrests of over 100 alleged al Qaeda militants whom it claimed were planning attacks on oil facilities.
 - Security forces discovered weapons, ammunition, suicide belts.

Succession: King Abdullah

- Relative reformer.
 - Municipal elections
 - Religious dialogue
- In his mid eighties: who will replace him?



Turkey

- Has Turkey's strategic orientation fundamentally changed?
- What are Turkey's biggest concerns in Iraq?

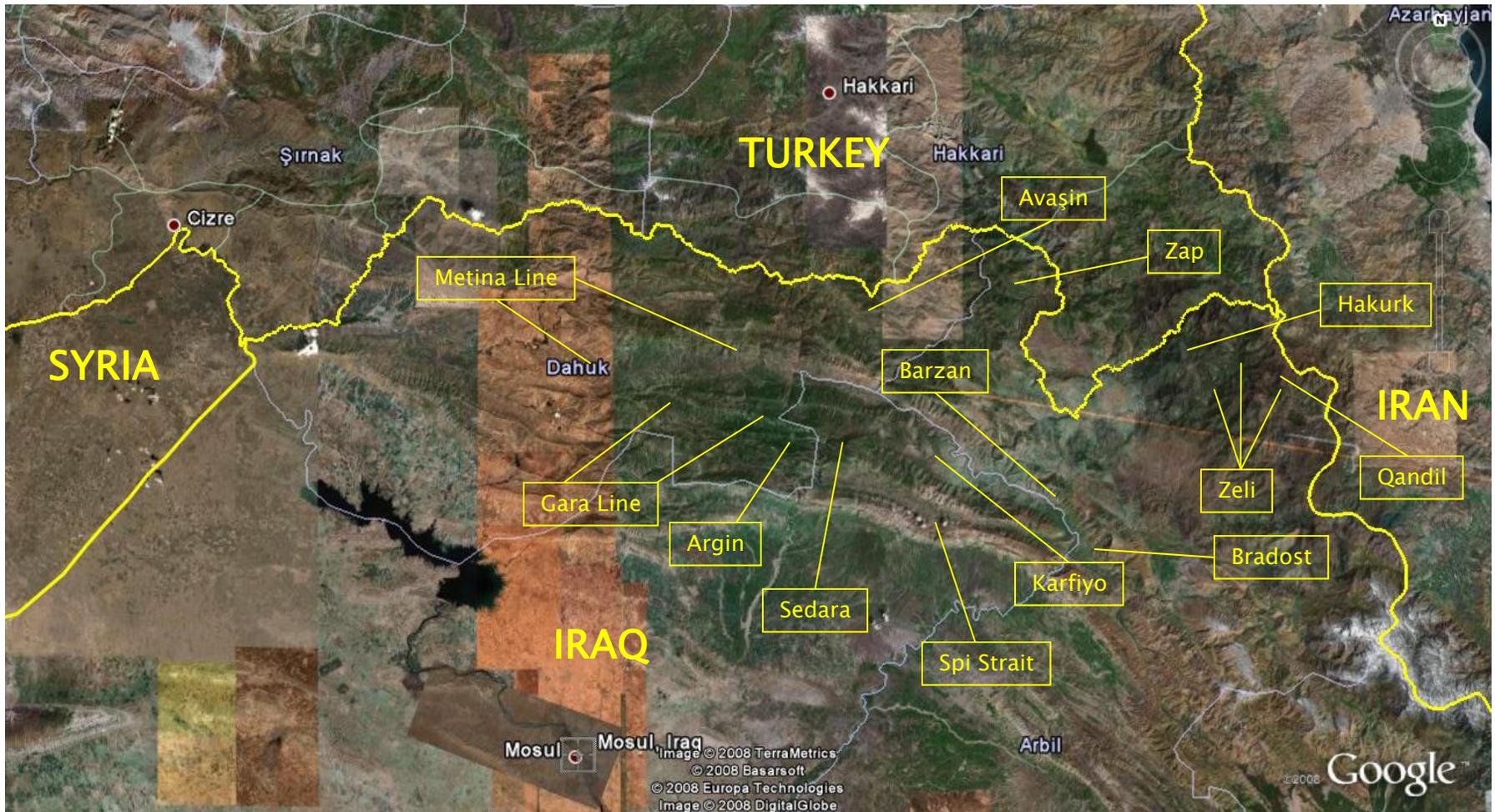


Turkish Soft Power

“A Turkey as resurgent as at any time since its Ottoman glory is projecting influence throughout a turbulent Iraq, from the boomtowns of the north to the oilfields near southernmost Basra, in a show of power that illustrates its growing heft across an Arab world long suspicious of it.... Turkey’s influence is greater in northern Iraq and broader, though not deeper, than Iran’s in the rest of the country. While the United States invaded and occupied Iraq ... Turkey now exerts what may prove a more lasting legacy.”

—*New York Times*, Jan. 4, 2011

PKK Bases in Northern Iraq Circa 2007



Source: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy

Turkish Actions in Iraq

- Scale of PKK attacks: In 2006 alone, PKK claimed to have killed nearly 900 Turks in almost 500 attacks.
- During the *Iran-Iraq war*, Saddam allowed Turkey to launch incursions into northern Iraq to fight the PKK.
- After Iraq's defeat in Desert Storm, Turkey carried out regular operations in northern Iraq (1992, 1995, 1997, 1999).
- *Summer 2006*: String of PKK attacks prompts Turkey to mass 50,000 troops on border. Shells PKK encampments while troop detachments are briefly sent into northern Iraq.
- *Winter 2007/08*: Large-scale cross-border operations against PKK.
- *April-May 2008*: Aerial bombardment of PKK targets
- Support in 2009 provincial elections for an anti-Kurd political party

Yemen

- Primed for a meltdown
- Military: AQAP, Houthi rebellion, threat of secession in the south
- Environmental and resource catastrophes
 - Water table nearly depleted from agricultural malpractice
 - Oil reserves dwindling
- Soaring unemployment, exploding birthrate
- Succession: President Ali Abdullah Saleh is in his 60s, has ruled Yemen since 1978.

Source: Gregory Johnsen, "Welcome to Qaedastan," Foreign Policy, Jan./Feb. 2010



Yemen's Challenges

- Challenges to Saleh
 - Less money to maintain his patronage network
 - Within his Sanhan tribe, bonds of loyalty straining: relatives and others trying to position themselves to seize presidency
- Decreased central power
 - Semiautonomous regions, rebellions
- AQAP has grown stronger
 - Marrying into local tribes
 - Strategy of persuasion and intimidation: popular narrative of jihad, assassinating security officials who are too aggressive in pursuit of AQ fighters

Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula

- AQAP's goals are in line with AQ's ideologically and strategically
- Responsible for a number of attacks, including against the U.S.
 - Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab's attempted Christmas Day bombing of passenger jet; parcel bomb plot
 - “Death by a thousand cuts” strategy
- A number of Americans have reportedly liaised with AQAP in Yemen.

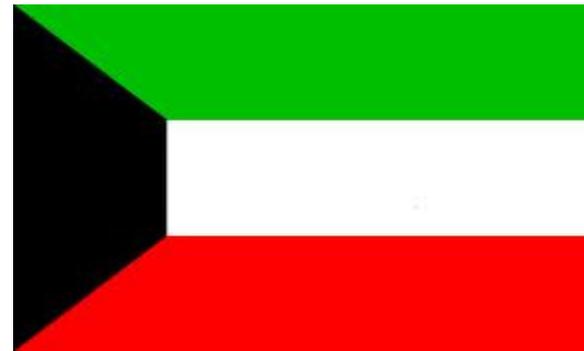


Regional Implications of Crises in Yemen

- *Gregory Johnsen*: “Yemen’s problems of today are going to become Saudi Arabia’s problems of tomorrow. This is already foreshadowed by Saudi involvement in the northern conflict and al Qaeda strikes from Yemen into the kingdom.”
- How could Yemen’s crises have an impact on regional stability?

Kuwait

- Does Kuwait fear a strong Iraq? Should it?
- What is Kuwait's desired outcome in Iraq?



Kuwaiti Insecurity

“Several new skyscrapers soar to the heavens, new shopping malls flank broad highways and there is no shortage of five-star hotels or luxury cars throughout Kuwait City. But a residual lack of confidence remains, despite the verified 108bn barrels of oil beneath the feet of the tiny country.”

—*Guardian*, Jan. 16, 2011

Should Kuwait be worried about being invaded again?

Political Basketcase

- “In this boom era of oil prosperity, Kuwait—once the exemplar of the Gulf—has increasingly come to be viewed as a mess.”
- Dec. 28: Prime Minister Nasser al-Mohammad al-Sabah undergoes the eighth “grilling” of his tenure: “a tumultuous five year period which has seen six different governments and three elections, two after constitutional dissolutions of the parliament due to repeated conflict between lawmakers and the executive.”
- PM Sabah survived a no confidence vote, 25-22.

Source: Kristin Smith Diwan, Foreign Policy, Jan. 10, 2011

Political Opposition

- Political opposition includes liberals, Islamists, tribal populists.
- Arrest and prosecution of journalist Mohammad Abdulqader al-Jasem (critical of government) galvanized opposition.
- Difficult opposition to hold together.
 - Tribal MPs “risk alienating their urban allies in the parliament, who face constituents who see the rise of tribal populism as a greater threat to civil liberties than the strong arm tactics of the government.”
 - Shia fears of tribal populism.

Impact of Political Conflict

- *Domestic effect:*
 - Stalemate has caused cancellation of energy projects
 - Impeded Kuwait's ability to deal with global economic crisis
- *Regional policy:* Causes Kuwait to defer to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states.
 - No leadership role in mediating intra-Palestinian disputes, Israeli-Arab disputes.

Syria

- Close association with Iran
- Served as transit point for fighters into Iraq
- Internal problems:
 - *Refugees*: claims more than 1.5 million Iraqi refugees
 - *Bad economy*, with already small oil reserves depleted, and foreign subsidies/foreign investment drying up
- Should Syria worry about regime survival?



Jordan

- Also faces problem with Iraqi refugees
 - More than 700,000 estimated
 - Equivalent U.S. influx is 38 million refugees
- Generally seen as stabilizing force
 - King Abdullah
 - “Amman Message” project



Other Gulf States

- Bahrain, Qatar, UAE, Oman.
- *Economy*: Hurt by global economic meltdown.
 - *Dubai*: Debt crisis.
- *International concerns*
 - Resurgent Shiism (i.e. Shia-majority Bahrain)
 - Iranian nuclear program
 - Non-state actors (al Qaeda)



Conclusion

- Shockwaves from Iraq war
- Period of transition can be seen throughout region:
 - Rise of Iran, and Shiism
 - Successions
 - Non-state actors: Sunni extremist groups, nationalist groups