

# UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE WORKING PAPER

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## Iraq, its Neighbors, and the Obama Administration: *Syrian and Saudi Perspectives*

A JOINT REPORT BY:  
U.S. Institute of Peace and The Stimson Center



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Iraq, its Neighbors and the Obama Administration:  
Syrian and Saudi Perspectives

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## About This Report

### Executive Summary

- The top concern for both Riyadh and Damascus remains blowback from Iraq: the ascendance of ethnic and sectarian identity and the spread of Islamist militancy. The need to contain this threat is the dominant force that shapes their relations with Iraq.
- Both Syria and Saudi Arabia have a vital interest in ensuring that Iraq's emerging political order is inclusive of Sunni Arab Iraqis, who have not yet been fully incorporated into Iraqi institutions.
- Syria and Saudi Arabia do not look at Iraq in isolation, nor do they assign it top priority among their foreign policy concerns. For them, Iraq is merely one element in a comprehensive view encompassing other regional players (including the U.S. and Iran) and other regional crises, particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict.
- Lingering resentment and bitterness toward Washington is now mixed with intense curiosity and modest optimism about President Barack Obama. Saudis still bristle when recalling how the Bush Administration sidelined Riyadh on Iraqi matters; as do Syrians, who believe the previous administration was intent on isolating and undermining Damascus.
- Iraq remains very much isolated in its neighborhood. Recent progress on regional cooperation notwithstanding, these two neighbors are still focused more on containment than engagement.

### About the Study Mission

Since 2004, USIP's "Iraq and its Neighbors" initiative has sponsored track II dialogues and ongoing research on relations between Iraq and its six immediate neighbors. As part of this work, the Institute—in partnership with the Stimson Center—sponsored a bipartisan, independent, and unofficial Study Mission to Syria and Saudi Arabia in mid-January 2009. The delegation met with a wide variety of leading political figures, businesspeople, NGOs and foreign policy experts in both countries, including President Bashar Assad of Syria and Prince Turki al-Faysal of Saudi Arabia. The group also met with Iraqi businesspeople working in both countries and with Iraqi refugees. The aim of the mission was to explore prospects for greater regional cooperation on Iraq; to understand how U.S. policies are perceived, and to assess regional expectations of the Iraqi government and the new American administration. These discussions necessarily involved a range of other regional security issues interconnected with Iraq—Iran, Lebanon, and especially the Israel-Palestine conflict and the war in Gaza. This working paper represents the initial findings of the Study Mission.

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**About This Series**

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## **BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

### **What's at Stake?**

The past two years have witnessed a dramatic improvement in security in Iraq. The Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) have improved in capacity and numbers. The Iraqi government appears to be assuming a greater degree of sovereignty, which was formalized in its signing of a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the U.S. that transferred substantial operational command on security matters to the Iraqi government and stipulated the withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Iraq by the end of 2011. Many in the U.S. are hopeful that these developments point toward the ultimate establishment of a basically stable and functioning Iraq that cooperates with international efforts to fight terrorism, and that the U.S. can substantially scale down its presence in Iraq without triggering regional instability and state collapse.

However, deep political divisions remain in Iraq and the potential for a relapse into violence—or, alternatively, for the rise of narrowly based, Shi'a authoritarian government—is very real. As the Iraqi Sunni community has turned against Al-Qaida and toward political participation, the Iraqi government has so far been tentative and reluctant to incorporate it into state institutions. Elections this year—both provincial and national—and the subsequent transfer of power will say much about how serious the ruling powers in Baghdad are about creating a truly inclusive political order. Moreover, tensions between Arabs and Kurds are escalating, and the potential for an outbreak of violence between the two sides is high.

At this moment of both great potential and great risk—as the U.S. draws down and the Iraqi government attempts to step forward—Iraq's neighbors will play a critical role. All of Iraq's neighbors have a vital stake in what kind of Iraq will emerge. The Arab neighbors in particular have an interest in seeing an inclusive government that will not be beholden to Iran. They do not want Iraq to spiral out of control and be a source of extremism and sectarianism as it has been over the past several years. They cannot

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sustain more outflows of refugees created by further conflict. All the neighbors have an interest in an Iraq that can be a partner in security, regional diplomacy and economic growth. Iraq's fate will increasingly depend on whether it is able to engage positively with its neighbors, and how positively the neighborhood engages with it.

## **Iraq and its neighbors since 2003**

For the first three years of the war, Iraq's neighbors were ambivalent at best and often openly hostile to developments there, from the U.S. occupation, to the violence and instability, to the implications of majority Shia rule. Iraq's Arab neighbors warned against the war and felt excluded from the decision-making process to topple Saddam. Once in Iraq, the U.S. did not welcome engagement by the neighbors, and though Iran became quite involved immediately, the Arab neighbors mostly remained aloof and wary, feeling that they were shut out.

However, beginning in early 2007, the mood began to shift. Iraq and its neighbors began to engage in more normal and productive state-to-state relations, and the Bush administration gave its cautious support to this emerging regional peace process. Ministerial-level meetings are now commonplace, with Working Groups meeting regularly to deal with issues of security, refugees, energy and economic matters. Iraq's position and standing within the larger Arab political realm has improved modestly, as has its diplomatic representation in the wider neighborhood. Regional and foreign investment and reconstruction contracts have seen a noticeable (if modest) increase, as has oil output. The Iraqi government has settled much of its Saddam-era foreign debt, though progress has been slower with Gulf Arab states like Saudi Arabia than with extra-regional powers like Russia. Despite the added complications of strained relationships with the U.S., as in the cases of Syria and Iran, the new Iraqi state has managed to move forward and renew formal ties with Syria and conclude a SOFA with the U.S. without rupturing its close ties to Iran.

## **Syria and Iraq**

### **Overview**

Throughout our extensive consultations with Syrian leaders, as well as interviews with foreign policy experts, diplomats and businesspeople, it was clear that Iraq by itself is not a top concern. Syrians tend to view Iraq as one element in an integrated, comprehensive view of the entire region, including other crises (mainly Israel-Palestine and Lebanon) and their relations with other regional players (particularly the U.S.). Our discussions about Iraq inevitably covered these other subjects, particularly due to the war in Gaza, which was at its peak during the Study Mission. In keeping with this more integrated outlook, Syrians still tended to discuss Iraq in terms of U.S.-Syria relations. Even specific questions about the Iraqi government tended to elicit responses about the U.S.

Syrians still see Washington as the dominant player in Iraqi politics. They seem not to have fully absorbed the implications of the U.S. withdrawal commitments and the newly empowered Iraqi government. While many Americans and Iraqis are of the view that the gains of the past two years and the SOFA have fundamentally changed the equation in Iraq, many Syrians appear to believe that not much has changed in Iraq since 2006. This could indicate that they are skeptical about the degree to which the improvements in Iraq of the past two years are sustainable and about U.S. commitments to withdraw. President Assad indicated his support for a phased withdrawal of U.S. forces accompanied by a conference of all political factions (excluding Al-Qaeda) in order to draft a new constitution.

Many Syrians the group encountered appeared uninformed about certain recent developments in Iraqi politics. They described Iraq as cut off, even mysterious to outsiders, and not well integrated into the rest of the region. Nonetheless, Syria has begun to engage with Iraq. Syria has an ambassador in Baghdad and there have been high-level visits between the countries. One Syrian analyst read these moves as a signal to the Iraqi Sunnis -- particularly the resistance -- that the Iraqi government is legitimate and that they should take part in the political process. In general, however, Syria has

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relatively limited influence in Iraq, and almost no ability to project power and influence into Iraqi political, security or economic affairs, particularly when compared to Iraq's more powerful neighbors Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran—states that have the means and the capability to be more involved on the ground. Still, Syria is by no means unimportant. It exerts influence in indirect and less costly ways, for instance by playing host to both a range of Iraqi opposition figures and the largest and most diverse community of Iraqi refugees.

President Assad emphasized that Syria's principal concern vis-à-vis Iraq are maintaining its territorial integrity. This includes preserving Iraq as a viable state with a strong central government and maintaining a "national" rather than a "sectarian" identity. As in our other meetings, Assad showed alarm at the prospect of Iraqi politics following in the footsteps of Lebanon's fractious, sectarian model. Syrians believe they have done their part in improving security on their frontier with Iraq, and that Iraqis (and Americans) could and should be doing more on their side. They described relations with Iran as based more on common interests, as currently configured, rather than on ideology or a shared vision for the region.

The group encountered considerable curiosity about President Obama and a strong desire for improved relations with the U.S., even amidst the Gaza crisis. Specifically, it heard a great deal about common interests, whether in terms of stemming the spread of Islamist militancy and sectarianism, a stable and unified Iraq, or a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement. There was also much talk (and hope) that Syria and the U.S. could turn a new page with the new administration, the return of an American ambassador and the relaxation of sanctions. Despite the strong interest in improved relations, the group left with the distinct impression that the Syrians were waiting for the new administration to make the first move, and that Damascus remains cautious and watchful. In our conversations about Iraq, they made it clear that Damascus and Tehran do not see eye-to-eye. Although not stated explicitly, the group detected an undercurrent of ambivalence about Syrian-Iranian ties, which remain grounded on interests and pragmatism, rather than a shared vision for the region.



## **Specific Issues**

*Iraq blowback:* The top concern expressed about Iraq was that assertive ethnic and sectarian identity and Islamist extremism could spill over from Iraq. Syrians were quick to blame the U.S. for unleashing these currents in Iraq and were emphatic in describing how this has worked against common U.S. and Syrian interests. Syrian officials claimed to deal “with Iraqis as Iraqis,” while other powers in the region (whom they did not name but presumably meant Saudi Arabia and Iran) promoted the interests of Sunnis and Shia and thereby fueled sectarianism in Iraq and in the region. Conversely, they lauded Turkey’s efforts to deal with Kurdish militancy, and several analysts interviewed described the two countries’ efforts on Kurdish issues as in sync. The regime believes that Kirkuk and its disputed status has the potential to spark a regional conflict and listed it among Syria’s top concerns with regard to Iraq.

This anxiety about ascendant sectarian and ethnic political identities is understandable given Syria’s own heterogeneity and the ruling elite’s ties to the minority Alawite community. Syrians made the point that Syria has remained stable and unified despite its ethno-religious diversity—the point was made so emphatically and so frequently as to suggest genuine unease about current counter-trends on its borders, in both Iraq and Lebanon.

*Foreign fighters.* The movement of jihadi fighters across the Syria-Iraq border seems to have been reduced but not eliminated completely. It is likely the case that in the immediate, post-Saddam period, Syria actively facilitated the movement of jihadi fighters into Iraq, possibly calculating that it would keep the U.S. military tied down and engaged in a costly war. Promoting instability in Iraq and fanning the flames of Islamist militancy and sectarianism were always against long-term Syrian interests due to the risk of blowback. However, the regime likely calculated that these interests were worth sacrificing in the face of a hostile U.S. government they believed was intent on regime change in Syria.

As for the foreign fighter movement that continues, Syrian officials and analysts described security on the Iraqi border in terms of Syrian, rather than Iraqi, security. Syria

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faces its own internal threat from Islamist militants. Keeping these groups from harming the regime and disrupting internal stability takes precedence over keeping fighters out of Iraq. “You think of this as a border security issue,” our group was told, “(we) think of it as a *city* security issue.” In other words, it is easy to see why Syria might allow some movement across the border: either to keep these militants out of Syria, to maintain intelligence access to militant networks, or to avoid provoking a violent response by denying passage.

Despite the Syrian regime’s angry public response following the U.S. military operations in Syrian territory in October 2008, the issue was rarely brought up in our meetings. The group did hear complaints that the U.S. does not treat Syria as a partner in combating Islamist militancy—a clear mutual U.S.-Syrian interest, according to some interviewees—but rather sees Syria as merely “the bad guy.” Pressed on the prospect of greater Iraqi-Syrian cooperation on the border, President Assad and others argued that there remained a serious capacity problem on the Iraqi side.

*Iraqi refugees:* The plight of many Iraqi refugees in Syria is dire. Many lack access to basic services, live in crowded and unsanitary conditions, and suffer from a range of health problems, including severe psychological trauma. Moreover, many families have been surviving on savings or the proceeds from selling businesses or property in Iraq (usually at below-market prices)—assets which are now drying up given that many have been in Syria for two years or more. Their presence strains Syrian infrastructure and public services, particularly in education and healthcare. Over the long-term, Iraqi refugees could become a source of extremism and instability in the country and in the region. President Assad expressed the concern that lacking adequate education and jobs, the refugees could be a “bomb” when they return to Iraq.

Despite these problems, Syrians seemed confident that they were managing the refugee issue. They would certainly like more direct financial assistance to cope with the refugees—directly to the government, rather than funneled through the UN or NGOs. In particular, complaints that Iraq and the wealthy Gulf states were not doing their part were common. However, Syrians did not convey the sense of urgency on this question that

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one might expect, and cast their welcoming attitude to the Iraqi refugees as a gesture of solidarity with the Iraqis and as part of Syria's traditional "open door" policy toward Arabs. Their attitude may mask a deeper concern, and may have been intended to evince Syria's firm control. Syrians did not seem to expect any early repatriation of Iraqi refugees, or onward movement to asylum countries beyond the Middle East. With respect to Christians, which are overrepresented among the Iraqis and also account for some of the neediest cases, it was implied that they are likely to become permanent residents of Syria.

Interviews with international NGOs indicated frustration in dealing with Syrian authorities, whom they see as a drag on efforts to deliver assistance to Iraqis. The group even heard stories of officials trying to ensure that funds are allocated to benefit Syrians as much as Iraqis to the extent that INGOs find projects they have designed no longer benefit their target population. That said, the Syrian government is working closely with the UN and the international community and should be commended for opening up the country to both the refugees and aid agencies. Despite the on-going problems of aid delivery, particularly with respect to international NGOs, it is hard to miss the fact that a relatively closed country like Syria has partially relaxed its traditional inhibition about giving third parties even limited space to operate within its borders.

No one was able to provide accurate statistics about the overall size of the Iraqi refugee community. Knowledgeable observers said the "one million plus" estimates previously cited by the government were too high. Most independent experts said the real figure was much lower, and probably closer to the numbers registered with UNHCR. The size of the Iraqi refugee community in Syria has not remained constant, which makes accurate estimates all the more difficult to ascertain.

*Playing host to the opposition:* For the past several decades, Syria has played host to parties and individuals opposed to the ruling regime in Baghdad. They continue to play this role today. One analyst related a joke making the rounds in Damascus about a table at a café in the Old City where Saddam Hussein used to sit while in exile, which was later taken by current Iraqi president Jalal Talabani when he was in exile, who in

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turn was followed by current Iraqi prime minister Nuri al-Maliki, and which today is occupied by former Iraqi VP Izzat al-Duri.

The Syrian approach appears largely reactive and has not been coupled with an effort to exert influence on the Iraqi political stage with its erstwhile or even current guests. Like its policy toward Iraqi refugees and even foreign fighters to some degree, hosting the opposition is part of the Syrian self-concept of keeping its doors open to Arabs and trying to remain relevant and maximize influence at a relatively low-cost. For example, Syria allows the Iraqi Ba'th and other groups to live and congregate on its territory, but has not taken on their sponsorship in the manner that Iran sponsored Shia Islamist opposition groups in the time of Saddam. This opposition presence may indirectly shape Syrian views of politics inside Iraq today.

*Economics & Trade:* Syria has much to gain from economic growth in and economic partnership with Iraq, especially if stability gains continue and Iraq lives up to the potential of its abundant natural and human resources. Iraq could potentially provide an outlet for Syrian goods, particularly agriculture and processed foods. Some Syrian businessmen interviewed expressed the hope that Syria could eventually serve as Iraq's gateway to Europe. Others described recent investment by the Syrian regime to expand the port capacity at Latakia and plans for road links with Iraq in order to serve as a Mediterranean outlet for Iraqi exports and imports. Syrians would like to see the pipelines with Iraq repaired and reopened, and there is still some lingering hope for concessionary fuel imports. Even without subsidized energy, Syria has a genuine, concrete interest in reliable and inexpensive access to Iraq's vast oil and natural gas resources---particularly as Syria's own resources dwindle.

At the moment, however, Syrian economic involvement in Iraq is very limited. The primary reason given by Syrian businesspeople is that the Syrian economy is too weak and small to be a player in Iraq. Bank capitalization is low, and most reconstruction tenders in Iraq are too big for Syrian firms to handle. Syria is currently undergoing liberalizing reforms that have had a positive effect, but there is still a long way to go. Moreover, U.S. sanctions on Syria are greatly impeding Syrian efforts to do business in

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Iraq—perhaps less due to the letter of the law (the U.S. cannot prohibit bilateral Syrian-Iraqi trade), and more due to the cloud of uncertainty and the myriad regulatory and other added costs Syrian businesses face as a result of the sanctions. Syrians want the U.S. to signal to its Iraqi partners that they should not worry about doing business with Syrians. The concern in Syria is that political problems between Washington and Damascus offer little incentive for Iraqis to work with Syrians, despite natural symmetries of language and proximity, and the demand in Iraq for low-cost consumer goods and agricultural imports.

## **Saudi Arabia and Iraq**

### **Overview**

As in Syria, our consultations in Saudi Arabia lacked a sense of urgency about Iraq—as if they have settled into an uneasy status quo where the situation in Iraq remains of great concern, but without the alarm that characterized either the U.S. invasion or the 2006 spike in violence. As a close partner of the U.S., Saudis remain shocked and resentful that Washington either ignored their advice on Iraq, or more typically, failed to consult with the Kingdom on critical matters relating to Iraq. The Bush administration was seen as prone to dictating and unwilling to establish any kind of honest partnership on vital matters like Iraq. Many Saudis interviewed also emphasized the interconnectedness of events in Iraq with other crises in the region, and they complained that Washington too often deals with issues in a vacuum. Saudis believe the Bush administration deliberately blocked Saudi involvement in post-Saddam Iraq, even in terms of economic and trade openings, for purely political purposes—something Saudis not only resent, but see as foolhardy given what they see as Washington’s inadvertent invitation to Iran to expand its influence in Iraq, especially in the south.

In discussing recent developments in Iraq, Saudis seemed somewhat out of touch—not unlike Syrians—which is not surprising given how few Saudis travel to Iraq, the absence of a fully staffed diplomatic presence, and the relatively small number of Iraqis in the Kingdom. Asked about pathways to political reconciliation and stability in Iraq, most (but

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not all) Saudis had few new ideas. Discussions continually reverted to ideas the Saudis claim to have put forward in the past and complaints about U.S. mismanagement in the early phases. Ambassador Bremer's name was mentioned far more often than Ambassador Crocker's or General Petraeus'. Saudis appear eager to contribute to stability in Iraq, and to expand economic ties, but do not seem well-positioned to serve as a political power broker or a regional mediator. Iran's growing influence in Iraq is of great concern and alarm, as is Iran's general posture throughout the region. One of our interlocutors assessed that the United States and Iraq had gone to war, and Iran had been the victor.

Saudis were optimistic about the election of Barack Obama. Nevertheless, they do not expect significant shifts in U.S. policy in the region. They remain concerned about the possibility that the U.S. might withdraw too precipitously from Iraq. Given the war in Gaza, it was difficult to keep Saudis focused on Iraq. Television, internet and mobile communications were saturated with images of death and destruction in Gaza. Saudis suggested that Washington was facing a new crisis of legitimacy and credibility, which Obama would have to deal with immediately. In terms of public perception, "you might as well be dropping the bombs on Gaza yourselves," one Saudi businessman said.

### **Specific Issues**

*Political support for Iraqi government:* Many of the group's Saudi interviewees believe that their country has no problem dealing with Iraq's post-Saddam political elite, as long as the Iraqi government is inclusive and major elements of society are not shut out. "Saudi Arabia has no objections to Shi'a rule in Iraq," said a leading figure we met with, "as long as they take into account the needs of all Iraqis." Saudis are still looking for more signs that the Sunni community will have a permanent seat at the table, expressing doubt that Maliki is truly convinced that the tribes have a legitimate role to play. When pressed, some acknowledged that trends were moving in that direction, though more progress is needed. Even before the U.S. invasion, the Kingdom promoted the idea of inclusion of tribes (as well as organizations such as labor unions and professional associations) as key pillars of the post-Saddam political order, a suggestion ignored by the U.S. and the UK. They contend that the use of such social institutions that cross the

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Sunni-Shi'a divide could have avoided many of the sectarian pitfalls brought about by the CPA's early emphasis on ethnic and sectarian affiliation in the allocation of official positions.

Saudis cited security as the only reason the Kingdom currently has no ambassador in Baghdad. One leading figure told us there is currently a plan to send a senior diplomat to Baghdad for short-term stints, an arrangement for which security would be easier to provide versus a full-time and fully-staffed diplomatic mission. Saudis are convinced that any representative from the Kingdom of sufficient seniority that would be acceptable to the Iraqis would also be a prime target for kidnapers. The delegation was urged not to read too much into the question of representation in Baghdad.

*Security, the border and blowback:* The Kingdom's primary concern is preventing spillover of the Iraqi conflict, which is why they continue to invest so heavily in massive security infrastructure along the Iraq border. With the rise of Al-Qaida in Iraq dovetailing with the surge in Al-Qaida terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia several years ago, the Kingdom has a clear and vital interest in preventing violence and militancy in Iraq from spilling over its border. It is also why the Kingdom has invested so heavily in re-education and reintegration efforts with Saudi militants at home. Similar to Syrians, Saudis are concerned with Iraq's territorial integrity, with the Kurdish problem looming most prominently on their minds. It was suggested that the UN Security council adopt a new resolution, under Chapter VII, affirming the inviolability of Iraqi territory and permitting the placement of international forces in northern Iraq to prevent the fragmentation of the country. Taking Kurdish ambitions off the table, we were told, was essential to keeping the neighbors at bay.

*Iraq's isolation:* Saudis spoke to us at length about Iraq's long-standing isolation, first under Saddam, and more recently as a result of the violence and chaos following the American invasion. Saudi hesitancy to travel to Iraq long predates the U.S. invasion. As a result, they asserted, Saudis and Iraqis rarely encounter one another (even though there were two Iraqis in the room as this conversation took place), particularly at the leadership level—whether in business, politics or the social sphere. This isolation

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showed in our consultations, as many Saudis did not seem well informed about recent political developments in Iraq, even within the Sunni community. While one well-informed observer noted the importance of a strong Iraq to regional peace and stability over the long run, Iraq had to reconcile with itself before it could be expected to reconcile with others.

*Economics, trade and debt relief:* The group found little hope among Saudis for expanding business with Iraq, though professed interest remains high. Saudis say they were eager to open new links to Iraq after the U.S. invasion, and even invested heavily in new border transit infrastructure, only to be blocked by the Bush administration and the CPA in Iraq. Saudis are also fearful for their employees and remain deterred by the high operating costs and bribes required to do business in Iraq. When pressed on the question of debt relief, Saudis admitted that they expected Iraq's Saddam-era debt to eventually be written off, but cited technical and accounting obstacles to explain why the Kingdom lagged behind Paris Club members. Despite what it was told, the group was left with the impression that lingering political problems and chilly relations between Maliki's government and Riyadh remain a formidable obstacle.

*Passive, but not indifferent:* The group was struck by the level of passivity Saudis display vis-à-vis Iraq. There is a sense that the forces shaping Iraq (and perhaps the wider region) are beyond their control; as noted above, many of our interlocutors referred to Iraq as an American problem to solve, even while they expressed fear that they will be left to deal with the mess if the U.S. leaves prematurely. Despite a clear interest in expanding the Kingdom's leadership position, the group was also confronted with a reactive and cautious attitude, whether with respect to Iraq, Iran or the Arab-Israeli sphere.

Saudis may appear reactive, but they are certainly not indifferent. Alarm was expressed over the increasingly weak position of the U.S. in the region, and the general rise in extremism and Islamist militancy.



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*Iran:* Of particular concern was the degree to which Iran supports regional crises to its advantage, and the failure of the U.S. to adequately grasp and address this phenomenon. Interviewees repeatedly told the group that without forceful and dramatic efforts by the new U.S. administration to contain and resolve the region's crises, especially in Gaza, Washington and its allies would continue to suffer dwindling influence. Saudis understand the changing debate in the U.S. over engagement with Iran. "Engagement yes, marriage no," said one leading figure. Saudis voiced their concern that the U.S. should first take action to reduce Iran's leverage in the region before embarking on a dramatically different course with Tehran. In particular, they pointed to the need for U.S. leadership in renewing the Arab-Israeli peace process--the absence of which only feeds into Iran's campaign for regional preeminence. Saudis also pointed to the upcoming Iranian elections in June 2009, and cautioned the U.S. against any dramatic moves ahead of the vote, lest it backfire and generate more support for Iranian hardliners.

## APPENDIX

### USIP & its "Iraq and its Neighbors" Initiative

The United States Institute of Peace is an independent, nonpartisan institution established in 1984 and funded by Congress. USIP aims to prevent and resolve violent international conflicts, promote post-conflict stability and development, and increase conflict management capacity, tools, and intellectual capital worldwide. USIP has been working in Iraq since 2004 to reduce interethnic and inter-religious violence, speed up stabilization, promote conflict resolution at the local and regional level, and reduce the need for a U.S. presence in Iraq. The Institute maintains an office in Baghdad, and operates programs throughout Iraq and the Middle East. USIP played a central role in organizing the Baker-Hamilton "Iraq Study Group," which called for greater American engagement with Iraq's neighbors, including Iran and Syria. Moreover, since 2006, the Institute has been promoting high-level, non-official dialogue between foreign policy figures and media leaders from Iraq and the neighboring states, including Iran. The *Marmara Declaration*, a blueprint for a regional peace process for Iraq, was the product of an Institute-led dialogue that took place in Turkey in March 2007. (See <http://www.usip.org/iraq/>)

### The Stimson Center: pragmatic steps for Global Security

Founded as a non-partisan, not-for-profit institution in 1989, Stimson conducts in-depth research and analysis to provide policy alternatives and overcome obstacles to a more peaceful and secure world. (See <http://stimson.org/home.cfm>) In 2006, Stimson published *Iraq and America: Choices and Consequences*, a series of policy essays by U.S. experts and practitioners. With support from USIP and the World Bank, Stimson has also held capacity building workshops for Iraqi civil society leaders.

## Expert Group Participants

### **Ambassador Lincoln P. Bloomfield Jr.**

Ambassador Bloomfield has a long and distinguished career working on defense and Mideast issues, both in and out of government. He is currently Chairman of the Board of the Stimson Center and President of Palmer Coates LLC. Bloomfield also served as U.S. Special Envoy for Man-Portable Air Defense System (MANPADS) Threat Reduction under the George W. Bush administration. From 2001-2005 he was U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Political Military Affairs. From 1993-2001 he was a Partner with Armitage Associates. He is a graduate of Harvard College (a.b. cum laude, 1974) and received a Master in Arts of Law and Diplomacy from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy.

### **Daniel Brumberg**

Professor Brumberg teaches comparative politics and Middle East studies at Georgetown University, and is also the acting director of the Muslim World Initiative at the U.S. Institute of Peace. A contributor to the *Washington Post's* "On Faith" webjournal, Brumberg is also author of *Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran* (University of Chicago Press, 2001)

### **Bruce Jentleson**

Professor Jentleson teaches international relations at Duke University, and is the former director of Duke's Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy. The author of *American Foreign Policy: The Dynamics of Choice in the 21st Century*, Jentleson also served as Special Assistant to the Director of the State Department Policy Planning Staff (1993-94) and as a senior foreign policy advisor to Vice President Al Gore during his 2000 presidential campaign.

### **Ellen Laipson**

Laipson is president and CEO of the Stimson Center, one of the leading independent think tanks in the United States. A veteran government analyst focusing on the Middle East and South Asia, Laipson directs a series of projects at Stimson focusing on security issues in the Persian Gulf region. A frequent commentator on Middle East issues, she served as an expert advisor to the Iraq Study Group (Baker-Hamilton).

### **Scott Lasensky**

Dr. Lasensky has directed the "Iraq and its Neighbors" project at USIP since 2004, serving both as research director and leader of the initiative's Track II dialogue series. Author most recently of *Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace: American Leadership in the Middle East* (co-authored with Daniel Kurtzer), Lasensky has also served as a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and the Brookings Institution. He has taught at Mount Holyoke College, Georgetown University and the University of Maryland.

### **Joseph McMillan**

Joseph McMillan is a senior research fellow at the National Defense University's Institute for National Strategic Studies. Prior to joining NDU, Mr. McMillan served in a series of civilian positions in the Department of Defense. He has 20 years of experience dealing with regional defense and security issues affecting the Persian Gulf, Levant, South Asia,

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North Africa, and the former Soviet Union. In 1998 he was promoted to the Senior Executive Service and appointed Principal Director for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (OSD).

**Sam Parker**

Sam Parker is an Iraq program officer in the Center for Post-Conflict Peace and Stability Operations at USIP. He is involved in coordinating and providing consultation for the Institute's programs in Iraq, as well as researching and writing for the Institute's Iraq publications. An M.A. graduate from Georgetown University, Parker is fluent in Arabic and has traveled extensively throughout Iraq and the Arab world.

**Randa Slim**

Dr. Slim, a senior program advisor to the Peace and Security Program at the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, is also a USIP guest scholar focusing on reconciliation processes in Iraq. She also currently serves as senior associate at the International Institute for Sustained Dialogue and is. Dr. Slim has worked extensively with U.S. and Middle East organizations on conflict management and peace-building dialogues.

**Abiodun Williams**

Dr. Abiodun Williams is vice president of the Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention at USIP. From 2001 to 2007, he served as director of the Strategic Planning Unit in the Executive Office of the U.N. Secretary General (under SG Kofi Annan and SG Ban Ki-moon). Dr. Williams also served in three peacekeeping assignments in Bosnia, Haiti and Macedonia, and was a professor at Georgetown University for several years.

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