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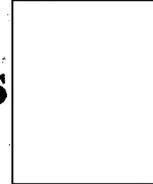
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Iraq: Succession Politics



An Intelligence Assessment

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
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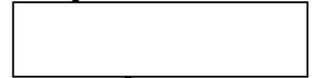
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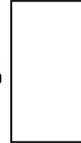


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Iraq: Succession Politics



An Intelligence Assessment

*Information available as of 1 June 1982
has been used in the preparation of this report.*



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**Iraq:
Succession Politics**

Key Judgments

President Saddam Husayn's decision to go to war with Iran has been a costly mistake. His battlefield strategy has placed Iraqi forces in a near untenable situation, and damage to Iraq's domestic and foreign policy objectives grows daily. Any rallying to the regime in the event of an Iranian invasion of Iraq, in our judgment, will be temporary.

The ultimate consequences of Iraq's failures in the war will be increased plotting against Saddam. The most serious threat—barring assassination—is likely to come from civilian and military leaders who have so far suppressed dissatisfaction with Saddam's policies. These leaders may attempt to replace Saddam if the Tikriti-led ruling hierarchy believes he has become a liability to its continued domination of Iraq. Saddam's command of the intelligence apparatus and extensive levers of repression—most run by trusted family or tribal members—as well as his record of striking first would seem to preclude drawn-out coup planning.

A successful coup would have to be executed swiftly by a small group of senior Ba'thists who would move on Saddam as soon as the decision to do so is made. We do not possess hard evidence of plotting and expect little warning given the secretive nature of the Iraqi system.

A takeover by the military acting alone appears unlikely. The officer corps will be preoccupied with long-term border tension or fighting with Iran. The Ba'th Party is entrenched at all levels in the Army and under Saddam has made considerable progress toward reducing the military's involvement in politics.

A popular uprising against the regime also appears unlikely unless the Army disintegrates in the face of an Iranian invasion. Khomeini's appeals to Iraq's majority Shia Muslim community to revolt have been largely ignored. Rebellious Kurds continue to be more of an irritant than a threat to government control.

The lack of an heir apparent to replace Saddam points to a period of collective rule dominated by key military and security figures from the current Tikriti ruling clique. Revolution Command Council (RCC) Vice Chairman Ibrahim and First Deputy Prime Minister Ramadan are strong candidates to succeed Saddam; ailing former President Bakr could be

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brought out of retirement to shore up support for a new regime. A collegial leadership probably would not make major foreign policy changes—it would continue to depend on the Gulf Arabs for financial support, trade heavily with the West for civilian and military goods, and rely on the USSR as a major source of arms.

Collegial rule will eventually break down as its leading figures, schooled in the politics of conspiracy and intrigue, seek preeminence. An unrestrained power struggle risks a return to a pattern of rule similar to the early 1970s when Ba'thist ideologues preoccupied with internal problems dominated Iraqi politics. The breakdown would affect Baghdad's foreign policy outlook, disrupting trends toward alignment with moderate Arabs and closer economic and political ties with the West.

Nonetheless, any Sunni government in Baghdad—collegial or dominated by a single figure—would have certain constant foreign policy goals, including competition for Arab leadership with Egypt and Syria; rivalry with Iran for domination of the Gulf; and an anti-Israeli outlook.





Iraq: Succession Politics



Regime Vulnerabilities

Two years ago Iraq had pretensions to succeed Egypt as an Arab leader, to shape the policy of the non-aligned movement for the next three years, and to use proceeds from expanding oil exports to achieve economic and political independence. Today, Iraq's human and material resources are being wasted in a war it cannot win, its Gulf ports are closed to trade, its domestic economic plans are being cut back, and its international prestige and military reputation are greatly diminished.



Iraq's dream of supplanting Egypt as Arab leader has been shattered. Iraq today is more supplicant than leader, and its dependence on moderate Arab neighbors, especially Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Jordan, for financial, logistic, and political support grows daily. The goal of independence from the USSR also is now more distant because Iraq must maintain deliveries of needed Soviet arms. Plans to hold the nonaligned summit meeting in Baghdad in September, kicking off Iraq's leadership of the movement for the next three years, are threatened.



Syria, Iraq's enemy on its western flank, has become a more dangerous adversary as the Damascus-Tehran alliance has strengthened. With quiet Soviet approval, Damascus has increased its arms aid to Iran. It has also closed its land border with Iraq and cut Iraq's oil pipeline across Syria to the Mediterranean, depriving Baghdad of about \$6 billion annually in oil revenues. The stated Iranian-Syrian goal is Saddam's overthrow.



The domestic costs also are substantial. The government can no longer insulate the public from the economic consequences of the war. Reduction of oil revenues by more than two-thirds has slowed the steady growth in the standard of living that was an important factor in regime stability during the 1970s. Oil sales, which account for almost all export earnings, are projected between \$8.5 and 9 billion in 1982; the import bill for 1982 is estimated at \$21.5 billion.



In January the regime curtailed its ambitious development program; only priority imports associated with the nonaligned summit meeting, military equipment, and food have been exempted. Consumers are being hurt by spending cutbacks. Imports for state-owned retail outlets, for example, have been suspended through June 1982. Despite more than \$20 billion in aid from the Gulf Arabs, new Iraqi austerity measures will be necessary and are likely to include more contract cancellations. Baghdad wants to limit depletion of its estimated \$26 billion in foreign exchange reserves so that it can finance postwar reconstruction.

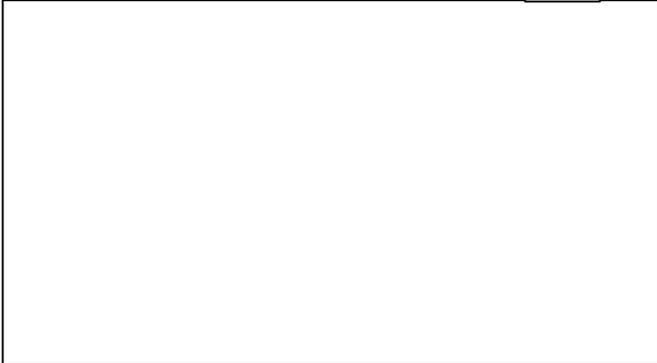


Responsibility for this remarkable transformation clearly rests with President Saddam Husayn and his decision to invade Iran. It would be surprising if the Iraqi people or elements within the elite did not at some point turn him out of office.



Principal Threats

The ultimate consequences of Saddam's failures will be serious attempts to oust him. We have scanty evidence of coup plotting and expect little warning given the secretive nature of the Iraqi system.

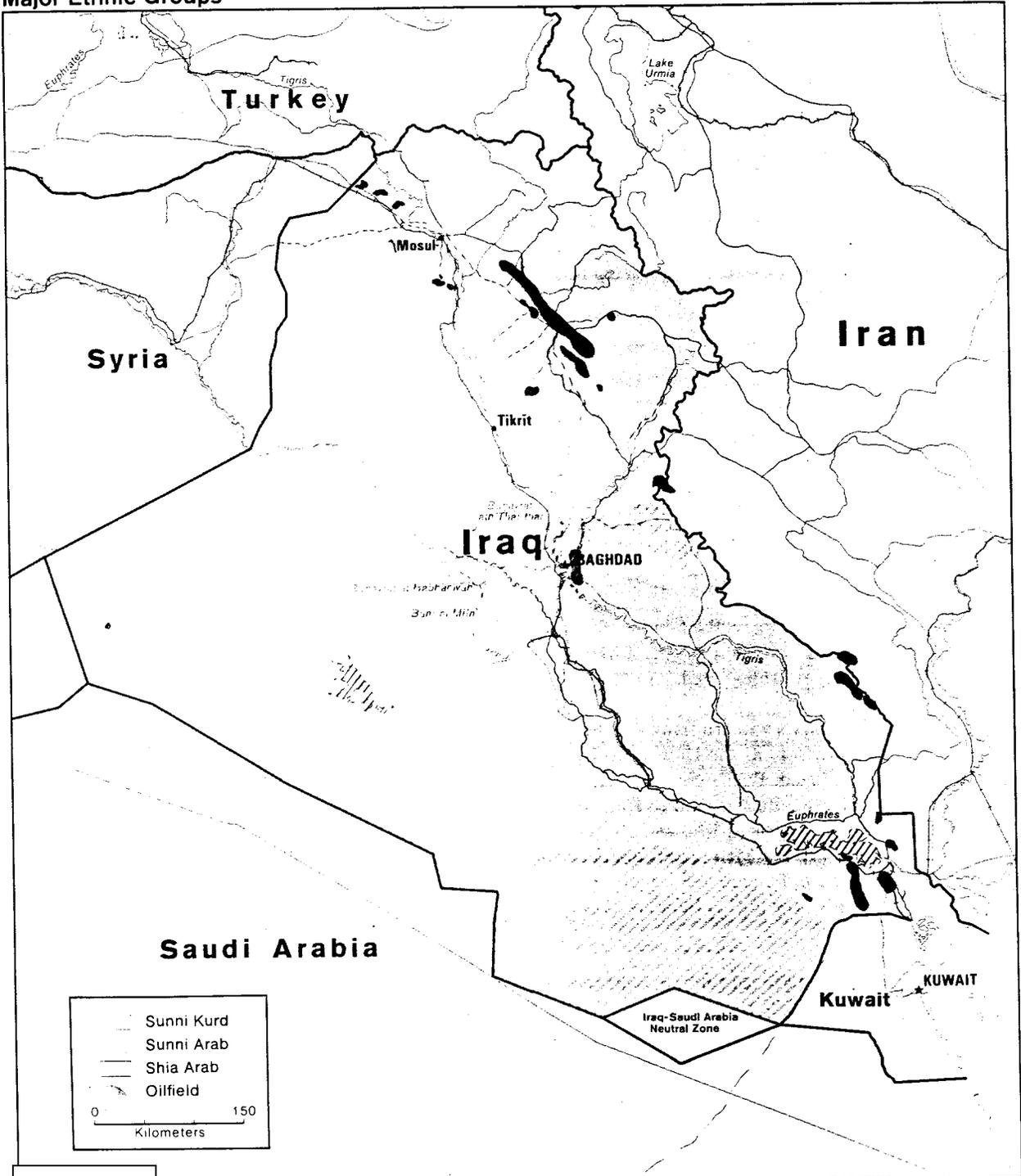


Coup Peril

The most serious threat—barring assassination—is likely to come from key civilian and military leaders. Iraq's fading prospects in the war against Iran, coupled with suppressed grievances over Saddam's personality cult, his refusal to share power, and his



Major Ethnic Groups



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deemphasis of the Ba'th Party, would be the principal stimuli for a palace coup. Potential opponents probably fear that continued public disgruntlement over having to bear the burdens of "Saddam's war" could grow and engulf the entire current leadership. [redacted]

Saddam Husayn's political system is highly centralized, heavily repressive, and narrowly based on family and clan from a small geographic section of the country—the city of Tikrit in north-central Iraq. To oppose or even question the Iraqi leader, in public or private, can have dire consequences. Few challenges to Saddam's authority escape the notice of the security services. [redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

The military has reason to hate Saddam. He is a civilian who owes his position to the Ba'th Party and the security apparatus. Since 1968 Saddam has worked hard to establish a tradition of civilian leadership in a state where military coups have been commonplace. He has used forced retirements, frequent transfers, and politically directed promotions to place loyalists in key commands and to deny individual officers the opportunity to build personal followings. Generous salaries and benefits as well as high levels of defense spending have probably helped buy only shallow loyalty from the armed forces. [redacted]

"Saddam's war" is probably stirring additional military resentment of the Iraqi President's leadership. Political interference by Saddam and his cronies and the presence of political appointees masquerading as generals in key command positions have contributed to the Army's poor showing. [redacted]

[redacted]

A successful military takeover bid would face major obstacles:

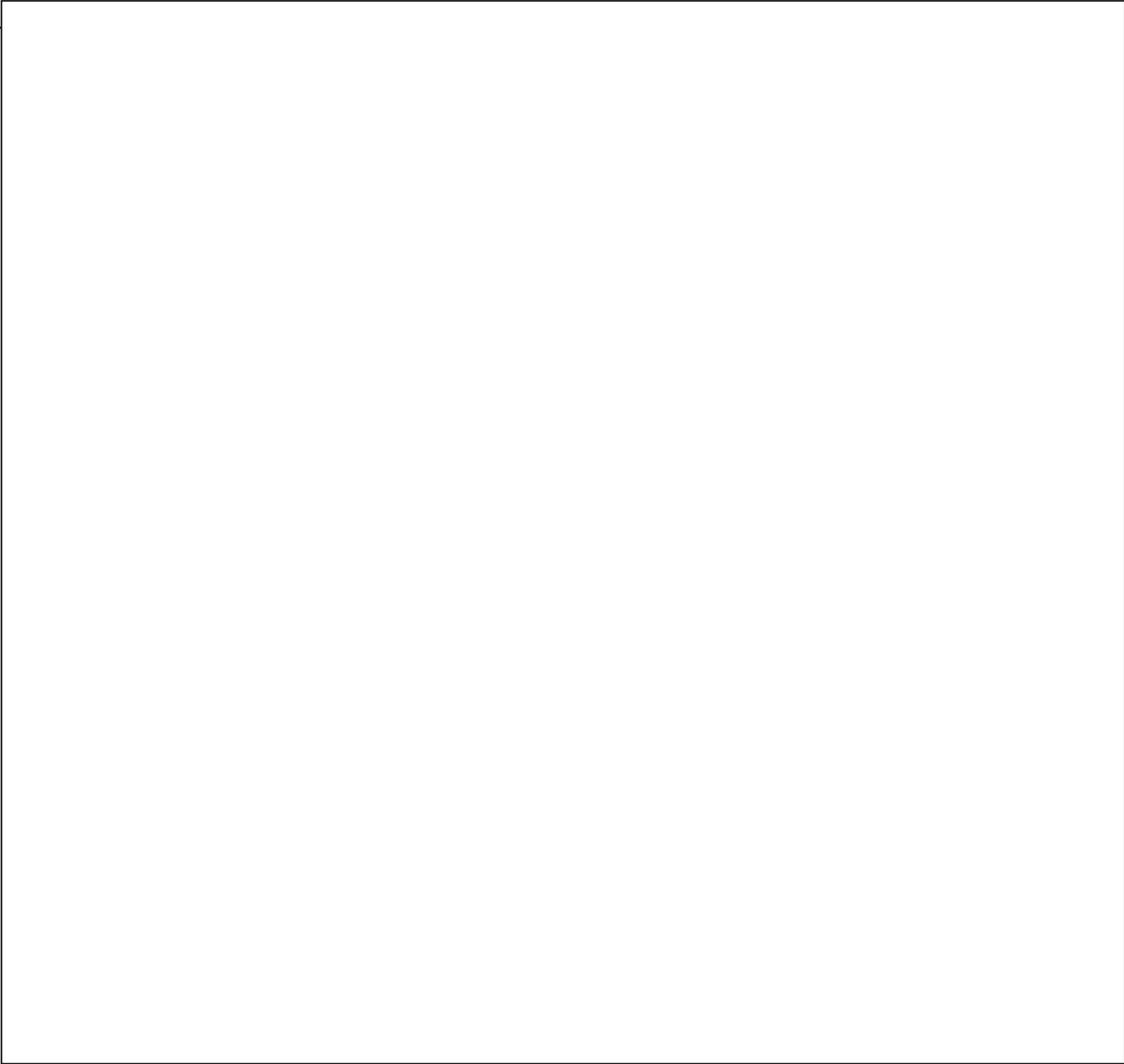
- The officer corps is preoccupied with the war with Iran.
- Key military commands are in the hands of Saddam loyalists.
- The military is riddled with Saddam's spies, making it dangerous to even talk about the leadership.

We know little of political attitudes within the military and can expect little or no warning of a coup attempt. Such an attempt, if it occurs, would most likely come from an as yet unknown group of middle-level officers. [redacted]

Prospects are slim for a coup in which the Ba'th Party plays no role. The party organization is too widespread to be ignored, and the military probably would have to make an accommodation with civilian leaders to run the country. [redacted]

Popular Uprising Unlikely

Popular revolt against Saddam seems the least likely near-term cause of a change of government. Saddam has made effective use of a carrot-and-stick policy to buy off and intimidate potential opposition. Draconian police powers have been used to cow opponents. The regime has used its oil revenues to create jobs.



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subsidize prices, and improve education, housing, medical care, and transportation. Saddam undoubtedly is aware that his regime cannot afford a loss of public faith in its ability to continue improving living standards. A severe decline seems unlikely, but the regime may have difficulty insulating the public from the effects of economic austerity measures []

Although the government's preoccupation with the war has given Iraqi opposition forces greater opportunities to work against the regime, their actions so far have been limited to isolated sabotage and assassinations. Antigovernment activists have been unable to provoke sustained or widespread protests among Iraq's majority Shia Muslim community, despite its traditional aversion to a Sunni-dominated central government. Many Shias are unwilling to risk opposition to the regime for fear of punishment []

Maintaining a psychology of fear is probably crucial to regime survival. Concessions to oppressed groups would probably be seen as weakness and would stimulate more active opposition. Withdrawal of the Army from Iran relatively intact, therefore, is vital to Saddam's prospects for maintaining internal control and preserving minority Sunni dominance of the country. []

Other Shias have been co-opted by the Ba'th Party. The party has been willing to allow Shia participation in government and party activities including the ruling Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), which has at least three Shia members. Still others, in our judgment, do not want to see a disruptive Islamic revolution jeopardize the steady rise in their standard of living under the Ba'th Party []

Moreover, Iraqi Shias are not so well organized as their Iranian coreligionists and seem less influenced by their religious leaders. Saddam removed a potential rallier in the spring of 1980 when he executed Ayatollah Baqr Sadr, the only Arab among Iraq's Shia hierarchy—the other prominent Shia leaders in Iraq are of Persian origin. The regime's expulsion since 1980 of over 50,000 Shias of Iranian origin has reduced a dangerous fifth column threat. []

The Ba'th also has skillfully exploited ancient—but still lively—Arab-Persian animosities to counter Khomeini's appeal. The Ba'th propaganda machine has made sure that Tehran's mistreatment of its Shia Arab minority has not escaped the notice of Iraqi Shias. []

Kurdish guerrilla leaders have been unable to take advantage of increased aid from Tehran and a significant reduction of government forces in the north since the beginning of the war with Iran. Kurdish strength also is dissipated by the continuing rivalry between the Barzanis and Jalal Talabani, the leaders of the two main antigovernment groups, and by apathy among the Kurdish populace. The Barzanis, in particular, have been discredited by their connections to Ayatollah Khomeini []

The Kurds and Shias, as well as Iraqi Communists and renegade Ba'thists—split by personal, religious, ethnic, and political differences—are unlikely to combine forces against Saddam. Moreover, they have failed to secure enough financial and military backing to pose a military threat. []

Succession Dynamics

Saddam's systematic purge of rivals has left Iraq bereft of figures of national stature. A new government, therefore, is likely to lack a single strong leader initially and to have a collegial leadership with a neutral figure serving as president.¹ If Saddam were suddenly killed or removed from power in a palace coup, the leadership would seek to ensure that the attendant disruption did not jeopardize continued Sunni rule. []

The Tikrit clan would continue to play an important role in any Sunni-dominated regime. The Tikritis are scattered in important positions throughout the military and security services. Among the most important Tikriti clansmen who would play a role is Interior Minister Sa'dun Shakir. He controls an ubiquitous

¹ The Iraqi Constitution calls for the Revolutionary Command Council to elect a new president within seven days of a vacancy. (U)

Sunnis and Tikritis

Sunni Arabs, who comprise 25 percent of Iraq's population, have dominated Iraqi politics since independence. Their ascendancy resulted in large part from traditional Shia reluctance to become involved with the secular state. The Sunnis, for their part, willingly cooperated with colonial authorities, establishing a preeminence in the military and bureaucracy that has persisted into the 20th century.

Sunnis also control the Ba'th Party. Underprivileged Shia Arabs dominated the party in the 1950s and early 1960s, but before the end of the decade the party had been transformed into a Sunni organization. Shia control declined because:

- Discriminatory police practices allowed Sunni Ba'thists to escape with light punishment while Shia colleagues were treated severely.*
- The leadership of the party was captured by army officers from Tikrit led by Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr and his kinsman Saddam Husayn.*

The Tikriti dominance of the Ba'th Party goes far in explaining Iraqi political dynamics. Institutions such as the Ba'th Party and the military, which touch all levels of Iraqi society, play important roles in legitimizing the exercise of power, but individual and group loyalty based on common family, tribal, and religious ties is still the key to understanding politics in Iraq.



internal security apparatus involving tens of thousands of police, spies, and informers. Shakir has ruthlessly served Saddam's interests since the Ba'th revolution in 1968, including service as a member of the regime's assassination squad and head of Baghdad's infamous "Palace of the End" prison. Barzan Ibrahim, Saddam's half brother, is the chief of the Mukhabarat, the RCC's strong arm for intimidating and eliminating antiregime elements. Although he

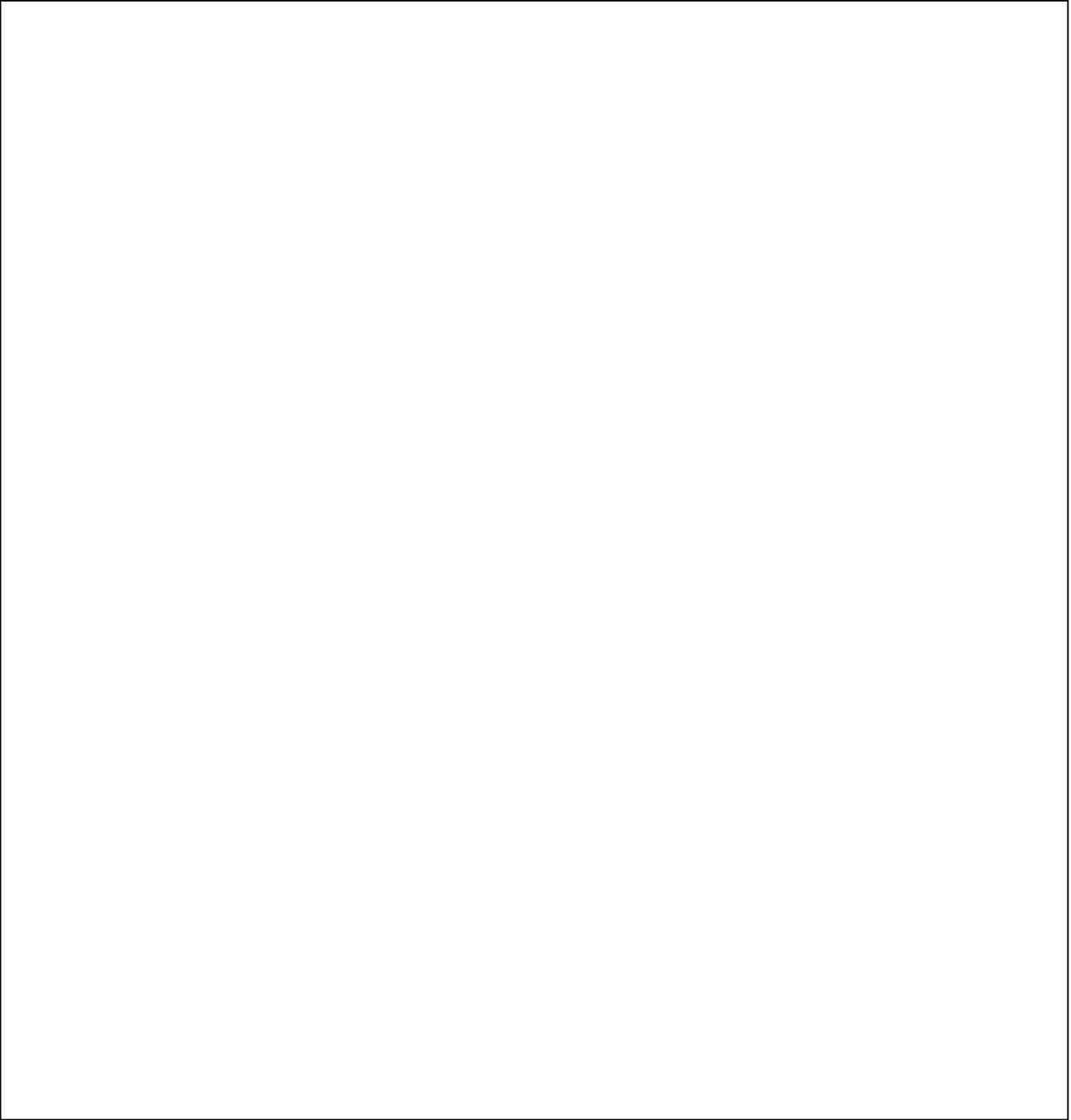
Institutional debate or competition has little impact on decisionmaking in Iraq because the process is dominated by a small group of individuals—Tikritis and their loyal followers—who hold important party, government, and military posts. The key institution is the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), where supreme legislative and executive power resides. Saddam, for example, is chairman of the RCC, President of the Republic, head of the Ba'th Party, and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. Saddam's colleagues on the RCC likewise have overlapping functions; every Council member holds at least one other major position in the cabinet, the party, or the National Assembly.

Since coming to power in 1968, Ba'th leaders have made skillful use of mass organizational techniques and the media to secure public acquiescence to government policies. The government has stressed party ideology with its emphasis on Arab nationalism, secularism, and social justice to overcome the country's serious sectarian and ethnic differences. Ba'th officials take party doctrine seriously, but in recent years the leadership's strict adherence to ideology has weakened. Narrower state interests now assume greater weight in defining domestic and foreign policies.

owes his position to family connections, Barzan has had several years to put his own imprint on the Mukhabarat. If a lone assassin removed Saddam, Barzan's long-term position would weaken, but in an immediate post-Saddam period he might play an important role 



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[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

Senior Tikriti officers and their supporters from other important Sunni clans permeate the military establishment. Gen. 'Adnan Khayrallah, who has family ties to both Saddam and former President Bakr, is Defense Minister and Deputy Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, as well as Deputy Prime Minister and a member of the Revolutionary Command Council. Khayrallah reportedly is a competent professional soldier, but he is disliked because of his rapid, politically influenced advancement. Top military intelligence and police functions as well as the commands of the Baghdad garrisons, which play essential anticoup roles, are in the hands of trusted officers [Redacted]

Shia RCC members such as National Assembly leader Naim Haddad would probably play a prominent role in a collective regime as symbols of the Ba'th's commitment to Shia participation in governing Iraq. [Redacted]

'Izzat Ibrahim, the current Vice Chairman of the RCC, in our judgment seems the most likely candidate to assume the presidency. His apparent lack of ambition and poor health—hypertension makes him a candidate for a stroke or heart attack—make him a

nonthreatening interim figure attractive to behind-the-scenes power brokers with leadership aspirations of their own. Ibrahim, a non-Tikriti, is a longtime Ba'thist who has served the regime loyally in a number of sensitive posts over the past decade. Unlike his more secular-minded Ba'thist colleagues, Ibrahim is a devout Sunni Muslim. He has had little contact with Westerners throughout his career [Redacted]

Taha Yasin Ramadan, RCC member and First Deputy Prime Minister, also is a likely contender to succeed Saddam. Ramadan, 44, is an intelligent, crafty politician who has held many responsible party and state posts involving both domestic and foreign policy functions. His political skills make him a contender in a post-Saddam period. His political power is strengthened by his command of the People's Army, the 350,000-man Ba'th Party paramilitary force. Ramadan not only survived the leadership purge that followed the alleged coup plot against Saddam in July 1979 but was elevated to First Deputy Prime Minister, making him de facto prime minister and number-two man in the government [Redacted]



Leadership figures who are wary of Ramadan's power and ambition would probably try to block him from moving to the presidency, and he may not be strong enough to overcome concerted resistance. Distrust of Ramadan may be particularly strong among clannish Tikritis because he comes from Mosul. Nor does Ramadan seem well positioned to seize the top job. The People's Army by itself would be no match for the regular forces, and Ramadan's apparent lack of important allies in the security forces and military would make a strong-arm bid for the presidency risky.

Foreign Policy Implications

A collegial regime in which the Sunnis were strongly motivated to maintain group unity to ensure their continued domination would be unlikely to produce dramatic foreign policy changes. Foreign policy continuity also could be achieved if a strongman emerged swiftly from a collective leadership

The first priority of a Sunni-dominated regime, assuming the war with Iran was still in train, would be to end the war. Iraq might initially attempt to improve relations with the radical Arabs in hopes that these states could persuade Iran to suppress its desire for revenge against Iraq. Iran would not countenance a lasting reconciliation with a secular Ba'th government.

At the same time, genuine improvement in Baghdad's relations with Moscow would be unlikely. The USSR is seen as an unreliable ally. Ba'thist leaders are suspicious of Moscow's support for rebellious Iraqi Communists and would not easily forget the Soviet arms embargo, Moscow's arms sales to Iran, and Soviet support for Iraq's enemy, Syria. Baghdad, however, would try to avoid a break with Moscow until it secured significant alternative arms sources.

Close contacts with the West would be maintained to facilitate rebuilding of the economy and the military. The pace of modernization would be slowed by economic austerity as well as a political need to reemphasize Islamic values and traditions. France would be



especially well placed to benefit from Iraq's development and reconstruction needs because of its fulfillment of military supply commitments despite the war with Iran. Baghdad's dissatisfaction with the quality of Soviet and East European goods has led to a sharp decline in recent years in the Soviet share of Iraq's nonmilitary imports.

US help in reconstruction also would be sought, especially in the oil sector. Some Iraqis would even push for arms purchases from the United States. Recent moves by Washington to upgrade bilateral relations—approval of civilian aircraft sales and the removal of Iraq from the list of states that support international terrorism—have been welcomed in Baghdad, but a major improvement probably would depend on changes by the United States in its position on the Arab-Israeli dispute, Iraq's perception of the threat from Iran, and its dissatisfaction with the state of Soviet-Iranian relations.

Iraq's friendly ties with moderate Arab neighbors probably would continue under a collegial regime drawn from the current leadership in Baghdad. Even if the war with Iran were to end, tension between Baghdad and Tehran would continue, leaving Iraq with the need for financial assistance, secure trade routes across Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Jordan, and Arab political support. Moreover, so long as a hostile regime remained in Damascus and it cooperated with Iran, Iraq probably would continue to improve relations with Egypt

Breakdown of Collegial Rule

Collegial rule, however, would be under great strain. Individual ambitions would not stay restrained for long, especially in the absence of a dominant figure to arbitrate disputes. We cannot make confident predictions about who would ultimately seize power, but given the conspiratorial backgrounds of the current leadership, the struggle almost certainly would be violent.

An unrestrained internal power struggle would weaken the central government and accentuate the serious sectarian and ethnic divisions in Iraqi society among



Muslim sects, Christians, Arabs, Kurds, Turkomans, Assyrians, and others. A battle at the top could usher in a period of instability similar to the turbulent era between the fall of the monarchy in 1958 and the consolidation of the Ba'th regime's power in the early 1970s.

The breakdown of collegial rule would affect Baghdad's foreign policy outlook, disrupting trends toward alignment with moderate Arabs and closer economic and political ties with the West. The length and duration of the disruption would depend on who comes out on top from among the various Ba'thist, military, and opposition group contenders.

Nevertheless, any Sunni-dominated government in Baghdad—even one preoccupied with consolidating control internally—would have certain constant foreign policy goals. These include:

- Competition for Arab leadership with Egypt and Syria, which will frequently see two of the states allied against the third.
- Rivalry with Iran for domination of the Persian Gulf.
- An anti-Israeli outlook as long as the Palestinian issue remains unsettled.
- A willingness to use oil leverage to secure advantages for Iraq.



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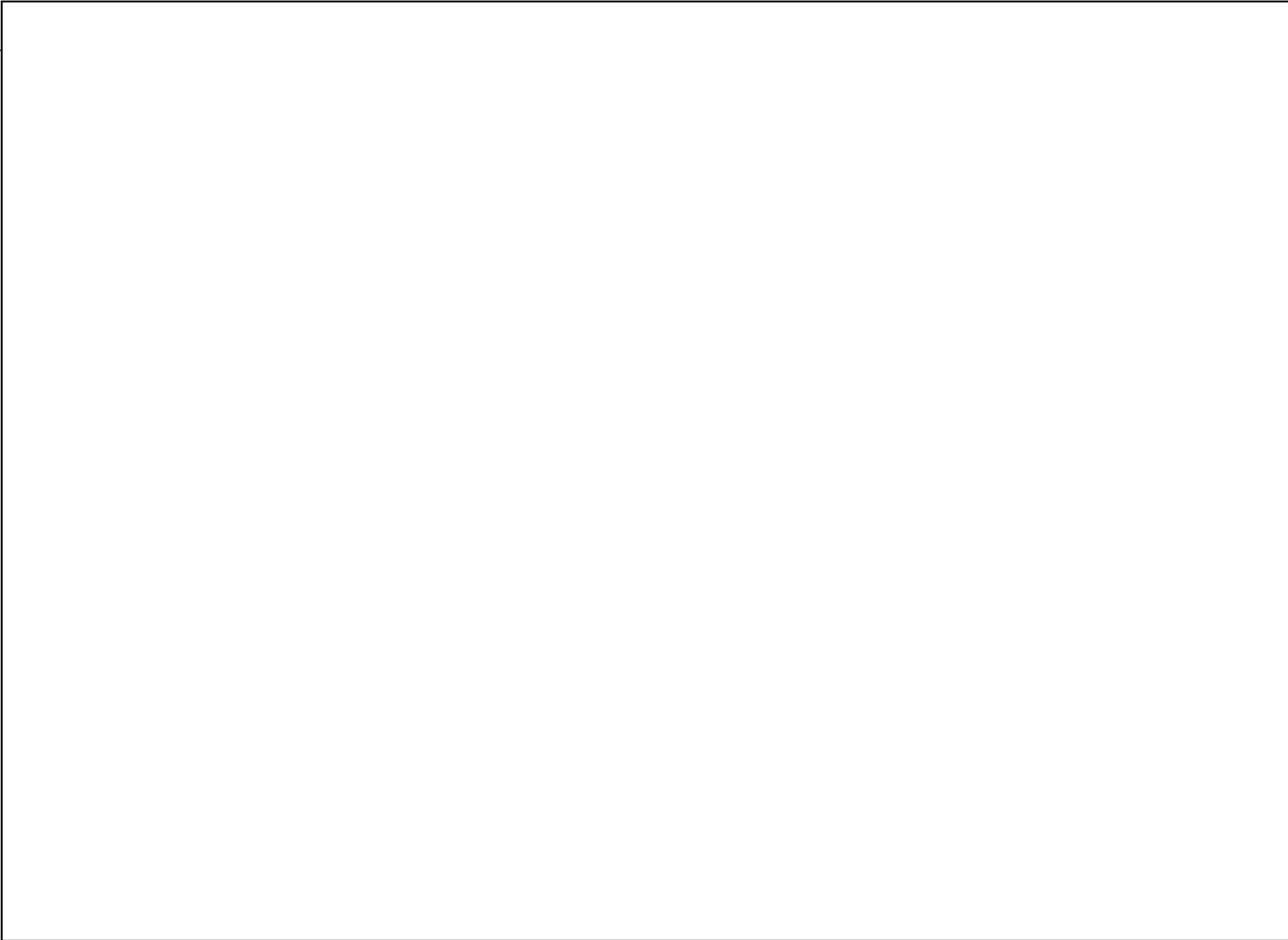
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