



MEMORANDUM FOR: Geoffrey Kemp

Iraq
FILE

A piece of informal "informed speculation" about the implications of Saddam Husayn's fall, should that event occur.

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Date

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Implications of Saddam's Departure

This memorandum examines the likely implications of a sudden change in regime in Iraq. It posits the replacement of President Saddam Husayn by other Sunni Muslim military leaders, either with or without the Baath Party. Such a development could be sparked by:

- War weariness; faced with a deteriorating financial posture, steady loss of terrain and Iran's unrelenting prosecution of the war, Iraqis try to offer up Saddam as a scapegoat.
- New battlefield reverses; Iran scores a major tactical success on the front.
- Assassination by Shia or other dissidents; the assassins probably would lack the forces to seize power themselves.

We discount for now the possibility of a popular Shia revolt bringing a clerical regime to power given the Shia's lack of cohesion, leadership and independent military force. Should the Iraqi regular army collapse a Shia regime could emerge but such a development does not appear likely in the near term.

A new regime in Iraq would be tempted to seek an accommodation with Tehran to end the war. New rulers probably would try to blame Saddam for the war, might offer to give Iran territorial concessions and perhaps agree to pay token reparations. It might also seek to establish its Islamic credentials by consulting with the Iraqi clergy (both Sunni and Shia) and offering to allow unrestricted Iranian pilgrimage access to the holy cities at Najaf and Kerbala (important Shia shrines and Khomeini's residence for 13 years). Shia military officers might be given nominal positions in the junta as well.

Iranian Reaction

Ayatollah Khomeini would welcome Saddam's departure as his third great victory (the Shah's removal was his first, President Carter's humiliation the second). Some in Tehran would urge a quick settlement with the new regime to allow greater devotion of resources to other issues. Others, however, would urge Khomeini to keep the pressure on Iraq until a Shia Islamic Republic emerges in Baghdad (perhaps centered around the government-in-exile set up in Tehran in November). This faction would argue that Iraq's total defeat is at hand.

Khomeini would closely examine the 'Islamic' credentials of any regime in Baghdad. He might be able to work with an accommodating Sunni regime but probably would want it to give Shia clerics some governing role. He would be reluctant to abandon his new Shia government-in-exile -- especially if it

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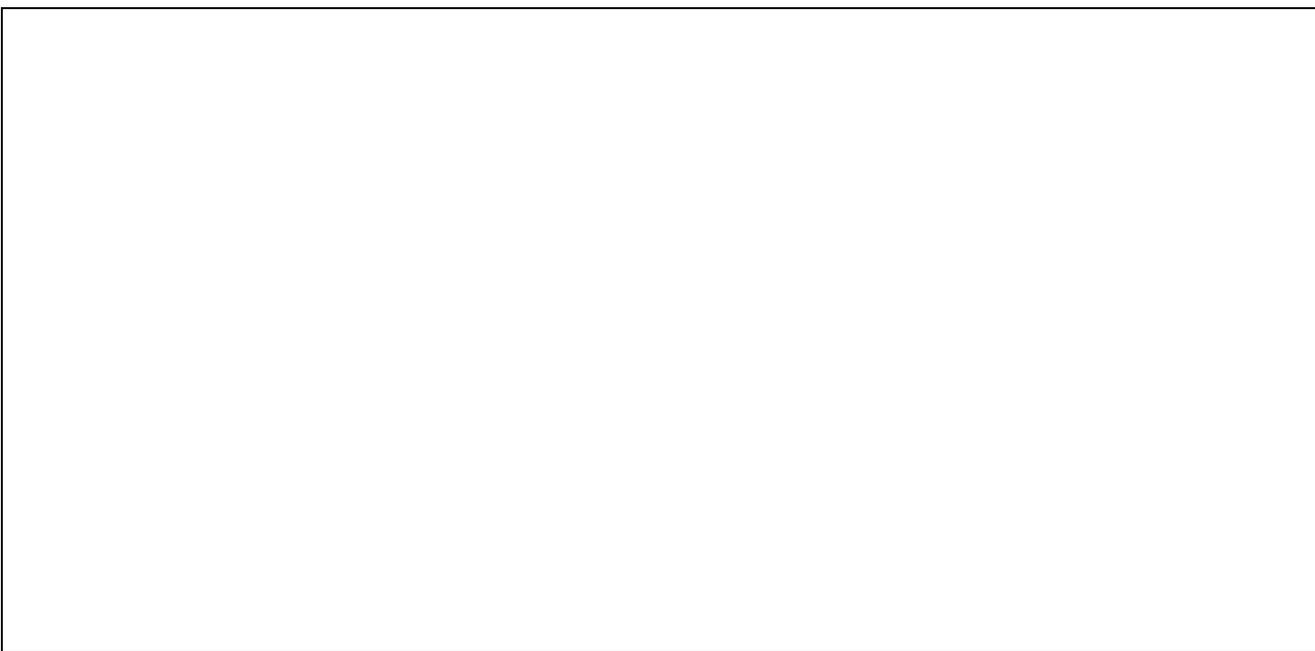


establishes itself on "liberated" Iraqi territory -- and might well demand more concessions (massive reparations, total clerical supremacy) unacceptable to a Sunni military junta. Even if the Sunni junta accepted a power-sharing agreement with Shia clerics, Khomeini probably would see this as only a stepping stone to total clerical rule. In sum, it is unlikely Khomeini would over the long run accept an "accommodating" regime in Baghdad that is not an Iraqi Shia Islamic Republic. A modus vivendi with such a regime for tactical reasons might be possible only temporarily.

If Khomeini rejects the new regime's overtures for an end to the war, he would probably order new offensives to break the last semblance of Iraqi resistance. Iraq's ability to resist the Iranians will be more a function of morale than of quality and quantity of weapons. If Saddam is removed and his Tikriti clan of supporters purged, the cohesiveness of any subsequent regime based on a Sunni military could well falter, ushering in a series of weak regimes and possibly opening the door for a Shia takeover. Moreover, should a clerical Shia government be set up in "liberated" territory, dissidence may grow in the Shia inhabited south and desertions increase in the army. On the other hand, Sunnis could rally to the regime as their last hope for maintaining their supremacy.

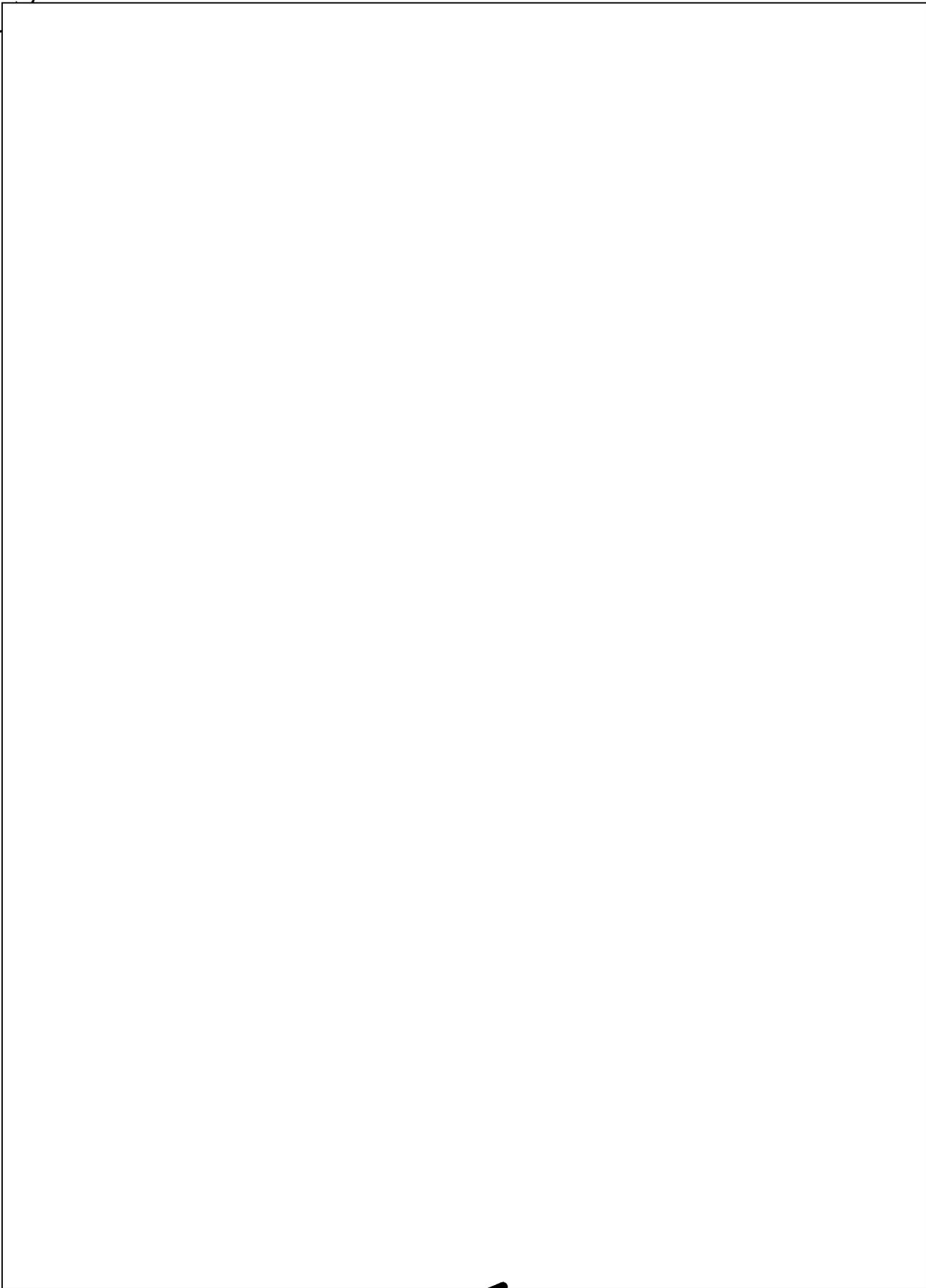
In the long run three basic outcomes appear possible:

- The post-Saddam Sunni regime gains cohesiveness and a stalemate persists in the war.
- The Sunnis lose all power, the military collapses, and a militant Shia Islamic Republic emerges under Iranian tutelage.
- The country is effectively partitioned as Iran makes gains into Shia areas in the south where an Islamic Republic rules and the Sunnis hold onto the central and northern areas.





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Longer-Range Speculation

Should the war result in either a militant Shia Iraqi Islamic Republic or a partitioned Iraq:

- A closer Sunni security bloc may emerge, particularly among Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. Egyptian troops in Saudi Arabia would be a real possibility.
- Islamic fundamentalists in the Sunni bloc may be encouraged. Their resulting boldness would be a source of instability.
- Syria may enjoy special status as "intermediary" between the two blocs.

There would be contradictory impulses affecting influence of the superpowers in the region. Unrest in the Sunni area may produce situations at least temporarily exploitable by the Soviets. The Shia fundamentalist bloc would probably be relatively staunch in both its anti-Communism and anti-Westerism. The Sunni bloc would initially wish stronger Western security commitments. The relative importance of the Palestine issue would recede somewhat in the near term.