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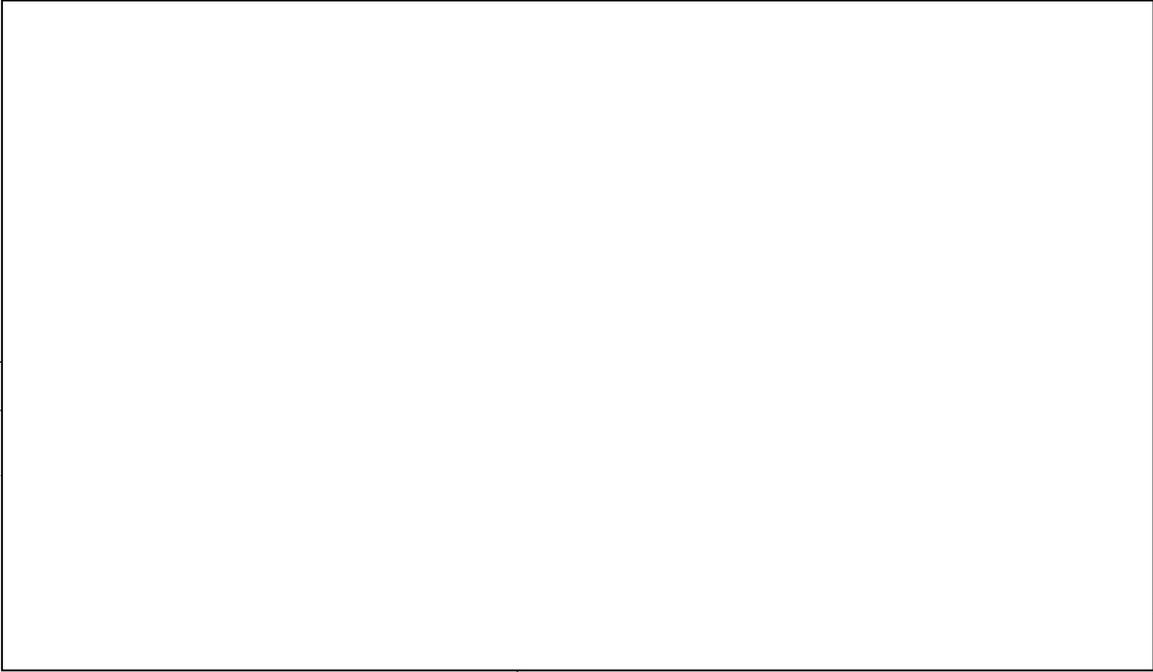
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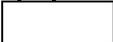
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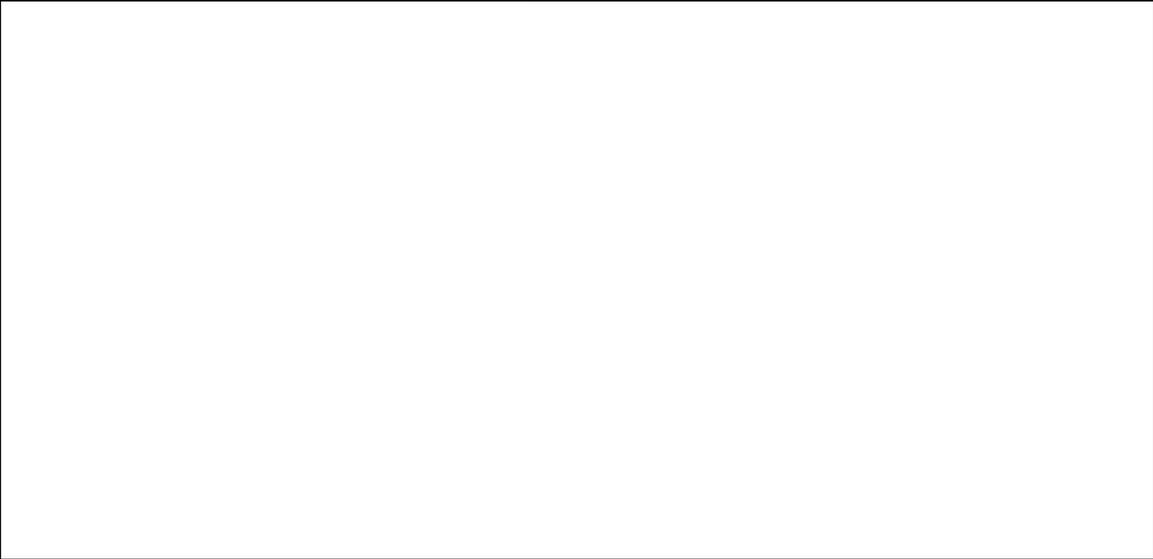
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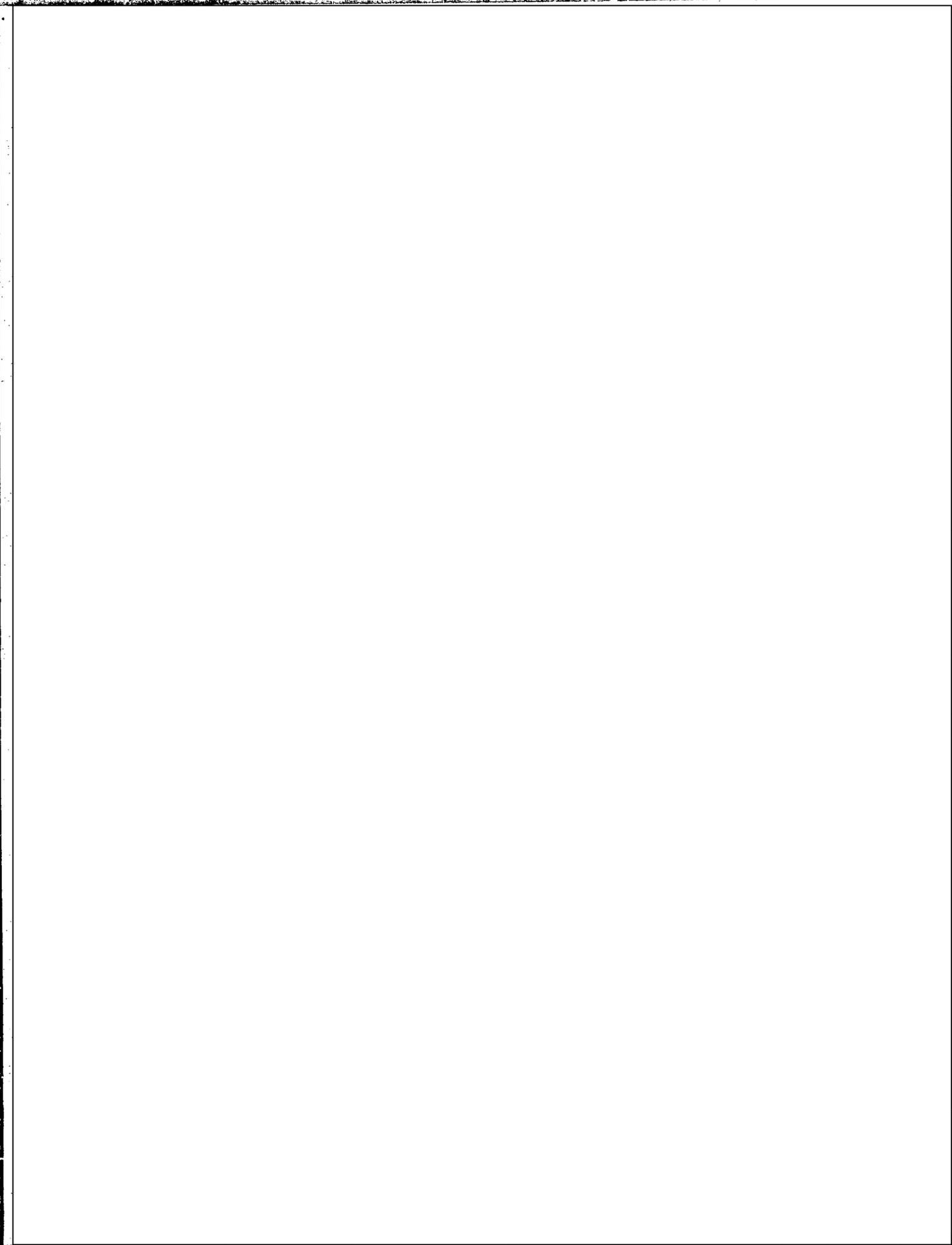
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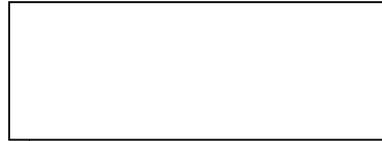
Iraq: Government Casts a Wary Eye on Shia
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Iraqi authorities. 



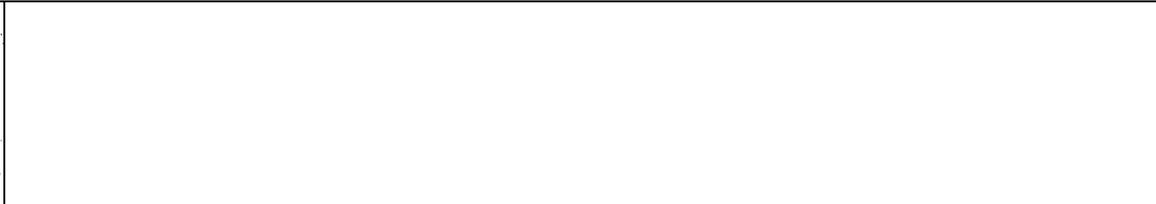


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Iraq: Government Casts a Wary Eye on
Shia Dissidence (U)

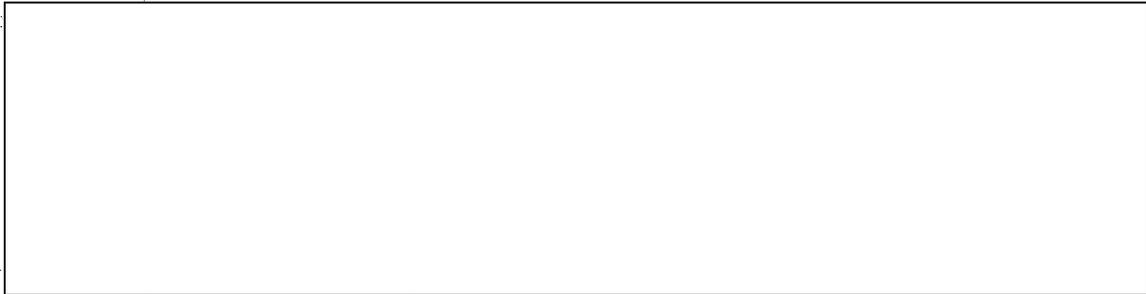
Shia Muslim opposition to the Baathist regime continues to command the attention of Iraqi authorities. The Iraqi Government, which is dominated by Sunni Muslims, has skillfully applied a carrot-and-stick policy toward Iraq's Shia majority, and seems to have quieted religious unrest for the moment. Although we lack information on the depth of Shia feelings against the government or on the scope of Shia dissidence, we believe that religious-based opposition to the Baathists will continue to vex the authorities. 



Although overt dissidence has subsided, tensions continue to be fueled by antiregime literature circulated by various groups claiming to represent or speak for oppressed Iraqi Shias. The literature has consistently called for the overthrow of the Baathist regime, extolled the Ayatollah Sadr of Najaf as the leader of the Iraqi Shias, and emphasized the ties between Iraqi and Iranian Shias. 

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Although the success of Iranian Shias in deposing an unpopular government has given heart to at least some Iraqis, the Ayatollah Khomeini's example cuts two ways. Despite the concentration of power in Sunni hands, Iraqi Shias have benefited materially from Baathist rule. When they look at the political convulsion and economic deterioration that their Iranian coreligionists are experiencing, many must feel some reluctance to stir up or participate in anti-Baathist activities for fear of giving rise to similar chaos in Iraq.

The government's willingness to apply whatever force is necessary to quell disturbances was apparent this spring and probably acts as a strong deterrent to would-be Shia activists. The Baathist attitude on this issue was clearly reflected by Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz, who told a Western journalist, "If there are those in this country who seek martyrdom, my government is prepared to accommodate them-all of them."

The government's Shia policy, however, does not rest on force alone. Serious efforts are made to recruit Shias into the Baath Party. A number of Shias remain in senior government and party posts despite recent executions and convictions. Moreover, the government's continuing socioeconomic programs have done much to improve living standards in the predominantly Shia southern half of the country.

This month the Baathist government granted pay raises to all civilian and military government employees. The flat sum raises will provide greater proportional benefits to lower level employees, many of whom are Shia. More importantly, the government has announced price controls and increased subsidies for a variety of goods and services, a move that should appeal to the less well-off Shia community. The government's improved image for having boosted

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the income of the average Iraqi may be somewhat offset, however, by the impact of increased spending power on already existing shortages of agricultural and consumer goods. [redacted]

President Saddam Husayn also made a personal effort during the month of Ramadan to placate Shias. Saddam's public remarks during this period have had an unusually strong religious flavor. In addition, in what has been seen as a significant conciliatory gesture, Saddam hosted an unprecedented iftar (the breaking of the daytime Ramadan fast) at the presidential palace for Iraqi religious leaders in mid-August. Saddam has also accused the Iraqi judiciary of becoming too bogged down in legal technicalities and not paying sufficient attention to social equity. The new President told the judges that in the future he expected their decisions to be guided by Islamic traditions as well as Baathist principles. [redacted]

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