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IRAQ-US:

Relations Strained

Baghdad's current anger over US policy toward Iran and Iraq is grounded in Iraqi suspicions that the US wants to prolong the war—suspicions that will be difficult to reverse. [redacted]

[redacted] the Iraqis are venting their bitterness over US arms sales to Iran and over their perception that Washington has failed to respond to their concerns. Iraqi intelligence has been harassing the acting US defense attache, and the regime insisted for a time that the US Ambassador personally pick up diplomatic pouches. In more public actions, First Deputy Prime Minister Ramadan has charged the US provided false information to Iraq, and the Iraqi press has become more critical of the US.

Although the Iraqis never fully overcame their mistrust of the US, Iraqi leaders, particularly those who supported closer ties to the US, feel betrayed and humiliated by perceived US deception. [redacted]

[redacted] The Iraqis now wonder if the US wants an endless war that would bleed both Iran and Iraq—a policy goal they also ascribe to Israel. [redacted]

[redacted] Baghdad is especially troubled by US reticence to discuss Israel's role in the Iranian affair, US statements that arms sold to Iran were defensive, US-Iranian meetings in West Germany in December, and US failure to make a point of Iraq's importance publicly. Baghdad believes the US is still focusing on improving relations with Iran at Iraq's expense. [redacted]

Comment: Recent developments have erased most of the gains in bilateral relations since diplomatic relations were restored in 1984. Iraq's anger and suspicion probably are even deeper than it is expressing; it wants to avoid driving the US closer to Iran. For that reason, Baghdad is likely to maintain proper, if cool, working relations with Washington. [redacted]

Iraqi leaders will be extremely wary of any US efforts to mollify Baghdad or to seek closer cooperation with Iraq or other Arab states—even after the war. The recent developments have weakened key US contacts in the regime who are proponents of closer bilateral relations, particularly Foreign Minister Aziz, and strengthened Iraqi leaders, like Ramadan, who advocate closer ties to Moscow. [redacted]

Nevertheless, the Iraqis probably see little chance of significantly increased support from the USSR, which is distrusted for its arms embargo against Iraq early in the war. They believe both superpowers regard Iran as the greater geopolitical prize. [redacted]

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