

Henri J. Barkey, Scott B. Lasensky, Phebe Marr, eds.. *Iraq, Its Neighbors, and the United States: Competition, Crisis, and the Reordering of Power*. Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2011. xiv + 250 pp. \$19.95, paper, ISBN 978-1-60127-077-1.



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The United States has been the dominant country influencing Iraqi foreign relations since the invasion of Iraq in 2003. However, with the withdrawal of U.S. combat troops has come a corresponding loss of American influence. Though there is little doubt that the United States will maintain some kind of influence in Iraq for years to come, the role played by Iraq's geographic neighbors has grown and will continue to do so. Middle East watchers are fond of saying that Middle Eastern countries are a diverse group and should not be generalized. This is certainly true for Iraq's neighbors. Iraq's history with each country is unique. It has different interests with each, and Iraq's future relationships with its neighbors will be shaped by these factors. The collection of essays in *Iraq, Its Neighbors, and the United States*, edited by Henri J. Barkey, Scott B. Henderson, and Phebe Marr, does an admirable job in describing the effect that Iraq's neighbors will have on the country, and outlines how bilateral relations will develop following the period of U.S. domination. All essays are clearly written for

a general audience with an interest in the Middle East, though Middle East specialists will find the book enlightening as well.

Following an introductory chapter written by the editors, the book goes from country to country, beginning with a chapter on Turkey, written by Barkey. The focus is unsurprisingly on the centerpiece of Turkish-Iraqi relations: the Kurdish issue. Barkey explains in detail the history of Turkey's relations with its own Kurdish minority, and also that of the Kurds in Iraq. Turkey's policy has been focused on containing the Kurds in Iraq, especially following the 1991 Gulf War when the Iraqi Kurds benefited from a U.S.-led no-fly zone and established a semiautonomous state. The Turkish government has long been wary of its own Kurdish population and was concerned that the newly empowered Iraqi Kurds would support the Kurdish nationalists in Turkey. This tension was exacerbated after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. However, in 2009, the Turkish government conducted a strategic pivot and attempted to improve relations with the Turkish Kurds.

Barkey's thesis is that this policy shift could not have happened without the fall of Saddam's regime in Iraq, though several other factors also influenced the policy change. Although critical of the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq—he writes that the fall of Saddam left a destabilizing vacuum of influence—Barkey posits that a stable post-Saddam Iraq could benefit Turkey's regional position. He also concludes that the new Turkish approach to its own Kurds may end up improving the relationship between Turkey and the United States.

In his chapter covering Iran, Mohsen Milani writes a detailed narrative of Iran's complicated relationship with Iraq, from the early twentieth century, through the Iran-Iraq War, and then to the up-and-down relations with Iraq led by Nuri al-Maliki, the prime minister. He notes that Iran took advantage of the chaos created by the U.S. invasion to advance its own agenda and change its relationship with Iraq from a bitter enemy to a relatively cooperative neighbor. American readers accustomed to seeing Iran portrayed as a bad actor in Iraq will benefit from a different view; Milani writes from a more Iranian perspective. He states that following the U.S. occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, Iran perceived a threat from U.S. military presence on its eastern and western borders, and much of its actions with regard to Iraq should be viewed through the prism of self-preservation. However, Milani's view is at times overly pro-Iranian in the view of this reviewer; he sees Iran as playing a "stabilizing role" in Iraq, though he offers no convincing proof to back this claim up (p. 92).

The chapter on Saudi-Iraqi relations, by Toby C. Jones, outlines the long history of mistrust and competition between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, two countries that have long vied for hegemony in the Arab world. Jones posits that the Saudis do not look forward to the departure of American troops from Iraq. Though the removal of Saddam as a threat was welcomed, the Saudis see the rise of Shia dominance and Iranian influence in Iraq as a

threat that could inflame their own Shia minority. Usefully, Jones states that individual Saudi religious scholars have as much an effect on Saudi-Iraqi relations as government officials. These scholars, Jones states, have large followings among the Sunni population in Iraq and shape popular Saudi and Iraqi opinion on anti-Shia sectarianism and U.S. presence in Iraq. As long as the Saudis see the hand of Iran influencing Iraq, Saudi-Iraqi relations will remain poor.

The chapter on Iraq and the Gulf states, written by Judith Yaphe, provides history and context, but more than this, offers a set of policy choices for Gulf leaders. The 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait looms large in this chapter, and though relations have improved somewhat, Yaphe explains that there is still much mistrust between the two countries. Saddam may be out of the picture, but Iraq's history causes the Gulf countries to continue to see Iraq as a potential threat. As with Saudi Arabia, the smaller Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries also view Iran as the second major threat, especially given their complicated relations with their own Shia populations. In the most useful part of the chapter, Yaphe outlines several policy options for the Gulf countries to engage Iraq at the expense of Iran or vice versa. Yaphe also provides some "hard truths" about GCC security. Given the historic weakness of these countries in relation to large states, such as Iraq and Iran, the most appropriate of these in the eyes of this reviewer is "trust no one" (p. 140).

One danger of a book like *Iraq, Its Neighbors, and the United States* is that the analysis can be out of date by the time the book goes to print. The uprising in Syria was just beginning as Mona Yacubian was writing her chapter on Syrian-Iraqi relations, and as of this writing, the outcome of the uprising is absolutely uncertain. However, Yacubian helpfully outlines the ups and downs of Iraqi-Syrian relations through the twentieth century and following the fall of the regime of Saddam. This story is a long way from conclusion;

Iraqi-Syrian relations will be very different depending on whether the Syrian government or the opposition prevails. This uncertainty makes it difficult to draw any kind of conclusion on the future of Syria at this time. However, a line in Yacubian's opening paragraph is particularly appropriate for the situation in Syria: "It is the changes, rather than the continuities, that will most define the relationship between Iraq and its neighbors" (p. 145).

The chapter on Jordan, by Lasensky, repeats one theme in a drumbeat fashion: Jordan is a weak country that must get along with its larger and more powerful neighbor. It therefore must adapt to whatever kind of country Iraq becomes. Using phrases like "with few choices and little influence" and "it can make do with less than it hoped for," Lasensky makes the case that Jordan must get along with Iraq for security and economic reasons, and it will simply do what it must to maintain good relations (pp. 166, 169). Interestingly, Lasensky quotes King Abdullah stating in 2004 that what Iraq needs to survive as a state is another strong leader, "somebody from inside, somebody who is very strong" (p. 169). This reviewer heard something very similar from a Jordanian army officer visiting the United States just before the 2003 invasion: "Iraqis need a Saddam to rule them."

The final chapters, written by Hesham Sallam and Kenneth Pollack, attempt to tie the previous country-specific chapters together. Sallam draws a pessimistic conclusion, that growing sectarian divides in Iraq post-2003 are having a deleterious effect on Sunni-Shia relations across the Arab world. In another instance where the advent of the Arab Spring has complicated the publication of books about current affairs in the Middle East, Sallam believes that the 2003 invasion of Iraq has provided other Arab dictators with breathing room because the United States will be hesitant to undertake such an ambitious endeavor again. One would surmise that as of this writing, Bashar

al-Asad is not relaxing in his palace in Damascus as a direct result of the Arab Spring.

Pollack, who was an early advocate of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, writes wistfully that U.S. influence is waning in the country. He repeats this theme throughout the chapter. Pollack believes that the United States will continue to influence Iraq, but that influence will be diminished without so many U.S. troops in the country. Pollack then proceeds to contradict this thesis by stating that the decrease in U.S. military presence could provide leverage for the United States over Iraq, rather than Iraqi leverage over the United States. Fewer U.S. forces in the country will cause U.S. politicians to pay less attention to Iraq, which will weaken Iraq's ability to influence the United States. Pollack adds that Iraq's military will never be completely self-sufficient, and with fewer U.S. forces, Iraq will be even more dependent on U.S. military sales and training to defend itself. Finally, he tries to make the case that the United States should renegotiate the Status of Forces agreement in order to keep Iraq from sliding into a civil war. Though there may be an argument for doing this, Pollack glosses over the difficulties of getting both the Iraqi and U.S. politicians and publics, which are dead set against this idea, to agree.

The 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq reshaped the balance of power in the Middle East, though not necessarily in the way U.S. policymakers intended. Iraq Study Group Chairs James A. Baker and Lee Hamilton make the case in the book's foreword that in the run up to the 2003 invasion, Washington paid too little attention to Iraq's neighbors and thus missed an important opportunity to share the burden of stabilizing the country. It is too early to determine how post-Saddam Iraq will develop. But it is time to consider how Iraq's neighbors will influence Iraq following U.S. withdrawal from the country. *Iraq, Its Neighbors, and the United States* is a useful resource for policymakers and analysts of the region.

Editor's Note: The views expressed are personal and do not reflect the official position of the Department of Defense or any other U.S. government agency.

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