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EXERCISE NEW HORIZONS

The present and future repercussions of the US-led war against Iraq
On the Arab Gulf states

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The Present and Future Repercussions of The US-Led War Against Iraq
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Introduction

The initial results of the war launched by the American forces against Iraq in 2003 were the collapse of the Iraqi regime and a deep rift occurred at the regional level in general and the Arab world in particular. The invasion created a major void in all Iraqi's institutions that can not be easily fixed. The event can be also described as an additional hit sent by the United States to the Arab regional system which was already exhausted from the effects of the previous war that was lunched for the liberation of Kuwait. The unexpected dramatic fall of the Iraqi regime was a turning point in the history of the Middle East in general and the Gulf region in particular, Although some believed that the changes that took place started in 1990, the event had great impacts on the political stability, security and economic situation in the region, a situation which may last for a long time. Moreover the intention of the American government to implement its plans on redrawing the Middle East map according to its strategic goals, indicates the future will be entirely different from the historical region experiences, and the challenges that will face the peoples of the region will be decisive.

The collapse of Saddam's regime created some expectation for the beginning of good relations between the post-war Iraq and its neighbors especially the State of Kuwait, given that the existence of Saddam Hussein was the cause of tensions between them. However, there is another point of view that argues the fall of Saddam's Regime does not

necessarily mean the complete disappearance of the tension and instability in the region. This opinion resulted from the fact that there are some considerations fixed on Iraq itself as it was a former dominant player in Gulf security. Add to this, the number of challenges in policy, economic and security issues post-war Iraq will face and all these factors are expected to have a direct impact on the Iraq-Gulf states relations.

Proceeding from the above considerations, the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime even if it led to the elimination of a threat to the security of the Gulf countries, it also has put these states at a crossroads, either they succeed in consolidating the relations with the new Iraq, the situation that will provide stability for the future, or they may face will a serious threat in a situation that might reintroduce the Gulf to the Iranian hegemony. Some analysts see the future of Iraq's relations with the Arab Gulf states relying on three key variables, "the position of the new Iraq within the American strategy, the formation of the new Iraqi government, and the way how the Gulf States will deal with post-Saddam Iraq."¹ This paper will discuss the existing and future effects and repercussions of the American war against Iraq on the Arab Gulf states, from political, security, and economic perspective, taking into account the different factors that were brought about by the occupation forces or those that already existed in the region.

Important Facts About Iraq

There are some important facts about Iraq that could be potential obstacle in the development of relations between Iraq and other Arab Gulf States. First, the

¹ Issues on The Agenda After War on Iraq, Gulf Center for Strategic Studies, London, p 24

Geographical location; although Iraq is considered a large country when compared to the rest of the region it has less accesses to Arabian gulf water, which leads to the fundamental problem that previously existed in the mind of the former Iraqi regime, the historical right over Kuwaiti land. Despite the fact that many analysts exclude any effects of this idea on post-war Iraqi government, the eradication of such thoughts from the memory of the Iraqis will require a relatively long period of time.

The second point is the anger and the bitterness still felt by the Iraqi people towards the Arab and the gulf countries as a result of their suffering from the international sanctions which have been imposed on Iraq since 1990, as well as the support given to the American invasion by some Arab states specifically Kuwait. Some Iraqis believe that the American-British aggression on their country which destroyed the cities and the historical heritage dating back thousands of years was a result of the failure of the Arab countries. Finally it is necessary to identify the American vision for the future of post-war Iraq in order to determine the impacts of the new Iraq on the region and the Gulf states. The United States who suffered financial and human losses during the invasion and the occupation of Iraq will not allow the new government to implement any decision that will run against its strategic objectives in the region.

Repercussions On The Political Level

The paper will address the repercussions at the political level in three main headings. First, the impact of the inauguration of a new government dominated by Shiites

and what the expectation for future relations with their Arab neighbors. Second, it will also discuss the American plans for restructuring the Middle East through the implementation of political reform and its effects on the Arab Gulf States. And last, the impact of future U.S.–Iraq relations on the Arab Gulf States will be considered.

Post-War Iraq Government

One of the most notable outcomes of the occupation at the political level was the strong presence of Shiite groups as major competitors for the power in Iraq. "Shiite groups have demonstrated the ability to organize command and state their demands on behalf of their group, to the extent that surprised the occupation authorities."² The United States has bet on the Shiites to be a strong ally. Furthermore some leaders described the Shiites as a different from the Wahabiest in the rest of the Arab peninsula. "Eventually they are a better ally than the Saudis."³ Even though, ultimate power on Iraq does not seem to be monopolized by a particular group, it is clear that the Shiites will have the upper hand in the post-war Iraqi government. In this sense the question is what will be the future of Iraqi relations with the other Gulf States, which consist of Sunnis as the great majority? And how these countries will deal with the new government in Iraq?

The worst scenario for the future of Iraq that may irritate Arab Gulf States is, the establishment of a Shiite Islamic State exclusively loyal to the government of Iran, which

² Hani Faris, the Socio-Political Implications of War against Iraq on Iraq And Arab, Arabic Future, Lebanon, p 36, see "Iraq Shiite Strength Surprised U.S." Washington Post, 23-4-2003.

³ Hani Faris, the Socio-Political Implications of War against Iraq on Iraq And Arab, Arabic Future, Lebanon, p 36

will make it difficult for the Arab Gulf Countries to deal with it as a loyal friend. Another expectation for the new government is to have close relations with Iran, Syria and Hezbollah in Lebanon, which will deepen the divide between Iraq and its Arab Neighbors. Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries have expressed their concerns about the situation in Iraq on different occasions. For example, “the Saudi Foreign Minister, held a series of diplomatic meetings in a number of Arab and foreign capitals in order to curb the tide of Iranian Shiites inside Iraq, and also to draw attention to the unfair treatment to the Sunni population by the new Iraqi government.”⁴ After all, the Arab Gulf States Governments do not want to replace the dictatorial rule by another Shiite who oppresses the Sunni population.

American Plans In The Region

After the attacks of September 11th, the government of the united States was convinced that the poverty, unemployment, and most important the absence of democracy in the Arab and Islamic worlds were the reasons creating the extremist religious groups, which dared to carry out the terrorist operations in the heart of the U.S. Therefore, one of the American strategy goals following the overthrow of the former Iraqi regime was to the redraw the map of the Arab world and the Middle East in accordance with American interests in the region. The Administration of President George W. Bush has adopted the idea of changing the Iraqi dictator with another successful democratic one, which paves the way for the transfer of this experience to the

⁴ Fathi Afifi, Regional Polarization And Shift on Geo-Strategy in The Gulf, Arabic Future, Lebanon, 2006,p 113

Arab countries in general and the Arab Gulf States in particular. The President of the United States expressed these thoughts on a number of occasions where he said "a free Iraq would highlight the strength of the freedom and its ability to shape the region and a new Iraqi's system will serve as a model to inspire other nations in the region."⁵

"In February 2004, Washington launched an initiative in the region named the Broader Middle East and North Africa."⁶ This initiative was unanimously rejected by all the Arab states because it did not take into account any of the specificity of the region from religious, social, and cultural aspects and it also ignores the Arab-Israeli conflict. The government of the United States responded to the rejection by applying some changes to the initiative that made rapprochement between the United States and the Arab points of view especially after "holding two seminars in 2004 and 2005, in Morocco and Bahrain."⁷ Though they both agreed that any changes should not be imposed from outside, there are two important points that must be taken into account before entering into the actual application of the political reform in the Arab region.

First, will the results of the political reform in the region, go along with the American objectives, such as, reducing the spread of terrorism and eliminating all of its components including the hostility against the United States, guarantee the supply of oil, and maintain good relations with Arab States in spite of the continuation of the unlimited

⁵ Abdulla Khalifa, External Factors And their Effect on The Political Process in The Gulf States, Gulf Research Center, (2005/2006), p 84

⁶ Ibid pg 86

⁷ Ibid pg 87

support to Israel. Based on previous experiences with democratic participation adopted in some Arab countries and Gulf States such as Kuwait or even to a lesser extent Saudi Arabia, the common results were the strength shown by the Islamic movements and their ability to organize and to influence the political scene in these countries. In November 2005 Zoghby International establishment conduct

from all parties in the political process. In addition to that, the direct interference by the American government in the political decision-making, not to mention the interventions by neighboring countries such as Iran, who influence the Shiite leaders in the Iraqi government. The success of the American scheme in the region depends heavily on the success of their forces to control the security situation in Iraq; the continuation of the current failing situation will continue to complicate matters and slow progression in Iraq.

The United States And Past-War Iraq Relations

The final impact on the political field is the Iraqi-American rapprochement at the expense of American relations with the rest of the Arab Gulf states. This point can only be taken into consideration if the Iraqi government overcomes the current crisis and stabilizes the security and political situation in the country. The United States has always considered the Arab Gulf States as an important strategic ally for different reasons; most important are the existing energy sources and the support to the American military presence. However, this attention will be relatively reduced if the United States manages to achieve success in Iraq. By controlling Iraqi oil the U.S. can guarantee the continuation of its supply, and also the U.S. can rely on Iraq as their main military presence in the region. Confirming this, the announcement made by the American government after the falling of the former regime. “The United States announced its intention to reduce its military presence in most of the Arab Gulf states in return for the establishment of about

four military bases in Iraq as a major presence in the region."⁹ Such acts by the United States could cause uneasy relations in the region.

The Impact of the War on the Gulf's Security

It is essential when dealing with the question of security in the Arabian Gulf to review the different visions of the parties concerned on this issue, also it is necessary to take into account the role of the United States and its interests in the region. The U.S. Government has historically played an important role in Gulf security and this was clearly reflected in 1990, when the American forces directly intervened to prevent Saddam's Regime from imposing any kind of hegemony over the small States in the region.

Previous to the war on Iraq, different visions for the security of the Gulf existed. While the Iran and Iraq insisted that the security of the Gulf was the responsibility of the countries of the region themselves, the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council considered the matter differently and despite some minor differences between them on how to deal with the security issue, the Iraq invasion on Kuwait was enough to unify their orientations. This can be summarized in the following points. "The link between the security of the Arab Gulf states with each other against any external threats within the United Gulf Cooperation Council, the need to continue to build capacity for self-defense,

⁹ Hani Faris, the Socio-Political Implications of War against Iraq on Iraq And Arab, Arabic Future, Lebanon, p 26

and security agreements with major countries with the acceptance of the foreign military presence as a protection for the region."¹⁰

Since 2003, security fears for several reasons increased among Arab Gulf States, for example, the unexpected outcome of the war, the continuing deterioration of American-Iranian relations due to the Iranian nuclear program, and finally, the problem of terrorism, which could be either transferred to the Gulf states through Iraq, or rise from inside these countries by Islamic groups opposed to the war and to the support that the American forces received by the countries of the region in general and Kuwait in particular.

The Iranian Threats

Post-war Iraq, whether its bias's to Iran at the expense of its relations with the Arab Gulf states, or survive as a weak disassembled state racked by internal sectarian differences between Arab Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds. All of this will lead to the concern of the role that will be played by Iran in the absence of the Iraqi state as a balance of power in the region. The Arab Gulf States do not want to see on one side of their borders disassembled weak state, and at the other side a country with nuclear capability. The Iranian ambitions in the Arabian Gulf are not new, Iranian government has continually rejected the gulf as an Arabic region, and they see it as inherited ancestry. In addition to this view is the hostile method they imply to resolve differences with Arab neighbors.

¹⁰ Enaas Hamdi, Gulf Security After The War on Iraq, Aljundi Journal, United Arab Emirates, October, 2006.p51

This was proven with the occupation of the islands of the United Arab Emirates (Greater Tunb, small Tunb, and Abu Musa) in 1971, and the rejection that any peaceful solution could be made through the International Court of Justice as UAE requested.

The rise of Iran as the only power in the Gulf after the fall of the Iraqi regime, caused the Arab Gulf States to take enhanced measures to provide security for its territory and its people. Because of the absence of any Arab or Islamic coordination, Gulf States find themselves forced to consider two options, the first one is to increase their military capabilities, which means the increase of military spending and dedicating huge amounts of money to armaments. This will affect the further development in the other fields. The second option is the reliance on Western countries in general and the United States in particular, to provide the necessary protection for the region, which means the continuation of the presence of foreign bases in the Arab countries.

Another important issue regarding the Iranian threat is the support of the Shiite groups inside the Arab Gulf States. The Shiite minorities in some gulf states consider themselves as oppressed by the Sunni governments. Iran deny any Interference in the internal affairs of the Gulf States, however the news that was uncovered recently on the fifteenth of march 2007 by the dissident Iranian consul Adel Al-Asdi to Arab television discussion the existence of sleeping cells supported by the Iranian government where he said, "there are Iranian sleeping cells in the Gulf. Iran train citizens of the Gulf States, most of them Shiites, and persuade them to come to Iran for military and security

training, then they return to their countries and are ready for the implementation of the conspiracy by Iran.”¹¹

Terrorist Groups

Will Iraq become another Afghanistan? Will it be the new jihad land? And most important will it be the base for exporting terrorism and violence to its neighbors. All these questions and more are revolving in the minds of the decision-makers in the Arab Gulf states. Since ousting Saddam Hussein, the acts of violence have not slowed down; the acts are not necessarily isolated against the occupation forces, but also targeted civilians as well as Iraqi forces. According to the statistics issued by the Iraqi Ministry of Interior reported by Reuters news on the first of April 2007 "the victims among the civilians killed by the violence in Iraq in March 2007 has increased from the previous month up 13% to 1861 persons, despite the major security campaign launched by the government in Baghdad.”¹²

There are different groups participating in the violence in Iraq such as Shiites, Sunnis, the remnants of the toppled regime, and the resistance groups that resist the occupation. However, the group that could be most dangerous not only for Iraq but for all

¹¹ <http://www.alarabiya.net/Articles/2007/03/15/32599.htm>

¹² [http://ara.today.reuters.com/news/newsArticle.aspx?type=topNews&storyID=2007-](http://ara.today.reuters.com/news/newsArticle.aspx?type=topNews&storyID=2007-0401T095010Z_01_OLR135289_RTRIDST_0_OEGTP-IRAQ-KILLED-AT2.XML)

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the countries of the Gulf, are those who attributed to al-Qaida. This group considers all the gulf countries as an enemy because of what they offered to help the occupation. Even though the Gulf States (except Kuwait) have indicated its opposition to the American war on Iraq, some supports has been provided to the American forces. Add to this, the participation of all these countries in the international war on terrorism led by the United States, which will motivate the terrorist groups to try to destabilize security in the region

Since the invasion, the Gulf States have undertaken tremendous efforts to detect acts of terrorism. “Last year, the consultative summit of the leaders of the six countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council held in Riyadh on the fifth of June 2006, formally gave the approval to the Bahraini's proposal of establishing a global center to fight terrorism.”¹³ Four years following the American's invasion, the security forces in the Gulf States remain in control of the situation, as there have been no terrorist operations executed in the Gulf's States. However with the growing violence in Iraq no one can predict what is coming next.

The Impact of the War on the Gulf's Economies

The strategic and economic importance of the Arabian Gulf has always played a major role in the stability of the region. “The states of the gulf region contain about 65% of world oil reserves and about 40% of the gas reserves.”¹⁴ This wealth was one of the

¹³ <http://www.alarabiya.net/Articles/2006/05/07/23512.htm>

¹⁴ Esam Saleem, Issues of Security And Defense in The Third Gulf War, The Annual report, Gulf research Center, January 2004, p192

main reasons for the outbreak of successive wars in the region, including the last American invasion. The current instability in Iraq has two secondary effects on the gulf economy, one, which could be regarded as a positive impact, “is the substantial rise in oil prices which have risen considerably since 2004 exceeding \$50 / barrel at times.”¹⁵ The direct result of that was the notable increase of oil revenues for the Gulf States. “In 2006 the oil revenue provided the Arab Gulf States about 400 billion dollars, Saudi Arabia alone achieved a surplus of about 70 billion dollars.”¹⁶ This increase was a valuable opportunity for these countries to overcome many economic challenges that were faced in the past, and use this fortune for the development of infrastructure, health, education, and the proliferation of mega-projects through out their countries.

The negative impact of the current situation in the region is the increase of military expenditure in these countries. Both, the continuing military unrest and the growing of the Iranian influence in the region, place the Arab Gulf states in a state of insecurity, which is expected to result in increased military spending in the Gulf States. This has been demonstrated by the increasing number of Western companies participating in the defense exhibitions organized by these countries. “In 2006, the six Gulf Cooperation Council countries, signed military equipments contracts worth of 35 billion dollars, the share for British and American companies were 24 billion dollars.”¹⁷ In a recent study published by "Aaraa news" part of the Gulf Research Center “the cumulative military expenditure of the Arab gulf states rose between 2000 and 2005 to

¹⁵ Hussein Tawfeeq, *Gulf-Vision for The Future*, Gulf research Center, 2005 p 256

¹⁶ <http://www.middle-east-online.com/qatar/?id=45371>

¹⁷ <http://www.middle-east-online.com/qatar/?id=45371>

233 billion dollars.”¹⁸ This armament race in the region will have political long term negative impacts on the development plans in the near future.

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Conclusion

The paper has discussed the current and projected future effects of the American war against Iraq on the Arab Gulf states from several directions. The paper has focused on three main areas, political, security, and economic. The current political transformation of the Iraqi government's system is of great importance not only within Iraq, but also regionally and globally. The success of the establishment of a stable democratic system that absorbs all sects, religions and is able to take decisions apart from any external influences will have positive impacts on the Arab Gulf region. Political stability will help Iraq to build good-neighborly ways to resolve any remaining problems peacefully and it will allow Iraq to reclaim the place it deserves among the countries of the region, which promotes a balance of power with the Iranian State.

The disintegration of the state, the absence of authority, and the continuation of interventions by the external forces and multinational groups such as extremist groups, will foster a base for exporting extremism, violence and terrorism. This is happening now in some states, such as Afghanistan. The continuation of the current situation in the region enhances the possibility of destabilizing security in the Arab Gulf states, either by extremist groups, which refused the assistance provided by these countries to the United States and rejects its participations in the international war on terrorism, led by U.S, or even by Shiite groups in the interior are loyal to Iran.

At the economic level, the importance of Iraq's oil will motivate the United States and the international community to act in order to control the current situation in Iraq. Any effect on oil prices will have a direct impact on all the Arab Gulf states and their development projects. Add to that, the continuation of Iran's desire to impose its influence on the countries of the region which will force Arab Gulf states to direct the bulk of its national income toward the military, which in turn will reflect negatively on the strength of their economies. Finally, if Iraq is successful in overcoming the current crisis will have a positive political, economic, and security impacts across the region, while failure poses disastrous consequences on Iraq, the region, and the international community.

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