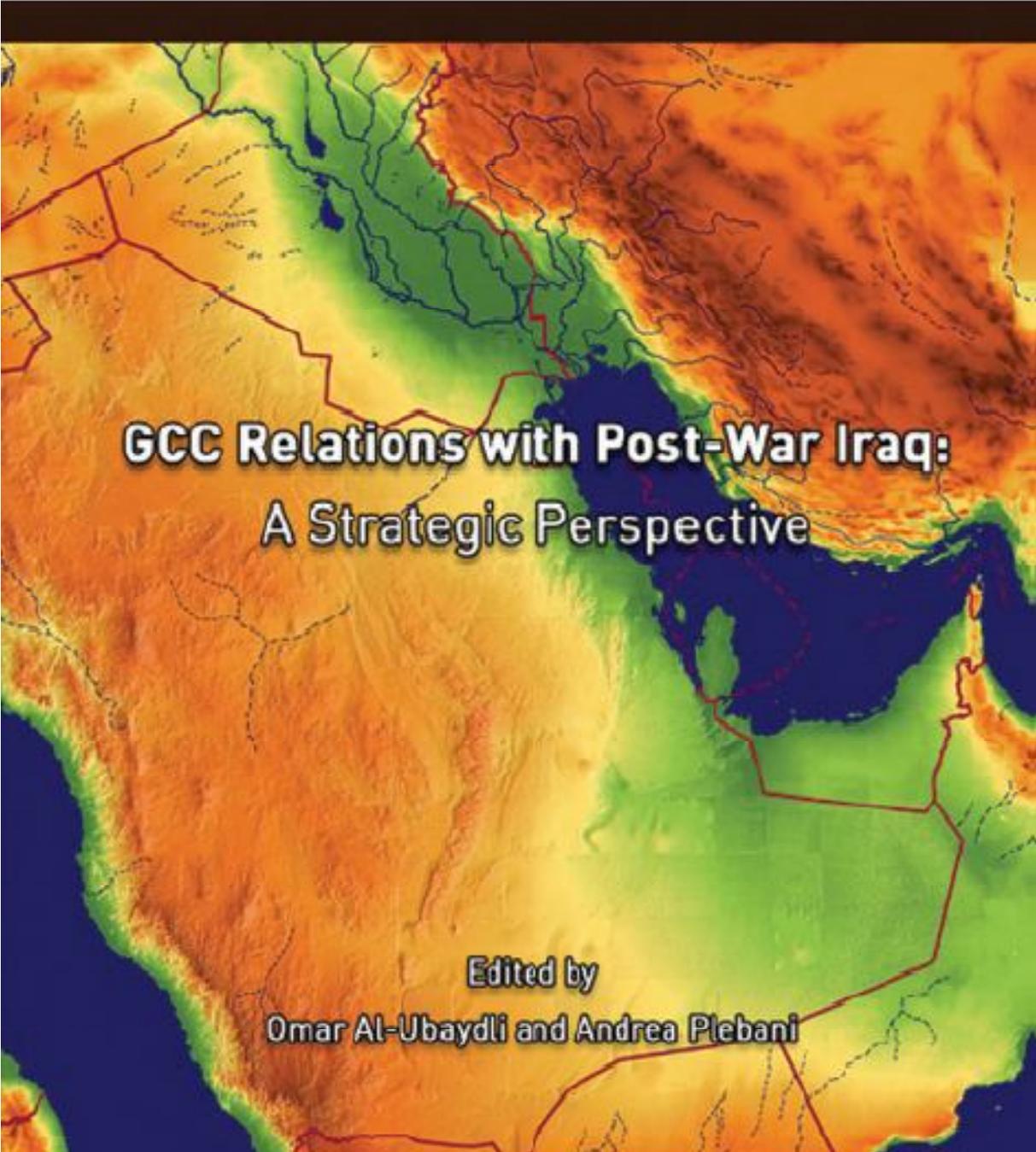**Gulf Research Centre Cambridge**

Knowledge for All

GCC Relations with Post-War Iraq:
A Strategic Perspective

Edited by
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Confronting Threats from Iran through Proactive Cooperation with Iraq: "Objective Necessity" for the GCC

Metodi Hadji-Janev

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- GCC countries need to act proactively and approach Iraq with a proposal whose final goal would be to accept Iraq as a full member of the GCC.

- The GCC countries must assure Iraqi leaders about their commitment to Iraqi identity building and isolate and prevent any destructive forces that might harm regional stability and Iraq's security.

- Building an extended security community with Iraq must begin with joint GCC-Iraq social stability projects in the short run that will replace sectarian-driven solutions with regional Muslim-driven solutions.

- The GCC countries should create an environment in which civil society organizations (free of any government interference and established on a joint GCC-Iraq platform) can develop projects to address common issues like corruption, socioeconomic needs or health policies stressing the shared Muslim identity as opposed to sectarian issues.

Recommendations for Iraqi Policymakers:

- All political representatives in Iraq should contribute toward building an Iraqi identity based on a Muslim outlook rather than with sectarian or ethnic overtones.
- All political figures must use their joint influence to discourage and prevent any form of violence or rhetoric and actions that lead to violence regardless of the perpetrators' ethnic or sectarian belonging.
- All political leaders should base their actions on internal and regional political and economic issues on a win-win rather than a zero-sum approach.
- Build a regional Muslim identity through an indirect joint approach with the rest of the GCC countries based on short-term measures (addressing economic, environmental and broader social challenges) and long-term plans whose final goal is full membership in the GCC.

Introduction

The US-led invasion of Iraq and the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime upset the balance of power in the Gulf. The removal of Saddam's regime and the rise of Iran as a regional power were seen as serious threats by the GCC countries. Complex internal, regional, and global dynamics on the security, political, social and economic levels hold the potential to affect Iraq's future in two directions. First, they could push Iraq into civil war and second, Iraq could become a dictatorship aligned with aggressive Iran. Hence if the GCC countries want to maintain stability and prevent Iran from dominating the Gulf, then they need to support the building up of Iraq's stability and security. In this context, a promising proposal such as an extended security community could produce a win-win situation and facilitate Iraq's membership in the GCC. In order to be successful, the GCC countries must cooperate with Iraq and consider short-term and long-term measures.

When Complexity Turns into Instability: Iraq as a Potential Threat to GCC Countries after the US Withdrawal

The destruction of the regional balance of power between Iraq and Iran after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime has been seen by the GCC states as a serious threat to stability in the region. Today after the US withdrawal from Iraq, ethnic and sectarian unrest seriously affects Iraq's national identity struggle. Complex security,

Introduction

The U.S. led invasion of Iraq and toppling of Saddam's regime has affected security in the Gulf by destroying the balance of power entrenched in the triangle among the GCC, Iraq and Iran. Removal of Saddam Hussein's regime and the rise of Iran as a regional power have been seen as serious threat by the GCC countries. Complex internal, regional and global (security, political, social and economical) dynamics hold potential to affect Iraq's future in two directions. First, to descend Iraq in to civil war. Second, to turn it in to dictatorship aligned with aggressive Iran. Hence if the GCC countries are about to maintain stability and prevent Iran to dominate the Gulf there is something to be done with Iraq's stability and security. One

possible way to avoid such scenarios is if Iraq is approached by GCC countries with a promising project that will produce win - win situation. In order to be successful GCC countries must consider short term and long term measures while approaching Iraq. These measures however will bring best benefits to the region's stability if Iraq is accepted as a full member of the GCC.

1. When complexity turns in to instability: Iraq as a potential threat to GCC countries after the U.S. withdrawal

The destruction of regional balance of power between Iraq and Iran after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime has been seen as serious threat by the GCC states. The US led invasion has spilled Iraq's internal issues in to the Gulf and empowered rise of Iran as a regional hegemony. Well intended efforts to turn post-Saddam's Iraq in to a functional democracy and thus as a contributor to stability in the Gulf so far have failed chiefly for two reasons. First continuous Iraq's struggle to establish a new national identity; second related to former, ill platform of governance that so far has failed to produce economic and social stability.

Support to the former views steam from the fact that Iraq's temporary stability vanished when U.S. troops withdraw. Today complex ethnic and sectarian unrest seriously defy Iraq's national identity struggle. Without it one could hardly overcome entrenched memories of dictatorship, wars, sanctions and recent occupations in order to build effective governance and social and economic stability based on mutual trust, coexistence and power sharing. Internal and complex regional and global (security, political, social and economical) dynamics hold potential to affect Iraq's future either by descending it in to civil war or turning it in to dictatorship aligned with aggressive Iran.

1.1. Iraq's internal unrest and potential for internal civil war

Internal security in Iraq has dramatically worsened when U.S. pulled out its forces. Current challenges that threaten Iraq's inner security are complex and straddle the boundaries of political, economic and social relations among Iraq's ethnic and sectarian groups. As a result struggle for new Iraq's identity is deeply trapped in sectarian disputes between Iraqi Shi'as and Sunnis on one hand and in interethnic disputes between majority and leading Shi'as and Kurds on the other. These divisions have so far opened the door for many violent groups to step in and affect Iraq's security from inside. By launching armed attacks violent groups polarize interethnic and sectarian divisions and undermine confidence in the current Government.[1]Thus rival political and sectarian factions throughout Iraq inhibit Government's efforts to protect its own populace without American support and threaten to drop Iraq in civil war. Although in the age of globalization one could hardly draw the line between internal and external threats for the systematic purposes we will continue our debate addressing internal challenges that comprise threat to Iraq's internal security.

Recent political crisis that challenges the internal Iraq's security dates back more or less to the events before and after 2010 elections. Today it is obvious that although promising the agreements that led to 2010 government creation did not resolve the underlying differences and disputes among the leading ethnic and sectarian political figures of Iraq's populace. In general complex political disputes over power sharing among Iraq's Shi'ites, Sunnis, and Kurds are ethnic and sectarian driven, with shifts in alliances (former strong enemies that practiced armed violence against each other are now together). Leading political representatives of the Iraq's ethnic groups fight over autonomy, authority, and control of Iraq's vast natural resources. In addition political struggle for power along with the economic issues (we will address them bellow) is segmented inside specific ethnic or sectarian groups which further influence the overall security to the country. In the current strained relations everybody accuses everybody and each side views the others with growing suspicion in this high-stakes competition.

1.1.1. Shi'a – Sunni, Shi'a-Kurdish and Sunni-Kurdish confrontations

Several Maliki's political moves have foster sectarian and ethnic divisions in Iraq. According to his opponents Maliki's goal is to centralize power in his and his own party's hands.[2] They accuse him for

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[1] _____"Suicide bomber kills 32 at Baghdad funeral march", Associated Press, Fox News, 27 January 2012, Retrieved 22 April 2012 from: http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/01/27/car-bombing-kills-26-in-baghdad/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed:+foxnews/world+(Internal+-+World+Latest+-+Text)
[2] See more general in: Marisa Sullivan, "Maliki's Authoritarian Regime", Middle East Security Report 10, Institute for the Study of War, April, 2013

grabbing more power over independent bodies, for minimizing Irbil Agreement provisions over power sharing and for denying Sunnis rights to exercise more autonomous political power in regions where they constitute majority.

Maliki's attempts to purge leading Sunni representatives from Iraqi government have seriously disturbed carefully designed power sharing relations between Shi'a and Sunni representatives. On December 18, 2011 (the day of the final U.S. withdrawal) Maliki asked the COR to hold a no-confidence vote that would enable him to dismiss top Sunni official at that time Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq.[3] Revolted by this move Iraqiyya (dominated by Sunni) parliamentarians walked out of the COR and most members of the cabinet suspended their work.[4] Next day another surprise from Maliki has further deepened sectarian tensions. Announcing his plans to arrest a Sunni official Vice President Tariq al Hashimi on charges of terrorism Maliki caused another shock. Hashimi immediately traveled to Kurdish regional government–(KRG) controlled area for meetings with President Talabani and refused to return to face trial in Baghdad, without promise for fair trial. Regardless of his demands the Bagdad court launched the trial in absentia in May 2012 and in September 2012 convicted him for killing of two Iraqis and sentenced him to dead.[5]

Ethnic Kurdish Arab unrest widen on when KRG President Barzani, accused Maliki of a "power grab" by harnessing control of the security forces.[6] Furthermore sectarian disputes have cascade effect on ethnic tensions. Since Sunni vice President al Hashimi is out of the office and faces dead penalty and Kuridsh President Talabani suffered stroke second vice president Khudayr Khuzai, a Shiite has become acting president while Talabani recovers.[7] Given the recent Maliki's practice (including the establishment of Tigris Operational Command) fear has begun to grow among the Kurds that Maliki will try to abuse Talabani's position and permanently replace him with a Shiite (Khuzai).[8]

Territorial disputes among Sunni Arabs and Kurds clearly attest for the complexity of Iraq's inner security. After provincial elections in 2009 Sunni Arabs took back control of the Nineveh – Mosul province from Kurds.[9] When al –Hadba'a won clear victory it became clear that its surge for Arab – Islamic identity with no Kurds could instigate ethnic unrest. Kurdish populace from this region also opposes the Sunni dominance. As a result in the region where Kurds dominate Atheel al-Nufaiji's visits are not welcomed.[10]

Along with current Shi'a – Sunnis – Kurds struggle for political power sharing there is growing social and economic unrest that deepen political crisis in to inter-sectarian and interethnic disputes. As a result these issues and challenges endanger security situation and open the door for outside forces to step in and influence the overall security of the country by vectoring it toward civil sectarian and ethnic armed conflict. Although inter-sectarian and interethnic disputes are for political power too since they are stimulated over social or economic issues we will address them along with ethnic and sectarian issues in the context of social and economic challenges to Iraq's inner security.

1.1.2. Economic and social challenges to Iraq's security

Along with political challenges economic and social issues aggravate Iraq's internal security. Sectarian and ethnic disputes but also inter-sectarian and inter-ethnic divisions over economic and social interests shape internal security after the U.S. withdrawal and the upcoming elections.[11] Disputes over Iraq's natural resources more or less draw ethnic tensions between central Shi'as led government and KRG.[12] These

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[3] Liz Sly, "In Iraq, Sense of Relief is Chilled by Political Crisis", *The Washington Post*, December 18, 2011

[4] Raad Alkadiri, "Iraq; Back to the Future", The International Institute for International Studies, 2011, p.10

[5] Omar Al Jawoshy, Michael Schwirtz, Duraid Adnan, "Vice President Of Iraq Is Given Death Sentence", *The New York Times*, September 10, 2012, p. A1

[6] International Crisis Group, "Deja Vu All Over Again? Iraq's Escalating Political Crisis," *Middle East Report* No. 126, July30 2012

[7] Kenneth Katzman, "Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights", Congressional Research Services, April 19, 2012, p. 18, available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/d-iq/dv/d-iq20120529_04_/d-iq20120529_04_en.pdf

[8] Hawar Berwani, "Breaking News... Maliki orders to form Tigris Operational Command" *Iraqi News*, July 2, 2012,

[9] Campbell Robertson and Stephen Farrell, Iraqi Sunnis Turns to Politics and Renew Strength", *The New York Times*, April 17, 2009, p. A4

[10] Sam Dagher, Tensions Stocked Between Iraqi Kurds and Sunnis", *The New York Times,* May 18, 2009, p.A4

[11] Jane Arraf, "Iraq's Unity Tested by Rising Tensions Over Oil-Rich Kurdish Region", *Christian Science Monitor*, May 4, 2012

[12] International Crisis Group, *Iraq and the Kurds: The high-Stakes Hydrocarbons Gambit*, Middle East Report No. 120, Executive Summary, April 19, 2012

disputes have been interpreted through security forces budgeting, territorial issues (over oil rich territory), laws regarding the oil production, and closing of contracts with specific firms.[13]

Commercial disputes and struggle for power have also caused interethnic and inter-sectarian confrontation. That the wave of Arab Spring had received many faces around the Arab World may be best be well described with what happened in Iraq. In fact closer view to the protests will show that beside social motives distinct from ethno-sectarian conflict part of the protests were as a result of solidarity with Bahrain Shi'a protest and against GCC (Saudi led) intervention.[14] Nevertheless rage at poor security and public services, corruption and frustration with exclusive focus on the major factions on politics rather than governing or improving services dominated the people's demands.

Kurdish unrest in Sulaymaniyah and the rest of the KRG reflected deep frustrations inside the Kurdish ethnic community. Violent respond by the peshmerga and Asayesh (KRG-security service) ended with three people losing their life.[15] Frustration from Maliki's policy has affected Shi'a solidarity too and caused inter-sectarian division. Struggling for power Shi'a cleric Muktada al-Sadr in May 2012 participated in a meeting with other Maliki's oppositionist and in June the same year Sadrist deputies joined the effort to vote no-confidence vote against Maliki.[16]

1.1.3. Iraq's security under serious threat from violent groups

In order to relax the pressure against him Maliki undertook short term political and populist social measures. However at the end of the 2012 it became clear that Maliki's political outreach to Sunni leaders was temporary and insincere. Arrest of ten bodyguards of Finance Minister Rafi al-Issawi increased Sunni fears and launched immediate anti-Maliki demonstrations.[17] The situation culminated when protests in Faluja ended with killing of 7 and injuring more than 70 Sunni demonstrators.[18] These events along with complex political, economic and social issues have convoluted Iraq's security by offering space for violent groups to accomplish their agenda.

Calling on restrain Maliki warned that current scenario matches violent groups such as Al Qaeda goals. Given the high involvement of the violent groups in many attacks since 2012 and the rhetoric at the beginning of the 2013 crisis events Maliki was telling the true.[19] It could be argued that violent Sunni elements in fact have taken advantage of the unrest. Nevertheless identifying any direct impact is difficult since Iraq continues to experience near-daily violence involving Sunni and Shiite Muslim communities.

What is clear though is that the war in Syria has impacted directly on the shared border region with Iraq. Fighting between rebels and Syrian regime forces has been regularly reported in close proximity to the border. Furthermore cross-border armed incursions have also occurred. According to New York Times' report in March this year, unidentified gunmen ambushed an Iraqi security force convoy transporting recently wounded Syrian regime personnel.[20] The attack left more than 40 Syrian soldiers and officials dead. According to the same report further incidents are anticipated along the shared border. Nonetheless it could be argued that given the low population densities in eastern Syria, a significant escalation in cross-border spillover is not serious threat to Iraq. Although this is true and Lebanon is facing greater challenges in this context than Iraq, seen in the terms of internal escalation these events further threaten Iraq's inner security. As a result on one hand this and similar events have sharpened arguments for al Maliki's government to use harsh measures against his political opponents (especially Sunnis) in the name of security. On the other these events along with other political and social constellations have pushed Iraq's near dictatorship toward aggressive Iran's arms.

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[13] Ban Lando, "Exxon to Start Drilling in Disputed Kurdish Blocks", Iraq Oil Report, October 18, 2012

[14] Hazim al-Sharaa, "Iraqi Shia Back Bahrain Protest", *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, March 24, 2011, available at: http://iwpr.net/report-news/iraqi-shia-back-bahrain-protesters

[15] Kenneth Katzman, April 19, 2012, p. 29

[16] Ramzi Mardini, "Iraq's Post Withdrawal Crisis, Update 24", Institute for The Study of War, June 1, 2012, available at: http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/iraq%E2%80%99s-post-withdrawal-crisis-update-24

[17] ___ ___, "10 of Finance Minister's bodyguards arrested, Interior ministry", December 21, 2012, available at: http://en.aswataliraq.info/(S(snyuv1fdvolmzq55fjbfj555))/Default1.aspx?page=article_page&id=151823&l=1

[18] Margaret Griffis, "Iraqi Tropes Fir at Protesters; 14 Killed, 72 Wounded Across the Country, *Antiwar.com*, January 25, 2013, available at: http://original.antiwar.com/updates/2013/01/25/iraqi-troops-fire-on-protesters-14-killed-72-wounded-across-country/

[19] _____, "Fourteen People Killed and 39 Injured in Bombings Across Iraq", *Al Arabia With Agents*, April 27, 2012

[20] Durani Adnan and Galdston Rick, "Massacre of Syrian Soldiers in Iraq Raises Risk of Widening Conflict", *New York Times*, March 4, 2013,

1.2. Iraq dictatorship aligned with aggressive Iran?

Possibility that Iraq turns in to dictatorship depends from several factors. These factors gravitate over Maliki's shifts in policy (internally and externally) in the context of his ambitions to stay in power; Iraq's ethnic and inter-sectarian dynamics; Iraq's economic, social and oil challenges; U.S. role in the region; Iranian's ambitions; Syrian internal conflict and other regional players such as GCC and Turkey.

Internal political dynamics show that if not approached al Maliki might be prone to dictatorship. Clear power grab (described above) notwithstanding lead one to conclude that he is moving toward that direction. So far it is not clear whether this was preplanned or the circumstances might lead him to that extent.

There are little arguments which support the view that Maliki has planned this. In his op-ed in Washington Post Maliki stressed that he opposes foreign interference and that Iraq is sovereign country.[21] Furthermore Maliki's decision to move against leading Sunni figures (also discussed above) on charge of terrorism so far did not cause international outcry. Even more after decision to go against Hashimi he did not hesitate to go against other Sunni opponents.[22] Maliki still holds between 600-1000 violent Shi'a militants in jail for fighting Americans and government forces even after he reconciled with Muqtada al Sadr. It is true that some of his ministers are Sadarists however it also true that his relations with al-Sadr are strange.[23]

On the other hand it could be argued that regional constellations and its influence on Iraq's security have pushed al – Maliki toward Iran. Syrian conflict (with threatening Iraq's inner security by foreign Sunni fighters), Turkey's regional ambition and potential for Kurdish secession and by all of that Iraq's sectarian and inter-sectarian dynamics (alliance between al Sadr and Sunni clerics) are more or less reasons behind al Maliki tries to explain some of his behavior.

The impact of the conflict in Syria on the security and political situation in Iraq is complex and is pushing actual central government toward closer ties with Iran. Sunni militants in Iraq have attempted to establish closer links to their compatriots in Syria. Central Government's officials so far have not hesitated to clarify that there is no place for terrorist activities in Iraq and to align these activities with sectarian speeches issued by the Sunni's opposition.[24]

Recent activities of the Sunni armed groups from Iraq that support struggle against Assad's regime in Syria, to some extend stimulate al-Maliki to seek support from Iran and to tide public security. Several reports attest that Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQ-I) and other Sunni insurgent groups have escalated their offences with numerous attacks on Shiite, as well as members and installations of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF).[25] Violent groups so far have tried to represent these attacks as retaliation for shift in power after removal of the Saddam's regime and inadequate politics toward Sunni minority by Maliki's government. Their ultimate goal is to undermine Maliki's leadership and the confidence of the ISF and to inflame sectarian conflict. In April 2013, Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, announced that his group was joining with Syria's Al-Nusra Front to form the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.[26] Even though many see this announcement as questionable, if one brings them in the light of the current political dynamics in Iraq and its surrounding it is more than clear that they are tracking al Maliki's path toward Iran which is supporting al Assad in Syria. Although ISI and Al-Nusra's immediate priorities remain quite different and focused on domestic pursuits al Maliki's unrest is reasonable for two reasons.

First, if the war in Syria concludes in the favor of the opposition, ISI could, have a major staging area in Syria in Al-Nusra-controlled territory from which to launch attacks against the Iraqi government. Second, if the Syrian regime prevails, Sunni militants are likely to return to Iraq and will join established extremist groups, such as the ISI/AQI. Given the recent political situation in Iraq they represent wealthy platform that could be used by Sunni's political opposition for bargaining. However, the sectarian issues (i.e.

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[21] Nouri al-Maliki, "Building a Stable Iraq", *The Washington Post*, December 04, 2011

[22] Adam Mausner, Sam Khazai, Anthony H. Cordesman, Peter Alsis and Charles Loi, "The Outcome of Invasion: US and Iranian Competition in Iraq", Center for Strategic and International Studies-CSIS, 2012, p.39

[23] Patrick Cockburn, "The Shia are in Power in Iraq, but not in Control", *The Independent*, March 6, 2013, available at: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/the-shia-are-in-power-in-iraq--but-not-in-control-8523280.html

[24] Durani Adnan and Galdston Rick, "Massacre of Syrian Soldiers in Iraq Raises Risk of Widening Conflict", *New York Times*, March 4, 2013

[25] Home Office, "Iraq Bulletin: Security Situation update 2013, Country of Origin Information Service, August 13, 2013, p-11-13

[26] _____, "Qaeda in Iraq confirms Syria's Nusra is Part of Network", *Agence France - Press*, April 9, 2013, available at: http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/afp/130409/qaeda-iraq-confirms-syrias-nusra-part-network

Sunni opposition) are not the only concern for al Maliki that he uses to justify his political behavior which many identify as dictatorship.

The conclusion of the civil war in Syria and threats to Iraq's existence in the light of the interethnic conflict (i.e. the so called Kurd question) could be seen as additional arguments for the recent al Maliki's political play. So far Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq is the only autonomous region led by the Kurds. Given the recent dynamics in Syria and the West's and GCC countries' support to predominantly Sunni led opposition against Assad, it could be argued that it is reasonable for al Maliki's government to fear from potential secession. Should the war in Syria end with the opposition's victory, there is good probability for establishment of a Kurd autonomous region in north eastern Syria. Accordingly another Kurd region, along to the KRG, is likely to bolster general Kurd goals for a single Kurd state. Since Iran also fear secession from its own territory, and Turkey has already launch a project to cooperate with KRG, the conflict in Syria from these perspectives also urges al Maliki toward Iran. Nevertheless this also gives arguments at al Maliki's disposal to bring security matters as an excuse for his power grip.

Additional political circumstances related to GCC countries - Iran relationships in the region play in favor of Iraq's dictatorship aligned to Iran. Iran plans for power projection and its behavior in the Gulf and broader in the Middle East, largely shape the GCC countries' fear from Iran and thus shape their attitude to the events in Iraq. This could be understandable if one agrees on the 2010 conclusion of the US Intelligence Community Annual Threat Assessment prepared for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. According to the report Iran's current strategy has four main priorities: preserving the Islamic regime, safeguarding Iran's sovereignty, defending its nuclear ambitions, and expanding its influence in the region and the Islamic world.[27] The Arab Monarchies' fear from Iran's influence in the Gulf has sufficiently grown after the Islamic revolution. In fact establishment of the GCC chiefly came as a respond of the fear from Iran. According to Vali Nasr *"...the Iranian Islamic revolution changed the Shia–Sunni power equation in Muslim countries "from Lebanon to India" arousing the traditionally subservient Shia to the alarm of traditionally dominant and very non-revolutionary Sunni...*[28] The removal of the Taliban and Saddam Husein regimes has further energies Iran's position in the Gulf. These interventions, especially the later one, have in the GCC countries' eyes enabled Iran strength. Furthermore Iran's nuclear program sparks many controversies that push GCC countries toward unity. As Mustafa Alani holds the GCC states see Iran as an aggressive and expansionist state and are convinced that a nuclear capacity-equipped Iran would constitute a major challenge to them.[29] In addition the evaporation of the balance of power after the US led coalition and its aftermath in the Gulf has tremendously increased the oil prize. At the same time the US led coalition's withdrawal from Iraq has arguably opened the door for Iran to move into his best position to influence the political shape of Iraq.

From all of the above it is more than clear that if not approached seriously Iraq will remain as a fertile ground for regional destabilization through its neighbors' proxy wars and non-state actors. Iraq's ethnic and inter-sectarian dynamics, and related to this, economic, social and oil challenges, Maliki's ambitions to stay in power, Syrian internal conflict, Iran's regional ambitions and GCC countries response to these ambitions hold potentials to turn Iraq in to dictatorship aligned to aggressive Iran. Hence if the GCC countries are about to maintain stability and prevent Iran to dominate the Gulf there is something to be done with Iraq's stability and security. One possible way to avoid such scenarios is if Iraq is approached by GCC countries with a promising project that will produce win - win situation.

2. Strengthening the ties with the source of fear: closer cooperation between Iraq and GCC countries as a solution to prevent possible crisis

The changes in Iraqi internal dynamics after the US led coalition in 2003 as we saw has had regional consequences that have urged current political situation in the Gulf and in the Middle East. Despite strained political relations between GCC and Iraq today the economic ties are also not promising. Although GCC-Iraq trade grew from roughly $31 million in 1999 to nearly $6.5 billion in 2008, more than 80 percent of the trade was Iraqi exports to the UAE.[30] Iraq has no trade with Kuwait and imports virtually nothing from the

[27] Blair C. Dennis, "Annual Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence", February 2, 2010,

[28] Nasr Vali, *The Shia Revival*, (Norton, 2006), p. 143-150,

[29] Alani, Mustapha, "Iran, Iraq and the Gulf Region", Finnish Institute of International Affairs, February 27, 2007,

[30] _____, "Global Insider: Iraq-GCC Relations, Interview with Sean Foley", World's Politics Review, April 28, 2011, available at: http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/8669/global-insider-iraq-gcc-relations

UAE and Saudi Arabia. Keeping this in mind and considering the above discussed concerns if the GCC countries are about to mitigate the threat from Iran it is more than clear that they need to approach Iraq.

2.1. GCC countries' potential to cooperate with Iraq

So far the direct relationship between the instability in Iraq and the domestic stability of the GCC countries has been well institutionalized concern. The emphasis on the Iraqi territorial integrity has been a subject in several summit meeting's declarations.[31] Nevertheless recent internal political dynamics in Iraq and the al Maliki's shift toward Iran supersede the basic concerns over Iraq sovereignty. Hence the question is how and in what form of cooperation can GCC countries approach to Iraq and mitigate the risk from Iran?

Opponents to this idea might argue that due to many differences that exist among the GCC countries themselves on one hand and among them and Iraq on the other, it is almost impossible to cooperate with Iraq. In 2011 Ambassador Seyed Husain Mousavian identified strategic concerns for GCC countries (some of which were addressed above) which in fact sit well with opposing arguments for potential GCC and Iraq cooperation.[32] Nevertheless, he also precisely identified common issues and common problems that need greater attention by all Gulf countries which in fact send promising signals for cooperation among them. Ideally, as Kenneth M. Pollack argues, there is a need of new framework that would help the states of the Region to navigate themselves in global political shifts.[33]

2.2. Best way to approach to Iraq

Some have argued that without foreign assistance GCC countries alone cannot resolve hard political questions.[34] It is well known that in this context U.S. has greatest role. So far U.S. has helped to promote regional cooperation and thus avoid dead-ends as a result to GCC countries' lack of capacity and will to make cooperation and regional institutions work. However, although U.S. help and support remain as valuable as ever with regards to the current circumstances GCC must move forward for three reasons.

First, as Christian Koch argues, security of the GCC cannot be determined solely by external factors.[35] Second, there is great possibility that U.S. will lose interest to play significant role to the Region regarding its foreseeable energy independence. According to some estimates US will be the world's leading oil producer in less than five years and will be exporting oil by 2030.[36] Furthermore it is very likely that the rise of China and India will dominate the US foreign policy for the foreseeable future. Third so far backed by the U.S. military support, GCC has facilitated cooperation among the Gulf countries and has helped each of the GCC countries to improve its own military capabilities. Nevertheless many arguments speak that among others GCC alone is not capable of enhancing security largely because it does not include any of the countries that threaten the Gulf countries. Hence it has to be clearly understood by everyone that there can be no Gulf security system without the comprehensive involvement of all parties including the GCC states alongside Iraq, Iran and Yemen.[37]

The legacy of the GCC speaks much about the culture and political rational when it comes to closing an agreements and resolving disputes. So far GCC states have easily resolved economic and welfare promotion issues.[38] Nonetheless when questions of national sovereignty are involved, GCC as a platform has not been quite promising. In this context for example Louise Fawcett precisely asserts that GCC "*sovereignty was a prize to be nurtured, not one to be sacrificed on the altar of a pan-Arab movement, or one that extolled the virtues of integration*".[39]

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[31] _____"GCC Reviews Steps in Military Cooperation', *Gulf News*, 15 December 2009, available at: http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/kuwait/gcc-reviews-steps-in-military-cooperation-1.554035

[32] Alani, Mustapha, 2007

[33] Kenneth M. Pollack, "Security in the Persian Gulf: New Framework for the Twenty First Century", Saban Center at Brookings, 2012, No24, p. 3

[34] Ibid

[35] Christian Koch, "GCC as Security Regional Organization", KAS International Reports, 2010, No. 11, pp.23-35

[36] International Energy Agency, 2012, "World Energy Outlook", OECD/IEA Publications, Paris, available at: http://www.iea.org/publications/freepublications/publication/English.pdf.

[37] Christian Koch, 2010; but also see: Pollack, 2012

[38] John Peterson and Michael E. Smith, "The EU as a Global Actor" in: Elizabeth Bomberg and Alexander Stubb, eds., *The European Union: How Does it Work?* (Oxford: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 197

[39] Louise Fawcett, "Alliances, Cooperation and Regionalism in the Middle East", in: Louise Fawcett, ed., *International Relations of the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, Second Edition), p. 196.

Considering the complex Gulf environment in order to avoid potential crisis and fear from Iraq GCC should focus on proved methods of collective security cooperation. This does not mean that GCC should apply defaults that have worked in other regions. Gulf countries share unique tradition, culture and values distinct from other regions that are crucial in perceptions, approaches and political calculus. Therefore one must take these considerations in to account when plan for GCC - Iraq cooperation. In this light when it comes to Iraq, GCC needs to consider what Ehteshami called "short terms requirements" and "long term visions".[40]

2.2.1. Short term measures as indirect approach that GCC needs to consider while approaching Iraq

In order to prevent escalation from Iraq, on a short term GCC countries need to undertake steps intrinsic to the crisis management process, based on the indirect approach. This is important since such approaches focus on activities and measures that will lessen tensions. Considering the current security situation in Iraq and tensions with the GCC indirect approach should be considered through introducing set of measures. These measures should focus on addressing issues that challenge both GCC countries and Iraq. Economic, environmental and broader social challenges are channels that need to be employed. Nonetheless, political narrative and behavior also must be considered on a short term measures.

GCC legacy clearly speaks about the ability to achieve political cohesion when it comes to addressing complex challenges on a short term. One possible way of indirectly lessening the tensions with Iraq is to build on best practices that have worked in the past. So far most of the GCC accomplishments have come from the economic sector cooperation. Joint Economic Agreement of 1981, the introduction of a Customs Union in 2002, the proposal for a common market in 2008, the introduction of a region-wide electricity grid, common transport and infrastructure projects, and even cooperation in the field of peaceful nuclear research are some of the areas that can lead to increased readiness of mutual cooperation with Iraq.

The process of globalization and its effects have brought common challenges to GCC countries and Iraq in terms of the social instability. As we saw social demands so far have easily fueled religious and ethnical tensions proving their mutually dependence and capability to create *circulus vitiosus* in Iraq and the Region. Addressing these challenges with joined mechanisms toward achieving social stability is a good way to proceed indirectly to the core issue and lessening tensions. The GCC countries have recognized some of these challenges and have already considered similar platform during the last Summit held in Bahrain in December 2012. [41]

Social unrest both in Iraq and in some GCC countries has showed that the whole region needs alternative to oil industry. Measures and initiatives that will stimulate cross-border projects (GCC-Iraq) for tourism, sports, culture, industry and small business support should be certainly considered. Food production should be increased using the latest technological developments.

Additional short term mechanisms that sit well with the indirect approach to the political and security tensions steam from other joined concerns. As the rest of the World the whole region is facing the effects of the global warming. Investments in renewable energy sources, like solar collectors and photovoltaic, will urge governments' officials and local populace to cooperate.

Among others social unrest in Iraq and GCC countries showed that the development of civil society organizations (CSO) is a must. Practice has shown that the role of the CSO is to support the grass routers and their problems and that CSO are helpful players when Governments need alternatives. Supporting local organization will relief the governors from part of their obligations, will produce a decrease in the high unemployment rates and will reduce social resentment. These organizations can organize different educational courses, can propose peaceful alternatives to violent actors and can lessen Iraq's and some of the GCC governments from pressure by destructive forces. They can also promote and educate on self-employment skills and entrepreneurship. Supported by the joined Iraqi GCC programmes governments, international foundations or local and regional charity organization, the CSO can actually contribute toward fostering social stability.

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[40] Ehteshami Anoushiravan, "Iran, the GCC and Eur ope: Alternative Strategies", in: Eds. Christian Koch and Felix Neugart, *A Window of Opportunity: Europe, Gulf Security and the Aftermath of the Iraq War,* Dubai: Gulf Research center, 2005, p. 45

[41] "Gulf Cooperation Council Joint Statement at 33rd Summit in Bahrain, December 2012", Council on Foreign Relations, 25 December 2012, Retrieved 27 April 2013 from: http://www.cfr.org/gcc/gulf-cooperation-council-joint-statement-33rd-summit-bahrain-december-2012/p29750

This can also be considered as a good example to stimulate social responsibility of the companies and local magnates, something that is serious issue in the light of the common problems that both GCC countries and Iraq are facing. In this context part of the peoples' unrest come from the fact that Iranian human resources are demanded throughout the region due to their advanced education, professional skills and training. According to some estimation around 500,000 Iranian workers and businessmen are living and working in United Arab Emirates alone.[42]

If one includes the findings of the 2009 Arab Knowledge Report about absence of insufficient qualified labor in technical education it would be clear why the above mention proposals are credential.[43] In this context as Antony asserts the GCC countries have done little to capitalize on a ready source of fellow Gulf-skilled labor in the service of the two people's shared commercial interests.[44]

The trust of the people in the institution must be increased. For example, quotas for the minorities in public administration and security forces will increase the trust and will deter possible attacks on the patrols, if consisted of servants who belong to different ethnic or religious groups. Rule of law has to be guaranteed to everyone in order to prevent the feeling of "first and second class" citizens and to ensure that religious practices are in consistence with the public order.

What can be concluded as a recommendation is that both GCC countries and Iraq need structural reforms to fulfill a new vision jointly created, in order to ensure peace and prosperity through economic, social and cultural cooperation. It is the only bidirectional solution for prosperity.

Most of these initiatives must be supported by the US. These efforts will also bring benefits to US in the context of relaxing the common wisdom in the Region for the US as a Sunni protector only. Engagement that would encourage the political dialogue in Bahrain would be a good start. [45]

Beside economic measures on a short term narrative and behavior of public figures play important role to the Gulf especially due to the intrinsic and unique culture of the region. Therefore public figures of the GCC countries must avoid narrative that will inflame tensions with Iraq, give arguments for more power grip and project trajectory toward Iran's hands. In this light measures that will undermine suspicions about growing political mistrust among al Malikis' government officials and GCC countries such as accusations for support of violent Sunni oppositions in Iraq are more than welcome. Furthermore political narrative must be carefully design with other partner nations because it also oiled the flame of mistrust among the gulf players (Example of this being diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks-According to this source some GCC leaders pushed the US to attack Iran).[46] Instead, narrative that will promote mutual trust and support meaningful political economic, social and educational reforms and that will lead toward unified GCC including Iraq is what is needed (example being the statement of the Prince Saud Al Faisal in 2004).[47] Although these and other short term measures are crucial components that GCC countries must consider for effective crisis management approach toward Iraq given the complex environment in the region this alone will not be enough.

2.2.2. Long term visions for future GCC Iraq relations

GCC must consider broad-based (long term) approach designed to establish itself as a driving force capable of shaping Gulf security community. Based on principles of collective security GCC must create environment to persuade Iraq and make it as valuable partner and member state. In this context platforms that guarantee long term economic development including stability of the flow and oil price are promising models to follow.

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[42] John Duke Antony, "Strategic Dynamics of Iran GCC Relations", in Eds. Seznec Jean Francois and Kirk Mimi, *Industrialization of the Gulf, The Socioeconomic Revolution*, Routledge Studies in the Meaddle Eastern Economies, 2012, pp 77-102

[43] _____, "The Arab Knowledge Report", United Nations Development Programme, 2009

[44] John Duke Antony, 2012

[45] "The New Sectarianism: The Arab Uprisings and the Rebirth of the Shi'a-Sunni Divide", The Saban Center for Middle east Policy at Brookings, April 2013, Retrieved 28 April 2013 from:
http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/research/files/papers/2013/04/sunni%20shia%20abdo/sunni%20shia%20abdo.pdf

[46] Mohammed Arshad and Colvin Ross, "Saudi king urged U.S. to attack Iran: WikiLeaks", Reuters, November 29, 2010, accessed: September 9 at: http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/11/29/us-wikileaks-usa-idUSTRE6AP06Z20101129).

[47] "Towards a New Framework for Regional Security," Statement by HRH Prince Saud Al Faisal, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Saudi Arabia at the Gulf Dialogue, Manama, December 5, 2004 available under http://www.mofa.gov.sa/media/35123_E05-12-04.pdf, accessed October 19, 2010.

Much has been written lately about the future evolution of the GCC. Trying to propose solutions for existing security challenges that gravitate over GCC countries including Iraq and aggressive Iran, Pollack have compared GCC with several similar organizations. According to his calculus the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe-CSCE model is a good example for GCC - Iraq relations on a long term. Others have also urged for a change in the GCC toward co-opting Iraq and other regional players.[48] Some have even come with the concrete initiatives. According to Mousavian, "…. *a Persian Gulf Security and Cooperation Organization" initiative should be based on the principles such as: impossibility of any change in existing borders, respecting the integrity of other members and noninterference in internal affairs of member states...*" [49]

Regardless of the fact that there are also other good proposals that could serve as a basis for future development in the context of GCC - Iraq relations, one thing worth mentioning is that all of these proposals calculate US and Western support. Tradition, political and security dynamics dictate that in order for these ideas, concepts and efforts to succeed all players must agree and participate. For example CSCE succeeded because NATO and Warsaw Pact, as well as virtually all of the neutral states of Europe, were able to discuss their security concerns. Thus U.S. and other Western players, including other major players, must be encouraged by the International Community to participate and support this processes and persuade Iraq to cooperate with GCC.

This is a win-win scenario that both GCC and Iraq must pursue. The GCC with Iraq as its member is a promising project that will lead to establishment of the wider regional cooperation system to promote political, security, economic, cultural, social and military cooperation among regional states. Such system on a long term is of vital importance for complete and all-out confidence building which eventually will propose alternative to Iran's unilateral regional ambitions. Organization capable to benefit from mutual differences will inhibit possibilities of another interference by foreign powers in the Region and will be a guarantee for the establishment of sustainable peace, stability, and security. Beside promising union of the Arabs in the Region it will strengthened relations among nations and thus focus on the promotion of sustainable development in the region.

The GCC does not have alternative when it comes to Iraq. As we saw if not approached by the GCC countries it is very likely that Iraq is moving toward dictatorship aligned to aggressive Iran. In this context it is clear that GCC does not have the military capabilities or other hard forms of security projection that can influence the calculus of their larger and more powerful neighbors. Therefore instead being a US protégé GCC must initiate the process of taking the ownership of the regional security and shape it. In this context the Prime Minister of Qatar al-Thani has stressed that: "*The security of the Gulf will remain part of the responsibility of the sons of the Gulf, it depends basically on building mutual confidence among the Gulf countries and their self-reliance.*"[50]

This definitely starts with immediate necessity to approach Iraq and build on a short term measures and mechanisms. If the GCC and its western allies fail to accomplish this goal it is very likely that instability will inhibit bright future of the Region. Moreover if the process towards bringing Iraq in to the GCC membership can be initiated in the coming years, the GCC will prove its incompetence and will confirm negative attitude toward this organizations' role in the Region.

Conclusion

Iraq is facing serious security challenges after U.S. and coalition forces withdrawal. While central government is struggling to establish Iraq as a functional democracy complex sectarian, ethnic and social dynamics hold potentials to affect fragile peace in the Gulf. At the same time regional dynamics are raising the alert button too. Sectarian violence in post-conflict Iraq and its spill-over capability has intensified Sunni-Shia rift across the GCC countries. Iraq's internal struggle for power sharing on one hand and Syria's internal conflict and allegations about Iraqis and regional Sunnis' support to the Assad's opposition on the other have urged al-Maliki to power grip. At the same time Iran's regional ambitions in the vacuum of regional balance of power have caused legitimate concerns among GCC monarchies.

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[48] Christian Koch, 2010

[49] Mousavian, 2011

[50] _____, "Arabian Gulf security, responsibility of gulf sons: Qatari PM", *Kuwait News Agency*, March 10, 2008

If not approached by the GCC Iraq's, and thus the whole Region's stability is unpredictable. Serious arguments lead one to conclude that Iraq might either decent in to civil war or turn in to dictatorship aligned with aggressive Iran. If the GCC countries are about to neutralize immediate threat as they see from Iran or unstable Iraq they need to approach Iraq and offer cooperation. This will enable GCC countries to shape Gulf's security in the context of good will and establish a real *bona-fide* platform for solving all disputes with Iran. Given the complex ethnic and sectarian disputes and regional and global (in terms of Arab Spring) influences GCC countries should focus on short term engagements and long term visions. Facing common challenges will be best solved with indirect approach focusing on improving social stability and establish wealthy platform for further cooperation that will lessen the existing tensions and mistrust. The final goal of these efforts must focus on granting Iraq full GCC membership. Nevertheless if the GCC are about to accomplish this effective collective security approach they must react immediately.

Conclusion

Iraq is facing serious security challenges after the withdrawal of the US and coalition forces. While the federal government is struggling to establish Iraq as a functioning democracy, its complex sectarian, ethnic and social dynamics hold the potential to disturb the fragile peace in the Gulf. At the same time, regional dynamics are a cause of concern too. Sectarian violence in post-conflict Iraq has intensified the Sunni-Shia rift across the GCC countries. Iraq's internal struggle over power sharing on the one hand and Syria's internal conflict and allegations about Iraqis and regional Sunnis' support of the Syrian opposition on the other have pushed Al-Maliki to tighten his grip on power. At the same time, Iran's regional ambitions amidst a regional balance of power vacuum have caused legitimate concerns among the GCC monarchies.

If the GCC does not come up with proposals, Iraq's and the entire region's stability will be unpredictable. Such a scenario may push Iraq toward civil war or turn it into a dictatorship aligned with an aggressive Iran. If the GCC countries want to neutralize the immediate threat they perceive from Iran or an unstable Iraq, they need to approach Iraq and offer cooperation. This will enable the GCC countries to shape the Gulf's security and establish a bonafide platform for solving all disputes with Iran. Given the complex ethnic and sectarian disputes and regional and global (in terms of Arab Spring) influences, the GCC countries should focus on short-term engagements and long-term plans. Common challenges will be best solved with an indirect approach focusing on improving social stability and establishing a platform for further cooperation that will lessen existing tensions and mistrust. The final goal of these efforts must be to grant Iraq full GCC membership. Nevertheless, if the GCC countries want to achieve an effective collective security approach, they must act immediately.

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