

Iraq Literature Monitor

(ILM) No. 2

19 October 2009

Contents

[Article 1](#) “**After the Fire: Shaping the Future U.S. Relationship with Iraq,**” by John A. Nagl and Brian M. Burton, **Center for a New American Security, June 2009.** *It is important to remember that until recently Iraq was a focus of extremist attacks led by the Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) organization, which played a major role in provoking sectarian conflict. The resulting chaos prompted fears that parts of the country would be controlled by AQI and become safe havens for Al-Qaeda to launch transnational attacks. Over the past two years, the likelihood of that scenario has declined dramatically. Thus far, Sunnis and Shiites have recognized AQI’s strategy and resisted falling back into a cycle of sectarian reprisals. However, as long as the country’s internal conflicts, including the disputes between Arabs and Kurds, remain unresolved Al-Qaeda and other extremist groups have an opportunity to foment disorder and reestablish a base from which to launch destabilizing attacks on surrounding countries. Consolidating democratic governance in Iraq is the best way to promote the country’s long-term stability.*

[Article 2](#) “**Iraq’s New Battlefield: The Struggle over Ninewa,**” **International Crisis Group, Middle East Report No. 90, 28 September 2009.** *Violence in much of Iraq is at lower levels than in years past but, in the northern Iraq province of Ninewa, the carnage continues. In August and September 2009, large-scale, horrific attacks targeting minority communities took scores of lives. Arabs and Kurds are locked in a political deadlock. The bloodshed and institutional paralysis are symptoms of the country’s shifting battle lines: from an essentially Sunni versus Shiite sectarian struggle to a predominantly Arab against Kurdish ethnic fight. It will be near impossible to resolve the crisis without tackling outstanding nationwide political issues. But Ninewa cannot wait. Urgent interim steps are needed to achieve equitable local power sharing and joint security patrols between Arabs and Kurds in disputed districts, as well as to ensure better minority protection.*

[Article 3](#) “**Stability in Iraqi Kurdistan: Reality or Mirage?**” By Lydia Khalil, **Brookings Institution/Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Working Paper No. 2, June 2009.** *Despite the mixed report card on Iraqi progress, one consistent theme is that Iraqi Kurdistan has been a quiet success story. But the reality is much more complex. Underneath the veneer of success lie simmering issues that often fall below Washington’s radar. Kurdistan faces many challenges that could undermine the gains the Kurds have made thus far, and which could jeopardize U.S. goals in Iraq and the broader region. The United States must promote peaceful and workable solutions that will also further U.S. strategic interests by pursuing six overarching goals.*

[Article 4](#) “**Criminals, Militias, and Insurgents: Organized Crime in Iraq,**” by Phil Williams, **Strategic Studies Institute (U.S. Army War College), Monograph, June 2009.** *Since 2003 the U.S. military has treated organized crime in Iraq, implicitly if not explicitly, as a secondary problem, separate from the main fault lines in the society. In fact, however, organized crime in Iraq is inextricably connected with state weakness, the emergence of multiple, competing power centers, the dearth of economic opportunities, and the collapse of norms and standards of behavior—all of which have been central to the challenges facing the U.S. military. As the United States draws down its forces in Iraq, it could usefully focus more seriously on organized crime and those criminal activities that contribute to the insecurity of the citizenry.*

[Article 5](#) “Mujahedin-e Khalq in Iraq: A Policy Conundrum,” by Jeremiah Goulka, Lydia Hansell, Elizabeth Wilke, and Judith Larson, RAND Corporation, Monograph No. 871, 2009. *From the early weeks of Operation Iraqi Freedom until January 2009, coalition forces detained and provided security for members of the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MeK), an exiled Iranian dissident cult group living in Iraq. Since 1997, the MeK has been listed as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) by the United States. However, the MeK has not been treated as a terrorist organization. Failure to assert control over the MeK and its facility has exposed the coalition, and particularly the United States, to criticism that the group is being treated as an ally for intelligence gathering purposes rather than as an FTO. This has exposed the United States to accusations of hypocrisy in its worldwide effort to counter violent extremism, and there have been no attempts to counter this destructive misperception.*

The Iraq Literature Monitor (ILM) has been published monthly since September 2009 by Interaction Systems Incorporated (isincreports@mindspring.com) under contract to the Office of Iraq Analysis within the Central Intelligence Agency’s Directorate of Intelligence. ILR issues are intended for non-profit research and educational use only. Quoted material is subject to the copyright protections associated with the original sources.

[Top of ILM Cover Page](#)

Articles

Article 1 [Return to ILM Cover Page](#)

1. “After the Fire: Shaping the Future U.S. Relationship with Iraq,” by John A. Nagl and Brian M. Burton, Center for a New American Security, June 2009. [KBTSIraqGen, KBTSIraqGW, KBTSIraqAQ] Dr. John A. Nagl is president of the Center where Brian M. Burton is a research assistant. From <http://www.cnas.org/node/986> we quote:

. . . The primary American counterterrorism objective in Iraq is to prevent the reemergence of Al-Qaeda or its affiliates and keep the country from serving as a safe haven that could be used to attack Americans or U.S. allies. **The principal front in the campaign against Al-Qaeda is the Afghanistan-Pakistan theater**, where the Obama administration has substantially increased attention and resources.

However, **it is important to remember that until recently Iraq was a focus of extremist attacks led by the Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) organization, which played a major role in provoking sectarian conflict. The resulting chaos prompted fears that parts of the country would be controlled by AQI and become safe havens for Al-Qaeda to launch transnational attacks.**

Over the past two years, the likelihood of that scenario has declined dramatically. AQI, rejected by former insurgents and driven from nearly all of its former strongholds, is near defeat. While continuing terrorist bombing campaigns attempt to reignite Sunni-Shiite violence, the strategic significance of the attacks is negligible as long as the lack of Shiite retaliation prevents AQI from reasserting a claim to be the protector of the Sunni community.

Thus far, Sunnis and Shiites have recognized AQI’s strategy and resisted falling back into a cycle of sectarian reprisals. However, as long as the country’s internal

conflicts, including the disputes between Arabs and Kurds, remain unresolved Al-Qaeda and other extremist groups have an opportunity to foment disorder and reestablish a base from which to launch destabilizing attacks on surrounding countries.

The United States should pursue its interest in defeating Al-Qaeda by continuing direct actions against AQI and efforts to promote political reconciliation among Iraq's communities. U.S. policy should also strengthen the counterterrorism capabilities of the Iraqi government and security forces in order to ensure that they can prevent transnational terrorist groups from gaining a foothold in their territory.

[Authoritarianism in Iraq will harm prospects for long-term stability]

. . . Consolidating democratic governance in Iraq is the best way to promote the country's long-term stability. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's perceived efforts to centralize state power under his command are a source of concern to some groups within Iraq, particularly Kurds and former Sunni insurgents, and could provoke resistance and renewed conflict. The problem, however, is not necessarily al-Maliki himself, but the fact that Iraq's troubled history and weak institutions make the reemergence of authoritarianism a distinct possibility, whether by a power-centralizing prime minister or coup d'état.

A dictatorship is likely to be unstable in the long run, with few safeguards for peaceful resolution of political disputes or orderly transfers of power. If only one man holds the country together, governing institutions are likely to remain weak under personalized control and battles over succession are as likely to be fought in the streets as in elections. Ultimately, authoritarianism in Iraq may seem to support American interests in the short term, but will harm prospects for long-term stability.

While U.S. efforts alone will not be sufficient to turn Iraq into a stable representative democracy, consigning the country to authoritarianism can only be regarded as a poor outcome. In order to avoid it, **U.S. leaders should combine strong and public rhetorical commitments to Iraqi democracy with institutional capacity-building programs in Iraqi ministries and local governments that improve transparency and reduce corruption. . . .**

[Democracy requires commitment to work through peaceful, not violent processes]

The United States must help ensure that Iraqi factions cement the progress that has been made and settle their outstanding internal disputes through negotiated processes rather than violence. The potential for unraveling is real: the February 2006 bombing of the Shiite al-Askariya shrine in Samarra sparked a spiral of reprisals and counter-reprisals by extremist Shiite and Sunni factions that overwhelmed U.S. efforts to transition responsibility to Iraqi forces. The lesson from that event is not simply that more security is needed to stop major attacks, but that steps must be taken to defuse the competition and mutual distrust that exists between Iraq's sectarian and ethnic communities.

As **General David Petraeus** pointed out in his September 2007 testimony before Congress: **"The fundamental source of the conflict in Iraq is competition among ethnic and sectarian communities for power and resources. This competition will**

take place, and its resolution is key to producing long-term stability in the new Iraq. **The question is whether the competition takes place more—or less—violently.”**

These challenges to Iraqi stability will not be solved immediately or by the United States alone. In some respects they will never be “solved:” even developed democracies feature intense clashes between competing identity groups over the balance of power in government. **What allows democracies to function**, and what the United States should help the Iraqis develop, **is a basic commitment to work through peaceful processes rather than violence. The United States** will not necessarily lead these processes, but **should support Iraqi and international organizations committed to propagating this norm and building the requisite institutions.**

[Kurdish-Arab conflict primarily involves disputed territories, distribution of oil revenue]

While the Shiite-Sunni sectarian split draws more attention from U.S. observers, **the conflict between Arabs and Kurds in the north is now the more dangerous and defining challenge for the new Iraqi state. The conflict is driven by boundary disputes between the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) and the primarily Sunni Arab provinces of Nineveh, Ta’im, and Diyala.** Kurdish leadership regards parts of these provinces, especially the city of Kirkuk in Ta’im, as territory that it has earned after enduring Saddam Hussein’s brutal program of ethnic cleansing and Arab settlement. Many Arab leaders conversely contend that the Kurds have exploited the post-invasion disorder to encroach on Arab lands by sending their peshmerga militiamen to occupy areas in the name of providing security. **Tensions are high, with standoffs between Iraqi security forces and the Kurdish peshmerga coming perilously close to violence.**

This conflict helps to sustain the remnants of AQI and other insurgent factions. The predominantly Sunni Arab population of northern Iraq generally supported the insurgency after the American invasion. **The fear of Kurdish expansion drives the Sunni Arabs in these areas to continue supporting militant groups as allies. The most recent elections have reasserted Arab political strength in northern Iraq in the form of hard-line parties whose members have ties to extremist elements in Nineveh and Diyala.** Insurgent violence may increase as extremists attempt to spark a broader Arab-Kurdish conflict that they could exploit to further reassert their own influence in Iraq.

The conflict has intensified over oil rights in the KRG and the presence of oil in the disputed territories—particularly around Kirkuk, the location of a “super-giant” oil field that could hold up to 13 percent (15 billion out of 115 billion barrels) of Iraq’s oil reserves. The KRG has aggressively promoted its own economic development, signing independent deals with foreign oil companies. Baghdad is uneasy about allowing the KRG to exercise more control over oil, generally refusing to recognize the KRG’s unilateral oil contracts. Kurdish leaders have already committed to revenue sharing under the constitution, but the Iraqi government fears that the KRG will seek to use oil development in disputed territories to “prejudge their ultimate disposition.” Though the Iraqi oil ministry has agreed to allow some Kurdish exports, **oil is likely to remain a key sticking point in resolving the status of the disputed territories and relations between Baghdad and the KRG.**

Striking bargains that address the disputed territories, fairly distribute oil revenue, and keep the KRG enmeshed within the Iraqi state will be critical to preventing violent conflict between the Kurds and the Iraqi state. **The United States must support peaceful efforts to reconcile Arab-Kurdish differences and discourage both Baghdad and the KRG from continuing to employ belligerent, absolutist rhetoric** that aggravates the situation and contributes to mutual distrust. It must also **proactively support and empower a United Nations-led consensus-based negotiation process.**

The United Nations Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) recently issued a report to the Iraqi government and KRG to provide a neutral history of Kurdish and Arab claims to the disputed territories and list possible options for resolving competing claims, including semiautonomous status for Kirkuk. **American policymakers cannot impose decisions on Baghdad or the Kurds, but should ensure that the central government and the KRG are engaged in a negotiating process with the UNAMI report's findings as a starting point.** So long as there is a process underway, the likelihood of violent incidents causing the situation to spiral out of control is reduced. Additionally, **the recent Iraqi agreement to allow limited Kurdish oil exports offers a possible starting point** for negotiating a federal hydrocarbons law that ultimately removes control of oil as a point of conflict.

[Dynamic in which former insurgents once thrived has fundamentally changed]

The danger posed by conflict between Shiites and Sunnis has decreased relative to the disputes between Arabs and Kurds. **Encouragingly, provocative actions like Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) bombings of Shiite targets and the government's arrest of "Awakening" (Sahwa) and Sons of Iraq (SOI) leaders—former insurgents whose decision to turn against AQI marked an important turning point in the war—have not reignited a cycle of retaliation.** Yet the possibility that destabilizing violence will resume cannot be dismissed.

Nouri al-Maliki's government still regards some elements of the Sahwa and SOI as a potential threat, accusing them of harboring members of the Baath Party and AQI. For their part, **many Sahwa and SOI leaders, along with many Sunnis, distrust the Baghdad government and the official security forces,** believing them to be sympathetic to radical sectarian Shiite militias like Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army or under the control of Iran. For Iraq to put this sectarian conflict firmly in the past, it must continue to work towards national reconciliation.

The Iraqi government assumed responsibility for the Sahwa and SOI, a process that has gone relatively smoothly. While the government has arrested many Sahwa and SOI leaders on what appear to be politically motivated charges, some segments of the SOI reportedly have gone unpaid, and relatively few (approximately 5,000 men) have received government jobs. However, **this slow progress is attributed increasingly to limited funds and institutional capacity rather than a nefarious sectarian agenda on the part of Baghdad.**

As Multinational Force-Iraq Commander General Raymond Odierno recently reported, **"the [Iraqi] leadership has shown its determination to move the SOI members into the Iraqi security forces and other ministries"** by ensuring that the SOI integration program remains fully funded despite the country's economic difficulties. Moreover,

even if disgruntled Sahwa and SOI elements seek to revive the insurgency, the dynamic in which they once thrived has changed. As journalist Nir Rosen points out:

“As guerrillas and insurgents they were only effective when they operated covertly, underground, blending in among a Sunni population that has now mostly been dispersed. Now the former resistance fighters-turned-paid guards are publicly known, and their names, addresses, and biometric data are in the hands of American and Iraqi forces. . . . The remaining Awakening men have burnt their bridges with their more radical former allies and are now hunted by them; the Iraqi Security Forces have improved their intelligence and strike capability and have little problem tracking those men they want to arrest. Sunni civilians have no interest in backing a new insurgency after their own bitter experience—and they no longer feel targeted by Shiite militias.”

In this environment, even fighters backed by foreign countries like Iran or Syria would not be strategically significant. Foreign-supported insurgents and militias in Iraq must rely in some part on popular acquiescence to support their presence. Neither Sunni nor Shiite populations are likely to provide it.

[Facilitating next round of national elections set for early 2010 a crucial next step]

While the prospects for a return to the open sectarian war of 2006 appear to be declining, the potential for sectarian violence to destabilize Iraq will persist unless further integration of Sunnis into the political system takes root. Regular elections conducted fairly and free of intimidation will be critical to the reconciliation process. **The provincial elections of January 2009 were an encouraging first step** toward reversing the political imbalances created by the Sunni boycott of the 2005 elections, with previously disfranchised groups playing a role in the provincial government.

As a key Sahwa leader told the Los Angeles Times, **“The Awakening is an economic and political entity now, and our strategy is financial and economic.”** While elections alone are not a panacea, they demonstrate that political gains can be won through non-violent means. **Facilitating the next round of national elections scheduled for early 2010 will be a crucial next step.**

Substantial pitfalls remain. America’s efforts to moderate Prime Minister al-Maliki’s opposition to rehabilitating figures who served in Saddam Hussein’s Baath Party have met with little success, along with its push for progress on top-down reconciliation between Shiites and Sunnis. **Distrust engendered by still fresh memories of repression and violence will not vanish anytime soon.** However, U.S. diplomats should continue to support reconciliation enshrined in Iraqi law in order to diminish sectarian conflict until it no longer threatens the country’s stability.

[U.S.: Continue to show commitment to Iraqi democracy rather than just man in charge]

With a fractious polity, weak institutions for democratic governance, and a recent history of totalitarian regimes, Iraq is at risk of a return to authoritarianism. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki’s centralization of control over important state functions, most notably the security forces, raises concerns that he intends to be Iraq’s next strongman. He has employed a “divide and conquer” strategy against his rivals,

including leaders of the Sahwa and SOI, rewarding some who cooperate with political patronage while arresting those who would challenge him.

Maliki's actual desire and ability to accrue dictatorial power are less clear. Much of his power and influence was achieved legitimately. The ongoing centralization of power under his leadership is largely a reassertion of national government discipline that has been lacking since 2003. **Maliki's power is at least partly checked by leaders in the parliament, ministries, and military. He faces substantial opposition in the Council of Representatives,** which recently appointed a critic of Maliki as its speaker.

Yet even if Maliki's consolidation of power is less pervasive than some fear, the trend of creeping authoritarianism may exacerbate more problems than it solves, despite any benefits for security and order. As Maliki builds his credentials as an Iraqi Arab nationalist, **the KRG increasingly fears a strong central government in Baghdad.** His appeals to nationalism may attract Shiite and Sunni Arab support, but they raise tensions in northern Iraq and increase the likelihood that the Kurds will resort to violence to resist perceived encroachment on their territory and interests.

U.S. engagement with Iraq should aim to impede and discourage the reestablishment of authoritarian rule by helping the Iraqis develop stronger institutions for responsible, representative governance. Even if the dangers of authoritarianism in Iraq are overblown, any strong central government in Baghdad is likely to face some resistance from parties fearing a decline in their independence. **Engaging with Iraqi institutions and opposition parties rather than just the man in charge will communicate a U.S. commitment to Iraqi democracy and moderate the perception among opposition factions that they must prepare to defend their interests by force. . . .**

The foregoing is Article No. 1 (IM002A01) in the [Iraq Literature Monitor](#) (ILM) , No. 2, 19 October 2009, prepared by Interaction Systems Incorporated (isinreports@mindspring.com).

[Top of Article](#)

Article 2 [Return to ILM Cover Page](#)

2. "Iraq's New Battlefield: The Struggle over Ninewa," [International Crisis Group](#), Middle East Report No. 90, 28 September 2009. [KBTSIraqKurds, KBTSIraqGW] From this report at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=6318&l=1> we *quote* from the summary:

Violence in much of Iraq is at lower levels than in years past but, **in [the northern Iraq province of] Ninewa, the carnage continues. In August and September 2009, large-scale, horrific attacks targeting minority communities took scores of lives.** Arabs and Kurds are locked in a political deadlock. **The bloodshed and institutional paralysis are symptoms of the country's shifting battle lines: from an essentially Sunni versus Shiite sectarian struggle, mainly centered in the capital, to a predominantly Arab against Kurdish ethnic fight playing out along an extended axis of friction.**

It will be near impossible to resolve the crisis without tackling outstanding nationwide political issues. But Ninewa cannot wait. Urgent interim steps are needed to achieve equitable local power sharing and joint security patrols between Arabs and Kurds in disputed districts, as well as to ensure better minority protection. All this

requires a continued and active U.S. role. **Washington might be on its way out, but its hands will be full even as it heads for the exit.**

For Arabs and Kurds, the real prize remains Kirkuk, where emotions run highest and oil reserves are richest. But, precisely because of these stakes, Kirkuk also is where much national and international attention has turned and efforts undertaken to, if not resolve the conflict, at least freeze it. Not so in Ninewa, where local factors have brought the dispute to a head and which has become the focal point of the ethnic battle.

[Ninewa appeared caught between Kurdish dominance, Sunni insurgents from 2003-2008]

Ethnic relations in Ninewa have a chequered history. The struggle between Arab and Kurdish nationalisms has been especially acute, notably in the capital, Mosul, home to deeply rooted Arabist feelings. The Kurds have paid a heavy price. The state has made aggressive attempts to contain or suppress their national aspirations. The Baathist regime in particular engaged in forced displacement and discriminatory resource distribution.

Kurds saw a chance for redress in 2003 and seized it, launching an offensive to rewind the clock and undo the effect of past practices. This too had a cost. Operating largely in an ad hoc manner, without due process and by dint of force, they took control of several districts, including many towns and villages, seeking to incorporate them into the Kurdistan region and, largely thanks to the Sunni Arab boycott of the 2005 provincial elections, they established political dominance in the governorate.

At the same time, Ninewa proved fertile ground for a Sunni-based insurgency, fueled by the governorate's strong Arabist, military, and (Sunni) religious tradition and propelled by growing anti-Kurdish and anti-Shiite resentment. Groups taking up arms against U.S. troops and Kurdish fighters exploited the long, often unguarded Syrian border and a history of cross-border trade, while finding ready recruits among former officers, Baathists, and an increasingly destitute youth to impose their rule over predominantly Sunni Arab areas. **From 2003 to 2008, Ninewa appeared caught between Kurdish dominance and Sunni insurgents.**

Gradually, **the political landscape shifted. Insurgents—especially the more Islamist—overplayed their hand; U.S. and Iraqi forces re-energized efforts to stabilize Ninewa;** and Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki sought to push back Kurdish territorial advances. Perhaps most importantly, **Sunni Arab leaders entered the political fray, coalescing around a resolutely nationalist, anti-Kurdish platform.**

[Provincial elections in January 2009 rebalanced council seats demographically]

The 31 January 2009 provincial elections brought the new phase in the Arab-Kurdish tug-of-war to a head. Four years earlier, Sunni Arabs had boycotted the polls, viewing the entire political process as illegitimate. They were not about to repeat the mistake. United around the al-Hadbaa National List (Qaemat al-Hadbaa al-Wataniya), they triumphed, waging a campaign focused on two key points: Ninewa's Arab identity and the inviolability of the Baathist-era de facto boundary line that has separated the governorate from Kurdistan since October 1991.

The elections were a demographic corrective. Kurdish parties won roughly a third of council seats under the banner of the Ninewa Brotherhood List (Qaemat Ninewa al-Mutaakhiya); this was as they had anticipated given their population share. But though they accepted their significant electoral decline, **they feared al-Hadbaa's virulently anti-Kurdish rhetoric, resented its efforts to diminish Kurdish military, administrative, and cultural influence, and insisted on sharing power.** When al-Hadbaa rejected this demand, they **boycotted the provincial council.**

The resulting local government paralysis, coupled with al-Hadbaa's decision to reassert provincial government rule over disputed territories heretofore under Kurdish control, has led to an alarming rise in tensions. Conflict chiefly has occurred where Arabs and Kurds vie for administrative control and where Iraq's army and Kurdish peshmergas [security forces] face off across an increasingly tense divide. On several occasions, these forces have come perilously close to head-on collision. **Further contributing to the governorate's growing instability and tinderbox quality is the vast array of official and unofficial armed groups: the national army and police; the Kurdistan Regional Government's peshmergas and security police (asaesh); what remains of Sunni Arab insurgent groups; and tribal militias.**

[Governorate-level arrangements between Arabs, Kurds most realistic starting point]

Caught between Arabs and Kurds are ethnic and religious minorities in whom the central government has evinced little interest. **While Ninewa is majority Arab with a strong Kurdish minority, it also counts a number of smaller groups—Christians, Yazidis, Turkomans, and Shabaks—that may comprise a mere ten percent of the population but are concentrated in disputed borderlands between Kurdistan and Arab Iraq.** They have suffered a disproportionate share of the hardship caused by war, occupation, and intercommunal violence and fight today for survival. At times co-opted, at others threatened by one of the camps, **they have become vulnerable pawns in a contest that often sees them as little more than fodder. In August and September 2009, four bombings took over 100 lives and left many hundreds more wounded.** For minorities, these have been among the deadliest of months.

There have been signs of late that the federal government and its Kurdish counterparts, with U.S. help and pressure, are seeking to address the problem. **But dangers remain high, especially as U.S. military disengagement has begun, with unpredictable consequences on various actors' calculations and the overall balance of forces.** Although significantly diminished, **insurgent groups also remain active.** They could decide to focus on anti-Kurdish attacks or step up violence against minority groups in disputed territories **in hopes of prompting greater unrest and encouraging Arab-Kurdish recrimination.**

Any successful effort to defuse the crisis needs to be two-tracked. As the International Crisis Group has repeatedly argued, **Iraq's fundamental and festering problem concerns the allocation of power, land, and resources.**

With national elections approaching in early 2010, it is hard to imagine the federal government, the Kurdistan Regional Government, or any domestic party engaging in politically costly compromise, however urgent the need.

At the governorate level, however, steps could be more realistic. Arabs and Kurds should agree on an interim arrangement that gives the latter a legitimate share of power while allowing the former to govern; **Kurdish military and police forces should be formally incorporated** into federal army units and Ninewa's security police, respectively, under joint command and with joint patrolling. **Minority groups should be given far greater protection** and subjected to far fewer attempts at manipulation.

The idea, floated by some U.S. officials, of temporarily inserting American soldiers in joint army-peshmerga patrols is interesting and not only because it might produce immediate benefits. It would also send a message about Washington's longer-term commitment that would be no less indispensable. . . .

The foregoing is Article No. 2 (IM002A02) in the [Iraq Literature Monitor \(ILM\)](#), No. 2, 19 October 2009, prepared by Interaction Systems Incorporated (isincreports@mindspring.com).

[Top of Article](#)

Article 3 [Return to ILM Cover Page](#)

3. "Stability in Iraqi Kurdistan: Reality or Mirage?" By Lydia Khalil, Brookings Institution/Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Working Paper No. 2, June 2009.

[KBTSIraqKurds, KBTSIraqGW] Lydia Khalil, born in Cairo, Egypt, and a native Arabic speaker, is an international affairs fellow in residence at the Council on Foreign Relations where she focuses on Iraq. From 2003 to 2004, she worked in Baghdad as a policy advisor to the Coalition Provisional Authority. She has traveled extensively in Iraq and within the Kurdish region. From http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/06_kurdistan_khalil.aspx we *quote* from the summary:

Despite the mixed report card on Iraqi progress, one consistent theme is that Iraqi Kurdistan has been a quiet success story. Kurdistan is a snowy oasis, free from the sectarian strife that has marred the rest of the country. **Its leadership is unified after decades of disarray, and former rebels now hold the highest government posts.** Iraq's Kurds finally have the respect they crave after having been relegated to the status of the forgotten stepchildren of the Middle East. **They have forged strategic alliances with powerful Shi'ia groups in Iraq, won the trust and support of the United States, and co-opted other, smaller political groups** beholden to their patronage. In the process, **they have become the kingmakers of Iraqi politics**—no important appointment has been made without their approval. **And they have negotiated and legalized an autonomous Kurdistan** in the heart of a region that has been brutally opposed to this very outcome.

The Kurds also made it a key priority to encourage foreign investment in their region by rolling out an extensive public relations campaign promoting "Kurdistan: The Other Iraq." Calling their investment law "the friendliest in the region," **they developed a Website, filmed public service advertisements that thanked Americans for their sacrifice in liberating Iraq's Kurds, and invited international businesses to set up shop in Kurdistan as a gateway to the rest of the Iraqi economy.** They even promoted local tourism by inviting prominent journalists to spend time in the Kurdish region to pen articles like, "Tourists and Investors to Iraq? Why Not, Say Kurds." **Nechervan Barzani, prime minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), could often be heard musing that Kurdistan would become the next Dubai.** Actively

pursuing this goal, Barzani made numerous visits to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), signed deals with Dubai's Dana Gas, and instituted direct flights between Irbil and the UAE.

[Three key issues will likely determine the future of Kurdistan]

But the reality is much more complex. To be sure, the KRG has made significant gains and is keen to publicize them. **But underneath the veneer of success lie simmering issues that often fall below Washington's radar.** Kurdistan faces many challenges that could undermine the gains the Kurds have made thus far, and which could jeopardize U.S. goals in Iraq and the broader region. In particular, **many Iraqis and neighboring states bristle at the KRG's "full steam ahead" approach that was central to their success, but which has left lasting resentments.**

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, backed by a more assertive centralist political block, is looking to scale back Kurdish autonomy and decentralization in general. **Internal tensions in Kurdistan that have been masked by more pressing problems in Baghdad are now coming to a head** and Kurdistan's image as an oasis of progress and stability is fraying.

There are **three key issues** that threaten both the image and reality of Iraqi Kurdistan as the stable hub of Iraq:

- **The growing Arab-Kurdish dispute over oil exploration contracts, the final status of Kirkuk, and constitutional reforms aimed at strengthening the central state.**
- **Governance problems within Kurdistan that have inflamed the Kurdish population against their long-time leadership.**
- **The legacies of the Turkish incursion into northern Iraq in response to PKK attacks in late-2007.** [The Kurdish Worker's Party—the Partia Karkaren Kurdistan, or PKK— has waged a decades-long insurgent campaign against Turkey.]

Together, these issues are likely to determine the future of Kurdistan. **If the Kurds cannot surmount these obstacles, it is hard to imagine they will be able to achieve a prosperous future.**

Moreover, **their failure could have profound consequences for Iraq and the rest of the region. The Obama administration was elected with a strong mandate to end the Iraq war.** In a [27 February 2009] speech at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, President Obama announced that all U.S. troops, except a residual support force of 50,000, would depart Iraq as per the recently negotiated Security Agreement. **Iraq, too, is growing increasingly independent and less tolerant of U.S. interference. This will constrain the ability of the United States to have an active role in directing Iraqi politics.**

Yet, within these confines, the United States still must do what it can to help Iraq consolidate its security gains. **The United States must promote peaceful and workable solutions that will also further U.S. strategic interests.** This will require a deep and detailed knowledge of emerging Iraqi politics, which will help maintain Kurdish progress

and contribute to a resolution of the difficult issues facing Iraq and the region. **This will require the United States to pursue six goals.**

Encourage greater internal reform in the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG)

It seems unfathomable that while the rest of Iraq is moving toward greater political participation, **the KRG**—touted as an early democratic example for Iraq—is **solidifying rigid political systems that will perpetuate the KRG as “Barzani-stan” and “Talabani-stan.”** The KRG can only be considered a success if there is genuine democracy, or at least a process toward genuine democracy.

When U.S. officials meet with Kurdish leaders they must discuss the need for greater political and civil freedoms. Public and international pressure on the democratization front could do more to change the current undemocratic, and potentially destabilizing, trajectory of Kurdish politics. **Public and international opinion of the KRG and Iraqi Kurds is clearly important to Kurdish leaders for a number of reasons;** chief among them is the attraction of foreign investment to spur the economy and to assuage long-term concerns of Kurdish secessionist ambitions. **While its leaders deserve credit for Kurdistan’s accomplishments in such a volatile and violent region, they cannot be allowed to rest on their past accomplishments;** they must now take the next steps and broaden political participation.

Force important tradeoffs

There are two unresolved matters that are clearly very important to the Kurdish leadership and whose resolution will go a long way toward stabilizing Iraq—**oil legislation, particularly the status of oil exploration contracts already underway in the KRG, and the final status of Kirkuk.** **In the eyes of the Kurdish leadership, both are vital to the autonomy and development of the KRG,** and as a result, they have been maximalist on both counts. **But the United States and the international community have watched as the Kurds have pushed hard on both fronts and have stalled national political progress in the process.** The Kurds have not been pressured enough to make important tradeoffs.

The Kurds threaten to boycott the Iraqi government each time they are backed into a political corner. Barzani has threatened this on a number of occasions and the United States has often chosen to believe this threat, particularly the early instances when Kurdish cooperation was essential to advancing the United States’ political transition plans for Iraq. **But the Kurds have threatened this one too many times without acting on it.**

The truth is that the Kurds have no real interest in leaving the Iraqi government; on the contrary, **their participation in it is a major source of power and leverage.** **The U.S. administration must realize this and not let the threat of a Kurdish boycott prevent them from pressing the Kurds to make important concessions.**

One possible tradeoff could play out as follows: In exchange for renouncing their exclusive claims on Kirkuk, the Kurds would receive a guarantee that they could control the majority of the revenue from newly found oil resources within their current territories. This is only one formulation meant to illustrate a larger point: **tradeoffs could be presented in a number of permutations and the United States should press the**

Kurds and the central government to make important concessions so that Iraq can capitalize on the relative stability initiated by the surge.

Given the United States' desire to focus more on other national security concerns it deems more urgent, a U.S.-led mediation effort is unlikely. Consequently, **the United States should continue its support of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, and use tier-two efforts to move forward the process and pressure all sides toward compromise.**

Support the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) process

Conventional wisdom states that violence will increase in Kirkuk if a resolution is not reached soon. However, **there is an equal likelihood of violence if a resolution on Kirkuk is forced too soon. All sides in the conflict want to see an early resolution in their favor and complain about the lack of progress from United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura and his team. However, forcing an early resolution is dangerous given the stakes and high emotions of all the stakeholders.** De Mistura has recognized both the dangers of ignoring Kirkuk and the difficulty in arriving at a solution that all of the groups will find just and equitable.

Consequently, **he has moved deliberately and slowly in the hope that the process will not come to a head until the situation throughout the country is more stable.** This stability will be **necessary to absorb the inevitable shock waves that will roil the country when the matter is finally resolved and one or more sides believe they have been deprived of their God-given rights.** The "go it slow" strategy will also allow Iraqi politics to take its course, allowing Iraqi stakeholders the space to make compromises and come to a resolution on these issues through their own processes.

The United States should continue to support the UNAMI approach, which has focused first on resolving other, lower-stake and lower-profile provinces that can serve as test cases. However, **the United States could also do more to facilitate direct negotiations between Kirkuk stakeholders through United Nations auspices.**

Let Iraqi politics take its course

Though people often focus on U.S. missteps in Iraq, the United States has had success in expanding political participation and encouraging Iraqi electoral politics. Party-building efforts, democracy promotion, and a Sunni engagement strategy have finally borne fruit. **As a result of this and despite its many troubles, Iraq has one of the region's most robust and authentic forms of democracy, evidenced by the recent provincial elections.**

The United States was criticized for focusing its past efforts on bolstering the Kurds and ISCI (Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, formerly SCIRI, Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq), two political forces that had long-standing ties with the United States when they were both in exile. Many claimed it was their relationship with the United States that placed them in power positions in the appointed interim government, which they then parlayed into victory in the 2005 elections.

While this may be so, it was the United States' democracy-promotion policy that eventually gave rise to opposition forces like the July 22nd movement (the cross-

sectarian group that strongly supported centralism) that strengthened Maliki's position in office. These forces have now emerged to challenge the Kurdish and ISCI position of decentralization and federalism. **Now that the United States' policies have led to the opening of political space to accommodate all of Iraq's interests, it should stand back and let the process play out.**

Encourage KRG-Turkish trade

The Kurdish-Turkish relationship has been partially transformed by business and trade, with a large segment of the KRG economy bolstered by Turkish investment and potential energy export. It is in everyone's interest to see this relationship continue to develop. Turkish business interests in Iraqi Kurdistan were a key reason Ankara did not escalate its incursion in 2007.

The United States should begin thinking of ways to initiate either official or tier-two level mechanisms to encourage trade and business ties between Turkey and the KRG. Instead of appointing special envoys to manage the PKK issue, as the United States did with the 2006 appointment of General Joseph Ralston as U.S. Special Envoy for Countering the Kurdistan Worker's Party, the United States would do better appointing someone to encourage future economic ties and trade infrastructure.

Sharpen diplomatic tools

Since the Status of Armed Forces Agreement imposed a three-year deadline on the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq, mandating that they withdraw before 2011, the United States can no longer rely entirely on the military to execute its policies in Iraq. Up until now, the U.S. military has been the main innovator and driver of U.S. policies in the country. While the United States has had extremely capable ambassadors serving in Iraq, particularly the recent, outgoing ambassador, Ryan Crocker, it has been military strategy, institutions, and resources that have driven Iraq policy to date. **One wonders whether the debate about the potential for military withdrawal to cancel out security gains in Iraq actually reflects concerns about whether the United States has the political and diplomatic tools to fulfill the role it has asked the military to perform.**

In his [27 February 2009] remarks to U.S. Marines at Camp Lejeune, **President Obama stated, "The drawdown of our military should send a clear signal that Iraq's future is now its own responsibility. . . . Iraq is a sovereign country with legitimate institutions; America cannot—and should not—take their place. However, a strong political, diplomatic, and civilian effort on our part can advance progress and help lay a foundation for lasting peace and security."**

But a return to normal diplomatic relations with Iraq requires a deep and detailed knowledge of emerging Iraqi politics. **The Iraqi political landscape is getting more complex and the United States needs to make sure that it fully grasps the Iraqi political picture.** Because U.S. policy will no longer be bolstered by a substantial military presence in the country, **the United States needs to step up its political skills and sharpen its diplomatic tools.**

Though it will be Iraqi drivers and interests that will ultimately resolve the Arab-Kurdish disputes, that does not mean the United States cannot use diplomatic means to bring about resolutions that would further U.S. interests in the region.

The foregoing is Article No. 3 (IM002A03) in the [Iraq Literature Monitor](#) (ILM), No. 2, 19 October 2009, prepared by Interaction Systems Incorporated (isinreports@mindspring.com).

[Top of Article](#)

Article 4 [Return to ILM Cover Page](#)

4. “Criminals, Militias, and Insurgents: Organized Crime in Iraq,” by Phil Williams, Strategic Studies Institute (U.S. Army War College), Monograph, June 2009. [KBTTCrime, KBTSIraqGen] From <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB930.pdf> we quote from the concluding chapter:

. . . Given the scope and impact of organized crime in Iraq, the lack of attention devoted to it is almost as striking as the lack of planning for the aftermath of the military campaign itself. This monograph is an attempt to help mend the deficiency. . . .

There is no perfect prism through which to view organized crime. **The analysis here has focused on criminal organizations** (often network-based) **and illicit markets; but even these do not capture all the dimensions and dynamics of organized crime in Iraq.** Consequently, **it is important to identify other facets of organized crime which could inform the development of comprehensive strategies** to combat organized crime, insurgency, and violence, **while recognizing the inherent limits of enforcement efforts and the need for changes in both governance and incentive structures.**

[Six main points best explain organized crime in Iraq]

Organized crime in Iraq can be understood first as a complex adaptive system exhibiting emergent behavior and characterized by high levels of persistence and resilience. **It is driven by need, greed, and creed, which are difficult to disentangle.** As a mixture of organizations and activities, organized crime cannot be decapitated by one broad stroke, and is highly resistant to displacement. **It has roots in a tribal culture where smuggling is the norm and national boundaries are respected only by the map-makers.** Other roots can be found in corruption and criminalization **stemming from a dictatorial regime which had monopoly control and no oversight,** and circumvented international sanctions. Yet others can be found in the massive dislocation following the toppling of the regime which resulted in what was, in effect, **a governance vacuum with an attendant mix of anomie and anarchy.**

Second, organized crime is a means of “primitive capital accumulation.” Regime change in Iraq meant that **elites which had hitherto been in a privileged position were replaced by another group previously excluded from power.** This had a dual impact **on organized crime and corruption: for the new elites, obtaining a share of long-denied spoils became a priority, and the state became simply a mechanism for “rent-seeking” and personal and private accumulation. For the displaced elite, criminal activities allowed the retention of at least some wealth and power.**

Third, organized crime is closely linked to alternative (that is, non-state) forms of governance, whether these provide security when the state fails to do so and/or services when the state marginalizes or neglects certain populations. In Iraq, these alternative forms of governance **include the Sunni tribes with their tradition of patrimonialism, and the Sadrists movement which is based on both sectarianism and nationalism combined with a sense of religious duty and a tradition of social obligation and activism. The Sadrists and the Jaish-al-Mahdi (JAM) militia have been simultaneously protective and predatory, and both supportive and exploitative of their young marginalized, and disenfranchised supporters.** They have looked after displaced Shiites, even providing homes (often taken from expelled Sunnis).

Alternative forms of governance, however, pose an inherent challenge to the government. This is why some observers, including the U.S. ambassador in Iraq, and some relief organizations **have compared JAM to Hezbollah and Hamas.** As noted above, **service provision is a form of warfare through welfare**—especially when legal revenues are insufficient to provide services. **Systematic criminal activities become critical in generating the necessary revenues for both service provision and the struggle against the state.**

Fourth, organized crime is a safety valve and safety net. In a society and economy characterized by massive economic and social dislocation and extremely high levels of unemployment, criminal activities, the insurgency, and militia activities (including sectarian cleansing) have been sources of employment and money. **This is not to suggest that organized crime is benign; it is simply to acknowledge that it benefits more people than is usually acknowledged.** From this perspective, the Anbar Awakening and the creation of a U.S.-funded Sunni militia were important not only because of the fight against Al-Qaeda but also because of the economic opportunities.

Indeed, **acknowledgments by U.S. military officers that it was hard to find Sunni tribal leaders who were not involved in smuggling revealed that—unlike AQI—the United States had learned not to interfere with activities that were economically necessary for ordinary tribesmen and lucrative for the tribal leaders.**

Fifth, for all its benefits, organized crime is predatory and parasitic. Organized crime is largely about money whether as an end in itself or as a means to other ends, and **those involved do not care how they obtain this money. The predatory nature of organized crime in Iraq was evident in the kidnapping business.** Victims of kidnapping for profit ranged from businessmen, doctors, and bankers, to the children of ordinary Iraq families. In some case, the targets have been small businessmen whose entrepreneurial activities, so critical to the future of Iraq, were inhibited or disrupted by their abduction. Ransom payments robbed these businesses of start-up capital or profits and, in some instances, led to their closure.

Sixth, organized crime sustains conflict and can also precipitate conflict. As suggested earlier, organized crime in Iraq has something of a hybrid quality, with **criminal activities providing a major funding source for insurgents, jihadi groups, and militias, enabling all of them to accumulate substantial war chests** to pursue their campaigns of political violence. Yet criminal activities have also been a source of tension and conflict among the organizations. **Though organized crime has given some Iraqis a safety net and provided some opportunities for the United States to play one faction against the other, its overall consequences have been profoundly negative.**

[Far more Iraqis face day-to-day threats from criminals than from terrorists, insurgents]

Since 2003 criminal enterprises and activities and corruption have derailed or hindered U.S. efforts to restore political, economic, and military stability in Iraq. Organized crime helped to finance insurgency, terrorism, and sectarianism; hindered the emergence of a viable central government; and rendered the complex economic problems associated with economic reconstruction even more intractable. In the immediate months and years after the invasion, insecurity became pervasive.

Kidnapping and extortion as well as sexual violence (which for cultural reasons was significantly under-reported) were compounded by a lack of trust in the police and the low U.S. priority on policing the kidnapping of ordinary Iraqis. The impact was far reaching.

As Anthony Cordesman notes, “the crime problem . . . affects Iraqi confidence in the government and its popular legitimacy. Far more Iraqis face day-to-day threats from criminals than from terrorists and insurgents. . . . If Iraqis are to trust their new government, if insurgents are to be deprived of recruits and proxies, and if Iraq is to move towards economic development and recovery, the crime problem must be solved.”

Organized crime also added to the economic woes facing ordinary Iraqis by undermining reconstruction and development. The problems in supplying electrical power contributed to disillusionment with the United States, which seemed unable to turn the lights back on. Given the scale and scope of the deficiencies in the system, such judgments were unfair. Nevertheless, they added to the frustrations of Iraqis and “to the image of ineffective governance” by both the coalition and the nascent Iraqi government.

Iraq’s centralized distribution system was also subject to diversion and interruption by criminals (and terrorists and insurgents) as well as corrupt officials, making the system less efficient and reliable. Extortion from contractors involved in construction projects also had a debilitating impact, increasing the costs of most projects and offering opportunities for diversion of funds to insurgent groups.

[Organized crime has had negative impact on NGOs, contributed to poor governance]

Organized crime also had an impact on the non-governmental organization (NGO) community and its capacity for assisting with economic development and social problems. The kidnapping of aid workers and their transfer from criminal groups to terrorists who murdered them led many NGOs to leave Iraq. For those that remained, security became the overwhelming concern, limiting their reach and effectiveness. Kidnapping also made partnerships between military forces and NGOs much more problematic.

Though some NGOs continued to operate even in an extremely inhospitable environment, many international businesses lacked this level of commitment. Organized crime, insurgents, and militias, for several years at least, contributed significantly to deterring potential investors, thereby perpetuating the unemployment problem. The major exception to this trend was in the Kurdish-controlled region, where violence was much lower and investment more attractive. In the rest of Iraq, foreign direct investment was very low. This, in turn, perpetuated and

worsened the violence as organized crime and the insurgency became major sources of employment and income.

Organized crime in Iraq also contributed to poor governance, which in turn created another vicious circle. Criminal organizations sought to perpetuate a permissive environment creating more opportunities for crime and high levels of immunity to punishment. This contributed to the corruption and continued weakness of Iraqi political and judicial institutions and government agencies. **The infiltration of government departments and agencies by organized crime made the state apparatus far less effective, thereby ensuring that levels of disaffection with—and alienation from—the Iraqi state remained high, while legitimacy remained low.**

[Focus must be on those criminal activities that contribute to insecurity of Iraqi citizenry]

What, then, can be done about organized crime in Iraq? A pessimistic answer to this question would suggest not much. After all, the very conditions that allowed the blossoming of organized crime in post-Saddam Hussein Iraq make it difficult to counter. Nevertheless, **it is possible to outline a broad program that would reduce the criminalization of Iraqi political and economic life, in tandem with the rebuilding of the state, the re-creation of infrastructure, the revitalization of the economy, and the creation of legitimate employment opportunities.**

Unless combating organized crime is integrated into this broader program for Iraq, the program stands little chance of success. Moreover, **unless the Iraq government incorporates an effective strategy to combat organized crime, the prospects for long-term state stability will remain poor. . . .**

Since 2003 the U.S. military has treated organized crime in Iraq, implicitly if not explicitly, as a secondary problem, separate from the main fault lines in the society. At the command level, it was therefore treated primarily as a law enforcement issue as opposed to military, and consequently as an Iraqi government responsibility.

In fact, however, **organized crime in Iraq was inextricably connected with state weakness, the emergence of multiple, competing power centers, the dearth of economic opportunities, and the collapse of norms and standards of behavior—all of which were central to the challenges facing the U.S. military.** Profit-oriented criminal groups created their own forms of intimidation and exploitation, easily crossing from the criminal economy to the conflict economy. At the same time, the appropriation of organized crime methodologies by key Iraqi power centers increased the resilience of insurgents, terrorists, and militias.

As the United States draws down its forces in Iraq, it could usefully focus more seriously on organized crime. **One element in this focus is the need for closer cooperation between military units and law enforcement agencies.** As Paul Kan has convincingly urged, having “**gumshoes at the generals’ table**” would add a new and useful dimension to both planning and operational activities. At the same time, the military emphasis on “lessons-learned” and after-action reports could be usefully adopted by law enforcement agencies. . . . **The focus . . . must be on those criminal activities that contribute to the insecurity of the citizenry.** As U.S. forces draw down, this goal must receive the highest priority until the final transition to Iraqi responsibility for security and order. . . .

The foregoing is Article No. 4 (IM002A04) in the [Iraq Literature Monitor](#) (ILM), No. 2, 19 October 2009, prepared by Interaction Systems Incorporated (isinreports@mindspring.com).

[Top of Article](#)

Article 5 [Return to ILM Cover Page](#)

5. “Mujahedin-e Khalq in Iraq: A Policy Conundrum,” by Jeremiah Goulka, Lydia Hansell, Elizabeth Wilke, and Judith Larson, [RAND Corporation](#), Monograph No. 871, 2009 (http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2009/RAND_MG871.pdf). [KBTSIranIraq, KBTSIraqGW, KBTSIraqGen, KBTSIranGen]. We *quote* from the report’s summary:

From the early weeks of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) until January 2009, coalition forces detained and provided security for members of the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MeK) [in English, the name means “the People’s Holy Warriors”], an exiled Iranian dissident cult group living in Iraq. At the outset of OIF, the MeK was designated a hostile force, largely because of its history of cooperation with Saddam Hussein’s military in the Iran-Iraq War and its alleged involvement in his suppression of the Shia and Kurdish uprisings that followed the Gulf War of 1991.

Since 1997, the MeK has been listed as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) by the United States because of the attacks it has conducted against Iranian targets since the time of its founding in 1965—and particularly due to the assassinations of three U.S. Army officers and three U.S. civilian contractors in Tehran during the 1970s, which were attributed to the MeK.

Despite their belief that the MeK did not pose a security threat, **coalition forces detained the group and provided protection to prevent the Iraqi government from expelling MeK members to Iran, even though Iran had granted the MeK rank and file amnesty from prosecution.** The coalition’s decision to provide security for an FTO was very controversial because it placed the United States in the position of protecting a group that it had labeled a terrorist organization. Among many resulting complications, **this policy conundrum has made the United States vulnerable to charges of hypocrisy in the war on terrorism. . . .**

[Government of Iraq reaffirmed resolution calling for the expulsion of MeK from Iraq]

In April 2003, after a brief period of conflict, the MeK requested a cease-fire. Because they had no information about the characteristics of the group, the Special Forces officers who received the request were persuaded by MeK leaders (who spoke fluent English) that, prior to the invasion, the group had offered to fight on the coalition’s behalf and that many of its members had been educated in the United States. Based on these claims, which turned out to be false, the officers accepted the MeK’s request for a cease-fire under terms that allowed the MeK to keep its weapons.

In May 2003, the Washington agencies agreed to direct coalition forces to secure the MeK’s surrender and to disarm the group. Again, the coalition officers who negotiated with the MeK leadership were dissuaded from carrying out this instruction. Rather than insisting upon the MeK’s surrender, **they accepted a cease-fire agreement under which the MeK would be disarmed and its (at the time) 3,800 members would**

be consolidated and detained through assigned residence (rather than internment) **at the MeK's largest facility, Camp Ashraf**, which is located approximately 40 miles north of Baghdad. . . .

In December 2003, the Iraqi Governing Council passed a resolution calling for the expulsion of the MeK from Iraq. Subsequently, the interim Iraqi government and then the **Government of Iraq (GOI) reaffirmed this pledge. Based on the presumption that the MeK's members would be persecuted if they returned to Iran and that returning them would be a "gift" to the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), the United States announced its intention to seek the MeK's relocation elsewhere.**

However, the central question remained: **Where could they go?** . . . [Of] options for relocation, the only viable one for most MeK members is repatriation to Iran. For six years, Iran has offered amnesty to the MeK rank and file. **Despite the broad-based expectation that the IRI would persecute all former MeK members who returned to the country, that has not proven to be the case for the approximately 250 individuals who have already been repatriated through a process managed by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).** . . .

In light of ongoing vows by the GOI to deport the MeK and shutdown Camp Ashraf, in December 2008, the GOI provided written assurances to Washington that, when Iraqi security forces took responsibility for Camp Ashraf, the MeK would be treated humanely and that members would not be forcibly transferred to a country where they might face persecution. **GOI officials have stated their intention to work with the ICRC to pursue repatriation to Iran.** Meanwhile, **the Joint Interagency Task Force-Ashraf (JITFA) will monitor the transition** and provide guidance to Iraqi security forces.

[Major challenges and lessons learned]

The MeK was a minor issue in the overall conflict in Iraq, but it was an important one because the issues that emerged in the course of detaining the MeK were, in many ways, a microcosm of the larger challenges posed by detainee operations in general. Thus, both the missteps and the small successes along the way provide **valuable lessons for improving how the United States deals with "special populations" in future operations.** This study identified **five principal problem areas** that require attention:

- **OIF planners did not adequately define their military goals and objectives regarding the MeK.** Although the MeK had FTO status and had been designated a hostile target, coalition forces were given no military objectives regarding the group except to secure its surrender, and that outcome was never achieved. **Without a clear goal, the coalition's activities at Camp Ashraf began—and largely remained—ad hoc.**
- **Coalition forces were not prepared to deal with a special population like the MeK.** The officers who served on the JIATF that was responsible for managing the MeK at Camp Ashraf had little or no lead time to prepare for their assignments and had no time between changes of command to share hard-won experience. **No information or training was provided regarding the Iranian (Persian) and Iraqi (Arab) cultures in general or the MeK in particular, and, in the early days of OIF, no interpreters were assigned specifically to the JIATF.**

Most importantly, **JIATF military members soon discovered that they were dealing with a cult.** Despite the special challenges posed by cult behavior, those in charge of detainee operations were given no training on how to manage a cult. Thus, **the ability of the MeK leadership to create the appearance of cooperation and to manipulate coalition perceptions of the group's intentions seriously hampered the overall detainment process and, in particular, repatriation efforts.**

- **Coalition forces did not establish a dominant role at Camp Ashraf. Although the coalition disarmed the MeK and consolidated its members at the largest MeK facility, it took very little action to limit the MeK's freedom of movement.** There is no fence around the approximately 15-square-mile facility; further, the coalition guarded only the main gate and did not search all vehicles entering or exiting the camp on a daily basis. Lack of manpower has meant that the coalition has never conducted a thorough search of Camp Ashraf. The MeK was allowed to establish a liaison office on the coalition's nearby forward operating base (FOB) rather than at Camp Ashraf, to hang its propaganda posters in recreation areas at the FOB, and to hold conferences to promote its agenda.

Approximately 14 U.S. soldiers were killed and 60 wounded as they provided security for convoys escorting MeK members to Baghdad to purchase supplies. Thus, it was often unclear just who was in charge of Camp Ashraf.

- **The coalition did not actively encourage MeK members to leave the camp. One of the purposes of consolidating the MeK at Camp Ashraf was to reduce the number of troops needed to control the detainee population.** Another way of doing this would have been to reduce the size of that population. Given the MeK's cult-based control over its members, this would likely have been a difficult and frustrating process.

However, **at a minimum, the leaders should have been separated from the rank and file.** Most JIATF officers believed that the rank and file would have requested repatriation had they simply been separated from the leadership. **No effort was ever made to do this,** even though the Third Geneva Convention provides that officers should be quartered separately from enlisted personnel. And although the JIATF built a facility to house individuals who left Camp Ashraf, it did not oppose the construction of physical barriers—e.g., guard posts, berms, concertina wire—that were used to keep MeK members from leaving the group.

- The MeK has not been treated as a terrorist organization. **Failure to assert control over the MeK and its facility has exposed the coalition, and particularly the United States, to criticism that the group is being treated as an ally for intelligence gathering purposes rather than as an FTO.**

This has exposed the United States to accusations of hypocrisy in its worldwide effort to counter violent extremism, and there have been **no attempts to counter this destructive misperception** through broad-based communication efforts aimed at policymakers and the public. . . .

The foregoing is Article No. 5 (IM002A05) in the Iraq Literature Monitor (ILM), No. 2, 19 October 2009, prepared by Interaction Systems Incorporated (isinreports@mindspring.com).

[Top of Article](#)

[Return to ILM Cover Page](#)