The Rise of Dictatorial Rule in Iraq

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Introduction: Post conflict stability is major issue anywhere war ends. The possibility that armed violence could resume is omnipresent. The chaos in Iraq after the American-led invasion in March 2003 toppled the government of Saddam Hussein created serious post-war issues. These remain only partially resolved. Weak post-conflict planning precipitated a civil war that killed over 100,000 people and forced over 2 million to abandon their homes and lose all their property. The country divided on secular lines, divided primarily into Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish enclaves. The resentments created during this traumatic process have not been resolved. Violence remains a major problem, especially between Shi'ites and Sunnis.

When the U.S. initially set in to motion the war in Iraq, it had a primary of objective of fundamentally transforming Iraq politically and economically. Leon Panetta, who over saw military operations for the United States as Secretary of Defense under President Obama noted the accomplishments of restoring the Iraqi states, which can now "govern and secure itself … the Iraqi army and police have been rebuilt and they are capable of responding to threats; violence levels are down; al Qaeda has been weakened; the rule of law has been strengthened; educational opportunities have expanded; and economic growth is expanding."

Major issues remain resolved. These include continuous terrorist violence between Iraqi Shi'ites and Sunnis, Shi'ite dominance of government institutions blocking out other groups, the question of declining democracy and rule of law in favor of central government authoritarianism, Kurdish establishment of a de facto state in the north of Iraq, and Iranian influence.

Background: Perhaps the most important event in Iraq after the 2003 invasion was the withdrawl of American combat forces in December 2011.. The Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), negotiated by the Bush administration in 2008, arranged for December 2011 to be the deadline for American troop removal. President Barack Obama attempted to speed the process along slightly, but it would quickly become apparent that to follow through on certain promises made in regards to troop training, US forces would need to remain in the region longer. Robert Gates, then US Secretary of Defense, attempted to arrange for no less than 8,000 troops to remain in Iraq after the deadline, but Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki made very apparent his

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wishes for US troops to stick to the original December 2011 deadline for departure. The withdrawal leaves Iraqis in control of their country after eight years of American rule or control. Another concern of U.S. Secretary of Defense Panetta's during his 2011 farewell speech was rising uncertainty about the stability of Iraq's political system. The United States' aims at the onset of the war was to install democracy and free-market economy in Iraq, but when faced with the insurgency that resulted from the toppling of the government and military that existed under Sadam Hussein caused the US to drastically alter its aims mid-course. Prime Minister Maliki didn't share in such doubts, celebrating and sending a nationwide text message declaring the start of a new "post-American" era. His optimism, however, was not shared among other top ranking officials in the Iraqi government. Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq believed the country's political trajectory was headed "in a very wrong direction, headed toward dictatorship." It would later become a widely held belief that Prime Minister Maliki was the primary concern to the stability of a free and democratic Iraqi government.

The government that formed in the aftermath of the Irbil Agreement represented a political triumph for Prime Minister Maliki. As the political leader of the country's Shi'ite majority, he has cultivated strong support and reduced the role of the Sunni opposition. In spite of coming second in the elections Prime Minister Maliki retained premiership, evaded all attempts to constrain his power, and filled high-ranking positions with loyalists. For the first seven months of his regime, Prime Minister Maliki rejected all the candidates proposed by Iraqiyya for the security ministries. In June 2011, he appointed his close adviser, Falih al-Fayyad, as minister of national security. To this day, however, Prime Minister Maliki retains the position of Minister of Interior. By making sure that all of his acting ministers were either weak politicians or close friends he has retained control of the army, police force, and intelligence services. He has frequently circumvented constitutional calls for parliament to approve appointments. At this point the only recourse against him is a vote of no confidence in parliament, and a senior parliamentarian, when asked about this noted that it was not likely he would allow members of parliament to move towards such a vote, and if he did it is not likely he would take notice of any outcomes of such a vote. Also concerning are Prime Minister Maliki's comments about how state power will be used in the future. A week after US troops left Iraq, Prime Minister Maliki

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threatened to move to a majoritarian government based around Shia Islamist political parties in violation of the Irbil Agreement.

Given Prime Minister Maliki's success in centralizing power to the office of Prime Minister, only two major hurdles remain to stop Iraq from becoming a dictatorship only nine years after the removal of Saddam Hussein. One of the remaining hurdles is that the constitution gives individual regions a great deal of executive, legislative, and judicial authority, and the ability to demand equitable shares of national oil revenues. In 2011 key Iraqiyya party politicians determined that regional decentralization was the only possible way to limit Prime Minister Maliki's domination of Iraq. Prime Minister Maliki's response was mass arrests in regions north of Baghdad with a Sunni majority. The prime minister's consolidation of power in the capitol and his use of the state to silence dissenting politicians, leaves the KRG as one of the few organizations with political autonomy left inside Iraq. Kurdish leader Bazani and the wider leadership of the KRG are concerned about the threat of Prime Minister Maliki's power to their autonomy. However, the threat of secession is not a credible one at any time. The KRG receive 17% of Iraq's national budget or just over $11 billion in 2012. Although plans are currently in motion to develop the regions oil reserves, these funds will not be sufficient in replacing the resources provided by the central government for many years to come. Also, it would require agreement from its neighbor Turkey to get the oil to foreign markets, and Turkey is unlikely to actively encourage Kurdish separatism.

On top of constitutional doubts about Prime Minister Maliki's ability to effectively centralize power, there are questions about whether the state itself is strong enough to be an effective vehicle for a Saddam Hussein-style dictatorship. Until 2011 the US State Department collected data from the 18 provinces to determine if a lack of state services was driving political unrest and violence. In July of 2011, it judged that 16 provinces were 'very unstable' due to the states poor delivery of basic utilities such as electricity, water, sewage, and transportation infrastructure. The current cause of profound state weakness in Iraq is the endemic corruption that has spread through the state institutions. There is sustained evidence that corruption at the highest levels of Iraqi government are being shielded because of the political benefits and

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royalties they deliver. Prime Minister Maliki has, in his time as prime minister, directly and overtly attacked the anti-corruption measures established during the US occupation. Because of Iraq's corruption Transparency International has rated it the 8th most corrupt country in the world with an estimated 10 percent of revenue loss due to corruption.

In the short term, Prime Minister Maliki's dominance of security forces is sufficient to secure his roles, but in the long term, his ongoing attempts to centralize power in his own hands and marginalize the Iraqiyya party , his main electoral rival, could be a destabilizing force in Iraqi politics, potentially even reigniting the civil war that ended in 2008. Those wronged by Prime Minister Maliki have the potential to challenge his power by using violence.

The Role of the United Nations: In the past the UN has passed resolutions which denounce the leaders of dictatorships and vow to put them under continuous observation, although at this time it is not clear that Prime Minister Maliki would acknowledge such a denouncement from an international body, or alter his behavior due to observation. While the United States has great interests in Iraq's continued stability due to its oil interests, it is unlikely that they would seek such invasive action, as it would raise questions about their ability to be effective stabilizers in the region. Most western European countries would likely back the United States in its "wait and see attitude" while eastern Europe would have a more vested interest in seeing peace and security established not only in Iraq, but in all situations of possible political unrest in their neighboring region. Asia as a whole would likely be interested only in seeing their oil interests protected, or a more stable Iraq that could cheaply and efficiently supply their growing oil needs.

The UN typically supports calls for rule of law, which could be relevant to Iraq. Some members—especially Western states—insist that Iraq also strengthen democratic principles. Many other member states are more ambivalent about democracy, which they associate with chaos and civil war, and will hesitate to support pressure for Iraqi democratization.

The United Nations is especially unlikely to support Kurdish autonomy or independence,

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despite the popularity of this cause among Iraq's Kurdish residents. Many UN member states face serious separatist problems of their own. Fearing the international precedents, they oppose successful separatism elsewhere. This fear is especially acute in the Middle East, where Kurdish minorities in Iran, Syria and Turkey might press to join an autonomous Kurdish state. Kurdish autonomy or self-rule, if it is to happen, would have to happen outside the UN system.