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Iraq: Farewell to the Americans? Internal and regional implications

contents

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The new balance of power in the regional system: Is Iran the "winner" of the US involvement in Iraq?

Anna Apostolidou

Ceteris paribus, the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq and the subsequent vacuum of power in the region is at Tehran's best interest. However, the frictions among the Shi'ite groups in Iraq, the reaction of Iran's neighbouring countries, and the complications regarding its nuclear programme pose obstacles to Iran's arising. The developments in Iraq, the change of leadership in Washington, and the potential change of leadership in Tehran make an American-Iranian rapprochement possible, which could lead to a strenuous reaction of the Gulf States and Israel and to additional complications in the regional balance game.

"If you are going to destabilise the balance of power, do it against the main enemy" was the off-the-record Israeli reaction to the Bush administration's plans to invade Iraq in 2003, as stated by Lawrence Wilkinson, member of the State Department's policy planning staff and later chief of staff of Secretary of State Colin Powell. Israeli Defence Minister Binyamin "Fouad" Ben-Eliezer, accompanying Ariel Sharon in his meeting with George W. Bush, put it more explicitly: "Today Iran is more dangerous than Iraq". Tel Aviv foresaw what would later develop into an extended debate over the beneficiaries of the U.S. invasion and withdrawal from Iraq: that the alteration of the balance of power in the regional system would tip the scales in favour of Tehran.

Iraq was historically Iran's counterweight in the region and vice versa. Stephen Walt argues that from an American perspective "Iraq's condition in 2001-2 was almost ideal" since on the one hand, Baghdad's military capabilities had been weakened due to the past wars with Iran and Kuwait and therefore did not pose a significant threat to the regional system and on the other hand, it had maintained relatively strong so as to discourage its neighbours, in particular Tehran, from revisionary actions. The U.S.-adventures in Iraq, which essentially infringed the American dual containment doctrine, resulted in the creation of a "failed state" instead of a strong, democratic and U.S.-friendly state; that is a state which, having its social and political structures shattered, lacks the monopoly of the legitimate use of force and suffers from anarchic internal violence. The presence of U.S. military forces on the Iraqi territory maintained control to some extent; and it would not be an exaggeration to argue that in fact the U.S. replaced Saddam Hussein's regime with their presence as a counterweight to Iran. Now that the new administration of Barack Obama is planning to withdraw its troops, Iran seems to be the first candidate to fill in the vacuum of power which will be created, mainly due to its regional status, its proximity to Iraq and the traditional patronage of the Shi'ite Middle Eastern populations. However, the declaration of Iran as a "winner" is anything but impetuous; in order to resolutely opine on Iran's gaining from the American failed ventures in Iraq, we have to take into account the other major actors' responses to the alteration of the balance of power, as well as the Islamic Republic's readiness to face the new challenges.

Starting from Iraq, the overthrow of the Ba'athist regime and the ascension of the Iraqi Shi'ite majority into power offered Tehran, the vanguard state of Shi'a Islam in the Middle East, the opportunity to expand its influence on its neighbour and historical competitor. However, the debate about the formation of the so-called "Shi'a Crescent" and the consolidation of Iran's role in those countries does not take into consideration that, at least in Iraq, the Shi'ite block is not a unified one. Tehran may have strong ties with the ruling Da'wa Party and the Iraqi Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, who resided in Iran for 8 years, as well as the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), former known as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), however its relations with the Sadrist movement, with its prominent Mahdi Army, and the Basra-based Fadhilla (Islamic Virtue) Party, which often employ anti-Iranian Arab nationalist rhetoric, cannot be characterised as vigorous. The conflicts among these groups are frequent and violent, as demonstrated by the Karbala (2007) and Basra (2008) fights, where the ISCI and the Iraqi army respectively attempted to disarm the Sadrists' militia, the Mahdi Army. Tehran

has repeatedly demanded the withdrawal of the U.S. troops; however, a potential civil war among the Shi'ite fractions, which would undoubtedly aggravate after the redeployment of the American military forces, could turn out to be not in Tehran's best interest, considering that it could alienate the Iraqi Shi'ites from Iran and impair Tehran's manoeuvring abilities. So far, Tehran's Iraq policy has been cleverly comprised by both devious and straightforward elements: the first category includes the disproportionate support of the ISCI, as well as the alleged infiltration in the Iraqi security and political institutions, such as in the Ministries of Interior, Oil, Public Works and Finance. Nevertheless, the more direct policies tie Iraq to Iran's influence: Iranian investments in Iraq and the trade between the two countries have not only rendered Tehran Iraq's major trading partner, but have also strengthened its ties with both the Iraqi government, which has agreed to increase the value of trade exchange to $5 billion by 2010, as well as the Kurdish population, whose Regional Government has signed various memorandums of understanding on trade, roads, and energy. As the first means seem to fail, as demonstrated by the failure of the ISCI in the recent provincial elections, Tehran is putting emphasis on strengthening the economic – and cultural – ties with its neighbour.

However, Tehran is not the sole player in the Iraqi political scene: Riyadh has already declared that if the U.S. removes its forces, it will take Iraq's Sunni population under its protection; Ankara will also attempt to exert its sway due to the Kurdish question; and Washington will not allow Iran to appropriate Iraq that easily. Furthermore, those countries', plus Israel's, behaviour is influenced by the inevitable vacuum of power in the regional system that the U.S. redeployment will provoke, as well as by the threat emanating from Iran's nuclear programme.

First and foremost, the withdrawal of the U.S. military forces from Iraq is not tantamount to total retreat of American presence in the region. On the contrary, Washington is expected to redeploy troops in bases in Kuwait and Afghanistan, while it remains unclear whether it will establish military bases in Halabja, a town in the Kurdish part of Iraq, situated less than 10 miles from the Iranian border. The Obama administration has soften the tones, but its Iran strategy is still blurred: it puts emphasis on diplomacy, however it also speaks of "containment and punishment" if negotiations fail. Likewise, Tehran appears indecisive on its stance vis-a-vis Washington: on the one hand Ahmadinejad, on February, 10, 2009 states that the Islamic Republic is ready for dialogue with the U.S., and on the other hand the very next day Mottaki, Iran's Foreign Minister, ruled out security talks with the U.S., arguing that Iraq's security had improved. Regarding its contesting nuclear programme, Tehran's actions indicate that it is not willing to negotiate either, since it has announced the beginning of its first nuclear plant's full-scale operation within this year. There are no signs that Iran will cease its uranium enrichment activities, though it is possible that if Khatami gets elected in the upcoming presidential elections in June, he will temporarily suspend them in order to improve relations with the U.S. The Nixon Center, a Washington-based think tank, estimates that the U.S. could ultimately agree to a small-scale, internationally supervised, Iranian enrichment programme. Such a concession - which could to be linked to the realisation that after the U.S. withdrawal, American-Iranian cooperation would be necessary for Iraq, Afghanistan and the regional security - would not only upgrade Iran's status as a regional power, but could also lead to a rapprochement between Washington and Tehran.

Nonetheless, other regional players, in particular Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, as well as Israel, would hardly accept such a development. Riyadh is already against U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, which it considers menacing for Saudi interests. It tries to antagonise Iran by supporting Sunni tribal groups (as for instance in the Anbar province), and has expressed - among other Sunni states with significant Shi'ite minorities (or majorities, as is the case of Bahrain) - its fears over the emergence of the so-called 'Shi'a Crescent' and Tehran's role in inciting the Shi'ites of the Middle Eastern countries. Iran has repeatedly tried to dispel those fears. At least on a rhetorical level, it includes Saudi Arabia in the plans on how to "fill the power vacuum in the region" which will be the result of the U.S. withdrawal. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, though it nominally supports every nation's right to nuclear energy, including Iran, the idea of Tehran developing nuclear technology with or without the consent of the U.S., could be even urged to develop its own nuclear programme. In this context, the formation of an alliance between the Gulf States and Israel would not be improbable; besides, the Bahraini proposal for the establishment of a regional organisation that would include the Arab countries, Iran, Turkey and Israel has been interpreted as an effort on behalf of the Gulf States to approach Israel and alienate Iran even further, which would never agree to negotiate with Tel Aviv.

Finally, there is one more possible impediment to Iran's rise: Israel's response. While a broader U.S.-Iranian accommodation seems to be possible, Tehran has stated that it will not alter its approach towards Israel. Given that by withdrawing their troops, the U.S. deprive the regional balance from a counterweight to Iran, combined with the current improbability of U.S. strikes against Iran, Israel will probably undertake the task of thwarting the Iranian nuclear weapons programme. In two similar cases, when Baghdad was accused of developing nuclear weaponry, and Damascus of receiving a cache of nuclear materials from North Korea, Tel Aviv attacked the Osirak reactor in Iraq (1981) and the Deir ez-Zor region in Syria (2007). In July, 2008, it leaked out that Israel had carried out a full rehearsal of air strikes against Iran's nuclear sites. To date, it has been accused of sabotaging equipment and assassinating Iranian nuclear scientists in order to delay Iran's nuclear programme. Dennis Blair, Director of National Intelligence in the new U.S. administration, has indicated in a report to the Senate Intelligence Committee that Israel and Iran are liable to enter into confrontation in 2009. Tehran has not commented on Blair's report, nor has it changed its fixed anti-Israeli rhetoric. However, if Israel repeats this strike in Iran, Iran unlike Iraq and Syria, will probably respond. An Israeli-Iranian conflict would lead to a renewed balancing of the power in the region.

The alteration of the regional balance of power has indeed favoured Iran; however it is premature to declare it "winner" of the U.S. involvement in Iraq. The withdrawal of the U.S. troops has created the conditions for Tehran to pursue the regional role it aspires. The route, nonetheless, is not challenge-free: it has to counterpoise its role as the Shi'ite patron in Iraq and the inoffensive Shi'ite power in the Sunni Middle East, its ambitions with the demands of the West, and the regional power status with the threats that emanate from it. In the end, it will all come down to Iran's flexibility and ability to manipulate and compromise. ■

What state for Iraq?
The centralization – decentralization struggle

Chrysoula Toufexi

The three most significant groups of Iraq, the Kurds, the Arab Sunnis and Shiites are deeply divided over their state's structure while internal and external dynamics have indicated until now a trend towards decentralization. However, the results of the provincial elections which seem to alter the political equilibrium in favor of the centralist and secular political forces of the state are crucial for the future of the Iraqi state.

Post-war Iraq's first constitution was adopted in October 2005, incorporating the desire of the majority of Iraqis, however with the striking absence of the Sunnis, to form a federal democratic state. Nonetheless, the constitution's provisions have remained vague further inhibiting the actual form of federation which Iraqis seek for their state. This form could range from a loose confederation to a strong federal state. Proponents of a strong central state are represented by the Arab Sunnis who reject the idea of a federal state scheme and consider the federal constitution as an alien imposition. They support a unitary state system with power amass to the central government, in which they can play a significant political role while turning down the idea of a confederation as favored by the Kurds to achieve future secession from Iraq. Nevertheless, the notion of a unitary state brings back haunting memories of Saddam Hussein's repressive regime. Therefore, the Kurds and Shi'a Arabs take up a more suspicious stand on the idea of a strong government and national armed forces. The Kurds on their part propose a loose confederation of two constituent entities based on ethnicity, precisely an Arab and a Kurdish one. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has administered since 1991 the Iraqi Kurdistan Region; an area that consists of the three provinces of Dohuk, Erbil and Sulimaniyeh for which it seeks to grant autonomy through a future constitution.

Shi'a Arabs are divided concerning Iraq's future state structure: on the one hand there are those who

envision a unitary state, such as Muqtada al-Sadr and Iraqi Prime Minister al-Maliki and to the other hand there are the proponents of decentralization such as the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC) and the Fadhila. The latter two advocate a federal Iraqi scheme; however the two parties disagree upon which areas should be included in the federal region. The SIIC has claimed for the Shiites the region stretching from Baghdad to Basra, while Fadhila claimed merely Basra. However, al-Sadr has remained highly suspicious of federal plans that could lead to a future secession of the Kurdistan Region and Basra. Intra-factional violence has become evident between the Shi'a Arabs in Basra and Southern Iraq since 2006 over the future of the state. The SIIC has been targeted by al-Sadr's Mahdi Army as an Iranian backed party that wishes the separation of Shi'a-dominated Southern Iraq and its incorporation to Iran.

Furthermore, the deepening chasm among Iraq's main political forces, regarding the centralization/decentralization debate illustrates that the process of regionalization in Iraq has been consolidated.

Political analysts point out the internal dynamics and the external calibrations that reinforce regional loyalties at the expense of the central government. According to this same argument, any plans for a unitary strong state could prove difficult to accomplish due to several factors: sectarianism and civil war, the failure to agree to an equal wealth distribution system, the perpetuation of an undetermined status for Kirkuk, aspirations of regional neighboring states which promote the scheme of a weak confederation in order to advance their foreign patronage.

The first internal dynamic that prevents Iraqis from overcoming the state deadlock is the social and political polarization in Iraq created by the war. The Iraqi civil war is multifaceted, characterized by a complicated struggle for power, a set of internal conflicts between sectarian, ethnic and religious identities or intra-factional violence which have created deep polarization in the social and political sphere in Iraq. Civil conflict encouraged and strengthened the local sectarian or ethnic authorities and their militias, which assumed control of local security and of a thriving informal economy. In the South, Basra was controlled by the Shi'a Fadhila and the SIIC, while Muqtada al-Sadr controlled Sadr City with his Mahdi Army. The KRG has controlled since 1991 the northern area of Iraq, the Kurdistan Region while Kurdish claims over the oil-rich Kirkuk and Mosul have provoked intensive ethnic violence between the Kurds and Arab Sunnis. Moreover, in the region of Anbar, the so-called Sunni Triangle a Sunni insurgency against U.S. forces transformed under the wings of an umbrella organization, the "Islamic State of Iraq", into a hub for terrorist activities aimed at establishing a caliphate in the region. In 2006 the Sunni tribal leaders allied with the U.S. forces and formed the Awakening Councils. With their help the Iraqi national army managed to counter the Islamist insurgency and al-Qa'eda successfully and dismantled the Islamic state in 2008.

Moreover, a second aspect currently tied to and crucial for any agreement regarding the character of the federal state are the negotiations which will lead to an effective Petroleum Law. Finding an acceptable formula concerning equal redistribution of oil revenues will end the stalemate currently caused by the disagreement over this issue among Kurds, Shiites and Sunnis. The Sunni Arabs claim that the administration and redistribution of revenues should be the responsibility of the central government and the Ministry of Oil in Baghdad. The Kurds grant the central government's responsibility of the already existing oil

fields, however, they ask for new fields which will be established in the future in the constituent regions and their generated revenues, to be administered by the provincial authorities. This matter is also linked to the future fate of the disputed province of oil-rich Kirkuk, which has led to tensions among the Kurds, the Sunni Arabs and Turkmen. The latter two ethnic groups reject the Kurdish territorial claims and demand Kirkuk - which holds 13% of the state's proven oil reserves - to remain under Baghdad's control. If no successful agreement is found concerning the Kirkuk issue negotiations for the signing of the Petroleum Law will be undermined while leading to further delay of finding solutions.

Regional calculations regarding the centralization/decentralization debate indicate that the future of the Iraqi state is currently tied to the geopolitical competition in the Middle East between Sunni and Shi'a states. The SIIC which dominated in the 2005 provincial elections winning nine southern Shi'a provinces is Iran's current political foothold in Iraq. For Iran, on the one hand, a loose confederation in Iraq would ultimately lead to the partition of the country into three regions, facilitating its leverage on Southern Shi'a-dominated Iraq. On the other hand, the emergence of a strong Iraq where the Shiites would dominate the central government could strengthen Tehran's influence in the country. Both outcomes would provoke Arab Sunni states particularly Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt as they would nurture their concern of the emergence of a so-called 'Shi'a Crescent'. However, as Dr. Graeme Herd illustrates in his article "The Birth pangs of a new Middle East" (Conflict Studies Research Centre, Defence Academy of the U.K.), a con-federal structure that would prevent any of the three parts Shi'a, Sunni or Kurdish from monopolizing political power, is in the interest of both Tehran and Riyadh. Such a structure would provide a balance of power among the three groups, while facilitating the external paternalism of Iran, Saudi Arabia and US-Israel for the Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds respectively.

Contrary to foreign expectations and political analysis though, the results of the provincial elections held on January 31 this year in fourteen out of eighteen provinces have illustrated the Iraqi will to maintain a strong unitary state. The elections are supposed to predict the dominant trend concerning the nature of the state when the country will hold its general elections at the end of this year. The election outcome seems to indicate that the parties which advocate a strong central government are currently emerging as the next political force. The final election results verified preliminary assessments of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's victory, where the polls indicated The State of Law coalition's relative majority in nine of the fourteen provinces. According to news analysts, al-Maliki's success highlights that public support rallied in favour of a strong central and secular state. Provincial results are expected to grant the Prime Minister a great precedence over the general elections and reward his choice of a secular and national tone. Al-Maliki has presented himself as willing to uproot sectarian divisions and bring security by crashing the Iranian-backed Shi'a militia in Baghdad and Southern Iraq. Strong adherent of a unitary and secular Iraq, he opposed to the Biden Plan that proposed the tripartite division of Iraq along ethno-sectarian lines and managed to win the support of both Sunnis and Shiites. Al-Maliki also dominated in the ballot boxes in Baghdad and managed to win Basra over the Islamic Fadhila party.

In the Sunni province of Anbar, Sheik Ahmed Abu Risha, leader of the Awakening of Iraq and Inde-

pendents, managed to win 8 of the 29 seats, while two other Sunni parties followed. Anbar province's last local elections brought to power the SIIC, due to the Sunni abstain from the ballot boxes. Nevertheless, the Sunni tribal leaders blamed the Shi'a party for the worsening security situation in the light of the emergence of al-Qa'eda in their region at the period of the SIIC local administration. Al-Maliki could not have fought al-Qa'eda successfully without the help of the Awakening Councils that now, in the light of his success, will be expecting to be recruited in large numbers in the Iraqi police and national army. In return, the Sunni tribal leaders are expected to support al-Maliki to promote his centralist argument.

The big looser of the provincial elections is estimated to be the Iranian-backed SIIC which once dominated the Shi'a South, but lost its support due to the widely held -and quite unpopular to most of the Iraqis- view that the party serves Iranian aspirations. Its decentralization views and desire to create a southern Shi'a region similar to the status of the Kurdish Region seem to have damaged the party in favour of al-Maliki. A victory of the central state is also highlighted in the province of Nineveh in Mosul, where the Sunni Arab nationalist party al Hadbaa won over the once dominating Kurdistan Democratic Party and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan which sought the annexation of the Nineveh Plain and Sinjar to the Kurdistan Region. Nineveh is inhabited by Sunni Arabs, Kurds and ethnically diverse minorities such as the Shabak, Chaldo-Assyrian, Turkmen and Yezidi. Currently frustrated by the repressive methods of the Kurdish militia the vote of the minorities will be essential for the future status of the Nineveh territories and the question of whether it will be annexed by the Kurdistan Region or not.

The provincial elections have created an atmosphere of optimism to the international community about the prospect of Iraq to reinvent itself as a democratic and stable state. It is believed that al-Maliki will be given the mandate in the general elections to proceed with his vision of a unified Iraq. Afterwards, much will depend on his will to preserve security and strike a balance among the main Iraqi groups that compete for political power in order to prevent the re-emergence of extremist forces and any further ethno-sectarian divisions in the aftermath of the U.S. withdrawal in 2011. Whether Iraqi political forces manage to surpass the centralization/decentralization dilemma peacefully remains to be seen.■

The Iraqi Shi'a after U.S. withdrawal: repercussions for Lebanon

Styliani Saliari

It is beyond question that the Iraq War had a tremendous effect on the Arab world. Its impact was a change in the balance of power. Precisely, Iraq has become the very first Shi'a Arab country; this fact on the ground has enormous symbolic implications in the Middle East - which has always been perceived as being Sunni - as it showed that it is feasible for Arab Shiites to gain political power. Against this background, a new political-religious fault-line has emerged initiated by the Arab Sunnis who worry about a Shi'a revival which will capture the region and is epitomized in the so-called 'Shi'a Crescent'.

It seems as if the Twelver Shiites are no longer the 'forgotten Muslims', the 'heretics' which cannot represent the Arab world and provide a panacea to the Arab-Israeli issue: Iraq has become a Shi'a Arab state, Iran's geopolitical position has been strengthened after the overthrow of the Taliban and Saddam Hussein and during the 2006 war on Lebanon Sunni Arabs were rebelliously carrying pictures of Hizbullah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah.

Evaluations of these events culminated in hyperbolic statements. Disastrous alerts of an increasing Iranian hegemony began to loom. Sunni leaders such as King Abdullah II of Jordan depicted the emergence of a 'Shi'a Crescent' headed by Iran and incorporating Iraq, Alawite-ruled Syria, Lebanon's Hizbullah and the Syrian branch of Hamas. Although Hamas is a Sunni movement it is often portrayed as part of the 'Shi'a Crescent' in order to enforce the image of the 'dangerous Shiites who are coming' to take over the Arab world. Precisely, the idea of embedding Hamas creates even more fear among the Arab people as it implies that a part of the essentialised 'self' has already moved to the externalized 'other'. Furthermore, President Mubarak stated that the Shiites of Iraq were always loyal to Iran while Saudi Arabia and the Arab League complained about 'Hizbullah's misbehavior' during the Lebanon war in 2006 and then went even further to speak about a Shi'a struggle for ascendancy in the region to serve its master Iran.

Moreover, America's leading expert on political Shi'ism Vali Nasr speaks about a 'new paradigm in the region' referring to the Ayatollahs as one level of transnational Shi'a leadership and to the militias - Hizbullah, Mahdi Army, Badr Corps and Basij Revolutionary Guards in Iran - as another one. In June 2006 the U.S. Council on Foreign Rela-

tions organized a symposium called 'The Emerging Shi'a Crescent: Implications for U. S. Policy'. An assessment of these events implies that the Middle East is largely perceived in binary oppositions: Sunni versus Shiites implicating that there are two different transnational identity blocs. Hence, due to Hizbullah's popularity the forthcoming elections in Lebanon are perceived as a possible threat which will further concuss the foundation of the current political order in the region.

How correct are these accusations and how appropriate is the term 'Shi'a Crescent'? Can the Lebanese elections be essentially seen as Iranian elections and thus as a further step towards Shi'a supremacy in the region? Does Hizbullah identify itself with Iraqi Shiites and consider the political outcome of Iraq as something worth of imitating? On the surface, the idea of a 'Shi'a Crescent' might seem plausible. Nonetheless, as scholars such as Saad-Ghorayeb, a leading Lebanese expert on Hizbullah and a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment Middle East Centre emphasize, the theory is seriously flawed and therefore a more in depth analysis is required.

In order to unravel the notion of a 'Shi'a Crescent' it is necessary to consider the framework in which it is trapped: a concept that obscures more than it reveals as it backs the idea of a transnational monolithic Shi'a movement. This has major epistemological implications, i.e. it simplifies Shi'a identity politics by nurturing the myth of a monolithic and cohesive community characterized by a one-dimensional political orientation. The fact that Shi'a Islam has undergone revolutionary change epitomized in the Iranian Revolution in 1978-79 enables the increasing circulation and internalization of the idea of a transnational monolithic Shi'a movement which will spread throughout the Middle East. In other words, since Shi'ism has been politicized it is characterized by political and religious consistency.

However, a range of views about politics and religion objects to the notion of a monolithic, radical and pro-Iranian Shi'a community. Shi'ism cannot be equated with revolution per se, as there is also a quietist strain. According to Saad-Ghorayeb, the latter is represented by Ayatollah Abul-Qassim Khoei and his successor Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani (an Iranian born cleric who has achieved representation in Iraq) who stresses the importance of religious and scholarly matters and denies the doctrine of the velayat-e faqih established by Khomeini. They stand in opposition to the more prevalent followed political activist trend educed by clerics such as Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and Imam Moussa Al-Sadr. Thus, according to Maximilian Terhalle who serves as an expert on the Gulf region with the German Army, the existent competition among the various mujtahids in the context of modern-nation states has led to rivalries among Shi'a dominated states and started producing nationalist Shi'ism. The example of Lebanon in relation to Iraq will make this clear.

Looking at Lebanon and Hizbullah precisely, there is little doubt that Hizbullah is a strong and powerful agent in Lebanon. It showed its military capability outstandingly in the war with Israel in 2006. However, Hizbullah is also a political party holding 14 seats in the Lebanese Parliament and a social movement which provides fundamental

services. Hence, it is woven into the fabric of the Lebanese society. As Lara Deeb an associate professor of women's studies at UCI notes Hizbullah is neither a creation of Iran nor Syria but emerged due to Israel's occupation of south Lebanon from 1982 – 2000 and above all to stand up for Shiites in Lebanon who had been disfranchised historically. Hizbullah might have received significant help from the Revolutionary Guards in its creation and survival especially during the first years, adhere to Ayatollah Khamenei as its marja', sustain a special relationship with Iran which provides an unknown amount of economic aid to Hizbullah, however, Iran is not able to control the movement. Precisely, its push to incorporate the Shiites of Lebanon with a transnational Shi'a movement centered on Iran did fail due to Hizbullah's Arab identity and its growing Lebanese nationalism.

Additionally, according to Saad-Ghorayeb Iran and Hizbullah represent a distinct concept of political power from the Shi'a prevailed Iraqi government. The campaigns initiated by Hizbullah and its allies against Israel and U.S. imperialism did not strive merely for assuring greater participation of political power for Shiites. The movement's essential aim is the protection of the 'resistance priority' in securing Lebanon's sovereignty from U.S. and Western influence. In fact, Hizbullah's standpoint is that true empowerment means resistance and hence it has questioned the legitimacy of the Iraqi government while distinguishing it from the Shi'a political identity that reflects Hizbullah and its allies. If Hizbullah was really interested in the creation of a 'Shi'a Crescent' it would nurture the idea of an oil-rich Shi'a region adjacent to Iran. Thus, Saad-Ghorayeb concludes that actually Hizbullah does not identify itself with the Iraqi Shiites, much less aims at affiliating itself with them in order to form a Shi'a strategic alliance.

Shiites might have gained a sizeable visibility in the Middle Eastern landscape and developed into major political players; however, to speak about the emergence of a 'Shi'a Crescent' is untenable. A transnational monolithic Shi'a bloc which challenges the 'truths' established with the Treaty of Westphalia does not exist in the Middle East. In fact, the Shi'a identity is used within the nation-state for communal interests with reference to the government and parts of society. Hence, it is more appropriate to speak about the formation of nationalist Shi'ism although this term should not be taken as something absolute.

Rather, it seems as if the fabrication of the idea of a 'Shi'a Crescent' serves a particular policy. In the post-9/11 period, with the proliferation of Islamist movements challenging the U.S., Israel and the Arab regimes a possible amalgamation of 'the Shiites' is causing cries of dismay among the Sunni leaders which explains why they are propagating the myth of a 'Shi'a Crescent'. Particularly, with Iran and Hizbullah 'stealing' the Palestinian cause from the Arab world, addressing the sentiments of the people and adopting the role of the critic on Arab affairs in Iraq the legitimacy of the Sunni rulers is in danger. Nevertheless, instead of re-acting to these developments they intensify their ties with the U.S. and refrain themselves from any critical comments against Israel's war on Gaza. Hence, the only available means to reassure Sunni rulers' legitimacy is the sectarian argument which is not more than a useful rhetorical bludgeon that tries to present the Middle East through the prism of tribes and sects as the leading factors in Middle Eastern politics.■

Leaving Iraq, Living up to Saudi expectations"

Ilias Tasopoulos

Saudi Arabia's approach towards the US plans to pull out their armed forces from Iraq is indicative of the spirit that is prevailing in most of the GCC states. Once the notion of US withdrawal from Iraq had been identified as a feasible development in the near future which would involve major regional implications, Saudi Arabia started following a consistent policy.

While President Obama is announcing the US withdrawal plans from Iraq, the rulers of the Gulf countries are faced with a dilemma. All of them share the perception that the US is the «glue» that keeps Iraq together and prevents it from collapsing into Sunni, Shi'a and Kurdish pieces; however, inviting the US to maintain an active presence in Iraq is a task that is proving even more challenging. Israel's Operation Cast Lead in Gaza along with the long-standing relationship between the US and Israel, force them to dissociate themselves from US actions; while even the clinking of George W. Bush's and Shimon Peres' wine glasses during the Interfaith Dialogue Conference in New York last November was used by the Saudi regime's domestic opponents to discredit King Abdullah's rule. Things were different two years ago. Riyadh, acting as if it was the protector of the Sunni population in Iraq, had almost publicly threatened Washington by announcing that it would finance Sunni Muslims in sectarian fighting against Shiites if a US pullout from Iraq was decided.

A speech by Prince Turki al-Faisal and leaked statements from King Abdullah were major indications of a policy turn back at that time, as the Saudi regime had previously abstained from backing local parties. Saudi Arabia, following the demands of the Sunni religious establishment, declared its support to Sunni groups inside Iraq, as it had realized that the US pullout was possible to occur. As the members of the large Shi'a minority of Saudi Arabia (more than 10% of the Saudi population) did not associate themselves with their co-religionists in Iraq, the kingdom was not afraid of a possible awakening of the Sunni-Shi'a sectarian divide. In contrast to the situation during the Shi'a rise in Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979, Saudi Arabian Shiite religious leaders kept a safe distance from the situation in Iraq, due their fear of being the next targets of the sectarian violence. When the occasion arose, Saudi Arabia backed US plans to send extra troops to Iraq, possibly fearing Iran's empowerment, due to Prime Minister al-Maliki's relationship with Iran.

During that period reports appeared in the press arguing that the Saudis were funding former Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi's efforts to form an alternative coalition in Iraq. Since then however, Nouri al-Maliki's Shi'a

government, in consultation with the US, has been following a different course of action, by employing a reconciliatory policy toward Sunni tribal leaders and attempting to mediate between Iran and the US.

In the last months, partly in order to allay the fears of the Sunni population, Sunni political prisoners were set free while government posts were given to Sunni tribal leaders, employing them against the infiltration of al-Qaeda operatives in Iraq. Tribal Support Councils were established to organize the local tribes to back the security forces in their campaign against radical groups. Baghdad paid them approximately $21,000 when they were initially founded, and since then they seem to receive $10,000 every month.

According to unconfirmed reports, Prime Minister Maliki also performed a political manoeuvre; he attempted to persuade the US to lower their pressure against the Iranian regime, in exchange for Iran to stop supporting efforts from Shi'a groups (such as SIIC) to topple his government. Although the outcome of his attempt could not be foreordained, some signs indicate that it might have been successful. On January 2009, contrary to the European Union, which removed the exiled Iranian opposition group People's Mujahideen Organisation of Iran from the EU list of banned terrorist groups, the US State Department decided to keep it on its list of terrorist organizations.

Despite the political differences with the al-Maliki government, ongoing contacts existed between Riyadh and Baghdad, presumably with American intervention, in order to put pressure on Sunni groups inside Iraq. Or, to put it bluntly, Baghdad and Washington wanted to eliminate the sources which fund radical Sunni groups. Members of the Saudi regime are said to assist Sunni groups that perform destabilizing actions inside Iraq. In 2006, a Cairo-based Associated Press report claimed that "Saudis have been using religious events, like the hajj pilgrimage to Mecca and a smaller pilgrimage, as cover for illicit money transfers" while according to interviews with several Iraqi drivers "some money is carried into Iraq on buses with returning pilgrims". Saudi Arabia has also been accused of allowing fighters sympathetic to al-Qaeda to go to Iraq in order to "let off steam" at home. US services have estimated that about 40% of the 60 to 80 foreign fighters entering Iraq each month are from Saudi Arabia. Furthermore Saudi media, particularly Al Arabiya, are considered by professor As'ad Abu Khalil, as instrumental in having stirred up discord between the Sunnis and Shiites during the past years. These allegations have not affected the Saudi-American political relations.

Since last year, the US have embarked on a diplomatic initiative to demonstrate that the security situation in Iraq has improved, following the successful campaign against rebel groups and militia associated with the Mahdi Army. One of the basic components of this initiative has been to convince Arab states to reopen their embassies in Baghdad. The smaller GCC states have been on the frontline of this initiative. UAE foreign affairs minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan visited Baghdad in June, 2008 becoming the first GCC official to visit Iraq since 2003. UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait were quick to name ambassadors in Iraq. Saudi Arabia eventually succumbed to the American demand of opening its embassy in Iraq on October 2008, when Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sultan bin Abdul Aziz stated that Saudi diplo-

mats would be sent to Iraq.

The Iranian threat certainly influenced Saudi Arabia's and the other Gulf states' decision of aligning with the US initiative. The growing influence of Iran in the region has increased the awareness of the nearby regimes. On February 2009, Saudi Arabia, following the lead of other Arab states, was quick to condemn the "hostile comments" by a member of the powerful Expediency Council of Iran claiming that Bahrain was part of Iran. Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak and King Abdullah II of Jordan went even further by visiting Bahrain only a few days after this incident, in order to emphasize their support.

Although Saudi Arabia agreed to upgrade its diplomatic mission in Baghdad by opening an embassy, it has not named an ambassador for Iraq yet, evoking the lack of security for the embassy staff. It is true that a coalition of Iraqi Sunni Muslim insurgents has been warning Saudi Arabia not to open the embassy in Baghdad while more mainstream Sunni groups have also declared their objections to such a decision. Furthermore, analysts contend that it is probably more dangerous for Arab diplomats than American ones. However, Saudi Arabia is slowing down this process as it would prefer to use it as a diplomatic weapon in a future negotiation with the US and Iraq. The kingdom has already secured a 20 billion dollar weapons package, consisting of sophisticated hardware, from the Bush administration in order to stop "playing a counterproductive role in Iraq".

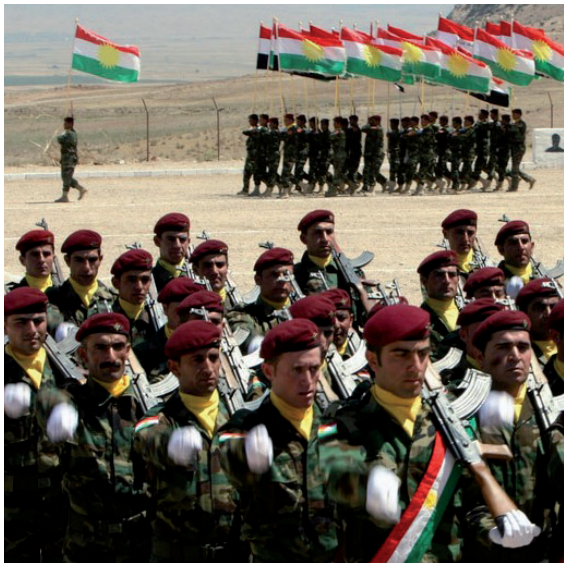
From an American perspective, Saudi Arabia is still characterized as "one of the few good news stories for U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East". This seemingly standard statement made by the American ambassador Ford M. Fraker in Riyadh during the 17th Annual Arab-U.S. Policymakers Conference last October, highlights an important theme of the Saudi-American relationship: the difficulty of a liberal state like the US to sustain good relations with a regime that has been widely charged of several human rights violations. Especially after the 9/11 attacks, there has been a massive non-orchestrated campaign from a lot of different sides, criticising Saudi Arabia's role in the proliferation of terrorist groups in the Middle East. From a Saudi perspective, a large part of its foreign policy vis-a-vis the US involves its attempt to counter the negative perceptions of Saudi Arabia inside the US. According to the American ambassador in Riyadh "the joke in the Embassy is that as U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia I should be spending 80% of my time in Washington and 20% of my time in Saudi Arabia because the problems in the relationship are in Washington, they're not in Saudi Arabia".

However, during the last years advisors of the kingdom have enjoyed access to influential American newspapers (e.g. Nawaf Obaid to the Washington Post) while Saudis have found sympathetic ears in the higher level of the administration (King Abdullah had regular contacts with President Bush and Vice President Cheney) concerning their requests. Expectedly, the attempts from Saudi Arabia to influence the US decision-making process in its favour have met resistance. Recently, an Israeli affiliated think tank criticized an American Law that enables and funds persons from the Middle East to perform speeches in American Universities, thereby facilitating the "Saudi infiltration into the American educational system, from elementary school and up." The Virginia Republican congressman Frank R. Wolf has also voiced his critic over Saudi Arabia's influence on US affairs by sending a letter to the Georgetown University in which he asked the President of the University to explain how a $20 million donation from the Saudi Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal was used. The reaction could be partly attributed to influential Israeli lobby groups inside the US whose target is to maintain the American-Israeli special relationship. Symbolically, the $20 billion weapons package for Saudi Arabia, proposed by the Bush administration, was approved last June alongside with a $170 million increase in security assistance to Israel. ■

Future *stability in Iraq: Common next door neighbors' interest*

Anastasia Maria Kalliga Chrysogelou

As a result of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, neighboring countries such as Turkey, Syria and Jordan, have experienced and continue to experience some significant security and economic repercussions, emanating from Iraq. Nevertheless, as security slowly improves in Iraq, and the country has begun to resemble a democratic state, albeit fragile and imperfect, the U.S., under a new presidential guidance has proposed a gradual withdrawal of troops with the objective of a complete pullout by December 2011. Under these circumstances, future shifting realities in Iraq, will affect neighbors' realities as well.



After the U.S.-led coalition's operation in Iraq, Turkey was threatened by a number of challenges arising from Iraq. The rebirth of the Kurdish question placed not only Iraq's stability at risk but Turkey's as well. The transformation of Iraq's state structure from a unitary to a federal one was not welcomed by Turkey; particularly, where it concerned the formation of a semi autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan as a federal region (The Kurdistan Regional Government, KRG). As the decentralization of its neighbor progresses, Turkish fears escalate over the potential for a future independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq, a development which would certainly inflame Turkey's Kurdish nationalists and create significant repercussions on Turkey's internal stability.

With America's impending withdrawal, Turkey's current concern is the possibility that Iraq may become a loose confederation, based on sect and ethnicity, with a large degree of decentralization. Such an outcome could allow the Kurds to expand the federal region of Kurdistan from Sinjar and Tal Afar in the West, to Khanaqin and Mendeli in the East, including the oil-rich Kirkuk region. From Turkey's perspective, should Kirkuk and its oil fall under defacto Kurdish control as a result of the constitutionally mandated referendum of Kirkuk, such an event would constitute

a major steppingstone towards Kurdish independence. Although initially the referendum was set to be held on November 15, 2007, it has not yet materialized and until now no mutually agreed framework has been formulated in order to solve the Kirkuk question.

Taking into consideration the strategic and economic importance of Kirkuk, a potential annexation would spark a violent reaction by the Arabs and Turkmens. This would not only trigger instability in Iraq but potentially in Turkey as well. Therefore, an effective solution to secure Kirkuk has to be developed before U.S. withdrawal from Iraq. Otherwise, as long as the armed forces in Iraq are composed of mostly Shiite and Kurdish recruits with both communities separately maintaining their own militias, it will be very difficult for any central authority to prevent or control a potential ethno-sectarian war in Kirkuk or elsewhere in Iraq.

Moreover, Turkey has recently embarked down an ambitious political path of cooperating fully with the KRG in order to try and eliminate the PKK safe-haven in Iraqi Kurdistan and with the additional objective of preventing Iraqi Kurdistan from gaining independence. Given the fact that the KRG is landlocked and threatened by the Iraqi Arabs, it should maintain good relations with Turkey, particularly as the KRG's only other potential ally, Iran, is facing a 'Kurdish problem' as well - although not to the same extent as Turkey. Iran is equally threatened by a resurgent Kurdish nationalism while perhaps more damagingly is on exceedingly bad terms with Iraqi Kurds primarily ally, the U.S.

Bearing this in mind, the incentives offered by Turkey for cooperation, regarding trade, investments and pipelines, are vital to the KRG. Particularly, even if the Iraqi Kurds were to control Kirkuk's oil reserves they could not, in the short term, export this oil without the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline. Therefore the best answer, although a difficult one for Kurds to accept due to their unyielding strive for independence, is for Kirkuk to become a federal area. Whereas power will be shared among the various groups (Arabs, Kurds, Turkmens and Christians), until conditions get more permissible.

Besides Turkey, Syria represented another of Iraq's neighbors that suspected that the U.S. presence in Iraq could have jeopardized its national interests. Post the U.S. invasion, it was in Damascus' interests to support the flow of foreign jihadists to Iraq and back former Iraqi Ba'athists in order to create and maintain a high level of instability in Iraq with the intent of preventing the formation of a pro – Western government.

Syrian political logic dictated that providing chaos was maintained in Iraq, U.S. forces would be overwhelmed and thus no longer pose a threat to Syria's territorial sovereignty or security. However, the Assad regime failed to take into account the dynamic of al-Qa'eda, who last September claimed responsibility for a fatal car bomb in Damascus that murdered 17 civilians. Those responsible were all members of the Fatah al-Islam group, whose roots were based in northern Lebanon and reported that their group was closely connected to al-Qa'eda in Iraq. This event forced the Assad regime to shift its previous policy, i.e. it became less hostile to al-Qa'eda-style jihadists.

America's plan of a successful withdrawal is inextricably linked with a regional approach while the improvement of relations with Syria is considered to be the basic precondition to materialize this approach. In order to achieve this goal, the U.S. should provide diplomatic and economic incentives to Syria to convince the regime in Damascus to secure Syria's porous borders. However, Syria will not act unless it knows that normalized ties

with the U.S. are on the table. As long as the "land for peace" deal with Israel continues to be the U.S.'s primary incentive in a bid to convince Syria to reduce its interference in Iraq, Syria is being given a window of opportunity to encourage the U.S. to apply pressure on Tel Aviv to resume the peace process so Syria may regain the Annexed Golan Heights. From Syria's perspective, by adopting a more favorable position in regards to Iraq, their efforts should be reciprocated with the pushing forward of Syria's WTO application, additional economic incentives and possibly an acknowledgment of Damascus' interests in Lebanon. With these cards on the table, a carefully conducted and successful U.S. withdrawal would very much be in Syria's own interest.

However, if Iraq implodes into a full-scale civil war after the U.S. withdrawal, Syria would have to cope with an even greater influx of Iraqi refugees compared to what it has faced over the past four years (the UNHCR estimates that, approximately 1,500 Iraqis enter Syria daily). Such an event would prove to be extremely detrimental to Syria as the placing of significant strain on the country's finances could provoke civil unrest. Another worrying consequence is the possibility of sectarian conflict erupting among the refugee populations. The danger for host countries would be the potentiality for refugee camps becoming hubs for insurgency groups and fertile grounds for extremism, which may threaten host governments such as the Alawi dominated regime of Bashar al Assad. In addition, a potential turmoil within Iraq would also affect the Kurdish issue in Syria, where the Kurdish people are estimated at 1.7 million. Should an independent Kurdish state emerge, as a possible result of civil war after the U.S. withdrawal, Syrian as well as Turkish Kurds could be inspired to fight for further improvement of their rights or even independence. From that point of view stability in Iraq after the U.S. withdrawal is crucial for the Assad regime.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is yet another of Iraq's neighbors that is becoming unsettled by the increasing presence of Iraqi refugees. After the fall of Saddam Hussein and particularly since the outbreak of large scale sectarian violence, the number of Iraqis seeking refuge in Jordan has grown steadily. It is estimated that nearly one million Iraqi refugees - many of them Sunnis from Baghdad and western Iraq - have already fled to Jordan. For a country of less than six million people, the arrival of one million Iraqi refugees has increased internal security concerns and aggravated economic issues. Diaspora communities can transfer the traumas and aggression of conflict into their new settings.

The threat posed by refugee communities to a host country's security is well known to Jordan who had to quell the Palestinian refugee uprising in the 1970's, and thus the memories to compound the fear of a similar situation emerging among its Iraqi refugee population particularly with the known increase in Islamist militants that are transgressing their border. After the November 2005 Amman suicide bombings, which killed sixty people, the government's fears of the growth of Sunni Islamic militancy, led the kingdom to reduce the number of Iraqis entering Jordan. Although, many of the Iraqi refugees who initially entered Jordan were relatively wealthy, as violence in Iraq grew worst, those who fled from Iraq were emerging from a wider spectrum of economic backgrounds and many were unable to sustain themselves in Jordan. This influx of refugees fueled inflation and shortages which aggravated existing inequalities within Jordan. Additionally, the Iraq effect undoubtedly has led to a boom in Jordanian's real estate business. According to recent reports, in some cases housing costs in affluent areas have tripled.

Furthermore, as Saddam-era benefits are a thing of the past (in 2000 with market prices around $30 a barrel, Jordan received Iraqi oil at $9.50) and as Iraqi refugees have increased oil-demand, Amman has been forced, in order to reduce the budget deficit, to pass the cost onto the Jordanian consumers, therefore increasing the prices of petrol, gas, and home heating oil between 12% and 43%. Consequently, the problems mentioned above have fostered xenophobia, increasing resentment towards Iraqi refugees, particularly since the November 2005 Amman suicide bombings. Today, due to the existence of President Obama's goal of redeploying large numbers of U.S. forces, Jordan looks forward to facing a stronger, more stable and moderate and "less federal" Iraq in the future. From Jordan's perspective, a serious effort for Iraq's reconstruction will benefit the Jordanian economy which is facing a global energy and food crisis. In particular, stability in Iraq will eventually be beneficial to Jordan's prosperity. Since Iraq owes a total of $1.8 to the Jordanian private sector and to the Central Bank of Jordan accordingly, Iraq may be able to fulfil past oil agreements. Precisely, Iraq is expected to provide Jordan with oil at preferential prices. Additionally, the prospect of stability along with the adoption of an effective and large-scale resettlement program would permit Iraqi refugees to return home, while the serious economic, political and security challenges which are faced by the host countries (Jordan and Syria) would decrease. Otherwise, if Iraq ends up in an ongoing ethno-sectarian war, Jordan will be vulnerable to Iraq's increasing chaos due to its lack of economic or political influence. This will deeply affect the kingdom's internal security, as instability inside the country will lead to a deterioration of Iraq's border control, increasing not only the number of Iraqi refugees on Jordan's soil, but also the appearance of violence and terrorism emanating from Zarqawi-style Salafist radicalism in Iraq.

Iraq's neighbors are faced with unmanageable repercussions deriving from the 2003 war, such as refugees, terrorism and sectarian conflicts. Hence, current shifting realities in Iraq mainly resulting from U.S.'s desire to withdraw, will lead to additional concerns for Iraq's next door neighbors' whose own security interests are more or less connected with those of Iraq. Unfortunately, Iraq's neighboring countries do not hold the key to Iraq's salvation; however, they can play a significant role regarding the country's future stability, which will further lead to the promotion of their own common interests. Therefore, as al-Maliki stressed in the past, "the region needs to communicate among its members in a rational way to cope with the challenges it faces". Hence, Turkey, Jordan and Syria should take these words into deep consideration while allocating their capabilities at the service of the Iraqi government to enable it to preserve security and stability at home. Nevertheless, stability is only a feasible outcome, if Iraq and its neighbors prevent Kirkuk and the refugee issue from turning into a flashpoint. ■

US troops withdrawal from Iraq: Calibrating the Israeli interests

A. Karal

With the impending withdrawal of US troops from Iraq, Israel's concerns regarding its security have augmented, potentially influencing its relations with adjacent countries. Threatened by the rise of Iranian power, Israel even appears receptive to a rapprochement with Syria. This might be a turning point inaugurating a new Israeli policy aimed at maintaining the regional balance of power. However, with the likely formation of an Israeli right-wing coalition government it is possible that the state might deviate from the moderate path.

In February, Barak Obama announced the withdrawal of US combat troops by the end of August 2010. As the war deprives other pressing policy issues from essential resources, the new president is eager to disengage his country from Iraq. Still, about one third of the troops will remain in place until the end of 2011 –as stipulated in the US-Iraqi Status of Forces Agreement signed last year- in order to "train the Iraqi security forces and complete the transition of responsibility to Iraq." Both Barack Obama and Joe Biden, the new US Vice President, appear to be employing the bi-partisan Iraq Study Group's (ISG) instructions in their diplomatic effort to achieve Iraq's stabilization. The ISG report issued in December 2006 called for a precipitated exit from Iraq and advocated the engagement of both Syria and Iran in the discussions as a means of curbing violence incited by the insurgency groups. However, for fear of accentuating the possibility of Iraq plunging into civil war and chaos, the Bush administration had opposed to the withdrawal of US troops.

The ISG report was neither welcomed by Ehud Olmert, the then Israeli prime minister, as it raised fears over state security. In his opinion, the report was attempting to link the situation in Iraq with the Arab-Israeli conflict, and his opposition to a hasty pullout was officially stated in March 2007, while addressing the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. Moreover, the same year five Israeli study groups (Ministry of Defense, Military Intelligence, the Israeli Defence Force Planning Department and the National Security Council) issued reports presented to the Israeli Minister of Defence Ehud Barak, in which they presented the perceived detrimental repercussions on Israel as a consequence of the imminent US withdrawal from Iraq. The rise of radical Islamist movements, the destabilizing effects on moderate Arab states and the reinforcement of Iran were all sited as viable threats to Israeli interests.

In their assessment of neighbouring states, the report concluded that a hasty exit from Iraq could cause the subversion of the Jordanian Hashemite regime owing to radical movements' hostility to the leadership. King Abdullah's moderate regime is friendly to both the US and Israel while the latter considers Jordanian domestic stability as vital. Israel regards Jordan as a "strategic asset", since it constitutes a buffer state for Iraqi Shiites. Furthermore, Jordan prohibits the infiltration of terrorists into Israel through its borderlines. Last summer, Jordan appointed its first ambassador to Iraq in five years, a

move which signified not only the Jordanian recognition and support for improvements in Iraq's political sphere and its security but also acted as a means to hold off Iranian influence on the fledgling government. The estimated 500,000 to 750,000 Iraqi refugees in Jordan, who are expected to return to their homes, explain Jordan's craving for the restoration of Iraqi stability.

On the other hand, Iran, by far Israel's greatest regional antagonist, benefited highly from the war in Iraq. The toppling of Saddam Hussein and the rise to power of a Shi'a government helped Iran increase its regional leverage. Furthermore, the deployment of the US forces in Iraq has shifted both time and energy away from US intentions to tack of the Iranian nuclear program. According to the ISG report, Iran offers financial support and arms to Shiite militias, an accusation that rests on claims of long standing relations between the Iranian state and the Iraqi Shi'a population particularly strengthened through the flight and exile of many of the Shi'a politicians to Iran under Saddam's regime. It is predicted that the American pullout will create a vacuum of power giving the chance to Iran to fill it. In order to stave off the threat of unmitigated Iranian influence in Iraq, preliminary meetings were held between American and Iranian diplomats over Iraq's security in 2007 however little was achieved as the US quickly withdrew the offer to collaborate efforts. Unlike the Bush administration, Barack Obama's government seeks to prevent Iran from building nuclear weapons by exhausting all diplomatic means. Accordingly, President Ahmadinejad appeared receptive to the American overture in his speech to the Iranian people in February. However, it is doubtful whether these negotiations can appease Israeli insecurity over the 'Shiite Crescent'.

Thus, Syria emerges as a key state mainly due to its ties with Iran. The Syrian regime, home to 1.5 million Iraqi refugees, re-established diplomatic relations with Iraq in November 2006. In a bid to outstrip the deterioration of American-Syrian relations following the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, Barack Obama sent a Congressional delegation to Damascus in January as the US appear keen on securing a Syrian-Israeli peace treaty. The delegation was assigned to discuss, among other things, Iraq's security issue. Bilateral indirect peace talks were once again restarted in February 2007 under Turkish mediation however these too were quickly stunted as a result of Israel's December offensive on Gaza. Benjamin Netanyahu, the leader of the conservative Likud assigned to form the new Israeli government in the coming weeks, had declared his opposition to a diplomatic track with Syria during his campaign. Nevertheless, according to the Sunday Times of February 22, the Mossad and the military intelligence will urge him as soon as he takes office to negotiate with Syria as a means of avoiding a bilateral war, but perhaps more with the intention of encouraging the distancing of Syria from Iran. Indeed, despite their durable bond, Syria and Iran seem to differentiate in their rhetoric. Unlike President Ahmadinejad's statement regarding his possible use of Iran's nuclear weapons to eliminate Israel, President Bashar Assad assumed a more diplomatic stance by suggesting the possibility of making peace with Israel. In an interview on February, the Syrian President stated that the offensive on the Gaza Strip would not intercept the peace talks. However, according to the Syrian President, a right-wing Israeli government will hinder the reach of such an agreement.

Overall, Israel's regional concerns stem from Iran's nuclear program, the volatile borders and the consequences of the upcoming American withdrawal from Iraq. Thus, negotiating with Syria could change the state of insecurity offering an alternative foothold. However, as Israel's foreign policy will depend on the new governmental coalition that Benjamin Netanyahu is most likely to form, the possibilities that such a development will take place seem to be small, given the harsh rhetoric of the Israeli right wing parties. ■

Ringing down the curtain in Iraq: The "jihad troupe" out in search of a new theatre

Marina Eleftheriadou

As the final part of the play "American adventures in Iraq" has started with the Obama election and the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), the critics and the audience have already presented their retrospective of the play and evaluated its possible influence and repercussions outside the theatre of Iraq. The community of jihadi (al-Qaeda related) actors is believed to be one of the most highly affected. However, on the one hand, it is too early to draw any final conclusions until it is really over. On the other hand, this premature analysis is primarily based on a previous staging of the play in the Afghan theatre and thus it plays down the importance of the theatre itself. The play is grandiose and it requires a set which Iraq lacks.

The conclusion of the SOFA agreement on the one hand, which provides for U.S. combat troops to have left the Iraqi cities by the end of June and all U.S. troops by 2012 (with no reference to military trainers and permanent bases whatsoever), and the Obama election on a platform of withdrawing the troops within 16 months on the other hand, makes the operation in Iraq look like a completed job. Additionally, the recent decline in violence as a result of the "troops surge" reinforces this perception. The violence is indeed lower by 60% and the main reason for that are the splits inside the Sunni camp as a result of a number of strategic mistakes conducted by al-

Qaeda affiliated jihadists grouped predominately in the "Islamic State of Iraq" led by Abu Umar al-Baghdadi (successor of the "Majlis Shura al-Mujahidin" led by Zarqawi) more broadly known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).

More precisely, by instigating the Sunni-Shi'a sectarian strife, the latter two brought the Sunni community under the Shi'a militias' fire without being able to offer them sufficient protection against these attacks. At the same time, they targeted their natural allies inside the Sunni camp on the basis that they either did not fight -at all or well enough- or they did not adjust to their version of Islam. Their wrath was first directed to the tribal leaders, primarily in Anbar and later to other groups that dared to raise their objections to AQI's tactics (e.g. Islamic Army of Iraq, 1920 Revolution Brigades, Ansar al-Sunna). In Anbar, the tribes reacted by forming in January 2006 the "Awakening Councils" which were armed and supported by the US army. These groupings, due to their better knowledge of both the operational system and the operatives of the AQI (as many previously were part of or familiar with the latter) managed to drive it out of the province. Their outrightly successful methods were soon "socialized" and emulated elsewhere through the establishment of the "Sons of Iraq" that continued to sweep al-Qaeda operatives out of other provinces, too.

Under this prism, many were quick to declare the extinction of al-Qaeda's danger in Iraq and instead advocated a re-emphasis on the fleeing al-Qaeda operatives (mostly non-Iraqis) heading to the resurgent insurgency in Afghanistan and its umbilical cord in Pakistan, to other Middle Eastern countries especially those around Israel or simply to their respective native countries. However, the Islamist insurgency in Iraq is far from over yet, as the gains which have been achieved against it are not permanent. First of all, the AQI has been tactically defeated but not eliminated. It can somehow remerge in the future. Its operatives have moved to areas such as Diyala, Ninewah and Baghdad and generally they have gone underground until the conditions get more permissive.

Moreover, there seems to be an acknowledgement among the AQI operatives of the setbacks their scornfulness and arrogance towards the other groups brought about and, therefore, a new more conciliating tone is evident, followed by fewer attacks against the non-jihadist groups as well as the tribal groupings. This reevaluated stance can bear fruits when the tribal leaders get disenchanted by their "honey moon" with the U.S. and the Iraqi government. Recently the U.S. have passed the administration of the Awakening Councils to the Iraqi government which, out of fear of losing its Shi'a edge, has pledged to absorb only 20% of them in the security forces and with a smaller salary (for the other 80% there is a vague promise for civilian government posts). This alienation can be accelerated by rifts inside the Sunni anti- al-Qaeda bloc. There are already signs pointing to that direction inside the "Awakening Councils" where two competing camps have been created.

While the Islamist-jihadi trend of the Iraqi insurgency is not entirely dismounted, several reports suggest that many of the jihadists leave Iraq in a manner resembling the hundreds of Afghan-Arabs that left Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal culminating in the creation of the "nomadic jihad" phenomenon. However, it would be more accurate to say, that the biggest issue for the Islamic insurgency are not the militants leaving the front but the lack of new recruits willing to enter it. This phenomenon can be attributed to the loss of Anbar from where most of the foreign fighters had entered the battleground. A second reason can be found in the possible recruits' disillusionment with -not only the aforementioned intra-conflicts and diminishing eagerness on the

part of locals to host them- but also the role they should play there. Most of the foreigners that came to Iraq ended up in suicide operations. Martyrdom is noble but it is more fulfilling when it is achieved during a regular fight. The reason behind their use in suicide bombings can be found in the geography of Iraq which rendered large training camps impossible to sustain, especially after the loss of Anbar whose deserts could compensate for the flatness of the ground. The only other suitable place could be the mountainous northern Iraq but it is under Kurdish control. Moreover, neighboring states (Syria, Iran) which had an interest to host them were reluctant to do that openly as this would draw U.S. wrath. As a result any training (mostly in Syria) was performed covertly and on a small scale. For that reason the training could be provided only in safe houses and as the Islamists were losing cities one after the other they turned more and more underground. Under these circumstances only indoctrination for martyrdom and the handling of a suicide belt could be done safely. This fact explains also the general turn to suicide bombings after 2006.

Hence it becomes obvious that most of the foreign militants cannot carry on their struggle outside Iraq since they are dead. Still, the experience of the Afghan Arab nomads could be relevant for those who escaped the fate of suicide bombers. These survivors usually had a previous training (as part of their military experience in an army, their participation in other conflict zones or other training camps); or they managed to stand out and demonstrate their skills fast enough. After Afghanistan the Islamists went to the "open fronts" of Bosnia, Chechnya and Algeria while others went to their native countries to "spark the revolution" there. Thus, the question arises where Iraqi veterans or new recruits of today will go?

It would seem more logical for them to spread throughout the Middle East or the West given that from their experience in the urban environment of Iraq they developed valuable skills in the matter of logistics, security and clandestine organization. However, unlike twenty years ago, those states are aware that they might come and therefore more prepared to prevent their arrival. Moreover, the current organizational pattern of jihadi groups is far more decentralized. Thus, although a number of "returnees" is expected to contribute, the jihad in these places is reserved for the local al-Qaeda franchise groups. The latter have benefited the most from the Iraqi jihad. However, the "Iraq factor" will be evident not so much in the fighters coming back to man the struggle but in the techniques and the know-how first developed in Iraq and then spread worldwide from the vast repertoire of related footages circulated through the Internet.

The real jihad call for professional militants is to be found elsewhere where there a promising conflict is going on and where vital space for free movement, training and socializing with co-believers is available. The place that represents this ideal to the outmost is Afghanistan (followed by North Africa -Sahel-, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen). In Afghanistan real fighting is taking place and hence an aspiring militant has the opportunity to

demonstrate his abilities. Already in 2008, a 33% rise in insurgent attacks was reported while the coalition forces' losses have been higher in Afghanistan than in Iraq since May 2008 (except November) and they will probably rise even more when the Obama administration materializes the redeployment of around 30.000 troops from Iraq to Afghanistan as more troops will engage into fighting. The prospect of participating in real battles has attracted a large number of foreigners to that point that the Afghan defense minister, Abdul Rahim Wardak, claimed that "in some encounters last year 60% of the Taliban fighters were foreign".

Beside the chance of a clear-cut struggle without sectarian complications, the nomad jihadists are attracted by the vast safe haven stretching out over the tribal areas of Pakistan. In 2001, al-Qaeda managed to escape and survive in this tribal belt and even set training camps (of course smaller and less organized) in Shakai Valley in South Waziristan. Since then it has moved from South to North Waziristan and lately to the Swat valley in the North-West Frontier Province. Although there have been anti-foreign militants purges either by tribal leaders or the Pakistani army, foreigners predominately from Central Asian states (mostly Uzbeks), Chechnya and China (Uighurs) and lately more and more Arabs, have been flooding the area. Their number according to Islamabad's estimates is estimated now to be around 8.000.

In order to improve the security situation in Afghanistan similar to Iraq there are several proposals on the table, however all of them are flawed. Sealing off the 2,600 km border with the available number of troops is impossible even if the Pakistani army operates on the other side. Co-opting the tribal leaders in Afghanistan as in Iraq presupposes a conviction from their part that the NATO forces are determined to stay and fight on their side as long as it takes, which is not present and therefore they are afraid of the consequences. In any case with the sanctuary in Pakistan, the southern and eastern parts of the country will always be subjected to attacks. In Pakistan, pressuring the government to move forcefully against the tribal zone is equal -at this point- with being forced to commit suicide; Islamabad will avoid it for as long as it can as it is evident from the agreements the government concluded with tribal pro-Taliban leaders in South, North Waziristan and recently Swat.

Co-opting parts of the insurgency (Taliban, Haqqani Network and Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddun) against al-Qaeda looks more promising. However, efforts to this end (Karzai openings, Saudi-mediated talks) had minimal results and even were refuted by the Taliban. In any case a winning party has few incentives to negotiate. Even if that could be achieved, it would require respective moves on the other side of the border. However, any alliances and anti-alliances in the Federal Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) have been short-term and extremely fluid and given that there are plenty of actors involved, the foreign al-Qaeda related presence there will be prudent enough to keep its options open and try not to alienate its natural allies as it did in Iraq. In any case they are starring in the same play; no need for prima donnas. The curtains will rise in spring when the (fighting) season begins. ■

BOOK REVIEW

Qu'est-ce que le salafisme?

Bernard Rougier (ed.), Paris: PUF (Presses Universitaires de France), 2008.

Stella Athanasoulia

A series of French and foreign scholars and researchers have embarked on an effort to approach a phenomenon that has increased in "popularity" since 9/11 in western media, academic communities and think–tanks; however, it still remains widely ambiguous. Analyses which focus on extremist movements in the Muslim world quite often use the term "Salafism" along with "Jihadism", "Wahhabism" and "extremist Islam". This kind of mixing of theological, militant and political terms obscures more than it reveals while confusing the reader and intensifying his or hers already troubled perception of the phenomenon under discussion. This work - the first one to approach the Salafist phenomenon under a global prism - sheds light on the course of salafism from its cradle in the Arabian Peninsula to its apparition in the Parisian suburbs, passing by the Middle Eastern world and particularly Morocco.

In the first part, Bernard Rougier traces the ideology, birth, principal figures and concepts of Salafism. According to the Salafist thought, returning to the sources of the religion as it was practiced by Prophet Muhammad and his companions – the "pious ancestors" – is the only way to protect Islam from the perils surrounding it, in a time where different movements and interpretations have alienated the religion from its deepest meaning. Thus, using the holy Qur'an and the Prophet's Sunna (his words, decisions and attitudes) are the only tools to give answers to everyday life's questions. Salafism, born during the unstable period of the grand Fitna (the conflict within Islam which gave birth to the Sunni and Shi'a doctrines) in the 8th century, was promoted by the Hanbali School of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence). During the Middle Ages, Salafism was influenced by major thinkers and intellectuals, such as Ibn Taymiyya who attached great importance to the notion of jihad against the infidels but also against Muslims who

committed apostasy. In the 17th century, Saudi Mohammed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab as well as Pakistani Abou Ala Mawdudi revived in their preaching Ibn Hanbal's and Ibn Taymiyya's thought. Another influential and radical figure – in terms of theology and in relation to politics – was the Albanian theologist Nasir al-Din al-Albani, who inspired in the 1960s the "new partisans of the Hadith", a branch which was responsible for the siege of Mecca in 1979.

Moreover, a typology is provided: Literal Salafism rejects political participation and concentrates on the holy texts. The traditional Wahhabi institution in Saudi Arabia is closer to this type; however, the two approaches never totally converged. Reformist Salafism privileges a political approach of the world, remaining highly conservative, which reminds one of the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology but also the Sahwa movement, expressed in the kingdom. Jihadist Salafism places the duty of jihad, be it individual or collective, local or global in the core of its ideology.

All those aspects of modern salafism are present in the Saudi kingdom. According to David Commins, different movements have been created in a context where relations between the regime and the religious institution have taken various forms, from cooperation to hostile coexistence. While the regime was keen to host the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s, chased at that time by the Egyptian and Syrian regimes, its "Occidentalism" has been put into question numerous times due to its cooperation with "infidels". After the siege of Mecca in 1979, some of the regime's religious prestige could be restored as it canalized some of the most "dangerous" religious elements towards the Afghan jihad. Nevertheless, it was questioned again in 1990 in view of King Fahd's call for American protection and its resulting military presence in the Peninsula. This call, that caused a great debate among intellectuals and ulamas, was the reason for the rising of the Sahwa movement, qualifying the regime as impious.

Bernard Rougier underlines the modern jihadist aspect of Salafism in his analysis of the Afghan jihad. Under the influence of the Palestinian ideologue Abdallah Azzam, a new form of jihad, liberated from the essential permission of the leader (a constant element of the Salafist thought), has been accessible and open to call for by every Muslim. This "democratization" has had a double effect on the concept of jihad; the notion of the "martyr" warrior has emerged through its privatization, while the possibility to declare jihad in every territory which poses a confrontation for Muslims with "infidels" has opened the way for its globalization. This situation marks the rupture between "classic", territorially-oriented jihadism and its "international" aspect, introduced in the 1990s by Ossama bin Laden's Al Qaida, which could explain why jihadist Salafism had never targeted the Saudi kingdom before 2003. This was mainly due to the lack of local "infrastructure" and recruits, as bin Laden had been absent from Saudi Arabia for a long time and focused primarily on attacking the "far away enemy". However, after the destruction of the Afghan basis in 2001, the Afghan veterans were dispersed in various new "fronts". Combined with the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, the ambition of a new front against the Saudi royal family gave birth to "Al Qaida in the Arabian peninsula". The organization was created almost

from scratch and its dismantling was equally quick and facilitated -though after the 2003 attacks- by the mobilization of the Saudi intelligence and a new, sophisticated counter-terrorism strategy.

The parallel evolution of terrorist, as well as counter-terrorist strategies in the 21st century reveals the role of the Internet as an important weapon in salafists' hands. Satellite TV and Internet, religious education as well as radical preaching and operational advices have led to widespread diffusion of the salafist doctrine. A virtual umma emerged through this "communication without frontiers", whose principal matrix became "Londonistan" after the end of the Afghan jihad. The American invasion of Iraq in 2003 witnessed the astonishing multiplication of jihadist portals and preaching networks, characterized as being highly sophisticated and above all able to escape state and intelligence control. Thus, through those new recruiting methods and new ideologues' figures, Al Qaida survived the destruction of its territorial basis and ever since has become a "label", under which all potential Salafist radicals and terrorists are able to meet.

The second part of the book is dedicated to the examination of the Salafist evolution in the Arabian space. According to Carine Lahoud, salafism in Kuwait has been implicated in politics by necessity, in order to prevent the Muslim Brotherhood and liberals from dominating the political scene. Combining political realism, conservative tribal values and Islamist populism, the salafist movement contributed to an Islamisation of the society from top down due to the regime's fear of a violent contestation of its legitimacy. Representing a prominent ally of the royal family the Salafist movement was the most active during the Iraqi occupation and highly popular after liberation. However, the movement does not hesitate to put Kuwait's regime into question. Nonetheless, since 1997 the movement has transformed into a fragment of political Salafism, the traditional Wahhabi-oriented and the revolutionary movement, mainly dealing with the question of obeying the emir without questioning him. Its gradual integration into politics and the absence of an alternative, realistic discourse do not distinguish Kuwaiti salafists anymore from other traditional parties to whom it once was in firm opposition.

Laurent Bonnefoy examines Yemeni Salafism, its evolution and the contradictory tendencies within it. At the civil war's aftermath, Ali Abd Allah Salih's regime avoided repressing Islamism and Salafism and turned instead against socialist elites and certain conservative zaydi groups. Salafism in Yemen emerged in the 1980s and was characterized by intransigence in doctrine and practices however with certain specificities. The main figure of the movement was Sheikh Muqbil bin Hadi al-Wadi, whose view on religion and politics ignored particularities of a given state while his major thesis was the disconnection of Salafism from the local political game; its real focus was on religious matters, particularly it rejected any kind of politics. Due to its emphasis on the return to the Hadith, the type of Salafism that Sheikh Muqbil was defending pretended to be universal and a-temporal. Gradually, it became popular among the youth that embraced the "Saudi way of life" in its religious perspective, a phenomenon used to characterize the Yemeni Salafism as an "imported" commodity.

Yemeni Salafism's contradiction lies exactly there: its steady increase in popularity linked to its absence from the political game resulted in the inversion of its a-political aspect as it gained a significant role in people's electoral behavior.

According to Arnaud Lenfant, the interesting aspect about the Syrian Salafiyya is its openness in comparison to the quietist, conservative Syrian ulamas. Having considered questions related to Arab nationalism, democracy and socialism since the French mandate, the Damascene section of the Muslim Brotherhood, inspired by the neo-Hanbali tradition became popular among the intellectual and political elite, powerful until 1963. However, under the Baath regime many of its leading figures chose exile, mostly in Saudi Arabia, while Nasir al-Din al-Albani's departure in 1979 and his successor's death in 2004 left the Syrian Salafiyya without a point of reference. As for Syrian jihadism, its emergence is rather obscure. The regime's foreign policy towards the U.S. and Israel guarantees on itself that the country will not be targeted by Al Qaida. At the same time, there is growing suspicion that Syrian intelligence has recruited "jihadist – agents" in order to infiltrate jihadist groups in Iraq and Syria.

Bernard Rougier traces the rise of the salafist group Fatah al – Islam in Lebanon, which became widely known during its violent confrontation with the Lebanese army in 2007. Created after a scission within Fatah al-Intifada in numerous Palestinian refugee camps, principally in Nahr al-Bared, Fatah al Islam took advantage of a conjuncture of regional (spiraling violence in Iraq) and local dynamics (institutional crisis in Lebanon). Moreover, the group's objectives were ambiguous; a hybrid of jihadism and the Palestinian cause with a fine understanding of the political balances inside Lebanon: a potential Sunni ally for Saad al-Hariri, or a Sunni surprise for Hezbollah while weakening the PLO's influence in the refuge camps, it took equal distances from all major actors. In the light of confrontation, Saad Hariri's majority coalition saw in Fatah al-Islam a Syrian effort to destabilize the country. Hezbollah, for its part, found itself in a double dilemma: either supporting the Lebanese army (a principal ally in the south) or the Palestinian cause.

Through a critical commentary on Seymour Hirsch's analysis, Bernard Rougier tends to shed light on the complexity of Lebanon's political scene and provides a global interpretation of the dynamics created by the presence of Fatah al Islam. Hirsch considers the actual situation under the light of confessional communities and the potential Hariri- Fatah al Islam coalition against Hezbollah. To the contrary, Rougier provides a different point of view by distinguishing between two potential orientations inside the Lebanese Sunni Islamist community: the first one is of confessional nature which could explain Sunni mobilization on the national and regional level against Hezbollah, Syria and Iran; the second one is of ideological nature - therefore jihadist - against the West and its allies in the region, which could excuse cooperating with Hezbollah against western targets. By additionally taking into account the Sunni actors' indecisiveness concerning the 'identity' of their principal allies and enemies Rougier reaches an interesting conclusion. The 2007 crisis in Lebanon is the translation of two conflicts on the national level to the regional one: the Sunni/Shi'a conflict mainly in Iraq at

the moment, as well as the American/Iranian projects in the region, which dramatically influence internal dynamics in Lebanon.

In a passage about the Maghreb, Abdallah Tourabi examines the apparition of violent jihadist groups in Morocco, where Islamist opposition was peaceful until the attacks in Casablanca in 2003. Though Wahhabism was not strange to society, its comeback has become obvious since the 1980s, with the Saudis financing Islamic studies, a policy favored by the state as a balance to leftist influence and active Islamist opposition in the universities. The Gulf War also influenced the Moroccan Salafist movement while a schism inside it resulted in the emergence of jihadist Salafism. However, it consisted of little dispersed groups that lacked a unifying charismatic figure. Through the social profiles of those that perpetuated the attacks of May 16, one can trace the process of radicalization. In a different context from the one that gave birth to Afghan and Middle Eastern jihadism, the only option remaining is collective suicide as a means to protest against one's social condition.

In the third part, the researchers approach the Salafist phenomenon in France, mainly visible in the suburbs of big cities, where the debate is not only about Islam but also "islamity", the individual Islamic identity of French Muslims which escapes from traditional communal practices, to create a new definition in respect of the sacred. Mohammed Adraoui, by referring to Olivier Roy, calls this phenomenon the "crisis" of the religious and not its return. In this context and according to their doctrine, French Salafists are living their religious identity in different ways that vary from traditional, a-political one to secular or public one, which are more or less open to society. Romain Caillet seeks to elucidate the beliefs of young Salafists eager to imitate the Prophet's path, a voluntary expatriation in Muslim countries. Their individual hijra is motivated by al-Albani's discourse in liaison to western Islamophobia and their desire to live in an environment better adapted to their religion. Some chose religious studies while others are converts with a criminal past. Admitting that neither Salafism nor Islamic terrorism are new phenomena in France, Samir Amghar distinguishes three "ideal-types" of warrior, martyr and resistant jihadist respectively. Islamo – nationalist jihadism consists of creating an Islamic state or Caliphate by provoking the fall of current regimes through indirect pressure, by terrorist acts in their western allies' territory. Internationalist jihadism, transfers the Muslim world's frustrations onto the international level, in a confrontation between the umma and its western enemies, whereas the defensive jihadism legitimizes the use of violence to protect Muslim populations found under attack or threat of attack from impious armies.■

event "Iran and Regional Security"

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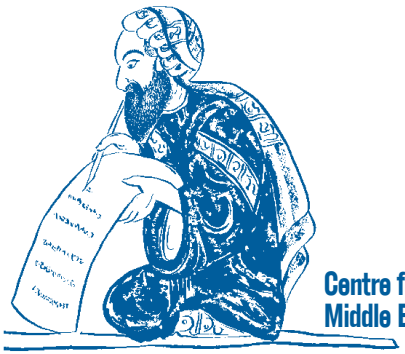
On January 27, 2009, the Centre for Mediterranean , Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies of the University of Peloponnese in association with the Institute of International Relations of Panteion University hosted a lecture by Dr. Mehdi Safari, Deputy Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran on "Iran and Regional Security" .



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