

Coping with Crumbling States: A Western and Israeli Balance of Power Strategy for the Levant

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- "Ultimate 'peace process' prize," by Robert J. Loewenberg, The Washington Times, October 13, 1996
- "Just as Saddam's Power is Under Assault," by David Wurmser, The Wall Street Journal - Europe, September 11, 1996
- "Balance of Power," by Richard Perle, The Wall Street Journal - Europe, July 10, 1996

Iraq's future will profoundly affect the strategic balance in the Middle East. The battle to dominate and define Iraq is, by extension, the battle to dominate the balance of power in the Levant over the long run. Syria understands this and has made the Iraq file its highest priority since the Gulf War. Belatedly, Jordan has realized the strategic significance of the circumstance and forwarded its Hashemite option for Iraq.

Until now, Syria and Iran have worked together without success to assume the lead role in defining a post-Saddam Iraq. Jordan's Hashemite option for Iraq is another blow to Syria's ambitions and will surely trigger a fierce Syrian-Jordanian competition. Still, Turkey's recent shift under the Islamist leader Erbakan and that country's continuing inability to come to terms with its Kurdish problem, as well as Iran's increasing position as the power broker in northern Iraq, Asad's close ties to Crown Prince Abdallah, and overall Western and Israeli inattentiveness due to their quest for "comprehensive peace," offer Asad some hope. The United States, Israel, and Turkey should pay particular attention to this circumstance in formulating an approach to the Levant.

The Stakes for the Region and the United States

Syria's and Iraq's regimes are based on Baathism, a variant of Nasser's brand of secular-Arab nationalism. Baathism has failed. Since it is pan-Arab, it holds that all Arabs should unite into one Arab state. This quest undermined the legitimacy and retarded the development of both Iraq and Syria as nation-states. Underneath facades of unity enforced by state repression, their politics are still defined primarily by tribalism, sectarianism, and gang/clan-like competition. It is unlikely that any institutions created by tyrannical secular-Arab nationalist leaders, particularly the army, will escape being torn apart. The leaders of both Syria and Iraq seek to overcome the consequences of this internal failure by engaging in relentless external efforts to control the region.

Iraq tried to take over its neighbor, Kuwait — a catastrophic mistake that has accelerated Iraq's descent into internal chaos. This chaos has created a vacuum in an area geostrategically central, and rich with human and natural resources. The vacuum tempts Iraq's neighbors to intervene, especially Syria, which is also driven to control the region. Syria has indeed sought to shift the region's balance of power by dominating a post-Saddam Iraq and tapping its resources.

Iraq's chaos and Syria's efforts simultaneously and provide opportunities for the Jordanian monarchy. Jordan is best suited to manage the tribal politics that will define the Levant in the

wake of failed secular-Arab nationalism. The Hashemites alone are adept enough in forging strong tribal, familial and clan alliances to create viable nations in the Levant.

Jordan's potential endangers Syria. In response, Syria has tried to cobble together a broad coalition, to include Saudi Arabia, to oppose, embarrass, isolate and eventually defeat Jordan. However, Saudi support for Syria, which is crucial for Damascus, is ambivalent. This has led Syria to take an active interest in Saudi succession. Jordan, in turn, tried to forge a Turkish-Israeli-American coalition to buttress its efforts. Saddam Hussein's invasion of northern Iraq early on August 31, 1996, is the latest manifestation of this strategic competition among the states of the northeast Middle East, or Levant. It marks his reentry as a long-term player in this competition.

The issue is not whether Syria in its Baathist form will survive or prevail in the long run. Like communism, Baathism's days are numbered. The issue here is whether the West and Israel can construct a strategy for limiting and expediting the chaotic collapse that will ensue in order to move on to the task of creating a better circumstance. The problem is as follows:

If Syria prevails in the short run, then Jordan would be isolated and King Hussein's regime besieged. Tribal alliances extending across the Levant would submit to Syrian diktat. Jordan, along with the rest of the Levant, would first come under Syria's sway, and then later be swept up by Syria's eventual crumbling. Most of the Levant then will crumble into neo-feudalism.

If, on the other hand, Jordan wins, then Syria would be isolated and surrounded by a new pro-western Jordanian-Israeli-Iraqi-Turkish bloc, the first of which can help contain and manage (through its more solid and traditional regime) the scope of the coming chaos in Iraq and most probably in Syria. In the long-run, a Hashemite victory could usher in an era defined by a stable balance of power system rooted to tribal alliances. These alliances, in turn, can form solid bases for the development of states.

Iraq's future will also determine how the Arab "Cold War" will end. The struggle for Iraq represents a return to the questions of 1958. The divide between traditional, pro-Western monarchies under the Hashemites and perhaps some of the al-Saud family on the one side, and the pro-Soviet secular-Arab nationalists on the other, has reappeared. Only now it is the latter that is in crumbling descent and missing its Soviet patron.

As this competition builds, the United States remains preoccupied with the quest for "comprehensive peace" without reference to regional strategic rivalries and the crumbling nature of the states engaged in them. It is in the West's interests to make a clean break from this policy. It would be prudent for the United States and Israel to abandon the quest for "comprehensive peace" — including its "land for peace" provision, with Syria — since it locks the United States into futile attempts to prop-up local tyrants and the unnatural states underneath them. Instead, the United States and Israel can use this competition over Iraq to improve the regional balance of power in favor of regional friends like Jordan. Doing so would help expedite the demise of Baathism in Syria and present King Hussein with the opportunity to forge tribal/clan/familial alliances across the Middle East that could become a more stable and solid basis for future Arab nations than the tyranny of the Baathist type. This begins with ensuring that Syria does not prevail in the struggle to define Iraq.

The West should not abandon its victory. It should not position itself to become the protector of Baathism, which is no more than a Cold War enemy relic on probation. The Arab-Israeli peace process is, in effect, doing just this.

The Strategic Consequences of Failed Secular-Arab Nationalism

Strategic planners must consider the political character of nations. American planners anchored their strategy during the Cold War to an appreciation of the nature of communism. America's strategy toward the Middle East must include a similar appreciation of secular-Arab nationalism, particularly Baathism.

Since the late-1950s, secular-Arab nationalism has been the prevailing political trend in the Levant. Two governments in particular were defined around variants of this school of politics — the Iraqi regime that ousted the Hashemites in 1958, and the Syrian regime that came to power in the early 1960s. Both regimes eventually fell to followers of an extreme form of secular-Arab nationalism, namely Baathism (Syria in 1963; Iraq in 1968).

Baathism seeks to combine Leninist socialism, a concept of "Arab awakening," and even racial nationalism. It is flawed, dangerous, and terminally ill. Some scholars argue that despite their failure, Syria and Iraq can remain united under strong statist institutions, such as a ruling military junta, rather than be ripped apart by the politics of warlords, tribes, clans, sects, and key families. Some, perhaps most, argue that the leadership in the military has become a case of "riding the tiger." Namely, at the moment of transition, the leadership, even of the military, understands it either hangs together or hangs separately. Thus, the unified army could be expected to assume power and hold at least most of the center of country together.

Some scholars argue that Iraq and Syria can remain united *because* of Baathism. They would argue that statist efforts have mobilized so broad a spectrum within the state that it forges a national identity. Mobilization gives a large portion of the population a vested interest in the success of the state-building enterprise for which so many have sacrificed. This vested interest develops into a sense of nation.

It is impossible to build solid nations through tyranny. The Soviet Union's collapse into pieces should have alerted the West that the post-Cold War world will be beset not by strong, threatening nations, but by chaos emerging from former tyranny. As a series of articles which appeared in the Arab and Western press after the Cold War indicated, this is also true of the Arab world as well. In 1992, Robert Kaplan wrote, "There is No Middle East." He argued that the artificial post-colonial state structure was yielding to irrepressible, older loyalties. Kaplan noted specifically how vulnerable was the facade of stability erected by secular-Arab nationalist authoritarian rulers and how the Middle East nation-state system could crumble with the violent resumption of history.

While many Arab writers, mostly from the Gulf region, took great umbrage at Kaplan's analysis, some, mostly from the Levant, agreed. Rami Khouri of the *Jordan Times* conceded over the following months that a combination of supra-national and sub-national forms of identity will define the Middle East in the future. Moreover, Khouri noted that the debate over the crumbling of national identity is vital to understanding the weakness of democracy and pluralism in the Arab world. When the civil war in Yemen erupted in 1994, a number of other Arab writers, notably also from the Levant, joined Khouri in his analysis. Foreign journalists also began to notice how authority, on the grass-roots level, had developed into forms of syndicalism. Even *The New York Times Magazine's* Michael Kelly described the Palestinian Authority in Gaza as racked by anti-authority sentiments and disintegrating into feudal warlord-like fiefdoms in refugee camps. And as recently as September 1995, journalists noted that the only real authority capable of functioning on the local level in the Palestinian areas was the old clan and leading-families structures. Others noted the resurgence of ethnicity among minorities in the region. These writers were all impressed by an emerging phenomenon — the crumbling of Arab

secular-nationalist nations.

Baathism is perhaps the most extreme and tyrannical form of secular-Arab nationalism. As such, it mostly reflects its failure. For thirty years Syria and Iraq engaged in massive statist repression to erase all loyalties other than to the regime. Instead, their regimes and institutions have prevented the building of nations. The failures of Baathism in the Levant chillingly resemble those of communism in eastern Europe. Both communism and Baathism faltered on the problem of nationality. Just as communism sought to unite all peoples under one ideology, Baathism sought to unite all Arabs under one state. Unity is paramount, and nationalism threatened that unity. Baathism blocked, rather than encouraged, the inhabitants of Iraq and Syria from forging distinct communities. The effort to pursue pan-Arab integration, which failed in every other respect, did achieve its most dangerous purpose: to undermine the legitimacy of nationalism which could be expected to emerge from the voluntary association of factions. Pan-Arabism could not be reconciled with nationalism or factionalism. Nor could statist repression break factionalism down as easily as it could erase nationalism. Baathism instead drove these states into relentless foreign adventures. In the end, Baathism attained neither, leaving the Arab nations to fluctuate between repression and anarchy.

Baathism's failure is most evident in Iraq. The residual unity of the nation is an illusion projected by extreme repression of the state. While there is a sense of common destiny among many Iraqis in ousting Saddam, the mechanism for doing so most reliably remains working through clan, family, and tribal connections. Indeed, only the most primordial, almost instinctual ties, manage to survive the watchful eye and heavy hand of Saddam. Those ties are resurfacing in the politics even of Saddam's innermost circle. As one long-time observer of Iraq noted:

No longer is the regime [Saddam] satisfied with punishing the military men whose heads become visible, even if they are from the central region and from the tribal body that forms its hard core....Thus, the tribes close to the regime no longer enjoy any inviolability or privilege. It may be the first time that the regime is facing danger from inside a circle that was assumed to protect the regime and form a defense for its Takriti hard core....Now the fire is encompassing the Sunni center.

The venerated Iraqi academic, Abbas Kelidar, explains the reason for this disintegration:

Iraq and Syria have continued to have as precarious an existence as when they were created....Although their political structure has become powerful and all-embracing, it has remained as alien and artificial as the boundaries drawn to demarcate their international frontiers.

Military service has been regarded as an imperative process of nation-building in new states....But the primordial ties of kinship — tribal, religious, ethnic, and family bonds — have remained paramount. Often they take precedence over national identity and interest. Group interaction within the armed forces, as in the state at large, has assumed a compartmentalized form, particularly when it comes to power-sharing....Instead, a military-civilian symbiosis has developed between highly-politicized officers and ideological groups of the intelligentsia, whose purpose and function are to dominate the political process. Under their domination, political authority assumes a tribal nature. It becomes segmented and totally dependent on the primordial cohesion of the group and its loyalty to a strong and pervasive leadership. Without group solidarity — familial, tribal, sectarian, and communal — the ruling establishment is reduced to warring factions. Under these conditions, the state is unable to ensure domestic political stability or prevent external interference and sedition. Its survival becomes a matter of speculation for its own people as well as its ambitiously irredentist neighbors.

In the Arab East...the threat of disintegration is inherent to the system itself.

Syria faces the same failure as Iraq. It, perhaps more than any other country in the Arab world, represents the regional danger of Baathism. As one Syrian Baathist noted with candor:

Classic Baathism addresses three distinct factional divisions in Syrian society: tribalism, sectarianism, and clanism. The army and Baathism have been seen as ways to level the field among all the factions and to offer a superseding identity. It was hoped that over generations, through "political education" and by achieving economic equality, this superseding identity would take root and erase the divisions and inequities. But in the 1980s, the Baathist party realized — especially in the wake of the events in Hama and the immediate threat posed to the regime by the Muslim Brotherhood — that its hold on power was still retained primarily through military force. It also realized that the military could not transform society and allocate values. This...is where the Baath Party now finds itself. It rules through the threat of violence as the ultimate means....The implication of this situation...is that any successor regime presiding over Syria that has not institutionalized Baathism will have to resort to purely traditional means to survive. In short, if the regime is stripped of Baathism, it will have to rely exclusively on force.

Tribal, ethnic, sectarian, and warlord-like centripetal forces — many of which are shared with the Iraqis — lie seething under the veneer of unity and stability carefully displayed by Damascus's Baathist regime.

Factionalism is not itself the problem bedeviling the Arab world. Factionalism need not doom efforts to forge nations. Under natural circumstances, these forces could be harnessed through voluntary associations, alliances, and unions as the seeds of real nations. Such was the case in the early 1920s, as the Hashemite King Faisal I of Iraq forged his nation by negotiating tribal alliances and union. Iraq was founded upon, rather than opposed to, these primordial ties which so define Arab society.

A natural state represents elements that can develop into a nation. These factional elements, in their turn civilize and restrain the power of the state. The problem of the nation-state, especially in the Arab world, is that government can quickly become intrusive, a distended clan, or anarchic. The state becomes an instrument of clan domination. Even under the best of circumstances, Arab nations will suffer enduring clan and tribal problems. While the state may need to employ some measure of force to protect the union of the nation from collapse, an intrusive statist presence designed to erase the tribal or clan identity or transform society leads inescapably to wild swings between repression and anarchy.

Factionalism in Iraq and Syria is likely in the short run to erupt into violence and anarchy during either succession or a major regional competition. The Baathist state, rather than serve as the limited, agreed-upon agent of factional alliances, instead became the instrument for unnatural, and eventually futile, repression of factions, intrusion into all facets of society to affect radical change, and exploitation of the entire state apparatus by the ruling faction over all others. Factional allegiance has become synonymous with the fight against Baathist tyranny. Here, then, is an example of a Baathist nation swinging wildly between repression and the anarchy that brings down the tyranny.

Collapse in either Syria or Iraq will affect the other profoundly. On the ideological level, a failure of Baathism in one indicts the regime of the other. But more importantly, the cross-border tribal and clan alliances make it likely that events in Iraq would spread uncontrollably into Syria itself. Syria's regime is well aware of this weakness. The link between the internal and external is described as follows by a French diplomat:

Asad relies, both domestically and at the regional level, on complex strategies and tactics based on community, tribal, clan, and family ties where interpersonal obligations are paramount. Over the last 30 years, the building of those ties...has determined and set the pace both for domestic public life and for external policy....As 'Alawi power has strengthened, expanded, and at the same time dispersed over the entirety of Syrian territory, the community's tribal distinctness, based on occupation of a particular terrain, has been blurred to the profit of segmentation by clans, even families, whose

networks of solidarity and alliance extend beyond traditional internal and external limits of the community.

In this context, both the Syrian and Iraqi regimes seek to avoid internal collapse by insulating themselves from and seeking to control external tribal politics and rival ideas. In short, they are driven to parallel their quest for internal homogeneity with external unity (pan-Arabism), which drives them to match their internal repression with external aggression against neighbors and more distant coalitions. This quest for regional control has hastened the destruction of Iraq already and drives Syria into dangerous policies as well.

Syria compensates for its weaknesses by being unswayable, relentless, cunning, bold and disciplined in its pursuit of regional control. Syria's opponents, in contrast, have been none of these. They have, therefore, allowed Asad, despite his and his country's weaknesses, to achieve much.

The very effort to prop Baathism up threatens the region by keeping its nations artificial and fragile. The inhabitants of Syria and Iraq will persevere in defining themselves through their families, tribes, and clans. U.S. and Israeli strategic policy in the Levant must be informed by an appreciation of the crumbling nature of Baathism and the perseverance of tribes and clans. Such a policy includes harnessing voluntary alliances (which serve as barriers to state repression) to forge eventual tribal, familial, and clan unions under limited governments. Such unions and limited governments, in turn, are the hope for the Arab world, since they alone can develop into real nations.

Syria Identifies the Emerging Power Vacuum in Iraq

The Levant now resembles Europe of 1914: crumbling states, like Syria, locked in bitter rivalries over a collapsing entity (Iraq). The prize itself is more powerful than any of the neighbors that covet it. Iraq, a nation of 18 million, occupies some of the most strategically important and well-endowed territories of the Middle East. Given the cross-border alliances of tribes and the fragility of the secular-Arab nationalist states in the Levant, strategic competition over Iraq may well lead to the collapse of some of the engaged regimes. Thus, whoever inherits Iraq dominates the entire Levant strategically.

Syria was the quickest of its neighbors to realize the dangers and possibilities of the circumstances in Iraq. After the Gulf War, Syria focused on shaping the overall regional balance by playing the dominant role in a post-Saddam Iraq. Syria chose not to work through the Iraqi National Congress (INC), the main Iraqi opposition umbrella movement to Saddam Hussein. Syria has never had close relations with the INC. In October 1992, when a major INC conference convened in Salaheddin in northern Iraq, not only did Damascus and Tehran-based groups refuse to attend, but the meeting was pilloried. Damascus's refusal was based on a policy of "reflecting the 'regional forces' displeasure with the American tendency to take hold of the opposition card." When the INC convened another large conference in 1993 in Vienna, Austria, Syria barred Damascene-based representatives of some INC member organizations from attending. Syria opposed the INC because it never came under Syria's control and, in the words of Syrian Vice President Khaddam, the INC includes components that serve as "Western agents." Syria opposed the INC, in fact, because it potentially threatened rather than assisted Syria's regional ambitions.

As a result, Syria has attempted ever since the Gulf War to topple Saddam under the banner of an alternative, Damascene/Tehran-based opposition. Such attempts date back as far as late December 1991. At that time, Syria's President Asad met with Iran's powerful agent in southern

Iraq, Ayatollah Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim of the Shiite Supreme Assembly of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SAIRI), who came to Damascus at Asad's invitation, to coordinate a coup attempt against Saddam. According to the Syrian press, Asad was briefed on December 23 on SAIRI's plan to launch the coup. Simultaneously, Baqr al-Hakim invited Iraqi opposition leaders to come together in Damascus to chart a plan to oust the Iraqi leader and install a new regime. While other opposition leaders did come, al-Hakim failed to secure their support. In the first days of January 1992, leaflets were distributed to the Iraqi population, asking it to support an impending coup and imploring Iraqi Baathist officials to defect now to avoid death. Soon thereafter reports began to emerge that there were mass arrests by the regime, focused mostly in the areas of Mosul, Salaheddin and the central area of the Anbar province. Mass raids, sweeps, and searches even in Baghdad itself were also reported. As the Syrian regime's news services began to predict an imminent coup, the official Iraqi press began to warn at the same time against what it claimed were "the Syrian regime's agents" preparing such a coup. The effort was ill-fated. Syria acknowledged candidly — within a week of Iraq's accusatory warnings against Syria's involvement — its prior knowledge of an attempt. The coup failed, according to Syria's radio network, *Syrian Arab News Agency*, because one of the officers, Mufleh al-Rawi, betrayed the plotters to Saddam.

This first attempt at seizing the initiative, and therein casting Syria as the mentor of the effective Iraqi opposition, failed. Despite all the detailed reporting, it is unclear that such a coup was ever planned. It is certainly strange that Syria, normally cagey and guarded, would so publicly inform all who would listen, which includes Saddam's security forces, about an impending coup. The only certainty was that the SAIRI head, al-Hakim, did come to Damascus to brief Asad and give the impression of dynamic opposition activity, and that Syria sought to rope the Saudis into their plans.

Syria's problem was deeper than just al-Rawi's supposed betrayal, if such betrayal even occurred. Syria, if it is limited to cooperating only with its own and Iran's agents among the Iraqi opposition, simply lacks the assets or inroads into Iraq to get done what it hinted it would like to do. Syria could not forge an opposition that penetrated the Sunni political and demographic core in the geographic center of Iraq, the power base upon which Saddam's regime rests. Eroding support for Saddam in this Sunni center was vital to any attempt to topple him. Syria had thus to involve an external force that had some currency with the Sunni core to overcome these liabilities. Asad realized that he would have to enlist the Sunni Saudis to give the Sunni stamp of approval to his Shiite/'Alawite (SAIRI/Syrian) initiative.

But the failed 1991 coup did not lead Asad to understand that he needed Saudi help; the reverse may be true. The need to impress the Saudis may have led him to launch a failed, or perhaps even faux, coup. It is worth noting that at the same time as the supposed coup, Syria reached out publicly to enlist Saudi Arabia in its efforts, hoping that Saudi support would lend a Sunni imprimatur. On December 23, 1991, the same day as Syria's press hinted at an impending coup, it also indicated that Damascus had already broached the subject of holding a Saudi-Syrian sponsored conference on the issue of Iraq, and that Riyadh was interested. Indeed, the Syrians were even reporting that the Saudis wanted to use the conference to set up an Iraqi government in exile.

The publicity surrounding the coup, coinciding as it did with a public campaign to enlist Saudi Arabia to host a conference which would enshrine Syria's "protective" but struggling lead role in Iraq, suggests that the coup served less to overthrow Saddam, than to illustrate Syria's vanguard role in the north Levant to the Saudis. It was meant to create the impression that the only plausible attempts to rid Iraq of Saddam are hatched, via SAIRI, from Damascus. Whether the coup worked, or even existed (there was a car-bomb in downtown Baghdad on December 30,

1991 but no other violence), was immaterial. What was important was to make sure the Saudis took note of who is the vanguard trying to get rid of Saddam.

Three months later a summit under Saudi auspices convened. The coup, "fool's coup," or "Potemkin coup" worked. The point had been made that the key players are Asad and SAIRI alone. Syria convinced Saudi Arabia to host a conference for Iraq, modeled on the Taef accords (the 1989 Taef accords choreographed pan-Arab, especially Saudi, support for a plan which granted Syria the lead role in defining a future Lebanon). As one Arab journalist, citing Syrian sources, described it in March 1992:

Just as the 1989 Taef conference brought reconciliation among the Lebanese, so Riyadh is likely 'to host a major political conference — under Syrian, Iranian, and Saudi auspices with the participation of the various Iraqi factions and personalities — in order to secure for Iraq that which was achieved for Lebanon.'

The actual Saudi conference in early March 1992 featured Ayatollah Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim, according him a warm reception. Not only did al-Hakim meet with King Fahd, Crown Prince Abdallah, and Prince Sultan as a group; he also met alone with King Fahd. Indeed, on parting, King Fahd remarked, "I look forward to the day when al-Hakim would receive him in Baghdad." Al-Hakim met also with Sheikh Mohammed bin-Jubeir, Saudi Arabia's justice minister who is the leading exponent of the thinking of the Kingdom's official Sunni, Wahhabi sect. The al-Hakim/Sheikh bin Jubeir meeting was perhaps the most significant. Saudi Arabia's involvement in staging this conference, especially its willingness to cooperate with al-Hakim and begin a Sunni-Shiite dialogue to reconcile the two with respect to Iraq, was symbolically very important. One of the problems Syria and Iran encountered in their efforts in Iraq was that the Sunni demographic core of Iraq, located in the center of the country, remained fearful of the consequences of Saddam's fall from power. As long as Iran and Baqr al-Hakim seemed to dominate Syrian efforts, the horrifying prospect of mass retaliation by a new Shiite-run regime against the Sunni loomed and gave any Iraqi Sunni opponent of Saddam pause. As one Iraqi dissident put it:

Saddam's survival is due not to his inherent strength, but in large measure to the absence of viable alternatives....Many Sunnis feel that the alternative to Saddam would be an anti-Sunnite backlash waged by a Shiite-Kurdish alliance that would disempower the Sunnis and blame them for Saddam's excesses.

This is why bringing in the Saudis was so important for Syria. Most of all, the Wahhabi clerical leadership, would give a stamp of approval to Hakim and Syria's and Iran's efforts. It was a signal to Iraqi Sunnis that the Sunni/Shia gap can be bridged and that no Shiite revenge would attend Saddam's demise.

And yet, in spite of all this, Syrian persistence did not pay off, even with the involvement of the Saudis. Syria simply failed to muster the assets it needed in the Sunni core of Iraq. Other Iraqi opposition figures continued to ignore al-Hakim. Syria thereafter engaged in nearly annual efforts to form new "front" blocs and coalitions — such as the one which was launched with great fanfare in February 1993 in Damascus, around Abdelamir al-Rakabi, that was opposed to the INC and Western intervention in Iraq. These efforts were all stillborn.

Jordan's Strategic Shift

In fall 1994, Syria began to encounter a more serious problem: Jordan's strategic shift. Since Asad's primary goal was to prevent the solidification of a pro-Western bloc that could serve as an alternative to his regional domination, Jordan's peace treaty with Israel and its attending

warmth challenged Asad's plans profoundly.

Toppling Saddam around a Damascene-based movement would have made Syria the preeminent regional power and thrown the Jordanian-Israeli cooperative relationship into disarray. However, it was beyond Asad's reach in the immediate future to accomplish this. Asad had to try another approach to sabotage Jordan's strategic shift. This came in the form of a diplomatic campaign to isolate and weaken King Hussein among Arabs in order to make the nascent Israeli-Jordanian-American strategic cooperation — which had the potential in Asad's view of becoming a powerful and dangerous regional bloc opposed to Syria and Iran — a dead letter. To do this, apart from accusing King Hussein of heresy (punishable by death), he took a new, conciliatory tack with Iraq. In January 1995, Asad decided he would tap Baghdad's power for the purpose of tactical alliance. Accordingly, he called for a summit involving Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq to convene in Damascus as part of the follow-on to the 1994 Alexandria summit (of Syria, Saudi Arabia and Egypt) to coordinate a more resolute stand against Israel. He also called for the resurrection of the Non-Aligned Movement which so plagued and undermined the United States in the 1970s.

But again Asad was stymied. No Syrian-oriented follow-on summit took place; no anti-Western bloc emerged either regionally or globally. Instead, the Cairo Summit a few weeks later, which involved Israel and Jordan but not Syria (by its own choice), dashed those hopes and left Syria isolated. February 1995 found Asad with little more than rhetoric. He accused Amman publicly of upsetting the balance in the Middle East in Israel's favor. This Cairo summit, and the attending warmth of the Israeli-Jordanian relationship that was developing, signaled most clearly the strategic shift in Jordan that would eventually become a major obstacle for Syria's regional pursuits. Syria after 1995 faced a powerful counter-bloc to its intentions.

Syria's Efforts Following the Ramadi Unrest in Iraq

Having failed to muster either a local or international anti-Western bloc, and observing growing Jordanian-Israeli cooperation, Asad's efforts seemed doomed. He had tried almost everything, but to no avail. But events in 1995 quickly presented him with new opportunities which he, in contrast to his pro-Western neighbors, was quick to appreciate and seize.

In spring 1995, infighting erupted among INC factions, especially among its two main Kurdish factions, the KDP and PUK. This fighting preoccupied and weakened that organization. About the same time, serious anti-Saddam unrest exploded in the city of Ramadi, the capital of the Sunni al-Anbar province in the center of Iraq and less than 100 miles from Baghdad. Asad seized the moment of INC inattentiveness and Saddam's weakness to launch Syria's most ambitious effort to forge a Damascus-based opposition to Saddam.

The unrest in Ramadi in May and the infighting which plagued the INC helped position Syria to play an active role in Iraqi politics and completely challenge Jordan's strategic shift. Jordan could hardly exploit such a revolt in its strategic competition with Syria since it was still so tied to the Iraqi military elite. It was seen as largely supportive of Saddam and the status quo in Iraq. The Ramadi unrest led many to believe revolution in Iraq was imminent. Jordan, which would be profoundly affected by such a revolution, could do little more than observe events nervously but passively. Syria, on the other hand, had no such obstacles and was well-positioned to exploit dramatic change. By effectively exploiting the events in Ramadi, Syria could strategically isolate Jordan at the very moment Amman went out on a limb making a warm peace with Israel. Syria moved, therefore, with great speed to exploit Iraqi developments.

The unrest in Ramadi involved the Sunni, one- to two-million strong Dulaym tribe. The

Dulaymis are among the largest and most strategically and politically central Sunni tribes. Until that time, they were also considered among the most loyal to Saddam. In the late 1960s, the Dulaymis played a major role in bringing Iraq's Baathists to power, and in the wake of the Gulf War in 1991, they were among the key tribes that kept the Baathists in power by playing a central role in crushing the Shia revolt in southern Iraq. So identified with the regime were they that the governate in which they reside, al-Anbar province, was referred to as the "White Governate" in reference to their loyalty to the Baathists.

The Dulaym tribesmen are also aligned and friendly with many other Sunni tribes considered loyal to Saddam, such as the al-Rifai. Most importantly, their territorial domain stretches from the outskirts of Baghdad to the Syrian border — implying that the politics of the Dulaym tribe also have an *internal* aspect for Syria. This was risky for Asad. Were he to align himself with the Dulaym, then he had a "in" in the Sunni core of Iraq. However, if his efforts failed or even backfired, then he stirred up his own tribal problems in Syria. And if he did nothing, then the unrest could eventually slide across the border to simmer and erupt in Syria. So, the unrest presented Syria with an opportunity — generated by the failure of Baathism in Iraq — but also a danger for Damascus — generated by the same failure of Baathism in Syria.

The eroding support for Saddam reflected by the unrest in Ramadi and Abu Ghraib did not necessarily threaten Saddam's first tier of defense — "Saddam's Fedayeen" units (highly paid mercenaries commanded by one of Saddam's sons, Uday). But it indicated that he was losing control of his second tier of defense: the Special Republican Guard which is staffed largely by Sunni personnel from several key tribes, especially the Dulaymis. Indeed, as *Cairo MENA* reported in the wake of the Ramadi uprising, "the events at al-Ramadi have led to complete mistrust between the Republican Guards [unclear whether this means the Special Republican Guard or just the Republican Guard], which in the past was the main force upon which the Iraqi president depended and which was completely loyal to him, and Saddam's Fedayeen units." To topple Saddam, the opposition needed support from at least some Sunni tribes constituting this second tier of defense.

The nature and location of this unrest threw Syria into the center of a new Iraqi opposition movement crystallizing around the Dulaym tribe. The options presented Syria by a large-scale popular defection of the Dulaym tribe were far-reaching: Were the Dulaym to oppose the regime actively and work with Syria, then Syria would become the mentor of a Sunni opposition with a sympathetic local population from its border to Baghdad. Here was an opportunity for Damascus to overcome the obstacle to all its previous attempts: the lack of core Sunni support in Iraq. Syria understood this. It is in the context of the Dulaymi uprising and the crumbling solidity of the Special Republican Guard that al-Hakim's statements on July 26, 1995 aggressively egging Syria on should be understood. It is noteworthy that a day later, it became clear al-Hakim had been in Damascus when he said these things immediately after meeting Syrian Vice President Khaddam.

Syria and its newly found Sunni allies fleeing the crushing hand of Saddam in Ramadi moved quickly. On June 8, 1995 the first reports emerged from Damascus that "the Armed al-Dulaym Tribes Sons Movement" had been formed as was distributing leaflets in Baghdad. Next, Western news agencies began reporting a flow a weapons from Dulaym tribe members in Syria to their brethren in Iraq. By mid-June, the Dulaym revolt seemed to be in full swing. The leadership of the Dulaym clan in Iraq slipped a message out, through Amman, to the West with a stern warning that they had now embarked on a general uprising against the regime in Baghdad.

Syria was now the center of activity for Iraqi opposition politics. The location of the primary actors and the sources of information both suggested the centrality of Damascus to sustaining this revolt. During the mid-June events in Abu Ghraib, the Supreme Assembly of the Islamic

Republic of Iraq's (SAIRI) spokesman in Damascus, Bayan Jabr, relayed timely information from the Dulaym tribe. By June 13, Ahmad Dulaymi, allegedly the brother of Generals Mazlum al-Dulaymi (whose execution sparked the Ramadi unrest), and Turki al-Dulaymi (who led the mutiny at Abu Ghraib) fled Ramadi for Damascus. Other Sunni tribal leaders joined Ahmad Dulaymi. On June 19, *Reuters* reported that the Dulaym were negotiating with the leaders of the Nimr and Shammar tribes, which are other Dulaymi sub-clans inhabiting the area bordering Syria north of al-Anbar. Together, these refugees formed the Iraqi "tribes movement" or the *al-Majlis al Ri'asi al-'a'la li Ittihad al-'asha'ir al-'Iraqiyyah* (The Supreme Leadership Council of the Union of Iraqi Tribes). On June 19 this Council announced that it would meet to coordinate a practical "united military action plan." It called "on the chiefs of the Iraqi tribes in exile to form a delegation to contact all opposition forces." Thus, in early summer 1995, Syria almost effortlessly acquired that which it had hitherto lacked: a Damascene-based Sunni Iraqi opposition movement with tentacles reaching to the heart of Iraq and Saddam's regime. Syria had penetrated Iraq's Sunni center.

As result, in late June 1995 Syria moved quickly to use its good fortune and set up a series of meetings to forge a new front to replace the INC. This new front united the Sunni "tribes movement" and the Iran-based Shiite opposition in southern Iraq. This coordination is significant considering the Sunni fear that Shiites and Kurds will take revenge on them after Saddam's fall (the same reason why Saudi/Wahhabi support was considered essential by Syria in 1992 in order to give an imprimatur to the otherwise Shia-Alawite axis which the Syrian-Iranian relationship represented). The Dulaym tribe played a key role in Saddam's campaign earlier to crush the Shia opposition in the south. Now it formed the core of the "tribes movement" which Syria was trying to coordinate with al-Hakim's Shia-based efforts. Table One illustrates the fast pace of intriguing diplomatic activity between Damascus and Tehran which signaled the launching of Syria's initiative in late June. By mid-July, all the main pro-Syrian and pro-Iranian Iraqi opposition actors were present in Damascus. Table Two illustrates the events as they unfolded.

The series of meetings and events revealed that Syria continued to rely primarily on the Shiite opposition — particularly al-Hakim's SAIRI as its main point of contact with the Iraqi opposition — rather than the Dulaym-based tribal movement in crafting its Iraq policy. This was a mistake. Coordination with SAIRI might have meshed well with Syria's strategic alliance with Iran, which provided contact with Iraq's Shia opposition, but it brought into question the very Sunni credentials which a Dulaym-centered tribal opposition offered Syria.

As a result, Syria's initiative, which culminated in the meetings of the Iraqi opposition groups on July 31—August 1, failed. Baqr al-Hakim's plan to establish a field command in Iraq itself to direct rebellious activities caused a contentious debate. Khaddam met al-Hakim on July 26, and Asad himself met al-Hakim on August 2, indicating that Asad sought to lend some weight to al-Hakim's side in the dispute. Even so, al-Hakim did not prevail. In fact, two key nationalist figures located permanently in Damascus, Generals Wafiq Samarrai and Hasan an-Naqib, spurned al-Hakim's invitation to help set up a field command since they felt it cast the entire opposition,

Table One

- **June 24:** Syrian Vice President Khaddam and Foreign Minister Shara traveled to Teheran "to take part in the semi-annual Joint Cooperation Committee meeting," and to meet with SAIRI's Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim.
- **July 4:** Khaddam and Shara met in Damascus with a delegation of the Iraqi Islamic Dawa party, according to the party's European publication, *Sawt al-Iraq*, and called "for an Iraqi political enterprise to serve as an alternative to the enterprise that has collapsed, namely the INC." Bahr

al-Uloum, confirmed the report, saying that Syrian officials told him earlier that "the INC's endeavor has come to an end," that the INC was an agent of the West, that a "new political enterprise as an alternative to the failed INC" should be established, and that "Syria, which proposed support in finding effective work for the opposition, suggested some nominations to establish a body as an alternative."

- **July 6:** This meeting was followed by a few resignations of Shia leaders from the INC, including Walid al-Tamimi, although he had already drifted away earlier from active participation in the INC.
- **July 11:** Mahdi al-Ubaydi, the head of the anti-Saddam Arab Socialist Baath Party met in Damascus with Major General Wafiq Samarraï, a senior Sunni defector from Saddam's regime who relocated to Damascus from northern Iraq at this time to discuss the formation of a new front under the umbrella of the Coordinating Committee for Nationalist and Democratic Action. Mahdi al-Ubaydi indicated there was soon going to be a large conference among opposition groups in Damascus, "which will accept the initiative of Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim." Al-Ubaydi said that "among the first tasks of this front will be to initiate field action in coordination with the military and popular leaders inside Iraq, which are in sympathy with the opposition forces, to overthrow the regime. . . [and to use] the broad base of opposition within the army that is expanding as a result of the regime's tyranny, particularly in Ramadi."

Table Two

- **July 17:** SAIRI's al-Hakim arrived in Damascus "to discuss a plan to topple Hussein this year" and to discuss with Syrian officials how "to improve the activities of the opposition." Specifically, al-Hakim said he carried specific proposals, which included setting up an operational headquarters to coordinate activities inside Iraq. On same day, SAIRI announced it had sent a delegation in secret to Ramadi to render assistance to the Dulaym tribe and meet with their leaders to establish more effective ways of coordinating activities.
- **July 23:** the Shiite head of the Islamic Action Organization, Taqi al-Mudarissi came to Damascus. According to al-Mudarissi, Khaddam convened an umbrella meeting of all these groups on July 23 or 24 to stress that "a practical plan to direct activities in Iraq was needed." He "would offer Syria's help to achieve this objective." Khaddam also said that the Iraqi opposition needed to establish a new umbrella group with Syrian help to replace the INC.
- **July 26:** al-Hakim met with Khaddam to discuss the details of his plan. The meeting was made public immediately afterwards. During the meeting, al-Hakim and Khaddam discussed "a new plan to overthrow the tyrant in which the Iraqi army will have a big role....Discussion focused on establishing a united field command to lead the Jihad to topple the defeated Saddamist regime."
- **July 31:** al-Hakim convened a meeting with a number of the nationalist (namely, secular) opposition elements to discuss the plans covered in the July 26 meeting between himself and Khaddam.
- **August 1:** al-Hakim reconvened the entire umbrella group for one last time to "persuade it to back his plan of establishing an opposition field command on Iraqi soil."
- **August 2:** Syrian President Hafiz Asad met with al-Hakim and other SAIRI members in Damascus, including the Sunni movements, under SAIRI's, namely the Islamists', overall control. As a slight to al-Hakim, neither general even attended the final August 1 meeting. It was evident that Syria again encountered the same problem as earlier; it failed to establish the initiative's credentials among Sunni Iraqis.

Al-Hakim tried to put the best face on the meeting's deadlocked results when he stated, "that meeting with Syrian officials and other opposition figures in Damascus recently has provided a new impetus to the anti-Saddam forces." He even claimed that the meeting did achieve one thing: an agreement to reestablish a 1990 committee for coordinating nationalist-Islamist opposition activities. Still, these statements and committees were meaningless. He could not hide

the fact that his defunct proposal for establishing a field command was to have been the physical manifestation of the Sunni-Shiite alliance. His field command, and therefore, the alliance, never got off the ground. Damascus and its nascent opposition movement still failed to penetrate the Sunni center of Iraq, as they had failed over the four previous years.

Enter Jordan and the Hashemite Option

After starting off so well in early summer 1995, but then souring by late July, Syria encountered even more serious trouble in August. Al-Hakim's wish — to find core Sunni officers around which to focus anti-Saddam activity — was realized, but as Jordan's opportunity, not Syria's or al-Hakim's. Hussein Kamal, among the most senior of Saddam's inner circle, defected to Jordan on August 8, 1995, a week after the failed Syrian conference on Iraq. This defection convinced King Hussein to raise the anti-Saddam standard himself.

When the unrest in Ramadi erupted, King Hussein was placed in a difficult position. While the king's neighbors could exploit the unrest to the Hashemites' detriment, Jordan could do nothing. It had not engaged the Iraqi opposition and was trapped in the status quo by its ties to the senior Iraqi leadership. However, when the most senior elements of the Iraqi national leadership themselves defected, it freed King Hussein from having to choose between his ties to the Iraqi elite and supporting a change in Baghdad. Both pointed toward revolt, and Jordan moved, alongside Iraq's most senior military elite, into the opposition. The "Hashemite option" for Iraq was born.

Shortly after Hussein Kamal's defection, King Hussein addressed the nation and the Iraqi people. He emphasized that Iraq's greatness is coupled with its Hashemite past. He spent the bulk of his speech gushing with pride over Iraq's Hashemite past, noting how bound and beneficial it was to all of Arabdom:

Iraq, its people and soldiers have a special status...characterized by the...long march...which was nourished by the pages of shining history, since Humaymah, from where the Abbasid call began, to the time of the great Arab revolt.

As for us, the tombs of our martyrs are studding the land of Iraq....This has been our history since the days of Ali bin Abi-Talib [the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law], his sons, Hasan and Husayn...and finally in the era of Faisal II and his family, whose precious blood flowed in Karbala.

The allusion once again to the spilling of the blood of a Hashemite, a descendent of the prophet, in Karbala, Iraq cannot be overemphasized (especially to the Shia). It draws an analogy between Faisal II's assassination and the martyring of Hasan and Husayn (the event from which sprang the Shi'atu Ali — Shia), and casts King Hussein as the savior not only of the Sunni center, but of the majority of Shia in Iraq as well. It also reminds Iraqis that his family's stature predates the Shia-Sunni split. This speech, and its long-historical musing, was more than nostalgia. It was a reminder of the central Hashemite role in the Levant and a strategic concept for the future — a Hashemite confederation across the northern Levant which would isolate Syria.

King Hussein's effort to woo the Iraqi Shiite community at Iran's expense is reasonable. While many in the West identify Shiite movements as spiritually tied to Iran, some are in fact not. First of all, there are fissures even within the pro-Iranian movements that leaders like King Hussein can exploit. Even Iraqi Shiite opposition leader, Muhammad Baqr al-Hakim of SAIRI, and the rest of the Shiite opposition, which is more indigenously Iraqi, have been at odds in the past. For example, most Shiites hesitated to involve themselves with plots hatched in Damascus and Teheran such as the failed coup attempt by Hakim in December 1991. On December 23, 1991, an official SAIRI spokesman in Damascus said that Hakim met with Asad to present a

"comprehensive politico-military plan to get rid of Saddam's dictatorship and foreign trusteeship...Hakim's visit to Syria heralded a drive to implement the plan." But on the same day, the Organization for Islamic Action (OIA), a Shiite opposition faction *under* the SAIRI umbrella, denied it had a part in plans to topple Saddam hatched by al-Hakim. Moreover, in a slap at Syria's involvement, its leader noted that "al-Hakim did not represent the OIA which believes that the future of Iraq should be decided by the Iraqi people." The rift is even wider between the pro-Iranian movements and others. Some of the Shiite opposition movements, such as the al-Khoe foundation under Layth Qubbah, are aligned with King Hussein and the West. And the head of the INC and one of the most prominent of the Iraqi opposition figures to Saddam, Ahmed Chalabi, is himself a Shiite and a close, long-time Hashemite confidant. For these reasons, and others such as his lineage, King Hussein can make a credible bid to lead the Shia community in Iraq as well, even though he is a Sunni.

King Hussein also described secular-Arab nationalism as destructive of Iraq's greatness. He had nothing positive to say about Iraq since 1958, and elliptically accused secular-Arab nationalism of being an agent of foreign conspiracies:

I have no ambitions other than to see soon Iraq emerge from the total darkness and its long night of suffering to see the dawn of its freedom and liberation from all the causes of suffering, be they internal or external...I was [Faisal II's] deputy and heir to the Presidency of the Arab Union that brought the two countries together. He departed at an early age and was a victim of the conspiracies of all hostile forces in and outside the Arab homeland.

Half a year later, King Hussein was less elliptical. He bluntly blamed the phenomenon of Baathism, which he added was an agent of foreign, namely Soviet policy. Regarding the events of 1958, and all that has gone wrong since in Iraq, he said:

It was fairly obvious that at that time, we had the Cold War in the region. There were divides created in our region, within the Arab family, and the movement that brought about the change in Iraq was essentially the Baath party, which is Syria and Iraq at that time — supported by the then Soviet Union and by Egypt.

This leaves little doubt as to King Hussein's understanding of Iraq's problem: secular-Arab nationalism, particularly Baathism. Iraq was born, progressed, and held together by Hashemites. Since 1958, when the Hashemites were killed, Iraq has languished and deteriorated. To avoid an almost apocalyptic future, Iraq must rid itself of this ideology and work with Jordan, perhaps in a Hashemite framework.

King Hussein's new strategy was more than rhetoric. Since Hussein Kamal's defection, and especially since late fall 1995, King Hussein has set himself up as the mentor/vanguard of the effort to oust Saddam and manage Iraq's eventual implosion through some sort of Hashemite construct. Jordan realizes it has little choice but to engage actively. Iraq has become a battle ground already. As King Hussein noted candidly:

Iraq is surrounded by many countries and many of them may have more interest than we have in Iraq, and that is the danger, that is the fear, that Iraq could turn to become a battle ground for those powerful neighbors of Iraq who seek to enhance their own positions.

Though he denies seeking a Hashemite role in Iraq, King Hussein's actions and the frequency of his denials bring to mind the words of the Queen in *Mousetrap*, Shakespeare's play within a play in *Hamlet* after the scheme is drawn out by the players: "The lady doth protest too much, methinks." He has no choice; the moment the focus of opposition to Saddam moved to Amman, King Hussein cast himself as opposed to about every dangerous leader in the Middle East: Asad,

Saddam, and Rafsanjani. Nor did he have a choice about taking such a risk. Failure to challenge Syria's dangerous inroads into Iraq, as Damascus did surrounding the Ramadi events, would eventually leave the Hashemite monarch so isolated by a Saudi-Iraqi-Syrian-Iranian-PLO axis that his realm and reign would be threatened. Success of his effort has become a matter of survival.



No opposition threatens Saddam's regime, and Syria's for that matter, more than King Hussein's. His initiative has assets and legitimacy that none of Iraq's other neighbors have. He is a Sunni, which eases fears among Iraqi Sunni of the sort of blood revenge that would conceivably attend a Shia- or Kurd-led revolution.

But the king also has solid credentials among Shia. He is a descendent of the Prophet Muhammad, and he has reminded Iraqis on numerous recent occasions of this fact. This impresses the Shia, marked in their veneration of the prophet himself and his lineage. The king's recent speeches serve a pointed political aim: The Hashemites are respected by all of Iraq's Islamic sects, have long been tied to the territory of Iraq, and have played a central role in the Levant. King Hussein remains close to the elite of Iraqi society, undermining the fealty of many of the tribes upon which Saddam's regime draws support. In short, all factions of Iraqi society can live with King Hussein's leadership.

Unfortunately, he entered this effort without being able to trust his own government or guarantee the acquiescence of his own people and with complications arising from Israel's and the United States's quest for "comprehensive peace." Signs of division within the Jordanian government over its Iraq policy became evident soon after Kamal's defection. At the same time King Hussein was making clear he sought a change of regime in Iraq (and his and Asad's foreign ministers were throwing insults at each other over the right to do so), some senior members of Jordan's government were claiming that the defection was a "passing cloud." Jordan, they said, had generally good relations with Iraq and did not seek Saddam's ouster. Jordan would not move alone without first securing "Arab solidarity and international support." Jordan's foreign minister (al-Kabariti) opposed this view. Indeed, al-Kabariti had made it clear in very undiplomatic language that Jordan will not take its foreign policy cue from others (a reference to Syria) and "does not need to discuss borders and the way we deal with neighbors with anybody." Moreover, on the same day that King Hussein was telling Israeli papers that he wanted to see Saddam replaced immediately and expects confrontation, Jordan's prime minister, Sherif Zeid bin Shaker, said Jordan was committed to good relations with Iraq. The prime minister added that Jordan would not interfere in Iraq's affairs or sacrifice its good ties with Iraq for the sake of improving ties with Gulf countries. The U.S. promise to protect Jordan from Iraq was uncalled for, he said.

It was precisely this internal lack of consensus, and the mistrust of the professional bureaucracy, that forced King Hussein to shake his government up in what was generally considered a "White Revolution" in early 1996.

The "White Revolution," the purpose of which was to set Jordan up more solidly to launch a major initiative on Iraq with the INC and other Iraqi elements, was focused on the office of the prime minister. Foreign Minister al-Kabariti was clearly among the Hashemite palace's closest confidants and supporters in its Iraq and new Saudi policies. He was, therefore, charged with forming a new government to replace Prime Minister bin Shaker, who had been the source of mixed signals and equivocation coming from Amman on the Iraq issue. As one Arab paper reported, Kabariti's letter of appointment was clear; it instructed him to:

Spare no effort to end the suffering of the Iraqi people and enable them to enjoy pluralism and democracy....The letter instructs Kabariti to back the Iraqi opposition and join forces with the United States and Gulf States to bring about the desired change in Baghdad.

The longer the Iraq problem remains unresolved, the less clear it is that King Hussein can succeed. Hussein's increasing stridency reflects his sense of danger, arising from the fact that time works against him. Time takes the initiative from his hands, giving Syria, Iran, and Iraq the

time to infiltrate, plot, discredit, and isolate the king. In short, the longer this drags on and the less support he gets from the West, the more endangered are the Hashemites. The Iraq issue could eventually bring down the dynasty.

Damascene Troubles

The Iraq problem threatens Jordan profoundly. It threatens Syria just as profoundly. As much as Amman's "losing Iraq" would leave Jordan isolated, so too would Damascus's "losing Iraq" leave Syria isolated. Iraq's course affects Syria's strategic environment in a series of ways.

First, events in Iraq can shake Syria's position in Lebanon. Lebanon is no easy problem for Asad. He works primarily through the strong Shiite presence in the South to maintain his pressure on Israel. This pressure is necessary to preempt the Israelis from engaging more deeply in Lebanese affairs and undermining Syria in its Sunni or Christian core. But beyond the pressure on Israel, one of the most important bolts Asad retains in his arsenal to retain his strong grip on Lebanon is Hizballah, both operationally and ideologically. Hizballah's ideological core emerges from the schools of Qom in Iran. Asad uses his alliance with Iran to keep the ideological thrust of Hizballah pro-Syrian. In turn, Syria retains operational control of Hizballah through Sheikh Nasrallah, who is more closely tied to Syria than Iran. As long as Hizballah is the primary force in southern Lebanon, the Lebanese Shia are linked ideologically to Iran.

Yet, while Hizballah is linked organically and ideologically to Iran, the Shia in southern Lebanon have more traditionally been linked over centuries through intermarriage and tribal alliances to Najaf in Iraq (a city in which the main Shiite schools are located). Because of Saddam's control of Iraq and suppression of Shia Islam, and because of Asad's control of Lebanon, the Lebanese Shia gradually were forced to abandon their ties to Iraq and accept Hizballah and Iran by default as their religious center.

A Hashemite presence in Iraq, especially within the Shia centers in Najaf, could break Iran's and Syria's grip on the Shiite community of Lebanon. Were Jordan to prevail in Iraq, then Najaf's elite, with its veneration of the prophet's family, would be tied to King Hussein, and pro-Jordan Iraq Shiites as Ahmed Chalabi and Layth Qubbah of the al-Khoe foundation would define the Iraqi Shiite community after Saddam's removal. Close cooperation between Israel and Jordan could undermine Syria's pressure on Israel's northern border as the local Shia are weaned from Hizballah's domination. In short, developments in Iraq could potentially unravel Syria's structure in Lebanon by severing the Shia-Syrian-Iranian axis.

In fall 1995, Syria faced not only the Iraq issue, but the festering problem of Lebanese leadership, since the final term of the pro-Syrian president of Lebanon, Elias Hrawi, was to expire soon. To avoid an unraveling of his solid grip in Lebanon while he engaged this most important Iraqi issue, Asad had to quickly solve the leadership problem. According to Lebanese sources, Asad summoned Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and Speaker Beri to Damascus, where they heard on September 10 according to Lebanese government sources, that:

The Syrians say they are surrounded by the Americans in Jordan, Israel, and Turkey, and now they fear in Iraq too....The Lebanese were told firmly to stop their chronic squabbling....Damascus was too preoccupied with dealing with the threatened new regional equation to permit distractions of the Lebanese flank. The problem is very serious for Syria; they cannot afford the fantasy of Lebanese problems now. This is one of the really rare times that they can't....The Syrians were really firm in telling everyone they have to cool it.

The two were told simply to reinstall President Hrawi.

Lebanon was not the only problem Syria faced. By late fall 1995 and early 1996, Syria's efforts in Iraq were falling apart. Key figures involved in the July 1995 meetings in Damascus, such as Bahr al-Uloum and Wafiq Samarrai, moved closer to Jordan, and even al-Hakim was forced to publicly admit the infeasibility of his plans to establish a field command in Iraq. And by March 1996, al-Hakim, perhaps in a moment of opportunism and sensing the currents, relayed a message to King Hussein through the Kurdish PUK leader, Jalal Talabani, offering SAIRI's cooperation in any action against Saddam's regime.

Syria Reacts

Driven by the need to keep together its crumbling Baathist state and its rickety regional strategy, Syria cannot afford to abandon to Jordan its efforts with respect to Iraq. Within a half year from the moment of great hope in June-July 1995 (the Ramadi unrest), Damascus' opportunities in Iraq turned into a mortal danger. Accordingly, Syria moved from actively forging an alternate Iraqi opposition to sabotaging Jordan's efforts. This strategy, the results of which were mixed, took the following forms:

- Forge an international coalition to isolate Amman
- Subvert the Jordanian regime
- Preempt American and Israeli support for King Hussein by linking the Iraq issue to the prospect of "comprehensive peace"
- Keep Saddam afloat and cooperate against Jordan.
- Undermine Jordan's attempts to work with the INC by establishing Syrian and Iranian dominance in northern Iraq
- Secure Saudi support for Syria and undermine Saudi-Jordanian rapprochement

The last objective led Syria into internal Saudi politics.

Syria's Efforts to Isolate Amman and Subvert the Hashemites

In response to Jordan's bid, Syria had to isolate Amman diplomatically. First, Damascus moved to neutralize the legitimacy which Hussein Kamal's defection had conferred on Amman's credentials among the Iraqi opposition. It did so by discrediting Kamal himself as a worthy or even genuine opponent of Saddam. The *Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA)* began lambasting Kamal, hinting that he should be killed along with Saddam. In the words of Fayez Sayegh, chief editor of *SANA*: "When people take over, they will punish all those whose hands were stained by blood whether they were inside or outside of Iraq...The change should not be made by Saddam's men." Syria also forbade any of the Iraqi opposition elements based in Damascus from meeting Kamal, a request with which all but one complied though some of them, such as al-Hakim, publicly had noted only a few days earlier that they wanted to work with Kamal. Furthermore, pro-Syrian newspapers, such as the Lebanese *as-Safir*, blasted the Hashemite-American-Israeli conspiracy to take over and partition Iraq and isolate Syria:

Could it be an American-Hashemite scandal in Saddam Hussein's house...this transforms the King [Hussein] from a host into a partner in a conspiracy against the historic ally Abu Uday [Saddam Hussein], or at least as the go-between who nominates the alternative on behalf of the initiator, the White House.

Having launched the public campaign to discredit Hussein Kamal, Syria moved also on the international diplomatic front to forge a coalition against Jordan's efforts, tapping the historic antipathies that both Egypt and Saudi Arabia had with Jordan.

The first such diplomatic effort was to secure Egypt's opposition to Jordan. On September 3, Asad flew to Egypt to meet President Mubarak, after which the two expressed strong reservations over Kamal, emphasized that efforts to remove Saddam must remain pan-Arab, and accused Jordan of undermining inter-Arab cooperation. Syria's next address was Iran. On September 10, Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq a-Shara traveled to Iran to report to Rafsanjani that Syria had succeeded in securing Egypt's complete support for the Syrian-Iranian position on Iraq. Echoing the views of Egypt's leaders, Cairo's government-run papers began criticizing harshly, even ridiculing, King Hussein and his Iraq policy. First came an article by Samir Ragab in Egypt's *al-Gomhuriya*. It attacked Hussein as an American stooge. This negative campaign continued deep into 1996.

Other Arabs quickly grasped the existence and significance of Syrian-Jordanian competition. The Saudi pan-Arab daily, *Asharq al-Awsat*, described the Egyptian-Syrian summit clearly as "an attempt to snatch the initiative out of Jordan's hands on Iraq," and in a separate article, noted that "a new regional alliance is taking shape to counter U.S. plans for the country." Despite its understanding of the momentous importance of Jordan's shift from supporter to opponent of Saddam, Saudi policy following the Kamal defection was confused. The Saudis went from initially being positive to eventually being negative, but with some residual ambivalence, a pattern suggestive of differences in ruling Saudi circles. These differences sharpened, and thus surfaced visibly, in early 1996. At first, Saudi Arabia welcomed Kamal's defection. The editor of the pan-Arab, Saudi-run weekly, *al-Majalla*, enthused in the Saudi daily, *Asharq al-Awsat*, on the positive role that Kamal could play in toppling Saddam and warned "opposition groups that if they try to discredit him they will only be assisting Saddam." Saudi Arabia reacted positively officially as well, and sent their intelligence director, Prince Turki al-Faisal, to Amman to debrief Kamal, and invited Jordan's Foreign Minister al-Kabariti to come to Riyadh to meet with King Fahd. Saudi papers predicted "imminent, positive developments in the Saudi-Jordanian relationship," which had been severed since 1991. Indeed, largely through the efforts of al-Kabariti, even as the Saudis soured on Jordan's efforts, Jordanian-Saudi relations improved throughout fall 1995. This was demonstrated by the reestablishing of diplomatic relations, with the appointment of Abdallah al-Sudairi as the new Saudi ambassador to Amman. Appointing an al-Sudairi established a clear link between the al-Saud ruling family's Sudairi branch (which includes Fahd, Sultan, Naif, Turki, and Salman) and Jordan. This is a matter of great consequence — especially with respect to the Syrian-Jordanian competition over Iraq. The Sudairi branch, close to the United States, was entering the succession struggle with Crown Prince Abdallah, who is not a Sudairi and is close to Syria and more sympathetic to Saddam.

Yet, while these meetings and diplomatic acts signaled Saudi-Jordanian rapprochement, there were conflicting signals as well coming from Saudi Arabia. Indeed the editor of a major Saudi paper wrote an editorial blasting Syria, saying that "the sudden emergence of Syrian-led opposition to the Jordanian project has unsettled many, and could end up rescuing the Iraqi regime from its grave predicament." But by late-September, Saudi Arabia had reversed most of its initial support for Jordan and joined Syria and Egypt in signaling that it preferred the status quo rather than leap into the unknown with a Jordanian-inspired change in Baghdad.

There was, thus, a clearly different reaction between Saudi Arabia and Syria in the first weeks after the Kamal defection, perhaps, again, reflecting fissures within Riyadh between pro-Syrian and pro-Western/Jordanian camps of the royal family.

Egypt had ever since Jordan's shift on Israel (because of the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty) sought to undermine King Hussein in coordination with Syria. Thus, Cairo moved quickly to help Asad not only in his campaign to discredit Hussein Kamal, but to isolate and undermine Amman. Egypt played a major role keeping Saudi Arabia and Jordan apart. In early February, with much fanfare and two-months lead-up, King Hussein was to travel to Saudi Arabia to meet with King Fahd and "seal the reconciliation between Jordan and Saudi Arabia." In advance of this visit, Egypt worked behind the scenes with Crown Prince Abdallah and Asad to try to persuade them to "clear the air with Iraq" because of concerns over Jordanian initiatives. Finally, a few hours before King Hussein's trip, Mubarak flew to Riyadh and met with Crown Prince Abdallah. The two conspired to cancel the Fahd/Hussein meeting and "to abort a full Jordanian-Saudi reconciliation at the last minute." A number of Arab papers noted the next day that Jordan's Iraq policy was a matter of particular attention during the Mubarak/Abdallah meeting. They noted that Mubarak met with Abdallah to "abort the Jordanian monarch's visit to the Kingdom by stressing that the call for a federation in Iraq [the Hashemite plan] was dangerous and could have an adverse impact on the stability of the region." It worked: there was no Hussein/Fahd summit.

While Egypt moved to drive a wedge between Jordan and Saudi Arabia, Syria tried to enlist Turkey. In an effort to exploit fears of a breakup of Iraq, which could exacerbate Turkey's Kurdish problem, Iran and Syria convened a foreign minister's meeting in Teheran with Turkey on September 8, 1995 to discuss the Iraq problem. To emphasize the danger of Jordan's plan to Turkey, in the week leading up to the meeting, both the Syrian and Iranian press highlighted Jordan's initiative as an Israeli-American plan to carve up Iraq and set up a Kurdish state. Turkey attended, but Syria and Iran failed to draw Turkey into a specific announcement opposing King Hussein's initiative or his hosting of Kamal. Indeed, the final communique included only a general statement that "the division of Iraq would have dangerous consequences for peace and stability at both the regional and international levels." Syria could simply not lure Turkey.

Syria also worked to undermine, perhaps even subvert the Hashemite reign in Jordan. Throughout the fall and winter, 1995-1996, King Hussein was besieged by Syrian efforts to infiltrate agents into Jordan and to undermine his regime. For example, King Hussein told the Jordanian press on February 22, 1995, that he had information that "Syrian Prime Minister Abdelhalim Khaddam had offered to cooperate with eight Jordanian opposition leaders" who visited Damascus in January 1995 in order to thwart further Israel-Jordanian cooperation.

Saudi papers reported in late spring that Jordanian authorities continued to arrest infiltrators of Palestinian organizations from Syria who were going to conduct acts in Jordan. And Jordanian Prime Minister al-Kabariti claimed that Jordanian forces had foiled 36 planned terror attacks in Jordan linked to the purported infiltrations. By May 1996, Israeli papers reported that the Jordanians had arrested several dozens of people suspected of planning terror attacks against tourists and senior Jordanian officials, and that a plot to assassinate Prime Minister Kabariti had been foiled the month before. The Israeli papers reported that Jordan had information that Syrian President Asad was aware of the planned wave of terror, and was trying "to show that the peace agreement between Israel and Jordan could not provide any country in the region with security and quiet."

Jordanian Prime Minister Kabariti's statements underscore what is perhaps the most important regional shift: Jordan was moved across the board by the Syria-Iraq matter to cooperate strategically with Israel to establish a pro-Western bloc to dominate the Levant's balance of power. Syria in turn, understood this and engaged every effort to sabotage the shift. The most dangerous of Damascus's efforts to sabotage Amman took the shape of the Syrian-Israeli peace

process, which exploited Israel's quest for "comprehensive peace." The "comprehensive" nature of peace was meant to neutralize Jordan's special strategic relationship with Israel.

Linking Syria's Regional Aims to the Peace Process

Israel and the United States have spent the last five years pursuing a regionally comprehensive peace. Underlying this view is the assumption that lack of progress on any one Arab-Israeli negotiating track undermines the progress of any other. This has led Israel and the United States to make concessions to Arafat and Asad under the notion that it would reinforce King Hussein's decision to make peace with Israel.

The pursuit of comprehensive peace can actually undermine Hussein. The pursuit includes too monolithic a view of the Arab world regarding the Arab-Israeli dispute. It accepts pan-Arab dreams of secular-Arab nationalists — that there is an "Arab interest" to all Arab leaders aspire. But these dreams, which have brought ruin on to the Arab world, have also served to prevent Arab leaders from cooperating with Israel against other Arab leaders. Each leader has far more important strategic interests than the "Arab" cause.

The Arab world's leaders are not informed by pan-Arabism. They are obsessed with survival. As such, inter-Arab conflicts, not Arab-Israeli issues, are the primary issues that occupy the minds of Arab leaders. Political developments in the Arab-Israeli dispute do little to threaten Asad's or King Hussein's existence internally. On the other hand, inter-Arab rivalries, along with the artificiality and porousness of borders, become acute internal problems for Arab leaders. The conflict between Jordan and Syria threatens both regimes.

Thus, the Arab-Israeli dispute acquires primary importance for Arab leaders only insofar as Israel's power is a *deus ex machina* for Arab leaders to tap for their existential dispute with other Arabs. That motivation grounded the Weizman-Faisal agreements of 1919. It led to the King Abdullah-Israeli understandings in the early 1950s. It forced King Hussein to rely on Israel during Syria's intervention in "Black September" 1970. It encouraged various Lebanese factions, including the Shias, to support Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. And it has now led Jordan into the current peace agreement with Israel — exactly because Amman needs Jerusalem's cooperation on regional strategic matters.

The faulty assumptions upon which the quest for comprehensive peace are based leads Israel and the United States into a dangerous strategic misstep. The more Israel tries to solidify its ties to King Hussein by appeasing Arafat and Asad, the more Israel abets their efforts to undermine King Hussein, unraveling the strategic cooperation between Jerusalem and Amman upon which King Hussein's decision to make peace is based.

Syria's interest in the Arab-Israeli peace process is informed largely by how it benefits Damascus in realizing its regional ambitions. Specifically, it is informed by how the peace process can help Damascus out-manuever competing Arabs. Within the context of this regional 'Alawite-Hashemite confrontation, the peace process with Asad and Arafat undermines Jordan. Jordan engages in the peace process to secure Israeli and American support for his regional efforts against Asad and Arafat. In response to Jordan's bid to influence the course of events in Iraq, Syria linked continuation of the Arab-Israeli peace process to American support for Syria's "regional concerns," which clearly meant Iraq. Syria dangles (but never fulfills) the temptation of peace in front of Israel and the United States in the hope of luring them into toning down their support for King Hussein in Iraq. In essence, Damascus took the peace process hostage to force on the United States and Israel his strategic plan to undermine Jordan.

At least until the Israeli elections of summer 1996, Syria's lure worked. Already in early September 1995, American officials started issuing a long series of public reassurances to Damascus that America would not harm Syrian interests by its Iraq policy. For example, after threats by Asad in early September over not resuming peace talks, an American official hastened to assure Asad by telling *al-Hayat*, that Assistant Secretary of State Pelletreau's early September trip which excluded Syria was not a snub:

It was by no means an attempt to deliberately exclude Syria from the debate about Iraq's future; Washington's policy is entirely separate from its approach to peace talks....

The United States is not trying to put pressure on Syria...by manipulating the regional equation in light of Hussein Kamal's defection....I will be very frank. The Syrians were talking of the United States' trying to manipulate developments in Iraq in a conspiratorial manner to increase pressure on Syria to make progress on the peace talks....This is far from the truth....Our policy toward Iraq is our policy toward Iraq and it exists in its own right. It is not linked....The United States is not trying to use Iraq as a 'stick' with which to beat Syria.

Pelletreau was making clear to Syria that the United States would not exploit Syria's concerns on Iraq; instead it would accommodate those concerns with its regional strategy.

Syria, either unimpressed by this reassurance or encouraged by America's anxiety over the peace process (or both), linked the issues even more closely. On September 27, 1995, a Syrian official spoke to a reporter from the Saudi pan-Arab paper, *Asharq al-Awsat*. According to the reporter, the Syrian official conveyed the following:

There is no room for signing a peace agreement before defining Syria's position and role in the future regional map. Iraq's fate is the key to the post-peace game. Asad wants to discuss this before signing a peace deal; Washington would ignore Syria's position if it signs with Israel before the Iraq issue is solved....Damascus believes that Jordan plays a major role with regard to establishing a 'natural axis' with central Iraq on one side and Israel on the other, which would isolate Syria from the Arabian peninsula and [in the words of the Syrian official] 'squeeze it between this axis in the south and Turkey in the north. Damascus fears that this could be the prelude to a redrawing of the map of the Middle East along sectarian, religious, linguistic, and ethnic lines, which would threaten Syria's territorial integrity, something Asad could not accept.'

Additional warnings were sounded by pro-Syrian journalists on the eve of Secretary of State Warren Christopher's trip to Syria in early October 1995. Accordingly, during Christopher's trip, Asad demanded that the United States address its regional fears and agree to the centrality of "Syria's regional role on the future Middle East map" before it would agree to restart talks with Israel. The following week, the U. S. Assistant Secretary of State Pelletreau assured Syria that:

Washington's policy is not aimed at isolating or putting pressure on Damascus....The United States opposes any confederal arrangement that would lead to the breakup of Iraq.

There was a lot of speculation that we and others might be trying to...put pressure on Syria through the policy we are following in Iraq, and I can tell you it is not true. In fact, we have had a certain dialogue with Syria about developments within Iraq. The key point here is that the problems that continue to exist with Iraq [are] one set of problems that are not related to the peace process.

But the issue arose again in November, when Syria warned of Jordanian schemes and linked them to a Jordanian-Israeli strategic plan. Khaddam, in an interview to *al-Wasat*'s George Seeman, not only linked, but merged Jordan's efforts in Iraq with the peace process as one coherent conspiracy:

[Khaddam] charged that plans were being hatched to break Iraq up into separate Sunnite, Shiite, and

Kurdish entities that would then be rejoined with Jordan in a federation that would be part of a new Israeli-led bloc in the region. He warned that such schemes would lead to the dismemberment of other Arab countries along ethnic or religious lines, part of the process of strengthening Israel's hand against the Arabs by fragmenting them.

The warning was astounding. Khaddam seemed to admit that if Jordan were to prevail and garner Israeli support, then the region's secular-Arab nations would collapse. In fact, since this statement was cast in terms of the threat Jordan's initiative poses to Syria, he implies that a break-up of Iraq would lead to a break-up of Baathist Syria. In defining the Jordanian threat in such a way, Khaddam comes close to admitting Syrian Baathism's failure to craft a solid state. This would contradict the facade of unity so carefully cultivated by the Syrian Baathist regime. It revealed that for Syria, the quest for regional domination was also a matter of survival, serving at once as an opportunity and a mortal danger.

These Syrian warnings were shortly afterwards met by further American, and eventually even Israeli, assurances that Syria's "regional anxieties" will be assuaged. Indeed, by December 1995, Jewish news sources reported that Israel, "in a deliberate departure from long-held positions...conferred on Syria a new strategic and regional significance that the secularist state never had." Jerusalem and Washington were sliding into being responsible for propping-up, if not even supporting, Baathism in order to keep the "peace process" afloat. In doing so, they were rapidly undermining the Hashemites in Jordan.

Loosening Saddam's Isolation

Despite all of Syria's efforts, including help from Egypt and some factions within Saudi Arabia, and despite the United States' and Israel's strategic missteps, Jordanian efforts gained momentum. In early 1996, after a series of meetings between King Hussein and INC heads in London, King Hussein staged a late-January Amman conference encompassing a broad array of opposition figures, including some that had taken part in the Syrian-based meeting in July 1996. Lacking the power to halt Jordan's efforts directly, Syria signaled that it and Iran might prefer a weak, but barely surviving Saddam. Thus, soon after the Kamal defection, Asad moved to sabotage King Hussein's efforts by trying to prop up Saddam long enough to ensure failure of Amman's drive. The first indication of the implementation of this strategy was an article, written by a Jordanian Baathist, already in August, 1995:

Syria may be locked in a historic and ideological dispute with the current Iraqi government, but it would rather deal with it than with the alternative regimes the international media machine has begun to lionize, namely a Jordan-based effort.

By early September 1995, Saudi papers were reporting that:

a new regional alliance is taking shape to counter U.S. plans for [Iraq]....It is widely believed that Syria is...determined to wrench the 'Iraqi card' from Jordan's hands and that Asad has even established contact with Saddam himself, his arch rival for two decades.

In October, major Western papers began to report the rapprochement with Saddam, saying "the bitter foes of Baghdad suddenly decided that Saddam and the status quo were preferable to a potentially dangerous disintegration of Iraq," which is how King Hussein's objectives are generally described. By mid-December, Arab papers noted improving Iraqi-Syrian ties, with one Bahrain daily reporting that "Syria is hinting that it might restore ties with Iraq in order to strengthen its hand." Egypt played a major role in this effort as well.

In early spring 1996, Syria began using Algerian mediation in order to affect a Syrian-Iraqi thaw.

By late spring 1996, reportedly Asad began to meet directly with Saddam Hussein along the Syrian-Iraqi border to try to forge a common strategy to deal with what Asad called a threat of "the return to the policy of alliances," namely Jordanian efforts to oust Saddam and the creation of regional Israeli-Jordanian-Turkish-American bloc.

Part of Syria's efforts may also involve relieving the pressure on Saddam. Iraq is forbidden under a number of UN resolutions from selling its oil, except under UN supervision and provisos. It is possible, however, that Syria is allowing Iraq to transport some of its oil for export through Tripoli, Lebanon. There is no firm evidence of this transshipment activity, but rumors persist. If so, then the oil would pass most securely through the port in Tripoli, to be transshipped as Syrian oil. The port in Tripoli is run by a Sunni named Shaaban, called the "Prince of the Believers." Shaaban is a close friend of Asad and skims money for private use from port operations. This arrangement permits Syria to conduct clandestine transshipments discreetly.

Saudi Succession as a Factor between Iraq and Jordan

To tolerate Saddam would incur the wrath of Saudi Arabia — a relationship even more important to Syria than its ties to Iran. Asad's relationship with Saudi Arabia — anchored to personal ties between Crown Prince Abdallah and Syria — is important for a number of reasons. It helps keep the common Hashemite foe off balance and is a vital link in isolating King Hussein. Saudi Arabia has provided Syria with much-needed cash in the past. The relationship helps Syria avoid isolation within the Arab world. Finally, it encourages the Saudis to intervene with the West to keep Syria out of the "rogue nation" camp that includes Iran, Libya, and Iraq; namely it helps Syria avoid isolation vis-a-vis Europe and America.

Syria, however, is clearly worried about its relations with Saudi Arabia and the damage Jordan's initiative could cause. As early as September 1995, as *al-Wasat's* Damascus correspondent Ibrahim Hamidi, reported, "[Syria's] main concern at present is the prospect of Jordan adopting a major role in bringing about a change in Iraq, which would reduce the oil-rich Gulf states' need for Syria." Hussein Kamal's defection and Jordan's subsequent initiative began to cause a rift on regional policy between Riyadh and Damascus. This fear must have been sharpened in January 1996 as King Hussein was openly making efforts to unite the various Iraqi opposition factions and have them move to Amman as their center of operations. Asad must have been particularly concerned when the al-Sudairi Saudi ambassador to Jordan, Abdallah al-Sudairi, "declared that there are no differences between his country and Jordan over Iraq...and that the two countries were working together." Asad's problem was compounded by the Jordanian "White Revolution" in the first week of February 1996, which installed al-Kabariti, known for his antipathy toward Syria. Syria was in danger of losing Saudi support on the Iraq issue, to Jordan.

To respond, Syria launched a strategic initiative to counter the pro-American drift in the Middle East, isolate Amman, and bring Saddam's Iraq out of the woods within limits, if only to counter-balance what it perceives is a pro-American, Israeli-Turkish-Jordanian alliance.

Syria's efforts to challenge the United States and deal with Iraq could run into resistance in Riyadh. In the framework of this delicate, but vital, relationship for Asad, Syria's involvement in the June 1996 terror attack on the U.S. barracks at Khobar towers in Dhahran is most perplexing. Press reports indicate persistently that Syria at least tolerated, perhaps even assisted, in the attack on American forces at Dhahran's Khobar Towers housing complex in June 1996. There is also mounting circumstantial evidence that this is the case. The bomb, according to reports circulated widely in the American press, originated in Lebanon, which is virtually under complete control of Ghazi Kan'an, Syria's *de facto* military governor of Lebanon. In the words of Alain Chouet, head of the French Mission to the United Nations in Geneva:

Ghazi Kan'an, an al-Kalbiyah [the 'Alawite tribe from which Asad hails] from Bhamra [the 'Alawite village next to Asad's] is allied to the Asads by having married his son to a daughter of Jamil al-Asad. He is a Brigadier General in charge of all security aspects of the Lebanon situation, which he discusses directly with President Asad, without intermediaries. A virtual Syrian proconsul in Beirut, he dominates public life in Lebanon, where nothing happens anymore without his authorization.

If Syria had no role in the bomb, and Hizballah acted in a wildcat operation, then this would have been an embarrassment to Asad, a failure of Kan'an, and a major crisis in one of Syria's most important regional relationships. Yet, a week later, Ghazi Kan'an was promoted; he was appointed Director of the Foreign Operations Branch of Syrian intelligence, among the most sensitive positions in Syria.

If true, why would Syria, a regime not given to forfeiting control, allow itself to be implicated with an operation so damaging to its most important associate in the region? Why would Syria, when it has entered a dangerous struggle with Jordan over the balance of power in the Levant, risk antagonizing one of its most important allies? And why would Syria, just as it moves to keeping Saddam afloat, risk antagonizing the Saudis further? The answer to these questions lies in the dynamics of internal Saudi politics, the course of which is critical to Asad. The split within the royal family, between the al-Sudairis and Abdallah, presents Syria with an opportunity. In launching an anti-American campaign that might include tolerance and rehabilitation of Saddam, Asad would have a particular problem with the al-Sudairi branch of the ruling al-Saud family. That branch is closer to the United States than to Syria. Moreover, the al-Sudairis have also been leading the rapprochement with Jordan, appointing one of its own members as the ambassador to Amman. They are also adamant in rejecting any rapprochement with Saddam.

In contrast to the al-Sudairis, Crown Prince Abdallah is closer to Syria than to the United States. He has even led efforts to sabotage Jordanian-Saudi rapprochement. He is also more positively disposed toward Saddam Hussein, in part because of his antipathy toward Jordan. In short, Asad and Abdallah share a regional strategic view.

Most observers would argue that the survival of the Saudi regime as we know it rests upon the presence and connection of the royal family to the Americans. The Gulf War, the reliance on U.S. forces, and the close ties to the Bush administration have so identified these royals with the American relationship that they could hardly survive its souring. The terrorists who attacked the Khobar towers were surely aware of this, and it is likely that they understood that attacking the American presence would threaten the position of these royals.

To make sense of Syria's involvement, if true, indicates that there must be a more nuanced understanding of Syria's calculus toward Saudi Arabia. The increasingly acute succession struggle in the Saudi kingdom may provide context.

In late December 1995, King Fahd of Saudi Arabia became ill, passing *de facto* power to Prince Abdallah, known for his sympathies to Syria. This dress rehearsal for the real transfer approaching, which included visible jostling for power between Princes Sultan and Abdallah, clarified for Syria both its opportunities as well as dangers at that moment. Abdallah had been placed in temporary charge of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia when King Fahd was incapacitated through illness. Yet, during Abdallah's brief absence for a state visit to a neighboring Gulf state, his main al-Sudairi rival, Prince Sultan, asserted power back in Riyadh. Abdallah had to hurry home and reassert his temporary, but paramount ruling status. Part of this effort to reassert power, according to Lebanese information, involved inviting Syrian operatives into the kingdom. Some of these operatives also assisted Lebanese terror groups in establishing a stronger foothold in the kingdom.

While Syria may not be interested in destabilizing or antagonizing Saudi Arabia as a nation, it may be interested in undermining Saudi Arabia's relations with the United States by encouraging and even helping forces within the kingdom who want to eject the Americans.

The close U.S.-Saudi relationship is essential for the survival of the al-Sudairi branch of the royal family that controls the regime currently. It is *not* so essential, and may even be detrimental, for other elements of the royal family. Some branches, such as those around Abdallah, are much more anti-Western, and even regard Saddam favorably. Even the most virulent of the local, anti-royal, fundamentalist-Sunni movements that call for violence and may have been involved in the Dhahran bombing, understand this distinction and seem to focus their wrath primarily on the al-Sudairi branch of the al-Saud family. In the words of al-Masari's *Committee for the Defense of Legal Rights (CDLR)*,

Brothers have had reservations with regard to using the generalized term 'Al-Saud' and of criticism of the Royal family in general. These brothers claim that there are actually several respectable members within the Royal family. They mentioned that some members of the family are also sympathetic towards the reformers and the reform project [i.e.-revolutionary movements like the CDLR], and, therefore, the general criticism of Aal Saud may lead to the loss of support to such people. This is valuable advice, but we would like to comfort our brothers in that most of our criticism is directed to a limited number of personalities headed by Fahd, Sultan, Salman, and Naif, and their direct responsibility for the crimes of the regimes.

Crown Prince Abdallah is glaringly absent from this list.

It is possible that Syria is undermining Saudi Arabia's relations with the United States in order to sabotage the position of the al-Sudairis and assist others in the royal family closer to the Syrians, more opposed to the United States and Jordan, more tolerant of Iraq and less hostile to Iran. In other words, if the succession struggle in Saudi Arabia is on Asad's mind, then assisting those who wish to remove the U.S. umbrella from Saudi Arabia through terror attacks, is in Syria's interest, precisely *because* Saudi Arabia is so important for Asad. Syria needs to ensure that succession flows in the direction of Abdallah and those who share his sentiments, and away from those who draw closer to Jordan.

Syria has interfered before in Saudi Arabia. In summer 1995, Asad conspired with Crown Prince Abdallah — who is married to a member of the prominent Sunni Itri family in Damascus that is very closely aligned with the Asad clan — to engineer a crisis that would sabotage improving Turkish-Saudi ties, according to the Turkish journal, *Nokta*. A number of Turkish nationals who had been selling drugs from Syrian-controlled territory in Lebanon and transferring them through the Hatay province in Turkey, were arrested in Saudi Arabia. When a death sentence was passed on these Turks, the Turkish government sent high-ranking emissaries to Riyadh to argue for commuting their sentence. However, the Turks were executed on Abdallah's order even though the Turkish emissaries had been reassured by King Fahd this would not happen.

The succession question is especially important because Abdallah and Sultan, the two most likely successors, are old, of questionable health and will serve at best as transitional figures. Their importance lies in the power wielded as king and in anointing the next generation of royal princes. Common wisdom holds that all the members of the royal family are keenly aware that their primary concern must be the survival of the royal family, and that even inter-family rifts over power are subordinate to the quest for family preeminence. Still, many observers concede that Saudi succession may be just as likely an unbridled and unprincipled struggle for power. Indeed, precisely because the survival of the family is on the line with every succession, precisely because the stakes are so high, the factional infighting may be intense as each views the other's politics as leading to the family's dishonor and destruction. Moreover, the

vulnerability and importance of Saudi Arabia tempt other nations, such as Syria and Iran, to interfere in internal Saudi politics to shape the succession struggle, perhaps even without their Saudi benefactor's being aware of this.

Thus, the stakes are not only over the next king, but over the institutionalization of the long-term direction which Saudi Arabia will take — toward the West and Jordan under the al-Sudairis, or toward Syria under Crown Prince Abdallah.

Undermining the INC in Northern Iraq

Jordan relied heavily on an alliance with the INC to pursue the Hashemite option. The INC encompasses the entire Iraqi opposition spectrum except some of those groups working with Damascus. By coordinating with the INC, King Hussein gave his Hashemite initiative an Iraqi facade. Moreover, the INC's presence in northern Iraq gave Jordan a locally populated geographic base — northern Iraq — from which to operate.

Hussein Kamal's defection to Amman in summer 1995 and Jordan's introducing its initiative on Iraq coincided with an American-mediated cease-fire between Kurdish factions in northern Iraq in late summer 1995, dubbed the "Dublin Agreement." This was yet another blow to Asad since it thrust the INC functionally as the protectors of peace in northern Iraq, therein proving the organization's effectiveness, reversing the weakness it faced as a result of the Kurdish infighting in spring 1995 which had left a void which Asad sought to fill. In short, King Hussein began forging an alliance with the INC to exploit traditional Hashemite ties to Iraqi society for the purpose of slowly infiltrating the tribal base surrounding Saddam. This transformed northern Iraq into a springboard and node of opposition activity associated with King Hussein's initiative.

Given the INC's importance to King Hussein's initiative, and given the INC's base of power in northern Iraq, the key battle ground between Syria and Jordan shifted in fall 1995 to northern Iraq. Iraqi opposition sources reported that Jordan was trying to "counter Syrian attempts to undermine its role in Iraq by establishing a 'Jordanian presence' in the Western-protected Kurdish enclave in northern Iraq." There were even reports that Israel had established an intelligence presence in northern Iraq in collaboration with Iraqi opposition leaders; whether true or not, these reports drew a strong warning from Syria and affected its perception of the situation.

While the "Dublin agreement" laid a solid geographical foundation for Jordan to pursue its Hashemite initiative, America did not use the "Dublin agreement" and cease-fire as a springboard to rejuvenate and forward the INC as a solution to the Iraq problem as a whole and to solidify its position on northern Iraq. Indeed, after the "Dublin agreement" was signed, America neglected northern Iraq and the role it would play in the competition for Iraq's future. U.S. envoys promised economic, financial, and security assistance to the INC, but little, in fact, materialized. Without U.S. involvement, the working relations between the two main Kurdish factions deteriorated as the INC lost its mediating effectiveness. The INC had been born and based in northern Iraq; politically ignoring northern Iraq was tantamount to abandoning the INC. Iran and Syria, seeing the vacuum thus created, soon began to assert their influence in the north by exploiting their geographic advantages — a move which drew no American response. It is likely that Syria and Iran increased their involvement in northern Iraq's Kurdish areas and undermined the "Dublin agreement" in large part in order to sabotage King Hussein's plans.

Two-weeks after the U.S.-brokered cease-fire in northern Iraq, the pro-Syria/Iran Kurdish faction, the PKK, attacked pro-INC Kurdish factions in an act, which Kamran Karadaghi, *al-Hayat's* Iraq commentator, noted:

may have been...part of efforts to undermine U.S. influence in the enclave...which could be part of the broader rivalry between Washington and Damascus over the Iraqi opposition and post-Saddam Iraq. The PUK-KDP agreement [the August 1995 US-brokered 'Dublin agreement'] provides for the INC to play a major role in policing the truce between them, and this runs counter to Syria's attempts to supplant the INC with an Iraqi opposition coalition under its auspices aimed at thwarting what it sees as the 'American project' for Iraq's future.

With the Kurdish issue unresolved, Iran and Syria increased their leverage in northern Iraq. Throughout the fall, Iran and Syria pushed hard to press both the KDP and PUK to regard them as the main power brokers. Iran moved SAIRI's military wing, the Badr forces, into northern Iraq by December — an act which drew Turkey's, but not U.S. concern.

Syria's and Iran's pressure began to pay off by late November, as evinced by the public agreements between the KDP, PUK, and SAIRI. The effects of the pressure were evident in the way in which both the PUK and KDP were forced to provide ostentatious receptions to visiting Iranian dignitaries, especially Iran's Iraq policy supremo, Ali Agha Mohammadi. It is possible that the increasing difficulties that the INC encountered in late fall 1995 in northern Iraq led the two Kurdish factions by late November to enter discussions with King Hussein of Jordan to move their center of activity from northern Iraq to Amman, as some Iraqi opposition elements claim.

The PUK, located in the eastern part of the enclave, buckled and came to terms with Iran. The KDP, located in the western part, remained aloof and refused to disband its anti-Iranian wing, the KDP-Iran. By spring 1996, Iran's Revolutionary Guards and Red Crescent Society intervened directly and freely in northern Iraq. Iran eventually invaded northern Iraq in June 1996, and pressed the PUK into active hostility against the KDP. The KDP was beleaguered in the face of Iran's pressure. America still took no notice of these developments, highlighting its political disengagement from northern Iraq.

Iran and Syria succeeded by summer 1996 to force Kurdish factions in the north to submit to Iran's and Syria's domination or face obliteration.

Syria's and Iran's interventions in northern Iraq had another deleterious effect that would undermine Jordan. It highlighted the power vacuum that the north had become. Such a vacuum was sure to invite Saddam's attentions. The efforts of Jordan's King Hussein to undermine Saddam over the past year particularly threatened Saddam. By late summer 1996, Saddam was ready to respond to this threat. According to the Jordanian government, Saddam fomented riots in August 1996 in a number of Jordanian cities, including the worst in seven years in Kerak, to derail Jordan's Hashemite option. Then, on August 30, displaying understanding that using power generates power, Saddam exploited the U.S. neglect of northern Iraq and invaded northern Iraq. While Saddam's incursion into the north was aimed tactically at the Kurds, it served this much broader strategic purpose. He invaded to undermine Hashemite plans and reverse his image of weakness. Saddam acted in response to the fragility of his regime, which has tempted Iraq's neighbors to compete for power in Iraq in preparation for Saddam's departure.

Conclusions

The competition to inherit Iraq has been underway since the end of the Gulf War in 1991. Its course will profoundly affect the balance of power in the Middle East. The events of August 1996 in northern Iraq are only the latest chapter in this competition, with Saddam reasserting himself as a major actor as well.

It would be tempting for the United States to write off northern Iraq and let Syria, Iran, and Iraq

brawl over the scraps. But King Hussein has launched an initiative that can manage the chaos that awaits Iraq and the Levant in a way that benefits the United States. It is in the West's interest that Jordan prevail in this confrontation. Were the Hashemites to win, then they could become the cornerstone of a stable balance of power that also includes Israel and Turkey.

The United States should encourage a reshaping of the regional balance of power in which Jordan plays a major role. The king's efforts have earned him the enmity of the most dangerous regimes in the Middle East: Asad's, Saddam's, and Rafsanjani's. If left to stand alone, King Hussein's initiative, perhaps even his regime, will be threatened in the face of such powerful opponents.

So this brings us back to the first questions of strategy. How should the West, particularly the United States and Israel, deal with the strategic competition over Iraq? To begin with, the battle over Iraq represents a desperate attempt by residual Soviet bloc allies in the Middle East to block the extension into the Middle East of the impending collapse that the rest of the Soviet bloc faced in 1989. The West must avoid repeating the mistakes at the end of the Cold War. It was futile and counterproductive in 1989-1991 to pursue stability in East Europe by trying to salvage communism and Gorbachev's rule. It is equally unwise to pursue stability in the Levant by propping up secular-Arab nationalism.

Moreover, the effort to prop up secular-Arab nationalism in its crumbling weakness, is anchored to the belief that it can be "reformed" enough to be resurrected as a bulwark against Islamic fundamentalism. Yet, one of the main strategic objectives of the peace process is to perpetuate Levantine secular-Arab nationalist regimes. Indeed, the previous Israeli government believed that, "[Israel's] role is to protect the existing regimes, to prevent or halt the process of radicalization, and to block the expansion of fundamental religious zealotry."

But the present study, which is the second *IASPS Research Paper in Strategy* to be published by the Institute, shows that the pursuit of comprehensive peace and the effort to harness secular-Arab nationalist regimes such as Syria's in the battle to stem the fundamentalist tide is not only futile. It is also a dangerous strategic misstep. Five years ago, the West learned that resisting the tide of fundamentalism in Iran by embracing secular-Arab nationalism in Iraq was perilous. The attempt to play one against the other was an explosive mistake. The same lesson should now be applied to Syria. It is in both Israel's and the West's interest to expedite the demise of secular-Arab nationalism. Secular-Arab nationalism, which is indeed on the edge of collapse, is perhaps most dangerous in its final moments and should not be regarded as an "ally in waiting." The pursuit of the peace process is preventing this.

Secular-Arab nationalism, particularly Baathism, undermines regional stability and damages the West's interests not only in its active role as a threat, but also in its more passive role as an obstacle to introducing more formidable, and beneficial, intellectual defenses among Arabs with which to stem fundamentalism. Secular-Arab nationalism offers no intellectual challenge to fundamentalism. It now holds onto power not by weight of its idea, but by the intensity of its terror. As long as this transitional, languishing circumstance continues, the Arab world is prevented from pursuing alternatives. Most of all, the effort to salvage secular-Arab nationalism, like the quest for "comprehensive peace," itself becomes dangerous and destabilizing to the region's balance of power.

As the rejection of communism was necessary for the Europeans and Russians to move on to a government more able to resist dangerous ideas in former East bloc countries, so too is the rejection of radical secular-Arab nationalism necessary for the Arab world to move to a more healthy future. The West and its local friends must engage fundamentalism with better associates

than Baathists.

Although the United States contains Iraq militarily, Washington and Jerusalem ignore Iraq politically. This too is, in part, a legacy of the peace process. U.S. and Israeli regional policies were informed almost exclusively by the quest for comprehensive peace, which replaced traditional strategic considerations, especially the balance of power, with European Union-style regional integration.

Israel's policies toward Iraq have been largely driven by this concept of "comprehensive peace." Israel's Rabin, who had developed a close working relationship with Jordan's Hussein, grasped the significance of Jordan's shift and supported Jordan's efforts. This support continued initially after Rabin's death. HaAretz reported that in Peres' December meetings with top American officials, he even proposed the creation of NATO-style alliance among Israel, Jordan, a post-Saddam Iraq, and Turkey. But Israeli commentators noted that all such cooperation was conceived more as a form of prodding Asad to accept comprehensive peace than as a strategic plan to contain, undermine, and eventually transcend Syria and secular-Arab nationalism. "Comprehensive peace," rather than balance of power, continued to inform Israeli policy on Iraq, as was revealed a month later when Syria balked returning to the negotiations. The stalling of the Syrian track, and the Israeli government's desire to revive it, led Israel to *concede* to Syria its prominent regional role rather than to redouble its efforts to contain or undermine Asad. In this context, the United States, as Pelletreau's statements indicate, and Israel, as Peres's also indicate, sought to coopt Syrian President Asad by considering seriously his regional plans.

The American and Israeli quest for regional integration has proven flawed and unrealistic. It has caused the West to neglect the dangerous strategic competitions that still define the region, quite independent of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Such neglect has allowed a dangerous deterioration in the power and relative position of those forces potentially aligned with the West by allowing Syria to leverage the peace process both to block the United States from endorsing Jordan's efforts, and to remove some of the teeth behind growing Turkish-Israeli collaboration — which will continue over the long-run despite Erbakan's current administration. In short, the quest for "comprehensive peace" blocks Israel and the United States from pursuing a durable regional strategy based on the balance of power.

Lebanon is Asad's Achilles heel. Iran is his strategic ally. Turkey's Erbakan is his hope. Iraq is his objective. And an Abdallah-dominated Saudi Arabia is his shield from the West. The United States must support moves to challenge Syria's position in Lebanon, to undermine Iran, to ensure Turkey's long-term pro-Western tilt and integration into Europe, to support Jordan's efforts in Iraq, and to understand better the dynamics of Saudi succession as they relate to its foreign policy. Otherwise, the West will still not get peace. Instead it will look beyond Israel's borders at secular-Arab nationalism's final legacy — a chaotic sea that resembles violent, medieval European feudalism (which will painfully intrude on the West), unfortunately infused with high-technology weaponry — rather than at a stable balance of power system that can serve as a more solid basis for the Arabs upon which to build their nations and contemplate effective governance.



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