

## A Hopeless Case? Recommendations for Action for a Political Handling of the Iraq Conflict

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Anyone following the political debate on Iraq in recent months would have been able to observe almost daily how in Washington the boundary between analysis and calculated wishful thinking was being transgressed. Weeks went by before the US authorities were able to finally make up their mind officially to recognize the existence of a »civil war« in Mesopotamia. The fact that today this is regarded as progress by some observers reveals something of the reputation of the US government but little about the current status quo in Iraq. This admission did not come from nowhere: in Washington the underlying tense relationship between »let's-get-the-job-done« rhetoric and the constantly rising number of victims was becoming ever more unbearable.

Today as a result the pendulum seems to be swinging in the other direction – the trend is towards »blaming the victim.« Characteristic of this perception is not least the recent attempt by prophet of the invasion Fouad Ajami to sell the campaign as a »gift to the Iraqis« who rather ungratefully do not appreciate it.<sup>1</sup> Leitmotif: »We had the best of intentions.«

After the »will to illusion« of the neo-conservative chief strategists – according to Christoph Reuter in *International Politics* – now appears to be at least diminished, Iraq is being portrayed outside the White House increasingly as a hopeless case.<sup>2</sup> One important voice in this is the influential specialist journal *Foreign Affairs*. In its March–April issue it announced apodictically the impossibility of stopping the »civil war« that has broken out in Iraq.<sup>3</sup>

1. Fouad Ajami: *The Foreigner's Gift: The Americans, the Arabs, and the Iraqis in Iraq*. Free Press 2006.
2. Christoph Reuter: *Irak – Die Welt als Wille zum Wahn*. In: *Internationale Politik*, Januar 2007.
3. James D. Fearon: *Iraq's Civil War*. In: *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2007. Similar evaluations may also be found in Germany. Cf. Christoph von Marschall: *Afghanistan vor der Irakisierung?* In: *Merkur*, 61/2007, p. 139.

But beyond this sweeping judgment and in the face of increasing American impatience the question is more and more urgently being posed, how the conflict in Iraq can be defused politically. Starting out from a stocktaking of the current lines of conflict in Iraq we shall bring together aspects of a possible political handling. In this way we also have to demonstrate that the complex masked ethnic and religious conflicts of post-Saddam Iraq are ultimately to be understood as struggles over distribution of power and resources which can be handled politically and in principle also solved politically.

### »War? What War ...?«: The Three Levels of Conflict

Although public debates about the Iraq conflict in recent months have mainly revolved around its definition as »uprising« or »civil war« it is becoming clear that in post-Saddam Iraq not only one war is being fought. The situation is more appropriately described rather as an overlapping of three conflicts: (i) resistance to the US occupation; (ii) internal antagonism between different ethnic and confessional factions (»civil war«); and (iii) a regional struggle. These three conflicts overlap to a considerable degree and »phenotypically« can barely be distinguished. In terms of their main focus they followed one another chronologically.

The first and oldest line of this bundle of conflicts is the armed resistance to the US occupation (in US military jargon: »insurgency«). This is carried out mainly, though not exclusively by Sunnis, former Baathists and radical groups such as Al Qaeda in Iraq, who at the moment find themselves as a result of this matter of common concern in a – to be sure, extremely brittle – coalition of interest.<sup>4</sup>

The second line of conflict developed rapidly after the attack on the Golden Mosque in Samarra on February 22, 2006, and in the Western public debate has been described in recent weeks more or less openly as the Iraqi »civil war«, that is, as a conflict between Sunnis and Shi'ites. Despite the religious charge this conflict is essentially a struggle over distribution between the two ethnic groups and also to some extent a conflict between them and the quasi-independent Kurds. The object of

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4. Details on the strength of individual military actors can be found in Guido Steinberg: *Die irakische Aufstandsbewegung. Akteure, Strategien, Strukturen*. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin, October 2006.

the conflict is the issue of the division of power and resources in the country as a whole. With reference to the intensity of the violence it is this conflict which at present is accounting for the most victims and giving rise to the, to some extent, extreme brutality of retaliation and counter-retaliation. However, it is often overlooked in the public debate that Sunnis and Shi'ites do not represent monolithic blocks but rather are split into factions which often represent opposed interests. The ambivalent role of Shi'ite leader Al Sadr in recent weeks in relation to the Shi'ite dominated government is a striking example of this – the internal disagreement between Sunni Al Qaeda activists and representatives of traditional forms of rule in, among other places, Anbar province is another.<sup>5</sup>

The regional component of the Iraqi conflict is the third and temporally most recent line of conflict. In fact, in Iraq today the possibility is emerging of a regional »proxy war« between the Shi'ite dominated Iran and Sunni forces – nolens volens led by Saudi Arabia – which in the background is heightened and intensified by the involvement of the United States. At the latest since the warning by the US political scientist Vali Nasr of a Shi'a revival in the region, which brought the case effectively to public attention, this dimension has dominated not only technical debates but also as a neat scheme of interpretation possesses political potential as a self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>6</sup> In fact this conflict at present has not yet completely got under way, though it potentially has explosive force. In Riyadh the voices are multiplying who favor supporting the »Sunni brothers in faith« in Iraq against the Shi'ite majority and are openly speculating about intervention on the side of the Sunnis.<sup>7</sup> Yet the regional dimension is not confined to rhetoric: for a long time many Saudi citizens have been active as private combatants in Iraq.<sup>8</sup>

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5. Iraq Sunni tribes build police force, fight Al Qaeda (Jordan Times: 29/4/2007.)

6. Vali Nasr: The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future. New York 2006.

7. For example, a religious scholar close to the Saudi royal house Abdul Rahman Al-Barak issued a *fatwa* at the end of 2006 in which he described the Shiites as »the most evil sect«. Moreover an expert attached to the Saudi embassy in Washington openly fantasized at the beginning of December 2006 about a »massive intervention« by his country in Iraq if the US forces were withdrawn. (International Herald Tribune, 29/12/2006.)

8. Research points to a proportion of foreign combatants in Iraq of less than 10 percent. Certainly many non-Iraqis are responsible for highly publicity laden suicide actions. Cf. Steinberg, op. cit., p. 28 f.

This involvement on the part of Riyadh is mirrored by Teheran's regional policy. Although Iran's foreign policy agenda must be considered in a differentiated fashion it is clear that Teheran's influence on political processes in Iraq is hardly to be underrated at present. The supply of weapons and explosives to the warring factions in the country constantly assumed (incidentally, entirely credibly) by the US government should not be emphasized in the first instance here but rather the personal dovetailing of Iranian decision-makers with the Iraqi political elite. Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki spent a large part of the Saddam regime in Syria and Iran and agitated against Iraqi aggression on the side of Teheran. The same can be said about a large part of the current leadership in Baghdad, as well as a significant portion of the Iraqi Parliament.<sup>9</sup>

One thing's for certain, far-reaching political decisions in Baghdad today could hardly be said to be against Teheran's wishes. However, this does not mean, for example, a complete bringing into line of Iraqi decision-making structures with Iranian ideas. Basically, Iranian policy – at least according to the evaluation of the International Crisis Group – appears to be oriented in terms of a »triad« which (i) against the background of the Shi'ite majority demands democratic structures, (ii) supports pluralism of actors in Iraq in the sense of *divide et impera*, and (iii) considers a certain amount of political instability as beneficial – certainly »of a manageable kind.«<sup>10</sup>

It is not surprising that Sunni Arabs react to this kind of Iranian influence with skepticism. At the same time, this Iranian involvement in Iraq is informative on other grounds: once again a certain absurdity of US policy becomes clear in relation to this development, which so far has refused to begin substantial dialogue with Iran but at the same time has the closest contacts with a government in Baghdad which consists of Shi'ite radicals and the parties Dawa and SCIRI which are close to Iran.

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9. For example, in Baghdad it is said on the quiet that the telephone switchboard in around half of all Iraqi ministries have become occupied by purely Persian-speaking employees. Although this appears exaggerated it does illustrate the perception of Iranian involvement in Iraq. Author's interview with Mahjoob Zweiry (Center for Strategic Studies, Amman) on March 19, 2007 in Amman.

10. International Crisis Group: Iran in Iraq: How Much Influence? Middle East Report 38, March 2005, p. 2. Apart from that a basically stable neighbour matters to Iran on economic grounds so that it doesn't have to carry on important trade relations with Syria via Turkey. The extent to which this economic argument is accepted is questionable, however.

A further aspect of regionalization is formed by a possible – and in the past already occasionally realized – intervention on the part of Turkey in Northern Iraq, for example, in order to combat PKK activists on Iraqi territory and ultimately to prevent an independent Kurdistan.

The conflicts in Iraq are also regionalized by extensive refugee movements to third countries, which go on as before. The UN refugee agency UNHCR estimated in April 2007 that in Jordan and Syria alone there are at present around two million Iraqis. This is posing both states serious problems – and especially against the background of historical experiences. In fact, we are currently witnessing the greatest movement of refugees in the region since 1948 or 1967. Anyone taking into account the consequences of the first two refugee movements will not underestimate the socio-political effects of this development. These facts have barely registered so far in the political consciousness of global (and regional) actors, however, which is undoubtedly to be ascribed to the invisibility of the problem. In Amman, Irbid and Damascus indeed there are no refugee tent cities – however, the exiles also have no access to media representation on the evening news.<sup>11</sup>

It remains to be emphasized: with regard to this large number of interconnections the conflict in Iraq is already extensively regionalised. Alongside these three great lines of conflict – anti-American resistance, internal »civil war«, regional components – a considerable portion of the violence we observe is also attributable to ordinary criminality which is scarcely to be distinguished from partly legitimate ethnic-religious violence on the basis of the general brutalization of wartime. In contrast to the three lines of conflict we have presented this violence is not in the first instance to be combated politically, but by the police. However, it can only be combated successfully if socio-economic developments in the country are positive over the long term.

## **No »Magic Bullet«: Internal and External Actors Are Needed**

Symptomatic of the current debate both inside and outside Iraq is the truism that a »magic bullet« is not available for solving the conflict. At the same time, observation of Iraqi civil society(ies) makes it clear how

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11. Fahed Fanek: »Who should compensate Jordan for the massive Iraqi influx?« In: Jordan Times, February 12, 2007.

much Iraqis involved in that sphere consider a solely external conflict solution to be necessary. This approach is entirely understandable and to some extent also sensible – at any rate, the *prima causa* of the current difficulties was an invasion in breach of international law. Certainly this outside orientation appears in large parts of Iraqi civil society to be connected to an increasing mythologization and largely unhistorical transfiguration of the Iraqi past as an era of ethnic and religious harmony. This again became clear when the UN subsidiary organization UNOPS invited representatives of Iraqi civil society to a dialogue in Amman in February 2007. The participants urgently demanded international measures for solution of the conflict without giving time and attention to political power issues which have to be settled *in Iraq and by Iraqis*. Problematic in this (self-)perception is the fact that the underlying causes of the current conflicts are neglected and causalities projected exclusively on external actors. A political handling of the relevant questions in Iraq therefore appears secondary and consequently is becoming almost impossible. With regard to the confused situation consisting of overlapping conflicts it is clear, however, that a monolithic conflict strategy taking place at only one level and implemented by only one category of actors is not exactly promising. The question of the main actors of the political resolution process (Iraqis vs international community) is ultimately idle. What is needed is an overall political strategy which operates at all three levels of conflict and involves international and regional, as well as Iraqi actors. Schematic resolution models such as the attempt to resolve the conflict by bringing in more troops, but also undifferentiated calls for an immediate withdrawal of all US and coalition troops, will get nowhere.<sup>12</sup>

## **A Three-level Approach to Handling the Conflict**

The conflict in Iraq even today is being addressed at the most various levels. The problem with this way of handling the conflict, however, is that at present and in the absence of non-violent forms of political participation the conflict is manifesting itself as violence. The actors must therefore be offered forums for action in which they can define, articulate

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12. In particular, it should be noted here that the recent increase in the number of US troops by the US president of around 25 to 30 thousand men is not an increase in the proper sense but rather represents a restoration of previous troop numbers.

and represent their legitimate interests through political processes. If one takes the three main fields of conflict presented above as a basis a political handling strategy will have to be put in place on exactly these three levels. In detail, the following are to be recommended:

## 1. No Immediate US Withdrawal!

The armed resistance to the international troop presence is actively being pursued only by small parts of the Iraqi population (often – though by no means exclusively – by marginalised Sunnis). A fundamental rejection above all of the US presence, however, is virulent in large parts of Iraqi society outside Kurdistan, as well as in the Arab world. This is shown not least by recent opinion polls.<sup>13</sup>

As a result of the US presence in the meantime Iraq has developed into a global magnet for Islamic terrorism. As elsewhere the very presence of Western forces supplies the protagonists of violence with a legitimate basis to pursue their cause.<sup>14</sup> Although the US forces are inevitably perceived at present as part of the problem and are failing in their policy of pacification, paradoxically this does not mean that an immediate withdrawal of troops – as demanded by the Iraq Study Group – would foster a solution to the various conflicts. On the contrary: an overhasty withdrawal of US forces would at the present time do more harm than good since the resulting political and military vacuum would in all probability be filled by Iran. In reaction to this, direct or indirect intervention by Saudi Arabia, regionally validated by the Mecca agreement between Fatah and Hamas, is entirely conceivable – though not inevitable.

Advocates of the fastest possible withdrawal of US troops from Iraq put their hopes as a rule on a speedy »Iraqization« of the current forces. Although in principle this makes sense this demand overlooks realities in the country. Cross-confessional, neutral and multi-ethnic forces of order do not exist in the Iraqi state at present. The idea that a professional Iraqi

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13. For example, in a recent poll 78 percent of Iraqis questioned were convinced that the US troops would provoke more violence than they would prevent. »It's time to get out of Iraq«. In: New York Times, February 14, 2007. Three quarters of all Egyptians and Jordanians demand an immediate withdrawal of US troops (»Arab and US public opinion show similar concerns about Iraq war«. In: Jordan Times, April 10, 2007).

14. Amir Buchbot: »Der Israeli der Bin Laden am besten kennt« (in Hebrew). In: Maariv, January 27, 2007.

army could replace the withdrawing US forces so to speak as a neutral actor of the central state appears scarcely realistic given the status quo.<sup>15</sup>

What does this mean in concrete terms? Although the US forces are at present unable to foster a solution to the conflict their presence can at least stem a further regionalization of it.<sup>16</sup> In order to reduce the politically explosive stationing of American troops on Iraqi soil at least partly, and to some extent diminish the breeding ground of resistance to the invasion, the announcement of a medium-term withdrawal on a fixed date – as demanded by the US Congress – is the only alternative. In addition, the interest of Iraq's neighbors in Iraq's stabilization would significantly increase as soon as it would no longer have to be perceived as a positive result of US involvement, which is considered illegitimate.

## 2. »Don't Kiss, Just Talk«: The Regional Dimension

The regionalization of the different lines of conflict in Iraq is today not a possibility but a reality. What remains still open is merely the question of how much the political and personal interconnections in the region will in future result in violent conflicts. The capture of British marines by Teheran, the storming of Iranian government buildings in Irbil in northern Iraq, the arrest of half a dozen Iranian officials by US troops on January 11, 2007, as well as the announcement by the US President about »searching for and destroying« Syrian and Iranian networks in Iraq scarcely give grounds for optimism.<sup>17</sup> Martial tones emanating from Ankara and Riyadh are more than a match for such remarks.

The decisive question in the coming weeks will be to what extent the actual regionalization of the conflicts will also be understood *politically*. It remains to be hoped that the decision-makers – above all in the USA – will accept the realities in this case, before enormous loss of life renders them undeniable. The widespread demand finally to instigate a comprehensive and ongoing dialogue without preconditions with the regional

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15. »Iraq: Stones at Glass Houses«. In: The Middle East, 2007, p. 374.

16. International Crisis Group: After Baker-Hamilton: What to do in Iraq? Middle East Report No. 60. December 2006, p. 6. »The violence [in Iraq] was triggered and is now both fuelled and contained by the U.S. military presence.«

17. »Troops raid Iranian offices in Iraqi City«. In: Jordan Times, January 11, 2007. Contrary to other reports the occupied building was not a consulate but a contact office which provides consular services.



actors, in particular with Syria and Iran, is not particularly innovative but still the only alternative. Above all adding an ideological charge to the matter at hand at this point leads nowhere. The question is simply whether political conflicts in Iraq are dealt with by violence between actors who otherwise do not communicate with one another or by an open political dialogue between all the forces de facto involved. The emphasis chosen by the German Foreign Minister in his call for dialogue with Syria points in the right direction, as does the meeting of US representatives with Iranian and Syrian representatives in March 2007 in Baghdad, as well as in May 2007 in Sharm el Sheikh.

On this basis an agreement between the regional actors on a common denominator as the result of a comprehensive political process involving all those concerned appears less improbable than is often believed. Ultimately, all regional actors are interested in an Iraq no longer occupied by US forces remaining as an integrated state with more or less strong federal structures; that a completely independent Kurdistan be prevented; that Iraq in future represents no threat to its neighbors; that the exodus of refugees is stemmed; and that the economic development of the sub-region is no longer hindered by continuing instability in Mesopotamia. These are all possible starting points for a political strategy.

### 3. »Civil War«: Three Political Challenges

The fact that conflicts which are partly legitimized on ethnic grounds have a tendency towards taking on a life of their own and radicalization can be observed not only in Iraq. For the handling of the conflict in Iraq this represents a complication of the initial position. However, besides the religious charge of the inner-Iraqi conflicts between Sunnis, Shi'ites, Turkmens and Kurds it should not be forgotten that the manifold causes of conflict are not grounded in ethnic or religious incompatibilities per se, but are rather rooted in the political situation. The violence which has assumed a religious and ethnic guise is a manifestation of political conflicts which can be handled politically, and, in principle, solved politically too. In order to ensure the existence of a sustainable Iraqi federal state it must be guaranteed in relation to the three largest factions that: 1. the Kurds remain within the Iraqi federal state and do not take the last step towards independence; 2. the Sunnis have an adequate share of resources and power; 3. the Shi'ites cease to engage in reckless clientism. But how is all this to be achieved?

## Create Kurdistan within Iraq

In northern Iraq in the meantime a de facto state of Kurdistan has developed which de jure forms a region of the state of Iraq. In terms of the generally accepted indicators of statehood Kurdistan meets almost all the requirements of a sovereign state including autonomous armed forces, state administration, institutionalized powers, sustainable economy, and so on. Kurdish independence does not confine itself to merely creating facts on the ground but extends to the symbolic level as well: therefore, for example, to forbidding the public display of the Iraqi flag, as well as the introduction of a Kurdish national anthem. The level of independence which has been achieved is safeguarded in the Kurdish regional constitution which at present is in the process of adoption. This constitution of »Kurdistan« may be read as a guarantee of the status quo and repeatedly points explicitly to the possibility of exit from the Iraqi Federal State, if the »sanctity of the federal constitution« or the »basic principles of democracy« are infringed.<sup>18</sup> It therefore represents so to speak the minimal demands of Kurdish nationalism and raises the question of the extent to which this minimal demand can be reconciled with the minimal demands of non-Kurdish Iraqis. Since the de facto sovereignty of Kurdistan we have described was able to develop under American auspices since the introduction of the no-fly zones in 1991 it is understandable on demographic grounds why advocates of a Kurdistan within the Iraqi state are increasingly being superseded by advocates of complete independence. In a society in which a large part of the population is below the age of 25 the younger generation almost entirely lacks any experience of even an imposed Iraqi identity. An internal turning away of Kurdish youth from the Iraqi central state could already be observed at the Parliamentary elections in 2005.<sup>19</sup>

The planned referendum on the possible affiliation of the oil-rich Kirkuk to the region of Kurdistan is of particular significance for the development of the Kurdish question in Iraq. The Iraqi constitution foresees that this referendum should take place before the end of 2007 and Kurdish decision-makers seem determined that the referendum

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18. Matthias S. Klein: »Federalism issues distilled from the Kurdistan constitution«. October 15, 2006. available at <http://www.niqash.org>.

19. »Kurdish youth hold key to power in Iraqi elections«. In: The Guardian, December 12, 2005.

should take place come what may. The future of Kirkuk is a key question for Kurdistan because an economically sustainable and completely independent Kurdistan can be realized only with the inclusion of this city. Against the background of the referendum tensions and ethnic cleansing in Kirkuk have increased considerably in recent months. Above all the regional government of Kurdistan is at present trying to determine the result in advance by a strict de-Arabization policy.<sup>20</sup> Turkey is involved twofold in these developments: in addition to its alarm at the Kurdish question, there is a Turkmen minority in the city.<sup>21</sup> The Kirkuk question therefore is potentially explosive and will do nothing to defuse the conflict: a delay of the referendum, as demanded by Ankara, is therefore urgently to be recommended. Of course such a delay could only be achieved under US pressure. The readiness of the Americans to offend its sole remaining partner in Iraq on this issue, however, appears limited.

Against this background, keeping Kurdistan as a region inside a federal Iraq and preventing the Kurds from a total withdrawal from the political process of Iraq – for example, in reaction to a delay of the Kirkuk referendum – appears to be a challenge for Germany's Iraq policy. The efforts of Kurdistan's regional government to obtain a higher diplomatic profile from Germany could be a perfect response. A symbolic acknowledgement of Kurdish representatives by receiving them in Berlin would increase the influence of German foreign policy on this issue, but at the same time it would have comparatively little effect on the Iraqi political process outside Kurdistan, and precisely against the background of the constant close contacts of high US authorities with Kurdistan's government.

## **Integrating the Sunnis**

The participation of the Sunnis in the resources and political processes of post-Saddam Iraq is a core issue of the current conflict. Looking back, it

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20. Christian Parenti: The Question of Kurdistan. In: *The Nation*, November 14, 2005.

21. Kurdistan's regional government continues to rely on US support, including the taming of Turkish ambitions. Personal interview with George Mansour, Minister for Regions and Civil Society of the Kurdish Regional Government on February 25 in Amman.

is clear that the US government has given too little weight to this aspect. The main priority of the US government after the fall of Saddam was obviously the belated legitimization of the invasion by means of the quickest possible and most visible »democratization« of Iraq by referenda and elections. This pursuit of the belated legitimization of the invasion *from outside* was only possible, however, by attaching less importance to a long-term *internal* legitimization of the political process in Iraq.<sup>22</sup> The political boycott of parts of the Sunni population was tacitly accepted. Similar mistakes appear to be being made in relation to individual laws – in particular the preparation and adoption of the new oil law. However, without a slowing down of the political process integration of the Sunnis will not be possible.

Paul Bremer's de-Baathification of Iraqi society has proved just as problematic, marginalizing large parts of the Sunni middle class and tens of thousands of Iraqis with military training. De-Baathification meant for a large part of the Sunni minority a contradiction between personal life experience and the development of the Iraqi state, and so produced an opposition which was both disloyal to the system and trained in the system.<sup>23</sup> The reintegration of this faction in the state, given Shi'ite supremacy in the administration and the government will be extremely difficult. An important step, however, would be a relatively far-reaching reversal of the de-Baathification policy and the acceptance of a controlled re-Baathification of Iraq. This must take place with the exclusion only of those guilty of grave human rights abuses. The de-Baathification law presented by Prime Minister Al-Maliki and President Talabani at the end of March and revised with the help of US advisers, which envisages a reintegration of party members subsequent to a three-month trial phase, is a step in the right direction. It should be pushed through against the resistance of the de-Baathification Committee and Shi'ite forces (Al Sistani).

Besides the political integration of the Sunnis their economic participation is also a central point of current conflicts. The mainly Sunni gou-

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22. On the perception of the political process in Iraq as undemocratic cf. Fatih Abdulsalam: »Regionalkonferenz wird Irakkrise nicht lösen« (in Arabic). In: Az Zaman, March 8, 2007.

23. Bremer's autobiographical justification that the Iraqi army would have disintegrated on its own before the end of the war is not convincing. De-Baathification did not encompass exclusively fighting troops and cannot be represented as Iraqi-motivated. Cf. Paul Bremer: *My Year in Iraq: The Struggle to Build a Future of Hope*. New York, 2006.

vernorates of Iraq have virtually no significant oil deposits, although they do have – something which is often forgotten – sufficient water.<sup>24</sup> In order to achieve adequate participation of the Sunni population in Iraq's resources the international community should ensure that the constitution, which is currently being revised, and the new oil law now being debated make possible a fair distribution of resources. It is particularly important that the law is not in the first instance aligned with the interests of international oil companies. The draft of a new oil law recently adopted by the Iraqi cabinet, which basically foresees a proportional distribution of oil revenues, seems, however, to do just this.<sup>25</sup>

## Controlling the Shi'ites

From the Sunni standpoint recent months in Iraq have seen a continual, deliberate and open marginalization and degradation of the previously favored Sunni population by the majority Shi'ites. This was clearly indicated not only by the introduction of numerous Shi'ite holidays, but also by the preferential infrastructural provision of Shi'ite districts, for example, in Baghdad. Particularly effective in this respect were the scandalous circumstances of the execution of Saddam Hussein and his half-brother. In the Sunni population the execution was perceived as a deliberate humiliation – the revenge of a Shi'ite mob on a Sunni statesman. The shock waves of the execution on the eve of the Feast of Sacrifice were felt throughout the Arab world. Internationally coordinated and with ensured regional support pressure on Al Maliki and his government should ensure, however, that the Shi'ite dominated government uses its position of power with more moderation and restraint.

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24. It gave rise to astonishment when it was recently reported that in the Sunni Anbar province on the Syrian border substantial oil and gas deposits had been found. Cf. »New oil finds in Iraq gives hope to Sunni areas«. In: International Herald Tribune, February 19, 2007.

25. »Oil law boosts Kurdish ambitions«. In: Jordan Times, February 28, 2007. The draft is at present meeting resistance above all from Sunni and Shi'ite representatives. Cf. »Einwände der Einheitsfront und der Irakischen Liste gegen Ölgesetz« (in Arabic). In: Mashraq, March 13, 2007, p. 1.

## What Happens Next?

It is clear that the approaches brought together here can at best represent individual elements of an overall political solution. In the current situation what is important is not to regard Iraq, despite the enormous difficulties, as a hopeless case *ad acta*. It should rather be made clear that the current situation is owing to problems which can – and must – be addressed politically. In order to be able to implement such an approach successfully, however, political reality must be accepted in all its complexity. This includes the acceptance that Iraq is not experiencing a »civil war« or an »insurgency« but rather a conflict with three overlapping dimensions: an anti-American, an internal Iraqi and a regional. On all three levels there are points of contact for German and international politics.

It is particularly important for the latter to put aside ideological blinkers and to begin a long-term and continuing political process with all the actors involved, which will ultimately include the establishment or reactivation of diplomatic relations between the United States and Syria, as well as Iran. The first meeting of US representatives with Iranian and Syrian representatives in March 2007 in Baghdad, as well as at the beginning of May in Sharm el Sheikh must therefore be taken to be steps in the right direction. They must now be followed up. However, these endeavors at dialogue are likely to be successful only to the extent that the United States at least modifies its policy of uncompromising containment of Iran. Without acceptance of a certain amount of Iranian power in the region dialogue will be merely a diplomatic sham.

In relation to the internal political situation in Iraq it is now important to support the construction of institutions in which all Iraqi factions are represented. These political courses have to be established now in order to bring about a political handling of the underlying levels of conflict. Only in this way can the goal of a federal Iraq be achieved in which there is a balance between centrifugal and centripetal forces and in which all parts of the population enjoy appropriate scope for development.

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