THE INTERNATIONALIZATION
OF COMMUNAL STRIFE

STUDIES IN INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT SERIES
Series Editor: Manus I. Midlarsky

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Manus I. Midlarsky

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STATE-BUILDING IN IRAQ DURING THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR AND THE GULF CRISIS

Eric Davis

INTRODUCTION

Having initiated two of the most costly and dangerous military confrontations during the present century, an eight-year war with Iran and the invasion and seizure of Kuwait, Iraq has become the focus of international attention. Strategically situated at the head of the Persian Gulf, and bordering on Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iran and what was until recently the Soviet Union, Iraq is one of the world’s largest oil producers. Prior to the 1991 Gulf War, Iraq’s army was the world’s fourth largest; it had developed chemical and biological weapons and was in the process of acquiring a nuclear capability. Hostile relations exist between Iraq and a number of regional powers including Israel, Iran and Syria. Despite its significance in geopolitical and political economic terms, Iraq remains an enigmatic society both in the West and the Arab world. What factors motivated Iraq to become engaged in the space of little over a decade in two highly risky military actions that have threatened global energy supplies and have involved the Middle East in two major wars?

Although definitive analyses of the factors that led Iraq to seize Kuwait are still premature, a spate of studies already exists regarding its war with Iran. Unfortunately, most of these studies are either descriptive or offer conflicting explanations for the origins and progression of the war. In attempting to make theoretical sense of Iraq’s actions and to offer an alternative explanation that would help understand both the invasion of Iran and Kuwait, it is necessary to first explore some of the conceptual underpinnings of these arguments as well as to point out their weaknesses. The central question raised here then is: what type of explanation best explains Iraq’s motivations in initiating these two conflicts? What status does the approach offered in this essay have in relation to existing approaches? What types of differences separate the two?

Briefly stated, the thesis proffered here is that Iraq’s resort to military force needs to be understood within the context of its domestic politics.
primary source of conflict between Batters and Islam is the issue of context and the role of religion. In the Middle East, Islam is seen as a key element in the region's identity and culture.

In this model, the role of religion is significant as it provides a framework for understanding the region's political and social dynamics. Islam is seen as a unifying force that brings together different communities and cultures. It is therefore important to consider the influence of religion in the context of the Middle East, including its impact on politics, economics, and society.

It is also important to consider the role of religion in the context of recent events, such as the Syrian conflict. In this conflict, religious differences have played a significant role in shaping the course of the conflict and the way it is perceived by different groups.

In conclusion, the role of religion in the Middle East is significant and cannot be ignored. It is important to understand the impact of religion on politics, economics, and society in the region, and how it has influenced recent events such as the Syrian conflict.

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MODELS OF THE IRAN-Iraq WAR: THE ETHNO-CONFESSIONAL MODEL

A number of models have been advanced to explain the origins and evolution of the Iran-Iraq War. Among these, the ethno-confessional model, developed by Middle East experts, is one of the most prominent. This model emphasizes the role of cultural and religious differences in shaping the conflict. According to this model, the war was fueled by longstanding ethno-confessional tensions between Iran and Iraq, which were exacerbated by the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

However, it is important to note that the ethno-confessional model is not without its critics. Some argue that it oversimplifies the complex geopolitical dynamics at play in the region and fails to account for the role of external actors such as the United States and the Soviet Union.

In conclusion, the ethno-confessional model provides a useful framework for understanding the origins and evolution of the Iran-Iraq War. However, it is important to consider the limitations of this model and to recognize the role of external actors in shaping the conflict.
A second model that competes with the first is that which links the onset of the war to the presence of the American occupation. However, when virtually all Iraqi actions were attributed to Saddam, the assumption was that this mode was best captured by any analysis assuming the war was a result of the political decision. Indeed, the war was the only event that could bring together the entire Iraqi population.

The war began with a serious political decision. The model's end is the point where the public has lost all sense of self. The first indication of this is the form artificially imposed by the new regime. The war was the only event that could bring together the entire Iraqi population.

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A third model that has been offered to explain the Iran-Iraq war is the "geopolitical" approach. As with the ethno-competitive and Great Leader models, this approach begins with the assumption that Saddam Hussein's war is driven by the desire to expand Iraq's influence in the region. The geopolitical approach, however, sees the war as a struggle for control of oil-rich territories and as an attempt by Iran to contain Iraq's expansion. This model suggests that the war was not simply a matter of personal vendetta or a war of attrition, but rather a strategic battle for regional dominance. The geopolitical model also emphasizes the role of outside powers, such as the United States and the Soviet Union, in shaping the course of the war. Overall, the geopolitical approach provides a more nuanced understanding of the Iran-Iraq conflict, recognizing the complex interplay of regional politics, economics, and international relations.
A FOCUS ON THE STATE

As with any other Middle Eastern state, the creation of the modern state of Iraq in 1921 was an artificial process. The driving force behind this process was Ibn Saud, King of the Saudi Arab tribes, who established the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932. While Iraq had been a part of the Ottoman Empire since the 16th century, it was not until 1921 that it achieved independence. The process of state building was complicated by the presence of various ethnic and religious groups, including the Kurds and the Shi'a, who presented challenges to the central government.

The state-building model in Iraq is not always clear. It is often described as a combination of top-down authoritarianism and bottom-up popular mobilization. The government has been criticized for its authoritarianism, corruption, and human rights violations. However, it has also been praised for its achievements in areas such as education, health, and infrastructure.

In recent years, Iraq has faced significant challenges, including terrorism, political instability, and economic difficulties. The country has also been involved in conflicts with Iran and other neighboring countries. Despite these challenges, the government has continued to work towards building a strong and stable state.
formed around what I have referred to elsewhere as an "organic social formation". Put differently, the social groups that were comprised by the British to form modern Iraq did not share a common sense of political community. The Sunni Arabs of central and northern Iraq, who comprised between 25 and 30 percent of the population and who dominated the state under Ottoman rule, traditionally looked to Turkey and the Levant for cultural and economic sustenance. The Kurds of northern Iraq, who make up roughly 15 to 20 percent of the population and who were traditionally viewed as backward by their Turkish and Arab overlords, were inward looking given a largely aridic economy and tribal fragmentation. The Shi'a majority in the south, comprising between 55 and 60 percent of the populace, traditionally looked to Persia (later Iran) with which it maintained strong trading ties and cultural bonds given the Shi'a holy cities of Najaf and Karbala' in southern Iraq.

As the Iran-Iraq War and Gulf crisis so vividly demonstrated, the problems of the modern Iraqi state find their roots in the arbitrary manner in which British colonial officials, especially Sir Percy Cox and Sir Arnold Wilson, drew its boundaries. Kuwait and portions of southwestern Iran that had been part of Iraq when it was a province of the Ottoman Empire were not included in the state when it was placed under a League of Nations mandate in 1921. A second manner in which the Iraqi state was saddled with built-in instability was the imposition by the British of a member of the Hashimite family from the Hijaz region of present-day Saudi Arabia, Faisal ibn Hussein, as ruler of Iraq. The creation of a Hashimite monarchy in Iraq was the method by which the British hoped to circumvent the broken promises it had made to the Arab forces under Faisal's father, Sharif Husayn of Mecca. Sir Henry Makin had offered an independent Arab state including the Hijaz and the Levant in return for an Arab revolt against the Ottoman Turks. A weak sense of national identity, arbitrary boundaries, and an alien monarchy that was dominated by the British from behind the scenes set the stage for constant political and social turmoil during the period between 1920 and the 1958 Revolution. In providing an analytic framework that helps explain the unstable development of the state over time, history becomes a dynamic element that is missing from the ethno-confessional, great leader and geopolitical models. History thus entails elaborating a structure within which to interpret the conflict among various groups within Iraqi society to define a sense of national identity since the state's founding. These struggles have been much more complex than viewing them as simple zero-sum games among various ethnic and confessional groups. Prior to the 1958 Revolution, the primary struggles pitted the monarchy against the British and the parliametary elites drawn from the landowning and mercantile bourgeoisie. At other times the monarchy and parlia-
intellectuals and students. Most important for our present concerns, the Iraqi Communist Party argued that, while Iraq was an Arab society, real democracy could only be achieved by recognizing its ethnic, linguistic and confessional diversity. Further, the party asserted that only through a cross-class alliance that united workers, peasants, progressive intellectuals and other sympathetic groups could the pernicious aspects of these social cleavages, particularly as they were exploited by the British and the Iraqi ruling class, be overcome.

During the 1940s, support for Pan-Arabism intensified, stimulated in part by a pro-Axis uprising in 1941 under the leadership of Rashid 'Ali al-Kaylani. Although the British suppressed the uprising, they could not contain Pan-Arabism. Its most ardent proponent was the Ba'ath (Renaissance) Party founded in 1945. The founders of the Ba'ath Party, Michel 'Aflaq and Salah al-Din al-Bitar, were strongly influenced by the corporatism of European fascist ideology during their education in 1963. The military was placed firmly under the leadership of President Ahmad Hasun al-Bakr, a highly respected military officer, and Vice-President Saddam Husayn, moved quickly to avoid the fate that befall the Ba'ath Party in 1969. To shore up its economic and political stability, the Ba'ath Party was unsympathetic to calls for recognizing the cultural diversity of the Arab world. The Iraqi Communist Party's advocacy of a class-based politics was sharply rejected. While Islam was praised for its political contributions to the development of the Arab world, state and religion were maintained as distinct and separate realms in Ba'athist ideology.

The rise of communism and Pan-Arabism during the 1930s and 1940s as system-challenging movements presented two different visions of Iraq's future that juxtaposed themselves to the ever weakening legitimacy of the Iraqi monarchy and the small class of tribal landowners and urban merchants that provided its social base. The decline of British imperial rule following the end of World War II and the inability of the monarchical state to employ rising oil revenues to institute any significant reforms thereby broadened its base of support sealed its fate. On July 14 1958 the monarchy was overthrown in a military coup d'état that was accompanied by massive street demonstrations in Baghdad and other urban areas.

The coup that brought Brigadier 'Abd al-Karim Qasim to power was significant not only for abolishing the monarchy and for withdrawing Iraq from the Baghdad Pact but also for tipping the balance of power between the communities and Arab nationalism in the former's favor. Left-leaning and committed to wide-ranging social reforms, Qasim came under attack from Arab nationalists both inside and outside Iraq. Nasserists and Ba'athists argued that by letting prominent communists gain positions of influence within the government, Qasim was opening the Arab world to greater Russian influence. However, Qasim was no Marxist and refused to give the ICP any real political power. Attacked from the right and ultimately faced with declining support from the left, Qasim's power base narrowed until he was overthrown in a bloody coup led by the Ba'ath Party in February, 1963. The coup was followed by the massacre of over 3,000 communists and leftist sympathizers. Repulsion at continuing Ba'ath Party violence led to a counter-coup by the army and, between 1963 and 1968, Iraq was plagued by a succession of weak governments.

The military coup d'état that brought a wing of the Ba'ath Party under Saddam Husayn to power in July 1968 ended a decade of political turmoil. While the Iraqi populace did not accept this coup with any great enthusiasm, it nevertheless was relieved that the new regime was quickly able to restore political stability to the country. Under the leadership of President Ahmad Hasun al-Bakr, a highly respected military officer, and Vice-President Saddam Husayn, moved quickly to avoid the fate that befell the Ba'ath Party in 1969. To shore up its economic and political stability, the regime nationalized the British dominated Iraq Petroleum Company in 1972. Oil revenues, which increased from one billion dollars in 1972 to $26 billion in 1980, allowed the regime to initiate extensive development and social welfare programs. A new state bourgeoisie tied to oil wealth began to prosper.

The period between 1968 and 1974 witnessed a sharp anti-imperialist rhetoric that allowed the Iraqi state to mobilize the Iraqi populace around its "revolutionary" ideology and the nationalization of foreign and domestic economic interests. Closer ties were established with the Soviet Union and the Iraqi Communist Party was invited to join a "national front" government in 1972. However, the Eighth Party Congress of the Ba'ath held in 1974 marked the beginning of a shift to the right. This move became decisive in May 1978 when Saddam personally oversaw the execution of thirty-one communists and supporters who were members of the national front government on the pretext of their attempting to organize a military coup d'état. At the same time, seeking to forge a sense of national and collective identity that had eluded previous Iraqi governments, the state began to intensify its effort to reinterpret the nation's history. Headed by Saddam Husayn (who in 1979 deposed al-Bakr and assumed the presidency), the "Project for the Rewriting of History," led to a massive output of books, journals, international and local conferences, television and radio programs and articles in the press that sought to present an interpretation...
The model of the urban masses successfully confronting one of the most powerful armies in the world under the leadership of Ali al-Interi was as an example of the "demonstration effect," not just in Iraq but in many other countries. The case of the Ba'th regime was to be a source of inspiration for many nationalist oppositions, including those in Iran and Syria. Despite the Ba'th regime's anti-communist stance, it was also involved in regional politics, including the PLO, and contributed to the formation of the Ba'th Club. The Ba'th regime was ultimately overthrown in 1963 and replaced by a military junta, which was eventually replaced by a civilian government in 1970.

The end of the Ba'th regime in 1963 marked a significant turning point in Iraq's history. The country faced a period of political instability and economic decline, which led to the rise of the Ba'th Party and the establishment of a new political order. The new regime was characterized by authoritarianism and economic policies that favored the regime's elite. Despite these challenges, the country continued to develop and modernize, and by the late 1970s, Iraq had become an important player in the Middle East and the world. The period of the Ba'th regime was marked by significant developments in various fields, including politics, economy, and culture.
The Islamic Republic of Iran on September 22, 1980, was a response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and a significant refusal to the international community's attempt to establish a unified political front against Iraq. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait led to a regional war, in which various states were involved. The war was characterized by intense fighting and high civilian casualties.

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL IMPACT OF THE WAR

Far from being a short conflict, the war led to significant changes in the region. The war led to the fall of Saddam Hussein's government and the establishment of a new government in Iraq. The war also led to significant economic changes, as oil prices fell significantly, leading to a recession in the global economy.

The war had a significant impact on the region, leading to significant changes in the political landscape. The war also led to significant human suffering, as the war resulted in significant civilian casualties and displacement.

THE STATE BUILDING AND THE INVASION OF IRAN

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The invasion of Kuwait was clearly linked to its oil producing capacity and the Iraqi desire for a foothold on the gulf. The threat of an Iraqi presence in Kuwait was viewed by some as an unacceptable situation. The United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 661 condemning the invasion. The resolution demanded that Iraq withdraw from Kuwait and restore sovereignty to the Kuwaiti government. The resolution was widely supported by the international community and aimed to deter any further actions by Iraq.

The United States and its allies, including Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, imposed economic sanctions on Iraq. These sanctions were aimed at reducing Iraq's oil exports and choking off its economy. The sanctions were intended to force Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait and to comply with UN Security Council resolutions.

The international community, including the United Nations, condemned Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and imposed economic sanctions. The sanctions were designed to isolate Iraq economically and to place pressure on the Iraqi regime to withdraw from Kuwait. The sanctions were widely supported and were a key element in the international effort to respond to Iraq's aggression.

The invasion of Kuwait marked the beginning of the Gulf War. The war had significant political and economic consequences. The economic sanctions imposed on Iraq were a major aspect of the international response to the invasion. The sanctions had a significant impact on the Iraqi economy and contributed to the eventual downfall of the Iraqi regime.

The invasion of Kuwait also had political consequences. The United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 661 condemning the invasion. The resolution demanded that Iraq withdraw from Kuwait and restore sovereignty to the Kuwaiti government. The resolution was widely supported by the international community and aimed to deter any further actions by Iraq.

The invasion of Kuwait was a major event in the history of the Gulf region. It highlighted the importance of oil as a resource and the potential for conflict over access to it. The invasion also had implications for the future of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the role of the United States in the region.

At the conclusion of the war, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 661 condemning the invasion. The resolution demanded that Iraq withdraw from Kuwait and restore sovereignty to the Kuwaiti government. The resolution was widely supported by the international community and aimed to deter any further actions by Iraq.

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A FOCUS ON THE STATE

The invasion of Kuwait must be understood as an extension of the war with Iraq. Unable to decisively defeat Iraq or to compensate the Iraqi populace for the deprivation it had experienced during the war, Saddam sought to use the seizure of Kuwait to solve his domestic financial problems and offset any potential challenges from the military and the populace at large. Neither the war with Iran nor the invasion of Kuwait solved the problems of state-building facing the Iraqi Ba'ath. The Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf crisis point to two important conclusions. First, both these conflicts must, in the final analysis, be seen first and foremost as efforts to strengthen the power and legitimacy of the Iraqi state. Second, military action can never be a substitute for effective state-building. In Iraq, only through a sincere attempt to recognize and come to terms with the cultural and political diversity of Iraqi society, can the Iraqi state hope to achieve that end.

NOTES
1 There are many examples of this approach. One of the most recent is a pro-

Alavian Empire, the modern Iraqi state inherited liabilities stemming from the

Kurds and the Turks, and the Ottomans who divided Persia.

2 I follow Edward Said's definition of Orientalism: "Orientalism is a style

of thought based upon an oculistological and epistemological distinction made
discourse ... was able to manage - and even produce - the Orient politically,

sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during

3 4

Research and the Modern

Iraqi-Iranian Dispute: Fact or Fiction?

Eri9 Davis noted to the dictionaries of the state. Inexpensively priced and readily available in bookstores, these volumes are meant to convey to the educated classes the manner in which they should think about the country's history and culture. See also, Abd al-Iraq [Iraqi] Culture [Baghdad: Dar al-Hurriya lil-Tiba'a, 1985].

Dar al-Hurriya lil-Tiba'a, 1983).

Ibid., pp. 178-9, the author of this particular section, Dr. Khudair Jasim

al-Duri, Dean of the School of Education at the Mosul University, argues that

given the difficulty of politically opposing religion under the "Abbasid Empire,

the shi'ah chose instead to attack the Arab rulers, "the foundation of Islam." Their ultimate goal was to destroy Islam in order to revive the Mazdakism that had predominated under the Sassanians. According to the author, the shi'ah chose Islam as the venue for their attack given its status as "the legitimate heir of the ancient Semitic culture and its role in consolidating Arabism and Islam, as a religion and a state." Clearly the author is seeking to develop arguments based on essentialist notions to explain Iraqi-Persian antagonisms as well as to promote the notion that Persians were responsible for the corruption and decline of Iraqi civilization following the collapse of the "Abbasid Empire.

For example, Shaker Safir al-Durabi, tenkh, al-muntakhab min al-wa'ith al-

Iraqi wa-turoni [The History of Conflict and Wars Between Iraq and Iran] (Baghdad: Dar al-Hurriya lil-Tiba'a, 1984). This study was sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and Information.


al-Durabi, op. cit., p. 9.

As one astute observer of Iraqi politics notes, "Before 1975 one would have

been very hard put to find anyone inside Iraq who actually believed there was

a "territorial" dispute with Iran." Sameer al-Khalil, Republic of Fear: The Politics


al-Khalil, op. cit., p. 272.

Ibid., pp. 274-5.

Ibid., p. 278.

Eliassar Karsh, "Geopolitical Determinism: The Origins of the Iran-Iraq War,

The Middle East Journal 44 (Spring 1990), pp. 256-68.

Ibid., pp. 260-3.

Ibid., p. 257.

al-Khalil, op. cit., pp. 276-80.

Ibid., p. 279.

See Robert O. Keohane, "Theory of World Politics: Structural Realism and

Beyond," in Ada W. Finifter (ed.), Political Science: The State of the Discipline


I would like to thank Jack Levy for calling my attention to this article.

Ibid., p. 508.

Ibid., p. 519.

See my essay, "Theorising Statecraft and State Formation in Arab Oil-Producing

Countries," in Davis and Gavrielides, op. cit., pp. 1-35.

Ibid., p. 16.

Of course, British duplicity during this period is well known. While the Arab

were being promised an independent state in the Haiga and the Levant, th-