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THE POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE US MILITARY WITHDRAWAL FROM IRAQ

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Abstract

This research article primarily investigates the potential repercussions of a prospective US military withdrawal from Iraq on both the future of the Iraqi state and its regional relationships, as well as on the United States' international standing. This analysis is crucial, especially considering the timing when non-state actors are gaining influence in Iraq, coupled with ongoing internal and external instability. The research also evaluates how the withdrawal may conflict with the interests of both Iraq and the United States in light of prevailing issues within Iraq and the broader Middle East. The findings indicate that such a withdrawal could drag Iraq back into a precarious state across multiple dimensions, while also risking historical parallels with the US experiences in Saigon and Kabul. In the event of withdrawal, Iraq, alongside its Sunni and Kurdish factions, as well as US interests and allies in the region, would face significant setbacks, while Iran and its affiliated militias would emerge as beneficiaries. In conclusion, it suggests that the prospect of a US withdrawal remains uncertain, with ongoing negotiations largely viewed as a strategy to buy time for both Washington and Baghdad. Both parties recognize the potential consequences of a withdrawal on the United States' global stature, and Washington is likely hesitant to repeat the events of Kabul and Saigon, which could undermine its position in the international power hierarchy. Thus, a new US withdrawal could considerably diminish its influence in ongoing global power contests against revisionist forces.

Keywords: military withdrawal, great powers, interests, strategic regions, strategic vacuum, strategic fill, non-state actors.

Introduction

International relations theories suggest that when major powers withdraw their military presence from strategically significant countries — especially those located in regions of geopolitical importance — at a time when it is not feasible to maintain the existing balance of power, and the local security and military institutions are not fully equipped to maintain sovereignty and control independently, the outcomes are often negative. These withdrawals tend to create a "strategic vacuum,"[1] which is quickly exploited by regional and international powers with geopolitical and economic ambitions. This shift not only destabilizes the country from which the withdrawal occurs but also diminishes the influence, global standing and authority of the withdrawing power, as rival powers present the situation as a victory over the departing state.

The potential US military withdrawal from Iraq is a major topic of discussion among experts and think tanks, given its significant implications for both Iraq and the United States. This debate is particularly relevant due to the sensitive period Iraq is experiencing, marked by a range of complex challenges facing its still-developing security forces. These challenges include the proliferation of uncontrolled weapons backed by Iran and repeated attacks on US targets without the state's approval. Additionally, Iraq's institutions have struggled to resolve complex crises for over two decades despite the country's substantial resources. The debate also focuses on how such a withdrawal could impact the United States' global influence and leadership, especially amid the intensifying geopolitical rivalry between dominant and revisionist powers, which could shape the future of the international order.

The study focuses on the conflicting perspectives of Iraq and the United States regarding a potential US military withdrawal from Iraq. For Iraq, there is a contradiction between the government's calls for the departure of US forces and the potential risks to national interests, as a withdrawal could mirror the aftermath of 2011. At that time, the US exit led to the rise of ISIS, which gained control over nearly a third of Iraq's territory and whose sleeper cells still pose a threat today. For the United States, the dilemma lies in the desire to continue its pattern of withdrawals while recognizing that pulling out from a strategic region like the Middle East could harm its interests. Such a move would further diminish the United States' global influence, potentially benefiting regional and international rival powers. It could also impact the perception of US allies toward its leadership role, recalling moments like the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan, which led to the Taliban's takeover of Kabul, and the fallout from the US exit from Vietnam, known as the "Saigon Moment." Iraq's current security challenges and the growing influence of non-state actors echo the instability seen before those events. Therefore, the central question of the study is: How well do the discussions of a US withdrawal from Iraq align with the interests of both the US and Iraqi governments?

The study aims to address several key sub-questions: What are the underlying motivations behind the calls for a US military withdrawal from Iraq? How do

various Iraqi political forces view these demands for withdrawal? What potential impacts could a US withdrawal have on Iraq's future and the global standing of the United States? And finally, who stands to gain or lose if the US military was to withdraw from Iraq?

Demands of Withdrawal — Between Sovereignty Requirements and External Pressures

Since taking office on October 27, 2022, the Iraqi government led by Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani has ramped up efforts to push for the withdrawal of foreign entities and forces from Iraq. This includes the International Coalition to Fight ISIS,[2] established in 2014 and led primarily by the United States, as well as the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI),[3] which was created following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. To achieve this, the Iraqi government has pursued two main approaches:

First Approach: Since August 2023, the Iraqi government has engaged in security negotiations with the United States, leading to the formation of the joint High Military Committee (HMC) in January 2024. Headed by Prime Minister Sudani, the committee has held multiple sessions to assess the threat posed by remaining ISIS cells, evaluate the security and military situation, and analyze the capabilities of Iraqi security forces in addressing security challenges. The primary aim is to establish a timetable for the final withdrawal of coalition forces from Iraq and transition toward a comprehensive bilateral security partnership with coalition countries that aligns with the Iraqi government's vision.

Second Approach: On May 8, 2024, the Iraqi government formally requested the UN Security Council to end the mandate of the UNAMI by the end of 2025, allowing Iraq to take over its duties. The Security Council, in a session on May 31, 2024, unanimously approved the request, setting December 2025 as the final date for the UNAMI mission. Despite efforts made through discussions with the US Embassy in Baghdad, meetings with US officials during visits to Iraq, and visits by senior Iraqi officials to Washington, no specific timeline had been set for ending coalition military operations in Iraq by the study's publication date. However, Reuters reported on September 6, 2024, that a tentative agreement between Washington and Baghdad was awaiting final approval. This agreement proposes the withdrawal of hundreds of coalition troops by September 2025, with the remainder departing by the end of 2026, while establishing a new advisory relationship that would permit some US forces to stay in Iraq after 2026.[4]

Iraqi Justifications for the Demand

The Iraqi government's official request[5] to the United Nations to end the UNAMI mission after two decades in the country was driven by several factors. First, the government viewed Iraq as having reached a state of political and security stability. Second, the request emphasized the importance of asserting Iraq's national sovereignty as the host country. Third, the combat capabilities of the Iraqi

forces had significantly improved, enabling them to address security challenges, particularly in combating remaining active and dormant ISIS cells. Additionally, successive Iraqi governments, with assistance from friendly countries and specialized UN agencies, had made significant progress in overcoming challenges. For these reasons, the Iraqi prime minister regarded the Security Council's vote to end the UNAMI mission as a recognition by the international community and the UN of Iraq's positive advancements across various sectors.[6]

Iraqi government spokesperson Bassem al-Awadi provided additional reasons for the request to end the UNAMI mission, emphasizing Iraq's recovery from the crises it faced since 2003. He highlighted the country's emergence from the phase of sectarian violence that followed the US invasion and the period when ISIS controlled parts of Iraqi territory. Awadi noted Iraq's resurgence and the resumption of its prominent regional role. He also mentioned the recommendation of the UN Strategic Review Committee, led by German academic Volker Perthes, which assessed all aspects of the Iraqi situation and endorsed proceeding with ending the mission based on the notable progress across various fields.[7] The Baghdad government saw the alignment between Iraqi and international perspectives as a validation of the demand's realism and credibility.

An analysis of the official statements from senior US officials regarding Iraq's request to schedule the withdrawal of coalition forces reveals that Washington has displayed flexibility in its withdrawal conditions. The primary objective remains the elimination of ISIS and its remnants in Iraq, along with halting attacks by armed militias on US targets, which include diplomatic facilities, military bases, civilian contractors, and logistical support vehicles. To address these concerns, a series of discussions have been initiated with Iraqi officials about the withdrawal timeline, particularly in light of ongoing operations against remaining terrorist cells and repeated militia attacks on US positions. However, a January 2024 cable from the US State Department indicated that Sudani does not actually desire a complete US withdrawal. It also mentioned that a senior advisor to Sudani communicated to US officials that the prime minister's demands were part of a strategy to appease domestic political factions and public sentiment that oppose the US presence in Iraq.[8]

Real Motives Behind the Request

Many observers of Iraqi affairs remain unconvinced by the official justifications provided for the demand to withdraw foreign forces from Iraq, citing persistent fluctuations in political and security stability, as well as enduring economic, living, and infrastructure crises, such as electricity shortages, water scarcity, unemployment, and widespread corruption. Additionally, the ongoing presence of weapons and their use against US targets without state oversight, along with continued terrorist activities from remaining ISIS cells, further complicates the situation. Several factors have been identified as driving the Iraqi demand for the expulsion of foreign forces, with escalating Iranian pressure being a significant

one. This pressure intensified since the United States adopted a maximum pressure strategy against Iran, leading to retaliatory actions from Iran, such as targeting oil tankers and international trade vessels following the US withdrawal from the 2018 nuclear agreement. Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has repeatedly urged Iraqi leaders to expel US forces, emphasizing the detrimental impact of their presence on the region's countries and peoples. In a 2018 meeting with former Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul Mahdi, Khamenei stated, "The presence of American soldiers in the countries of the region harms the countries and peoples of the region," adding, "You have to make the Americans withdraw their army from Iraq as soon as possible."[9] Furthermore, he stated, "Iran does not interfere in Iraq's relations with America, but it expects Iraqi friends to know America and to know that America's presence in any country is a source of corruption, ruin and destruction," adding, "Iran expects the decision to expel the Americans to be followed up because their presence causes insecurity."[10] Khamenei also renewed an escalating demand and threatened to continue targeting American forces after the killing of former Iranian Quds Force Commander General Qassem Soleimani along with Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) Commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis near Baghdad International Airport in early January 2020. During his meeting with Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid in Tehran in April 2023, he demanded the expulsion of the US-led coalition forces, stating, "The presence of one American soldier in Iraq is too much."[11]

The second motive behind Iraq's demand for the withdrawal of foreign forces is that the country has become an arena for settling scores between US and Iranian parties. Pro-Iran militias have targeted US assets as part of a strategy that counters the US maximum pressure approach. This escalation has pushed Iraq's crises into a new stage of complexity, which is proving costly for its governments. Both parties have employed armed force to resolve their conflicts, effectively returning Iraqi security to a precarious state. The militias have prioritized the expulsion of foreign forces from Iraq, disregarding state decisions in the process. They have adopted continuous missile and drone attacks against US targets as one of their pressure tactics aimed at achieving this goal. In response, the United States has increased its military actions against militia concentrations in Iraq, delivering a significant blow to Iran by assassinating Soleimani, the architect of the Iranian regional project. This action served to send strong deterrent messages to both Iran and its affiliated militias.

The militias used the killing of Soleimani as a pretext to adopt a strategy aimed at pressuring Washington by intensifying attacks against US targets and on the Iraqi government, seeking to push it toward demanding the withdrawal of US forces. Additionally, the militias exploited regional developments stemming from the outbreak of the war in Gaza as justification for escalating their attacks against US targets in Iraq. They argued that these actions were necessary to pressure Washington and Tel Aviv to cease military operations in Gaza. For instance, during the first four months of the Gaza war alone, US military forces recorded no fewer than

170 attacks against its personnel in Iraq and Syria.[12] In response, the US military targeted several militia leaders, including Abu Baqir al-Saadi, the military commander of the Iraqi Hezbollah Brigades, and Mushtaq Talib al-Saidi, nicknamed "Abu Taqwa," in January 2024. The militias possess multiple pressure tactics to influence the Iraqi government regarding the expulsion of U forces, including the use of weapons, the capability to create instability, and their influential alliances within the government and Parliament. These factors have played a role in pushing the Iraqi Parliament to demand the expulsion of foreign forces on two occasions: first, after the killing of Soleimani in 2020 and again in February 2024.

The third motive centers on the decline of the US role in the Middle East, with the exception of a recent period during which Washington intensified its military presence in the region to create a deterrent force in favor of Israel and to prevent the outbreak of a major regional war that many fear following the escalation of the war in Gaza. This decline in US influence is attributed to a shift in US priorities regarding threats to national security. In the past year, US defense and national security documents identified the Indo-Pacific region as the most dangerous area for the United States, as China emerges as a revisionist power aiming to reshape the international order. In response, Washington has formulated the "Eastward Direction" strategy to encircle and contain China within its regional sphere. The American National Security Strategy for 2022 emphasized what it referred to as the "decisive decade," denoting the 2020s of the 21st century, with the objective of enhancing the United States' capacity to surpass its geopolitical competitors.

The decline in the region's priority within the US strategy has led to the rise of countries with geopolitical ambitions and non-state actors, most of whom are armed militias loyal to Iran, at the expense of state actors. As a result, the influence over Iraqi decisions has increased, and consequently, so has the pressure on the Iraqi government to expel US forces and monopolize the Iraqi arena due to Iraq's centrality in Iran's strategy. It is evident from this that the demand to withdraw US forces from Iraq does not reflect a genuine national Iraqi demand stemming from a vision rooted in Iraq's supreme interests and comprehensive national consensus. Instead, it primarily represents an external demand driven by armed militias loyal to Iran. Therefore, despite the importance of state independence and full sovereignty in the process of state-building and development, the context and circumstances surrounding this demand do not serve Iraqi interests but rather facilitate Iran's expansionist agenda. Iraq is not prepared for the withdrawal of foreign forces, which carries significant implications for achieving a balance both internally and externally. A US withdrawal will create a strategic vacuum, leading to repercussions for Iraq and its people. This demand reveals the governance and influence equation in Iraq, characterized by the prioritization of military power over political authority, ideological motives over national interests at home, and external interests over those of Iraq itself.

Political Alliances and the Question of the US Withdrawal

The positions of the main alliances in Iraq — Shiite, Sunni, and Kurdish — regarding the demand for the withdrawal of US military forces are divided into two directions.

Those Supporting and Pressing for the Withdrawal of US Forces

This position is leading the political and media campaigns calling for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Iraq, represented by the Coordination Framework, which is supported by Iran. This framework includes several Shiite political and military figures, such as the State of Law Alliance led by former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, the Fatah Alliance led by Badr Organization leader Hadi al-Amiri, the Rights Movement led by the spokesman for the Iraqi Hezbollah Brigades — Iran's strongest ally — Hussein Mu'nis (Abu Ali al-Askari), the National Wisdom Movement led by cleric Ammar al-Hakim, the Victory and Reform Alliance led by former Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, the Iraqi Hezbollah Brigades led by Abu Hussein al-Muhammadawi, the al-Nujaba Movement militia led by Akram al-Kaabi, and the Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq militia led by Qais Khazali. The majority of these alliances and militias also adopt the principle of the sectarian state, revolving around the concepts of sectarianism, consensus, subordination, and Iranian interests. The Sadrist Movement's position is also consistent with the Coordination Framework's stance on this issue.

For example, the military spokesman for Kata'ib Hezbollah in Iraq, Jaafar al-Husseini, stated in an interview with BBC Arabic in July 2021, "All American bases — whether those of American forces or joint forces — in Iraq were subjected to strikes by what he called the resistance factions," adding, "The effort and focus of the factions now is not focused on the American forces present on Iraqi territory, but rather the main goal is to expel all American forces from West Asia."[13] Following the killing of PMF members in a US raid in November 2023, Kaabi called for the necessity of declaring war on the United States and expelling its forces from Iraq. In January 2024, his movement threatened those it called "traitors who sold their religion to the occupier, with what happened in Afghanistan, so that he would either flee shamefully or remain to be tried for his crime soon."[14] Khazali considered the Iraqi demand to be a step in the right direction toward reinforcing national sovereignty, and the militias' statements did not stop at the limits of expelling US forces, but rather called for the closure of US diplomatic headquarters. The Sadrist Movement's position is consistent with the Coordination Framework on this issue, as the movement's leader, Muqtada al-Sadr, called in January 2020 for a peaceful million-person demonstration to demand the expulsion of US forces. His movement also calls for the closure of US military bases and diplomatic headquarters in Baghdad.

Cautious Approach Regarding the Withdrawal of US Forces From Iraq

Pragmatic calculations indicate that the US withdrawal is not in the interest of the Sunni alliances (National Progress, Sovereignty, United, Azm, the Iraqi Islamic

Party) and the Kurdish alliances (the Kurdistan Democratic Party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) and therefore some of their key figures expressed their rejection of the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq in light of the current crises. For example, the former Sunni parliamentarian Mishaan al-Jubouri posted on the X platform in February 2024, "The voices of the Shiite leaders, factions and blocs close to Iran are rising, demanding the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq… It is no secret that the majority of Sunni Arabs and Sunni Kurds do not support this demand and agree on the desire for them to remain,"[15] as explained by Arafat Karim, the political advisor to the head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, "No party can control the fate of a state according to its imported religious ideology. They remember sovereignty when America bombs and forget it when Iran bombs."[16]

There are many considerations behind Sunni and Kurdish fears over the potential withdrawal of US forces, most notably the fear of losing the basis of the balance between the alliances, the comprehensive dominance of the Shiite alliances over the Iraqi government and even over the apparatuses of the Iraqi state itself, a power shift in favor of the militias at the expense of the national army, and thus the imposition of Shiite hegemony loyal to Iran by armed force over the rest of the alliances, which allows for "cloning an IRGC similar to the IRGC," and greater dominance over the key apparatuses of the state and influence over its strategic decisions. Additionally, there is a fear of the Shiite factions continuing to impose a sub-identity on the collective national identity, which prioritizes the Iraqi establishment, with all its apparatuses and bodies, to work for the benefit of the Shiite factions only.

But the question is: Do the Coordination Framework alliances, in their demand for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Iraq, represent the entire Shiite street? The answer is definitely no. The reality of the Iraqi Shiite scene reveals that the Coordination Framework alliances have only two types of audiences in the Shiite street: the audience that belongs to the framework ideologically and organizationally, and the audience that associates with them pragmatically. Both groups represent the smallest number when compared to the broader Shiite audience in the southern governorates, which has expressed its rejection of the sectarian projects that the framework strongly seeks.

This rejection is evident in two significant instances. First, the resounding blow dealt to the Coordination Framework alliances in the 2021 parliamentary election cycle, where Shiite alliances loyal to Iran lost their strong presence in Parliament, largely due to the withdrawal of Sadr's representatives. Second, the massive Iraqi popular protests against the Iranian project in Iraq have emerged not only in Sunni provinces but also in the heart of Shiite provinces. Protesters have consistently expressed their opposition to the Iranian project through various means, including targeting Iranian diplomatic headquarters, Shiite alliance headquarters, armed militia concentrations, and setting fire to pictures of the supreme leader and Soleimani. This demonstrates the existence of a national, cross-sectarian

Iraqi bloc, opposing sectarian entrenchment and the rampant Iranian influence in the Iraqi state.

The general Shiite position indicates that the issue of the US withdrawal from Iraq lacks "consensus between the Shiite alliances and the Shiite community in general," reflecting the existence of two prevailing perceptions within the Iraqi Shiite component regarding this issue. The first perception is a popular Shiite viewpoint that aligns more closely with that of the Sunni and Kurdish components. This perspective emphasizes the necessity of addressing the issue in terms of the supreme interests of Iraq, rather than those of external parties, particularly Iran. From this standpoint, the matter is viewed as a strategic concern related to the security, sovereignty and the future of Iraq, and it must be discussed and decided upon within a comprehensive, unified national consensus. The second perception is an elite Shiite viewpoint that approaches the issue through a lens that serves the Iranian agenda. This perspective treats the withdrawal as a geopolitical matter tied to the future of the Iranian expansionist project, asserting that decisions regarding it should be made within the consensus of the Shiite alliances that implement the Iranian agenda.

On the other hand, it is noted that the positions of the Sunni Arab masses align with those of the Sunni alliances regarding this issue. Data indicate that Sunni Arabs are uncomfortable with the current withdrawal of the United States, believing it will leave them vulnerable to militia threats and the remnants of ISIS. Additionally, the positions of the majority of the Kurdish masses regarding the issue completely mirror those of the Kurdish alliances, as they reject any US withdrawal from Iraq. The positions of the Turkmen faction toward the issue are divided, comprising both Shiite and Sunni Turkmen. The Shiite Turkmen are split into two factions: one that supports the demand for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Iraq due to its ideological and organizational affiliation with the alliances backed by Iran, and another that opposes their withdrawal, sharing the same concerns as the Sunni, Kurdish, and Arab Shiite alliances. As for the Sunni Turkmen, they are also divided into two groups: one that supports foreign withdrawal from Iraq, believing it to be in the interest of the Sunni Turkmen — especially if it affects northern Iraq — because it would weaken certain Kurdish forces empowered by the US presence in targeting the Turkmen. The other group rejects foreign withdrawal and shares the same concerns as the Sunni, Kurdish, and Arab Sunni alliances.[17]

Overall, the previous data reveal that the issue of the withdrawal of foreign forces from Iraq lacks the basis of "comprehensive national consensus." The issue does not enjoy the consensus of the Iraqi people — Shiite, Sunni, and Kurdish — nor does it benefit from a comprehensive Shiite-Shiite consensus.

The Potential Repercussions of the US Withdrawal From Iraq

If the US withdrawal is carried out in an uncalculated and unstudied manner, amid security and military institutions facing security challenges, and lacking a national consensus , it will be viewed as connected to external agendas within

a sectarian framework that do not prioritize the supreme interests of Iraq. The following potential repercussions are expected for Iraq:

The Imposition of Sanctions and Its Potential Impacts

The chances of imposing US sanctions on Iraq are increasing under the pretext of its cooperation with Iran, which is also subject to sanctions, particularly in the energy sector. Such sanctions would deprive Iraq of oil sales revenues, which constitute the mainstay of the economy and the largest source of the budget. Washington effectively controls Iraqi oil revenues by requiring Iraq to deposit its revenues into an account affiliated with the Central Bank of Iraq at the US Federal Reserve. This mechanism has been in place for over a decade and a half, following the establishment of the "Development Fund for Iraq" by the United States in 2003.[18] This fund was created pursuant to a UN resolution designed to protect Iraqi funds from legal claims by international companies seeking compensation for losses incurred due to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.[19] Additionally, the removal of Iraq from the list of countries exempted from US sanctions on Iran could deprive it of the ability to import gas and electricity from abroad, exacerbating the severe deficit in electricity production.

Potential sanctions could also drive investors away from Iraq and adversely impact foreign trade relations, further aggravating the existing crises within the country. Living conditions are expected to worsen, leading to intensified crises in electricity, water, and unemployment. For instance, the number of hours of power outages is likely to increase during the summer due to the financial inability to fund the completion of new power stations needed to address the electricity deficit crisis. Moreover, difficulties in continuing to pay for electricity imports from neighboring countries may lead to rising levels of public discontent, potentially resulting in widespread chaos. Thus, the mere warnings from some Iraqis regarding these outcomes are sufficient to maintain an internal balance of power.

Collapse of the Internal Balance of Power, Entrenching the Non-State Trajectory

Over the past years, Iraq has made progress in establishing a balance between state and non-state trajectories. Since the October 2019 protests, alliances adhering to the state path have emerged, advocating for a civil state within a comprehensive national vision for a new Iraq. This vision seeks to transition from a consensual government formation to a national one, shifting from the dominance of a Shiite sub-identity to a collective identity. It aims to achieve sovereignty and independence in decision-making and implementation, limit the presence of weapons to state control, and end Iraq's subordination to Iran and its project.

In contrast, the non-state path alliances, supported by Iran and dominating the Iraqi political landscape for over two decades, maintain a sectarian orientation that prioritizes a sub-identity. This ensures the continuation of weapons and Iraq's subordination to Iran to further the Iranian agenda. A US withdrawal would destabilize the balance, favoring the non-state path and ushering in a new

internal phase characterized by "strengthening Iran's sole hegemony over Iraq." In this scenario, Iran would exert significant influence over Iraqi decision-making, including the appointment of successive prime ministers, while loyal alliances would gain extensive control over ministerial portfolios and parliamentary seats. This dynamic would facilitate the passage of sectarian laws at the expense of civil laws, strengthen Iran's control over the Iraqi economy and market, and promote Shiite cultural activities and rituals to solidify Shiite identity. Moreover, it would expand militarization in strategic areas and ease the establishment of a corridor linking Tehran to the Mediterranean Sea, further entrenching corruption in a country already plagued by it. Iran relies on non-national figures to execute its agenda, undermining accountability efforts and facilitating the plundering of wealth, which would exacerbate popular resentment and potentially ignite mass protests. Internationally, Iraq's political orientation may shift toward Iran after it has made steps toward reconnecting with its Arab surroundings. The narrative could promote the withdrawal as a victory for Iran in its conflict with the West, distancing Iraq from the Western bloc led by the United States in favor of the Eastern bloc led by China and Russia.

The Return of Chaos and Ending the State of Fragile Stability

The United Nations and international forces led by the United States played a prominent role in addressing the security chaos resulting from the sectarian conflicts that followed the US invasion of Iraq. They achieved this through the continuous training of Iraqi forces to enhance their effectiveness, intensifying deployments in hotbeds, providing intelligence about terrorist cells, and participating in military operations that Iraq conducted — and continues to conduct — against ISIS and its remnants. They also helped maintain a balance of roles and influence on security decisions between the military establishment and auxiliary forces. The international coalition is credited with significantly contributing to the organization's loss of "spatial control" over most of the territory it had occupied in the Sunni provinces since 2014, which constituted approximately one-third of Iraqi territory. Their efforts were instrumental in Iraq's recovery of the oil fields seized by the organization, leading to a substantial reduction in its financial revenue sources. Moreover, coalition forces, leveraging advanced intelligence capabilities, succeeded in eliminating the organization's first two leaders: Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in October 2019 and his successor Ibrahim al-Qurashi in February 2022. They also targeted and eliminated numerous second and third-tier leaders, although some active remnants continue to exist across Iraq and Syria.

Therefore, the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq risks triggering a resurgence of security chaos reminiscent of the period after 2011. This period saw an ill-considered US withdrawal from Iraq, which led to the spread of terrorism in the Sunni provinces. It was during this time that ISIS was established in 2013, and in June 2014, the group declared the formation of an "Islamic Caliphate" in Iraq. Under

the slogan "Remaining and Expanding," the organization signaled its ambition for unlimited territorial expansion, appointing Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi as its Caliph.[20] The organization actively called upon Muslims worldwide to migrate to the so-called Caliphate. UN reports on terrorism noted that by 2015, approximately 40,000 individuals from over 120 countries had entered Iraq and Syria to fight, with around 80% joining ISIS and living under its rule. Additionally, more than 50 terrorist groups pledged allegiance to the organization.[21] As a result, by early 2017, ISIS had taken control of nearly one-third of Iraqi territory. The following are key indicators suggesting a potential recurrence of the post-2011 scenario if a US withdrawal was to occur.

The Actual and Gradual Return of ISIS

Currently, ISIS remains active in multiple Iraqi cities. For instance, the organization claimed responsibility for several attacks, including the bloody assaults in Diyala and Kirkuk in northeastern Iraq in December 2023, the bombings in Tarmiyah district that targeted a military convoy with explosive devices in March 2024, and the Mutaybija bombings east of Salah al-Din, which resulted in the death of five soldiers, including a regiment commander , and injured six other soldiers in May 2024. Estimates suggest that between 5,000 to 7,000 ISIS fighters are operating between Syria and Iraq. Additionally, around 11,000 militants suspected of ISIS affiliation are detained in facilities managed by the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces in northeastern Syria. The organization's resurgence in Iraq highlights the ongoing weaknesses within the country's security institutions and the lack of development projects in regions liberated from ISIS, which could otherwise deter the group's activities.

Data from the US Central Command (CENTCOM) highlights that the number of joint operations against ISIS reached 137 in the first half of 2024, underscoring Iraq's ongoing need for US military support. Additionally, statistics show that ISIS conducted 120 attacks in Iraq and Syria during the first six months of 2024 alone, matching the total number of attacks recorded throughout 2023. This indicates a rise in terrorist activities in Iraq.[22]

The Persistence of ISIS' Ideological Incubators

Intellectual incubators for ISIS persist in Iraq, fueled by growing social discontent over Shiite dominance and the ruling regime's reliance on sectarian policies to reinforce Shiite identity. This approach has marginalized other sectarian and ethnic groups, contributing to the emergence of disillusioned youth and making them more susceptible to recruitment by terrorist organizations. This context underscores the significance of former Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi's 2017 announcement that the defeat of ISIS was primarily a military victory, not an intellectual one. This statement acknowledges the presence of ideological conditions that could foster the resurgence of the terrorist group.

A Fragile Security Environment

Iraq faces numerous security vacuums, particularly in areas with dense woodlands or rugged mountainous terrain, such as Taji, Tarmiyah, and Sharqat. These conditions allow ISIS elements to hide and move swiftly, especially prevalent in regions liberated from ISIS and along the borders with Syria and Turkey. The issue is exacerbated by the presence of multiple security entities, including the Ministry of Interior, army and the PMF. The overlapping responsibilities and differing priorities among these entities weaken security coordination. While the army and Ministry of Interior prioritize national interests within a broader vision, the PMF often promotes sectarian interests. This dynamic has hindered the formulation and execution of effective strategies against terrorist groups. The Iraqi military's general weakness is further highlighted by military expert Ahmed al-Sharifi, who notes that Iraq lacks the technical capabilities needed to address security challenges without US support, particularly in countering ISIS.[23] An analysis by the International Institute for Strategic Studies similarly describes Iraq's military as "relatively weak."[24] Additionally, tribal leaders have observed that ISIS exploits the deployment of militias in Sunni areas by disguising themselves in uniforms similar to those worn by the militias, given the fact that the militias do not seem to harbor deep enmity for ISIS even though they are with the coalition to combat ISIS.[25] Despite their stated aim of combating ISIS, militias have focused more on controlling liberated areas, launching numerous attacks against coalition forces rather than ISIS since the large-scale campaign in 2017.

ISIS Resuming Operations Overseas

The organization has reestablished itself in Syria, which shares a border with Iraq, and has resumed operations in regions such as the Badia of Homs, Sweida, Hama, Raqqa, Deir ez-Zor, and Aleppo. Northeastern Syria hosts two camps, Al-Hawl and Roj, where approximately 55,000 people reside, including more than 11,800 Iraqis, about 16,000 Syrians, and others from over 60 countries.[26] Intelligence reports suggest that many of the camp residents have familial ties to members of the organization, making them susceptible to recruitment. ISIS is particularly focused on recruiting children through its "Cubs of the Caliphate" program. Many of its fighters have shed their military uniforms for civilian attire after battles ended in various Syrian cities, blending in with local populations to obscure their affiliations. This tactic is facilitated by the weakened security presence in these areas, allowing ISIS fighters to conduct operations across the border in Iraq. Additionally, regional instability since the onset of the Gaza war has created a favorable environment for the organization's members to hide and operate along the Iraqi-Syrian border.

Increasing Potential for Sectarian, Ethnic Disputes

Among the potential repercussions of the US withdrawal is the recurrence of sectarian and ethnic conflicts similar to those Iraq experienced during the early

phases of the US invasion. This risk is heightened by increasing discontent within Sunni and Kurdish communities, who perceive the Shiite-dominated government as pursuing exclusionary policies and seeking external support at the expense of national interests. Such tensions raise the likelihood of sectarian and ethnic strife, potentially draining resources and inviting further foreign interventions that could perpetuate conflicts for strategic gains. This scenario could also revive discussions about plans to divide Iraq's rich civilization and history along religious and ethnic lines. These challenges come at a time when Iraq has made progress toward security and has even taken on some regional roles, such as mediating the Saudi-Iranian dialogue that led to the signing of the reconciliation agreement under Chinese sponsorship in March 2023.

Overall, the withdrawal of foreign forces from Iraq further complicates the situation and strengthens Iran's influence in the Iraqi arena. This shift is likely to lead to significant security turmoil, exacerbate political, security and service-related crises, and create a fertile environment for increased terrorist activities and the reactivation of sleeper cells in Iraq and Syria.

The US Withdrawal and Potential Regional Repercussions

The US withdrawal from Iraq would impact the regional equilibrium, impacting ties with partners in the Gulf.

Regional Equilibrium Collapsing in Iran's Favor

Since Iraq serves as the primary launchpad for Iran's geopolitical ambitions, featuring an armed military arm and a critical corridor for smuggling weapons to its militias in Syria and Lebanon, the withdrawal of US forces would create a new regional equation, with the regional balance shifting in Iran's favor. This shift could lead to the formation of a more unified and robust force of armed militias across the Iraqi and Syrian arenas, akin to the strength of Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen. These militias represent weaker links in Iran's influence network, but their consolidation would bolster Hezbollah's military capabilities in Lebanon, potentially altering the balance of power in the Middle East and reshaping regional dynamics in favor of Iran's so-called Axis of Resistance. This situation would elevate the roles of non-state actors as influential players, creating environments conducive to the resurgence of terrorist cells, as history has shown that the expansion of non-state actors often coincides with the rise of terrorist organizations.

The potential regional shifts would generate further chaos, intensify rivalries, complicate conflicts, and likely dissolve existing truces and agreements as regional powers compete to manage the security fallout from the US military withdrawal. Iran, having made substantial investments — both financial and human — in its expansionist agenda, is expected to attempt filling the vacuum by bolstering the role of its militias in the region. This could result in increased armed confrontations between Iran and regional actors opposed to its expansionist project. A

notable regional development that has adversely affected regional and international security is the decline of the US role in the region. The Iran-backed Houthis, for instance, seized control of Yemen's capital, Sana'a, in 2014, and subsequently expanded their military presence in the Red Sea. This has led to ongoing threats and attacks on international navigation and trade routes in the Red Sea, impacting regional and global security, including the United States. The Houthis have further extended their influence, affecting maritime security in the Mediterranean and participating militarily in the conflict in Gaza.

Iraq Losing Gulf Partners

The future of Gulf-Iraq relations is likely to be jeopardized, not due to the Gulf states' desire to strengthen ties with Iraq, but because of the realities imposed by the sanctions that Washington is expected to use as leverage against Iraq to curtail its relations with Iran. This sanctions policy could inhibit the Gulf states from enhancing their relations with Iraq.

One of the first negative repercussions of imposing sanctions would be the disruption of Gulf-Iraq electricity interconnection projects, exacerbating the ongoing electricity crisis. Iraq currently faces a significant deficit in electricity production, estimated at about 14,000 megawatts (a 49% shortfall), which has resulted in frequent power outages throughout the day. Iraq generates approximately 16,000 megawatts of electricity, including the full contribution from Iranian gas and electricity, which accounts for about one-third of the total supply.[27] However, the country's electricity needs are nearly double that figure, at around 30,000 megawatts, to ensure reliable power supply throughout the day.[28] This ongoing crisis allows Iran to exploit the situation as a means of exerting pressure on the Iraqi government. It also contributes to growing public discontent, which could ignite protests, particularly during the hot summer months.

The second potential repercussion is the inability to implement cross-border development project proposals with the Gulf states, particularly the Development Road project proposed by Iraq. This initiative aims to support sustainable economic growth, diversify income sources, and establish Iraq as a major transit hub for trade connecting the Gulf states, Turkey, and Europe. Successfully implementing this project would not only address Iraq's various crises but also link the country to nine others, most of which are Gulf states.[29] Consequently, failing to realize this project would result in Iraq losing significant strategic and economic opportunities that it hopes to achieve through its implementation.[30]

The third repercussion is the potential weakening of the Gulf-Iraq trade and investment boom that has been developing since the mid-2010s. The UAE has emerged as a vital trade partner for Iraq, with an annual trade volume of no less than $27 billion and a growth rate of at least 6%.[31]Additionally, Qatar has been actively working to strengthen and diversify its investments in Iraq; the two countries signed investment agreements worth $7 billion in June 2023, focusing on real estate and tourism development. Over the past six years, trade between Riyadh

and Baghdad has increased to approximately $1 billion annually, marking the beginning of an accelerating trade relationship driven by Saudi companies' efforts to double their exports in response to growing Iraqi demand for goods such as food, construction materials, and electrical supplies.[32] Iraq and the Gulf states are mutually strategically dependent, not only due to shared religious, linguistic and national ties and common history but also for strategic reasons tied to Iraq's connections with two Gulf states: Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Moreover, coordination on oil policies within OPEC is crucial, given Iraq's significant oil reserves.

Potential Repercussions for US Global Standing

Historical experience indicates that the "strategic vacuum" resulting from military withdrawals by a superpower, such as the United States, not only disrupts the internal balances of the country from which it withdraws but also has significant strategic repercussions on the position and status of the United States itself, as discussed below:

The United States: From Dominance to Hegemonic Wars

US withdrawals from strategic regions are one of the fundamental reasons for the decline of US power in the hierarchy of international powers. These withdrawals contribute to reducing the United States' global presence, which it relies on to impose its agenda and maintain global hegemony. Consequently, this creates opportunities for revisionist powers to alter the distribution of power in their favor and for regional and international powers to rebel against US global rules. According to prominent theorists like Robert Gilpin and Robert Keohane, this situation may lead to more hegemonic conflicts, preparing the ground for what are termed a "hegemonic war" between the United States and China. As Washington becomes increasingly aware of the adversely shifting power dynamics, it may enhance its use of "coercive persuasion" strategies, leveraging its superior elements of power or executing costly preemptive strikes against rising powers to halt this shift.[33]

An article titled "America Is Not Leading the World" in *The New York Times* noted that China, Iran, and North Korea have increasingly allied with Russia to counter US hegemony, while the broader global community is not eager to align with the United States. Only US allies have imposed sanctions on Russia. In Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East, perceptions of Russia and China have actually improved since 2022.[34] Similarly, *The Economist* has reported that the liberal world order is collapsing, and this collapse may be irreversible.[35] Consequently, any withdrawals by the United States are likely to diminish its global influence further.

Revisionist Regional and Global Powers Vying to Fill the Void

The strategic vacuum resulting from US withdrawals in key regions creates opportunities for revisionist powers such as China, Russia and Iran, which are quick to exploit these openings through a strategy of filling the vacuum. This

phenomenon occurs because politics abhors a vacuum; it seeks to find someone to occupy it. The objective is to undermine US global hegemony while fostering a convergence of power among dominant and competing forces. Additionally, these actions aim to impose new arrangements in the regions from which the dominant powers have withdrawn. As a result, regional powers allied with the withdrawing nations are likely to gain confidence in the competing revisionist powers, viewing them as potential international poles capable of influencing global affairs to their advantage and enhancing their own status within the international system, ultimately seeking a larger role in global leadership.

Regional Allies' Confidence in the United States Diminishes

The strategic vacuum resulting from US withdrawals creates confusion within existing regional arrangements, leading to new dynamics where the United States' commitment to its allies' security diminishes. This chaos exacerbates current conflicts and ignites new, volatile tensions, thereby increasing the burden and costs for allies as they confront the fallout from a destabilized security environment. Such circumstances foster a crisis of confidence among allies regarding the US ability to provide essential protection, compelling them to bolster their own capabilities or seek alternatives beyond the US framework. In both scenarios, the global standing of the United States is adversely affected. The network of strategic alliances is a cornerstone of US power, crucial for achieving international hegemony. The United States relies on allied regional powers to enhance its influence and strategic presence while countering rival regional and international forces. Furthermore, these alliances are vital for sustaining its influence, maintaining international leadership, and upholding the global rules established to serve its interests and reinforce its hegemony.

The Rise of Israeli Disobedience Toward Washington

In the wake of successive US military withdrawals — be it the partial withdrawal from Syria, the chaotic exit from Afghanistan, or the increasing speculation about a withdrawal from Iraq — a trend has emerged in Tel Aviv that emphasizes self-reliance in addressing urgent issues and complex challenges. Security and strategic research centers closely aligned with the Israeli government have raised alarms regarding the implications of US withdrawals for the Middle East and Israel. Some analysts suggest that US administrations are adopting a strategy indicating a desire to disengage from the region, which, in their view, would bolster Iranian influence.

Yaakov Amidror, a researcher at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategic Studies and former National Security Advisor to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, argues that the US withdrawal from Afghanistan foreshadows a similar exit from Iraq. He contends that such a shift would position Israel at the forefront of confrontation with Iran, exacerbating the influence of Islamic movements in the region. This dynamic, coupled with escalating regional tensions driven by Iran's nuclear and geopolitical ambitions, threatens the stability of US allies while un-

dermining the United States' global standing as it grapples with challenges from China and Russia.[(36)]

Military analysts from *Israel Hayom*, an Israeli daily newspaper, including Yoav Limor, Yaakov Amidror, and Udi Dekel, the director of the Israel National Security Research Center at Tel Aviv University, agree that the swift collapse of Afghan forces and the rapid takeover of Kabul by the Taliban signify a significant US failure in Afghanistan. This situation compels Tel Aviv to closely monitor potential developments in the region in light of a possible US withdrawal, particularly regarding Iranian influence in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. As a result, Israel must assess its military capabilities and redefine the boundaries of its self-reliance in confronting the challenges that may arise from US disengagement. Udi Dekel poses a critical question, "Can Washington be relied upon in the face of an existential threat?[(37)]" This concern may partly explain Israel's actions in its ongoing conflicts in Gaza and southern Lebanon.

More Nations Daring to Break the Rules of the Monopolar World Order

The decline of the US role in the Middle East may reinforce the perception among countries of diminishing US hegemony in international leadership and the necessity for a more equitable distribution of global power. This shift encourages bolder actions that challenge the rules governing the unipolar international system. Numerous theorists link the chaotic US withdrawal from Afghanistan to various factors that reflect this newfound assertiveness among nations regarding the longstanding international norms established since the end of the Cold War:

■ Russia's decision to wage war against Ukraine: Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a country historically aligned with the West, demonstrates its willingness to defy established norms by occupying parts of Ukrainian territory.

■ China's escalation toward Taiwan: China has shifted its approach toward Taiwan from political posturing to military and economic aggression, conducting extensive military maneuvers that simulate scenarios of isolation.[(38)] Furthermore, Beijing has challenged the US monopoly on sanctions by imposing its own sanctions on Washington.

■ European division on Taiwan: The European response to the US stance on Taiwan has been divided. While many European capitals initially supported Washington's position toward Taipei, the costly repercussions of the Russia-Ukraine war have complicated Europe's strategic calculations.

■ Reevaluating reliance on the United States: Countries in the Middle East, East Asia, Latin America and Africa are increasingly wary of relying solely on the United States for their foreign relations. Many are beginning to reassess their strategies to establish new international alternatives and partnerships that align with their regional and global interests.

Conclusion

The potential US withdrawal from Iraq, a pivotal country in the Middle East, poses significant implications for both the region and global power dynamics. Historically linked to the theory of "strategic plurality," Iraq is one of the world's most crucial regions and serves as a testing ground for nations aspiring to international leadership. Control over this territory enables dominance in regional and even international decision-making, making it a hotspot for international competition. Consequently, the impending US withdrawal will inevitably result in both winners and losers.

Iraq as the Primary Loser: Iraq — specifically, its state structure and the Sunni and Kurdish communities — stands to incur substantial losses that could lead to a paralysis of governmental functions. Should sanctions be imposed, Iraq risks losing vital oil revenues, foreign investment and trade relations, mirroring the repercussions faced by Iran after sanctions were enacted. Additionally, the fragile stability and sensitive intelligence previously obtained from US sources regarding terrorist threats will be jeopardized. This deterioration will intensify the burdens on the Iraqi army across intelligence, combat and air support dimensions necessary for addressing security challenges. The withdrawal would also disrupt the delicate balance among the country's political, sectarian and ethnic components, reigniting ethnic and sectarian conflicts. Furthermore, Iraq would forfeit critical Gulf-Iraq electrical interconnection projects aimed at addressing its electricity crisis, exacerbating existing state crises and pushing living conditions to a critical level that could result in social unrest. The potential weakness of state institutions in maintaining control could lead to increased influence from non-state actors, reminiscent of the chaos seen in Afghanistan.

Lessons from the Past: Iraq's leadership should heed the lessons from recent history; Nouri al-Maliki's insistence on expelling US forces in 2011 had dire consequences, leading to the emergence of ISIS and its territorial control. This situation ultimately forced Iraq to invite US forces back to assist in combating the terrorist organization.

The United States and Its Allies: The United States and its allies in the Middle East are also poised to be significant losers from this potential withdrawal. The impact on the US global military presence is profound, as it plays a vital role in sustaining US international hegemony. The loss of influence in Iraq evokes memories of the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan, creating adverse regional and international ramifications that could undermine US standing globally and empower revisionist powers like China and Russia.

Moreover, this withdrawal risks eroding the remaining confidence of allies — not just in the Middle East, but across Asia, Africa, and Europe — regarding the US commitment to their security. This erosion may prompt these nations to seek closer partnerships with revisionist powers, potentially accelerating the transition toward a new international order favoring rising powers. The anticipated military withdrawals will also heighten security concerns for US allies, increasing their

national security costs and sending negative signals to nations contemplating a shift away from the Western camp, while simultaneously boosting confidence in the Eastern bloc.

As for the potential winners, Iran and its affiliated paramilitaries in Iraq will likely emerge as the foremost beneficiaries, positioning themselves as the victorious party in the struggle against US influence. This development would enable Iran to establish sole hegemony over Iraq , facilitating the expansion of its regional ambitions beyond mere militarization and integration. Such a scenario would further solidify Iran's Shiite identity and ensure control over the state's power resources and production capacities. Consequently, this dynamic could pave the way for Iran to implement its geopolitical projects, such as the Iranian corridor and the so-called Shiite Crescent, transforming previously aspirational projects into tangible realities and escalating the costs of confrontation.

China and Russia also stand to gain from the US withdrawal. They are poised to exploit any power vacuum left behind as part of their broader strategy to compete with the United States for international leadership and dominance within the global system. For Asian powers allied with the United States, the US withdrawal from Iraq signals positive developments as it offers an opportunity for Washington to intensify its encirclement of China.

Given these factors, the prospect of the US withdrawal from Iraq remains uncertain. Negotiations for withdrawal appear to be more about buying time for both Washington and Baghdad, as the United States recognizes the potential repercussions and losses to its international standing that could arise from such a decision. The specter of repeating the chaotic withdrawals from Kabul and Saigon looms large, with significant implications for the United States' position in the hierarchy of global powers. A new withdrawal would be interpreted as a victory for the Eastern bloc, particularly for Iran, which seeks to expel US forces from the Middle East. The presence of US troops in Iraq maintains a crucial balance against Iranian influence in both Iraq and the broader region, thereby safeguarding the security of US allies, particularly Israel.

Additionally, it is difficult to envision a withdrawal at a time when the United States is reinforcing its military presence in the region amidst escalating tensions, making the prospect of withdrawal nearly impossible. The Iraqi prime minister appears cognizant of the severe consequences of a withdrawal, prompting him to initiate negotiations with the United States by establishing the joint HMC. This initiative continues the approaches taken by former prime ministers Adil Abdul Mahdi and Mustafa al-Kadhimi, aiming to balance the demands of various political factions calling for a US withdrawal while addressing the broader US-Iraq relationship without setting a clear timeline for troop withdrawal.

The outcomes of the 2024 US presidential elections may further influence this situation. If Kamala Harris wins, she is likely to continue President Biden's strategic focus, as outlined in the US National Security Strategy for 2022, prioritizing the Southeast Asian theater over the Middle East to contain China. Consequently,

a reduction in US forces in Iraq could be expected. Conversely, if Donald Trump wins, his anticipated return to a more hardline stance against Iran may transform Iraq into a central battleground in the contest for influence with Iran.

However, Washington must also be aware of the growing popular — and occasionally official —anger regarding its military and political support for Israel during conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon. This backlash could intensify pressure on the US military presence in Iraq, potentially leading to accelerated discussions about scheduling a withdrawal.

Endnotes

(1) Strategic Vacuum: The term refers to regions of interest that create opportunities for external powers — whether regional or international — to intervene and exploit these areas. This intervention allows them to assume new roles or establish arrangements that further their interests, enhance their standing within the international system, and achieve strategic and security advantages. Strategic vacuums typically arise from the collapse of regional arrangements caused by the withdrawal or decline of a major power or superpower, the diminishing or absence of a leading regional state, or the complete collapse of a state, which consequently opens up space for external powers to operate.

(2) The International Coalition to Defeat ISIS was established in 2014 under US sponsorship, with the participation of 87 countries, with the United States enjoying the largest participation, with 2,500 soldiers after it had been 5,500. The coalition aims to fight ISIS in Iraq by striking the organization's economic and financial infrastructure, confronting the flow of foreign fighters across the border, and supporting stability in areas liberated from ISIS. Source: https://2u.pw/VcdHxsn

(3) UNAMI is a UN political mission established in 2003, pursuant to Security Council Resolution No. 1500, at the request of the Iraqi government, to help Iraq meet the requirements of rebuilding the state. The mission works to provide advice, support and assistance to the Iraqi government on promoting comprehensive political dialogue and national reconciliation, and plays a supervisory role on government performance through its offices spread throughout Iraq, which have about 648 employees, including 251 international employees and 397 local employees. Source: https://2u.pw/kVd6ux7y. However, this supervisory role arouses the resentment and anger of some political parties that do not want its presence.

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(12) "After US Strikes, Iran's Proxies Scale Back Attacks on American Bases," *The New York Times*, February 27, 2024, accessed September 20, 2024, https://2u.pw/pNvwqEG.

(13) Dijlah News Agency, "The Military Spokesperson for Hezbollah Brigades: 'All American Bases in West Asia Have Become Targets for Iraqi Resistance,'" YouTube, 1.32, July 28, 2021, accessed September 5, 2024, https://2u.pw/BJx8nzjG. [Arabic].

(14) "Al-Nujaba: 'Covert Presence of Americans at all Levels of the Iraqi State,'" *Tehran Radio*, January 28, 2024, accessed September 5, 2024, https://2u.pw/pbkaYlDS.

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(37) Ibid.

(38) The first followed the visit of former US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in 2022, the second followed former President Tsai Ing-wen's meeting with then US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in 2023, and the third coincided with the secessionist speech of new Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te.