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Iraq and Transnational Terrorism

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Iraq is a case history of the law of unintended consequences. Between 1919, when modern Iraq was created out of the wreckage of the Ottoman empire, and 1958, when the monarchy was overthrown and King Feisal assassinated, Iraq experienced 8 Kurdish revolts, 9 Shiite rebellions, and three pogroms, one against Assyrians and two against Jews.

Shortly before Iraq invaded Iran in 1980, the head of French intelligence, Alexandre de Marenches flew to Baghdad to dissuade Saddam Hussein from his war plans. Saddam told Marenches "not to worry because it will be over in eight days." It lasted eight years and caused hundreds of thousands of killed on both sides.

Following Desert Storm in 1991, about 100,000 Kurds in the north and 25,000 "marsh Arabs" (Shiites) were killed after Saddam suppressed uprisings the U.S. had encouraged. and with helicopter gunships the U.S. had allowed the Iraqis to fly, ostensibly for humanitarian purposes.

The last Gulf War spawned the evil of Osama Bin Laden and his global Al Qaeda terror network. After Saddam invaded Kuwait, Prince Turki, the now retired head of Saudi intelligence, tells the story of how Bin Laden had offered to push the Iraqis back across the border with his "Afghan Arab" mujahideen guerrilla veterans of the war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Turki says the idea of these foot soldiers defeating hundreds of Iraqi tanks in flat desert terrain struck him as utterly preposterous and he told Bin Laden thanks but no thanks. Bin Laden, still according to Turki, then concluded that the Saudi royal family had invited U.S. troops into the kingdom to protect both the House of Saud and the world's largest oil reserves. This was when Bin Laden decided the U.S. and his own government were to be the new enemies of Al Qaeda, an organization originally created to keep track of Arabs volunteering to become jihadis against the Soviets.

A U.S. invasion of Iraq would most likely create a new generation of Bin Ladens with weapons of mass destruction. If and when the U.S. throws the first punch against Iraq, there is much evidence that Saddam will hit back, as he said last June 28 in a story leaked to a Kuwaiti newspaper, "with all weapons on all fronts." If Saddam concludes his regime is going down in flames, presumably he will use chemical and biological weapons against U.S. troops, as well as attempt to lob over to Israel a couple of Scud missiles with a

chemical or a biological warhead. Saddam could also give the order to set fire to Iraqi oilfields, much the way he did in Kuwait eleven years ago. But, like the German commander who ignored Hitler's orders to set fire to Paris after the allied invasion of France in 1944, Iraqi generals may well decide to disobey Saddam's orders.

An attempt by Saddam to involve Israel after the U.S. begins hostilities would be clearly designed to elicit worldwide Arab and Muslim sympathy by turning the conflict into a U.S.-Israeli crusade against a Muslim country.

A preemptive attack launched against a country that has not yet attacked the U.S. and its allies, is a major departure in the world of geopolitics. Given the preponderance of U.S. global power, there is no doubt the U.S. would prevail in such a war. But such an undertaking would almost certainly incite increased attacks from transnational terrorist groups, such as Al Qaeda and Iran-influenced and Lebanon-based Hezbollah. There is no doubt that Muslim extremist groups would look upon a U.S. war on Iraq as an opportunity -- indeed a duty -- to strike America and its supporters. Military, civilian and economic targets are all fair game, with terrorist groups operating in concert or independently of the moribund Iraqi regime.

The CEOs of major commercial aircraft manufacturers, on both sides of the Atlantic, have warned their Boards that one more large jet hijacked or blown out of the sky, and their businesses would collapse. Another major economic target that could collapse the tourist industry worldwide is the sinking of a big cruise ship, in the Mediterranean or the Caribbean, by the simple expedient of coming alongside in a rubber Zodiac on a moonless night, and planting several limpet mines along the waterline. The global oil market could similarly be discombobulated by the sinking of a supertanker in the Persian Gulf.