**INQUIRY 2013-14**

**Democracy and Sectarianism in**

**the Middle East and North Africa:**

**Iraq 2014**

**Convened by the United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq**

Dear Delegates:

As we prepare to convene in April, Iraq remains a fragile state deeply traumatized and riven by thirty years of war, sanctions, occupation, and civil strife. Although there are some positive signs of progress in Iraq—its economy is growing modestly, oil production recently surpassed that of Iran, and foreign investment is beginning to restore infrastructure decayed by years of war and sanctions—the risk of acute instability and renewed conflict remains and there has been a severe uptick of violence. In 2013, Iraq experienced an estimated 40 suicide bombings per month.

In the wake of the U.S. military withdrawal in December 2011, Iraq has seen a fierce political struggle between Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and many of his rivals in the Sunni-dominated Iraqiya parliamentary coalition, plus increasing tension with at least some segments of the Kurdish minority. For the positive trends to continue, Iraq will need to contain various threats to internal stability and weather regional turmoil that could worsen significantly in the coming months.Internal sectarian tensions and divisions are still polarizing Iraq, while the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) continues to feed instability in the region, along with the flows of refugee populations and external meddling.

The most serious risks to Iraq's internal instability come from the overlapping and interacting effects of renewed ethnic or sectarian conflict, on the one hand, and an irreversible breakdown of the current constitutional order, on the other. Either of these conflicts could arise along any of the major fault lines in Iraq: Shia-Sunni, Arab-Kurd, or intra-Shia. Further, either of these contingencies could spark the other, as political declarations enflame ethno-sectarian tensions, or ethno-sectarian conflict spurs political declarations of independence or withdrawal from the political system.

*Some recent news stories over the last month:*

• Struggling for a decade against Iraq’s misery, Hani Jari Hattab assembled what passed for an empire in his neighborhood, including a cellphone kiosk, a computer store and a supermarket stocked with goods from abroad. When the bloodshed eased around 2009 — for a spell that Mr. Hattab referred to as the “golden years” — he started walking home instead of driving and kept the supermarket open past sundown, no longer dreading the night. But the respite was brief. [Last year was the deadliest in Iraq in five years](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/18/world/middleeast/sectarian-attacks-return-with-a-roar-to-iraq-rattling-a-capital-already-on-edge.html), and the violence has accelerated in recent months: **More than 900 people were killed in January alone**, according to Iraqi officials.

• Moktada al-Sadr, the anti-American Shiite cleric who became one of Iraq’s most powerful political leaders, said he was withdrawing from politics and would no longer be represented in the Iraqi government or Parliament. In a statement released on his website, Mr. Sadr said: “I announce that I will not intervene in politics. No party represents us from now on in Parliament or in any position inside or outside the government.” He added that no one should claim to speak for his Sadrist Shiite party, the Ahrar bloc.

• A series of daring but little noticed breakouts from Iraqi prisons has freed hundreds of hardened militants who are now among the leaders and foot soldiers of the radical Sunni groups operating in neighboring Syria and, increasingly, in Iraq itself. The role of the former inmates in fueling a new wave of Sunni jihad across the region is an unfortunate reminder of the breakdown of authority in Iraq since the United States departed in 2011, of the security vacuum that has spread around the region and of the continuing threat of Sunni-led terrorist groups that the United States said it was fighting during its occupation of Iraq. The prison breaks also reflect the surging demand for experienced fighters, which led to a concerted effort by militant groups, particularly the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, to seek them in the one place where they were held en masse — Iraq’s prison cells.

• If there were such a thing, it would probably be rule No. 1 in the teaching manual for instructors of aspiring suicide bombers: Don’t give lessons with live explosives. In what represented a cautionary tale for terrorist teachers, and a cause of dark humor for ordinary Iraqis, a commander at a secluded terrorist training camp north of Baghdad unwittingly used a belt packed with explosives while conducting a demonstration early Monday for a group of militants, killing himself and 21 other members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, army and police officials said.

• Fighters from a Sunni extremist group attacked an army unit in a northern Iraqi city on Tuesday, killing 15 soldiers in a rampage of beheadings, shootings and a hanging, security officials said. The strike on the army unit in Mosul by members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, showed how the group has moved beyond Anbar Province, west of Baghdad, where it controls Falluja and parts of Ramadi, and extended its reach into territory throughout the country. On Tuesday, the ISIS extremists drove up to the army unit, which was deployed to secure an oil pipeline that links Iraq and Turkey, in more than a dozen sport utility vehicles.

• The Iraqi Army is planning to cordon off a key Sunni city now occupied by jihadists so that Sunni tribes can lead the mission to secure it one neighborhood at a time, a senior State Department official told Congress. “The plan is to have the tribes out in front, but with the army in support,” said Brett McGurk, the State Department’s top official on Iraq, describing preparations to try to oust the jihadists from the city of Falluja, in Anbar Province.

These will be the first national elections since the U.S. military withdrawal in 2011. Then, violence was at a relative lull, and reconciliation between ethnic groups seemed to be within reach.

This is a very delicate time in Iraq’s development. We are looking forward to welcoming everyone to the conference to discuss these increasingly urgent issues as Iraq seeks to make a peaceful future for its people.

Sincerely,

Members of the United Nations Assistance Mission to Iraq

**Convening Questions**

**Committee on Federalism and Autonomy**

"This is seen as a fight to the death," says veteran journalist Jane Arraf, who notes that Prime Minister Maliki, in advance of elections slated for April 30, is facing one of his deepest crises. While Maliki's Shiite-led government is struggling for its survival, many Sunnis "feel that they are in danger of being essentially eliminated from the political landscape," says Arraf.

“If you discount Syria, where the Alawite majority is an offshoot of Shiite Islam, Maliki’s is the only Shiite-led Arab government in the Middle East. That is absolutely historic: It's the first time in hundreds of years that that's happened. The essential problem is they still feel like they're in a fight for survival, and perhaps they are. That goes all the way from believing that the Arab Gulf countries are actively trying to destabilize the government to believing that the Sunni protests in Anbar and other Sunni provinces over the past year are really covers for al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda's main goal, they believe, is to come and topple their government. So almost every decision they make is based on fear that their government will not survive because it's Shia, and because they're surrounded by hostile neighbors.”

In the waning days of the U.S. occupation, Iraq held elections that reduced the influence of warlords, and Maliki took action against Shi’a militants, committing his government to oppose sectarianism. Since then, however, the Government has appeared to consolidate power and undermine rivals. Such consolidation makes the regime increasingly insular, burning rather than building bridges with the Sunni community. Promises made to Sunnis who fought against Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) were not honored. Sunni Muslims have not been appointed to positions of influence. The security forces appear as more of an arm of the regime rather than of the Iraqi state. It has been contended that the security services often collude with Shi’a radicals in revenge attacks on Sunni Muslims, and that Iraqi Sunnis perceive them as a hostile force. Counterinsurgency methods that relied on excellent intelligence and winning over the community were abandoned in favor of indiscriminate methods that only further alienated Iraqi Sunnis.

Does Maliki fear losing his power base in the Shi’a community more than alienating Sunnis? Has he resisted U.S. pressure to open up decision-making? The April 2014 parliamentary elections may worsen this problem. Fear and sectarian rhetoric may be used to mobilize supporters, provoking hostile reactions from rival communities.

**Given the historic lack of trust among all sides, what trust-building measures does the committee recommend be put in place to encourage groups to see beyond their own ethnic groups or tribes as they approach the April elections? This is also important as Iraq considers the possibility of less centralization and giving more decision-making to the provinces? Should this be done with invited external parties?**

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) of Iraq has achieved a good measure of basic stability, security and autonomy. Though there are still significant tensions between political factions in the KRG, the government to date has been adept at preventing these tensions from boiling over. In terms of enforcing its internal borders, the KRG blunted Iraqi federal government military threats to the disputed areas in 2012. That year could be labeled the "year of deployments," during which the KRG consistently outperformed the Iraqi federal government in military face-offs along their disputed border. By contrast, 2013 was a "year of detente." The KRG stretched out leadership transitions using a form of "managed democracy." What matters now is how the KRG uses the political space it has created by delaying presidential and provincial elections: will it take the opportunity to share power between the executive presidency and the parliament, and will it devolve powers to local governments at the provincial level? Seeing the 2014 national polls looming on the horizon, the Iraqi government started embracing a conciliatory approach toward the KRG. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is seeking, in effect, a “nonaggression” pact with the Kurds. A shared recognition of the rising al-Qaeda threat has also bolstered the detente between the federal government and the KRG. But, the memory of the events in Kirkuk that followed the incidents at the Rabia border crossing and in the town of Tuz Khurmatu in Saladdin in November is still fresh. Furthermore, the KRG provides direct support to Syrian Kurds opposed to the Assad regime. Hence, the Iraqi central government, which openly supports the Assad regime, and the KRG are at loggerheads. In this context, the regional role of Iran and Turkey should also be taken into account.

**The committee is asked to recommend a five- and a ten-year plan for relations between the KRG and Iraq’s central government.**

The wholesale withdrawal of one sectarian or ethnic community from politics would accelerate a weakening of state authority in critical areas of Iraq. It is important to distinguish between the tug-and-pull of parliamentary politics with boycotts by blocs or parts of blocs and the wholesale withdrawal from the political process. The latter is a warning indicator of a breakdown in constitutional order; the former might be considered the nature of politics in Iraq. Sunni-dominated provinces have recently demanded broader autonomy from the central government in Baghdad. That is a feature of Iraq's constitutional design. If these calls lead to an organized effort to secede, however, the future of Iraq as a viable state will be in jeopardy. Similarly, KRG president Massoud Barzani has also given hints of declaring full independence. Either event would serve as an indicator for a breakdown in constitutional order.

**The committee is asked to determine the appropriate distribution of power between the Iraqi central authority and regional authorities. How should that balance be maintained without the country fracturing? In addition, the committee is asked to recommend how the Iraqi government should negotiate disputes between individual regions (eg, a land dispute between a predominantly Sunni province and a predominantly Shia province)? How should they ensure that rulings are objective, and not subject to bias?**

**Committee on Security**

Anbar is the biggest province in Iraq and over time has been considered one of the most difficult to control. It is said to be very tribal, very conservative. During Saddam Hussein’s rule, he had trouble appeasing the tribes. The province may have seen some of the most controversial moments of the U.S. time in Iraq. When there are such bad feelings, such suspicion, and when there's been bloodshed, it doesn't take much to ignite a community.

Last April, al-Qaeda’s Iraqi affiliate announced the creation of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which seemed like a direct and deliberate challenge to Prime Minister Maliki and to Iraq’s territorial integrity. It came at the very moment when Maliki was struggling to get his reforms addressing Sunni concerns through parliament. On April 23, Maliki’s forces stormed a protest camp in Hawija, 150 miles north of Baghdad, after an assailant shot dead an Iraqi soldier. The government forces killed at least 51 people, all of them civilians, according to Iraqi officials. The bloodshed sparked a week of fighting that left more than 200 dead, including civilians and fighters. Soon after, the death toll in Iraq soared to the highest levels since 2008 as ISIS set about waging war against the government. Concerned about the escalation, protestors in Anbar organized their own tribal armies to defend themselves in case the Iraqi security forces attacked them.

Without any substantive breakthrough between Maliki and the protestors, Anbar province remained a disaster waiting to happen. ISIS fighters were crossing the border between Iraq and Syria with regularity. A former Sunni insurgent, now working in the Iraqi cabinet, said that ISIS was sending foreign fighters in for special missions, including an operation that freed hundreds of detainees from Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad last summer.

Maliki then ordered his feared counter-terrorism force on Dec. 28 to raid the home of Ahmed Al-Alwani, a Sunni lawmaker from Ramadi whose rhetoric many observers consider sectarian. The military said Al-Alwani and his brother were wanted on terrorism charges. During the raid, Al-Alwani’s brother and five of his bodyguards were killed and Al-Alwani was arrested. Maliki then sent troops to clear the main Sunni protest camp in Anbar. Maliki had called the camp a center for terrorism and warned he would shut it down. The arrest of Al-Alwani and the move to crush the site of the popular protests sparked an uprising by the powerful Sunni tribes in Anbar that forced Maliki to pull his troops back from Fallujah and Ramadi. ISIS then moved in to take over both cities. Once more tribesmen rose up to fight, this time against the Islamic extremists in their midst, mindful of their past battles with al-Qaeda and worried the group would take vengeance on them for the tribesmen’s former alliance with the American military.

In addition, Maliki wants the U.S. to provide Iraq with Apache attack helicopters and drones and the government recently purchased Korean fighter jets. His critics claim he intends to use them against their communities.

The arbitrary use of state power to repress and/or isolate minority groups can give rise to non-state actors remobilizing an armed resistance against the state. Such explicit repression could be an indicator of either an outbreak of sectarian violence or a breakdown in constitutional order.

**Past attempts at ensuring peace-like the signing of “Honor Documents” whereby senior Iraqi leaders promised to put an end to violence and sectarian conflict during elections, proved ineffective. The committee is as to recommend measures to contend with and contain domestic terrorism and internal violence within Iraq in the lead-up to the elections. What kind of measures can be used to ensure the security of Iraqi citizens? How can violence be deterred? How should all parties contend with outside group bent on violence but who have no long-term stake in the future of the country?**

As has been noted by many, the Iraqi security forces are overworked and underpaid, which can lead to both corruption and divided loyalties. A critical piece of negating these options is to increase the professionalization of both the military and the police, including a clear division of responsibilities. Since the de-Baathification of the security forces (which is still state law), Iraq has been struggling to create effective security forces. As the elections approach, how should Iraq approach its civil-military relations and the role of both the security forces and the police? What would be an effective chain of command? What should be the power sharing arrangement regarding security between the Iraqi army and local police forces? How can a power sharing agreement that will be acceptable to all sides and that will not infringe on local entities but will also ensure that such entities remain accountable and prevent abuses be devised and enforced? Additionally, how should such forces be trained properly to promote responsibility and professionalism?

**The committee is asked to design a framework for civil-military relations in Iraq and the professionalization of both the military and the police.**

As Iraq prepares for April’s election, current circumstances and past violent acts related to elections are at the forefront. While many Iraqis turned out to vote in 2010 and 2011 despite an increase in violence, there has been an exponential increase in the last year. Essential to Iraq moving forward is the ability for citizens to participate in civic actions, like voting, free of fear and intimidation. A truly multilateral approach with unquestioned international legitimacy could possibly settle local violence and allow a political process to reemerge. What role should foreign international forces or external security companies have in ensuring security in Iraq? Are international forces a positive option, or will they incur violence from local forces and citizens due to mistrust? If mistrust exists, how can it be mitigated? What should be the role of security international forces in post-election Iraq?

**The committee is asked to determine a plan to ensure the safety of the April elections and their aftermath.**

Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) is perhaps the most important Al Qaeda affiliate. Not only has it been responsible for the deaths of thousands of Iraqis, it has sponsored jihadist insurgents next door in Syria and played a significant role in bringing groups like Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb into the Al Qaeda fold. In Syria, it has even tried to establish itself as the dominant jihadist group there, leading to conflict with jihadist rivals like Jabhat al-Nusra. AQI’s focus on Iraq’s Shi’a government and population was never in harmony with the Al Qaeda’s core focus on the United States and the West. Now, however, AQI’s sectarian focus has become the norm for many groups and extremists, and this agenda has broad support among many Sunni Muslims, enabling the group to improve fundraising and recruiting. Since 2010 AQIS has been self-funding through organized crime rackets involving kidnap for ransom, protection payments from large Iraqi companies, plus trucking, smuggling and real estate portfolios. What threat does AQI pose to the future of Iraq, especially as non-Iraqis seek to join the organization and take up arms within the country?

**Given the fragility of Iraq’s current state security, the committee is asked to make recommendations on how to contain outside insurgents and groups within Iraq and how to better secure its borders.**

**Committee on Elections**

These will be the first elections since the US withdrawal. Iraq's legitimacy rests on the democratic mandate of its electoral process. As the country prepares for the elections at the end of the month, there is rising concern about potential delays from the Independent High Electoral Commission, the absence of an elections law, and/or security concerns (real or imagined). If any of these events were to happen, Iraq’s, and Prime Minister Maliki’s, democratic legitimacy could be put in question, further destabilizing Iraqi politics. What steps does the government need to take to ensure smooth and transparent elections? Is there an appropriate role for the U.S. and other international observers to play?

**The Committee is asked to make recommendations that can be put in place immediately to ensure that the elections take place and are transparent and free from corruption and intimidation.**

In politics, elections in Iraq may be seen as a figurative “fight to the death”. For the Iraqi government, they believe they are struggling for their very survival. The Sunnis, on the other hand, feel they are in danger of being eliminated from the political landscape. The stakes are very high. Anbar province is in chaos. The instability could spread beyond Anbar and affect the rest of Iraq. If that happens, it risks disrupting the upcoming election particularly in Sunni regions, where violence may still be smoldering between different Sunni factions and al-Qaeda, and among the different Sunni groups running for parliament. Given the extreme high levels of violence and mistrust within Iraq, the Government needs to be mindful of the potential for post-election violence, along both political and sectarian lines. Since the security forces within the country are not fully trusted by the entire population, deploying them in sensitive areas may do more harm than good.

**The Committee is asked to address the very real need to contain violence before, during, and after the election. What protections can the Elections Committee ask the Security Committee to put in place? What are some potential options are there to address the outbreak of violence, from changing the location of polling place to extending the time for voting, etc?**

Iraq’s school textbooks fully endorse the concept and practice of democracy. Three-quarters of the textbook for the national and social education course for the third intermediate class (ninth grade) is made up of a discussion of the new Iraqi constitution and the functions of the various executive, legislative, and judicial agencies of the state. A full chapter is spent on civil society and its organizations. In the seventh grade, 75 percent of the content of the textbook on national and social education is about democracy-related topics. Additionally, scattered throughout the book are many Quranic verses and statements by the Prophet Muhammad to support the arguments presented. Notwithstanding these references to democracy, the contents of the textbooks are often disconnected from political and social realities and ignore the gap between democratic principles and practices mentioned in school curricula. They also do not address the potential authoritarian nature of political regimes and the prevalence of serious deviations from democracy, such as sectarianism, corruption, and the absence of transparency and public accountability.

Generally speaking, civic participation includes engaging in decision-making through governance and voting as well as influencing policy through various actions, such as petitioning and conducting peaceful protests. But in the textbooks surveyed, only voting is mentioned as part of decision-making, and then it is only mentioned in nations that allow voting for parliament or municipal councils. No part of the textbooks guides the students or presents models on how to influence policy, such as the use of petitions, community action, or peaceful demonstrations and the like. When it comes to community participation, the discussion in textbooks is restricted to volunteering in nonpolitical organizations, notably sports clubs and social charitable societies. But none of the nations surveyed encourages students to become politically active or to join political parties.

**The committee is asked to make recommendations that will move Iraq’s civil society towards the principles it encourages in its textbooks, including expanding civic education beyond school age students. What would constitute a thriving civil society in Iraq?**

Many Iraqis have been forced to flee the country since 2003, with many living in the adjoining countries. While some have started to return, many still reside beyond Iraq’s borders. Others have been displaced within the country. Iraq is seeing the return of many Iraqi refugees, particularly from Syria. Often these returnees cannot go back to their places of origin, leading to new secondary displacement inside Iraq. Should those outside of Iraq’s borders have a voice in the elections? Would participation likely encourage them to return to Iraq to begin to rebuild their lives? How will those who have been displaced internally or returned to a different region participate in the elections?

**The Committee is asked to recommend how best to include the refugees and internally displaced/relocated in the upcoming elections.**

**Committee on Religion and Sectarianism**

One of the significant developments over the past year is that parts of Iraq have been essentially partitioned. Fallujah and Ramadi are among them. The Iraqi army has cut off Anbar from Baghdad, which is only forty miles away, because of the fears by the Iraqi government and security forces that that's the source of a lot of suicide bombers and the materials for those explosions that go off almost every day in Baghdad. It's become very hard for Anbari residents to go back and forth. There are security checkpoints; they turn back a lot of people.

That's happened not just in Anbar, in Fallujah, but in a lot of the Sunni neighborhoods in Baghdad. On Fridays it’s difficult to get in or out of some of the Sunni neighborhoods because security forces are worried about the effect of protests after Friday prayers. It's a deep division that's been widening over the past year. It's part of what has contributed to Maliki going in and dismantling the Sunni protest camp in Fallujah, which was the trigger for al-Qaeda to come in and take over parts of Fallujah and Ramadi.

There is not a Sunni region in the country now that is not enmeshed in strife. To the north, Nineveh province is seen as a stronghold of al-Qaeda fighters, while to the east of Baghdad, Diyala province has witnessed fighting between Sunni and Shiite armed groups, causing an uptick in internal displacement. The conflict in Sunni regions is creating an atmosphere of perpetual crisis that could tip the country into civil war or be used by the Government as a justification to stay in power after what is expected to be a closely fought election. The more chaos, the greater the chance for al-Qaeda-linked fighters to hide among the population and reap chaos.

How have the sectarian divides been played by the politicians of Iraq, including Saddam Hussein and post-2003 regime? What is the potential for religious extremist groups to cause a disturbance to the election proceedings and how can these be prevented? How can minority rights be protected in the election proceedings?

**With less than a month until the elections, the Committee is asked to recommend peace-building steps that the Government can take to lessen tensions in the country. How can the Government, and the competing political parties, contribute to a decrease in sectarian tensions?**

The scenes of violence in Anbar testify to the failure of the government of Prime Minister Nouri Maliki to address the broad concerns of Sunnis. But they are also symptoms of the poisonous politics within Anbar itself and the dangerous rise of Islamic extremism in Syria and Iraq. Under Saddam Hussein, who was Sunni, the country’s minority Sunnis held nearly all true positions of power in the government and military but since the American-led invasion in 2003 Shia parties have dominated the government and the security forces.

The protests, which began in December 2012, were reformist in nature. Prompted by the arrest of the Sunni finance minister’s bodyguards in Baghdad and outrage over the detention of Sunni women by Iraqi security forces, thousands took to the streets of Ramadi and Fallujah, Anbar’s main cities. The demonstrations spread to other Sunni areas around Iraq, and even Shiite clerics, from the peaceable Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani to the more radical and bellicose Moqtada Sadr, publicly acknowledged the validity of the Sunni grievances. Shiite tribal leaders even visited the demonstrations to express their solidarity.

A push by Maliki and Deputy Prime Minister Saleh Mutlak, a Sunni, to pass a major reform package addressing the Sunni protestors’ concerns was blocked in parliament last April by the men’s Shiite and Sunni political rivals, who were loathe to hand their competitors a victory. After that, the situation took a turn for the worse.

Officials around Maliki suspected the protest camps were a front for Sunni militants and politicians who wanted to overthrow the government or find a pretext to carve out their own independent or semi-autonomous Sunni region. The government officials believed the protestors were inspired by, or in league with, Sunni militants fighting in Syria against the government of Bashar Assad, a member of the Alawite faith, which is an offshoot of Shiism.

**How do the various other players in the region, such as Syria’s Alawite minority, and Al Qaeda benefit from the sectarian violence in Iraq? Given this involvement of several domestic and foreign actors, can there exist a solution out of the current quagmire in Iraq? The Committee is asked to create an agreement between all participating parties that addresses extremist groups, within and outside the country.**

Iraq has put many of the pieces – from the constitution to education – into place to build a democracy in keeping with its population, yet it is still a young and fragile democracy and is emerging from decades of authoritarianism and sectarian politics. One might argue the biggest challenge it faces now is moving its politics beyond sectarian and familial patronage to creating an Iraqi identity and civic society. Its youth are the future of the country and its democracy. How will the young populations embody their religious affiliations and how will those affiliations affect their voting?

**The Committee is asked to design a program for youth that encourages civic engagement and cooperation across sectarian lines.**

**Committee on Regional Affairs**

Putting sectarianism aside, a number of Sunni states, notably Saudi Arabia, perceive the Syria conflict – and by extension Iraq – as part of a strategic competition with Iran. Riyadh fears Tehran is bent on regional hegemony and sees Tehran’s gain of an ally in Iraq after 2003 as a huge shift in the regional balance. Undermining Iran’s ally, and ideally reversing Iran’s gains in Iraq, motivate these states to support anti-regime forces in both Syria and Iraq.

Shia and Sunni extremists still retain the capacity to attack the government and Iraqi civilians. If these groups begin receiving significant new foreign support—from Iran on the Shia side or from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states on the Sunni side—the likelihood of ethno-sectarian violence increases. Iraq risks becoming a proxy battleground in a wider regional struggle with the front lines running through central Baghdad. What impact does the larger power struggle between Saudi Arabia and Iran have on what is happening inside Iraq?

**The Committee is asked to identify the specific key challenges within Iraq posed by the Saudi-Iran regional competition and make recommendations as to how the Government and other parties can balance these tensions and maintain a stable government, especially in light of the upcoming elections.**

The armed conflict in Syria is directly undermining Iraqi security. At a time when Iraq is already grappling with persistent domestic security problems, Syria poses the additional challenge of border security. This situation is likely to continue to debilitate Iraq’s internal security, especially in the case of al Qaeda off shoots.

What impact does the Syrian civil war have on the domestic situation right now in Iraq? What is the impact of refugees, both returning Iraqi ones and new Syrian ones, on Iraq? How important is stability in Iraq in the context of the whole Middle East?

**The Committee is asked to recommend how Iraq should contend with both the humanitarian and conflict issues on its border with Syria, challenges that have the potential to destabilize the upcoming elections.**

While the KRG is still part of Iraq, it operates more and more as an independent entity, establishing its own relations with external actors and other countries. The Peshmerga’s refusal to let the Iraqi military into Sinjar last March represents another dynamic of confrontation. As it is well known, relations between the central Iraqi government and the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have been plagued by political, economic and especially military tensions for more than a year. The memory of the events in Kirkuk that followed the incidents at the Rabia border crossing and in the town of Tuz Khurmatu in Saladdin is still fresh. Furthermore, the KRG provides direct support to Syrian Kurds opposed to the Assad regime. Hence, the Iraqi central government, which openly supports the Assad regime, and the KRG are at loggerheads. In this context, the regional role of Iran and Turkey should also be taken into account. This includes cross-border Kurdish relations and the influx of Kurdish refugees from neighboring countries.

**The Committee is asked to work out an agreement between the Iraqi Government and the KRG on developing relationships with foreign countries and border countries, including establishing who is responsible for border security.**

While members of the Arab League are hardly model democracies, Iraq's integration into these institutions could both assist in development of institutional capacity and strongly reassure Iraq's Sunni population that the Shia-led government is as committed to its Arab identity as to its Shiism. To help Iraq manage internal threats and reduce tensions in the region, the United States can use its influence in Ankara and Baghdad to build better relations between these two democratic neighbors that have historically not been close. The United States could begin with a relatively benign issue—perhaps water disputes between the two states—with an end goal of increasing familiarity and ties that move beyond the issue at hand. Turkey, as a NATO member, could also serve as a conduit for Western military assistance to counter the AQI threat.

**Above are some suggestions as to how regional actors could be helpful to Iraq’s future. The Committee is asked to consider the feasibility of these suggestions and develop their own as Iraq determines its foreign policy for the next decade.**

**Committee on Resources**

Iraq's fragile economic gains could serve to unite its leaders and people, especially with the outlook for its oil exports predicting exponential growth, said US Deputy Assistant Secretary Brett McGurk during testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Last year, Iraq surpassed Iran as the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries' second-largest producer. It now leads Iran as an exporter to India and China, and its 3 million barrels a day were earning nearly $200 billion in revenue a year. That rate is expected to increase to 6 million a day by 2020 and 8 million by 2035, and revenues for the period could approach $5 trillion.

Yet, Iraq's resources are not evenly divided across sectarian-demographic lines, creating ongoing tensions in terms of resource-sharing. Most known hydrocarbon resources are concentrated in the Shiite areas of the south and the ethnically Kurdish region in the north, with few resources in control of the Sunni minority in central Iraq. The known oil and gas reserves form a belt that runs along the eastern edge of the country. Iraq has five super-giant fields (over 5 billion barrels) in the south that account for 60 percent of the country's proven oil reserves. An estimated 17 percent of oil reserves are in the north of Iraq, near Kirkuk, Mosul, and Khanaqin. Control over rights to these reserves is a source of controversy between the ethnic Kurds and other groups in the area. The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimated that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) area contained 4 billion barrels of proven reserves. However, this region is now being actively explored, and the KRG stated that this region could contain 45 billion barrels of unproven oil resources. The Ministry of Oil oversees oil and gas production and development in all but the Kurdish territory through its operating entities, the North Oil Company (NOC) and the Midland Oil Company (MDOC) in the north and central regions, and the South Oil Company (SOC) and the Missan Oil Company (MOC) in southern regions. Production in the northern region controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) fluctuates because of disputes with the central Iraqi government.

Iraqi oil exports are currently running at near full capacity in the south, while export capacity in the north has been restricted by sabotage, deteriorating pipelines, and the inability to receive more oil from the south of Iraq via a deteriorated Strategic Pipeline. Pipeline capacity would need to be expanded in any case to export significantly higher volumes. Progress has been slow because of political disputes between factions within Iraq, especially those between the central government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government. Iraq also has disagreements regarding shared oil fields with Kuwait and Iran.

More generally, the Iraqi Oil Ministry insists that all hydrocarbon contracts must be signed with the national government, and that all oil produced in the KRG region be shipped via SOMO, Iraq's oil exporting arm. The KRG passed its own hydrocarbons law in 2007 in the absence of a national Iraqi law governing investment in hydrocarbons. In late 2011, the KRG challenged the authority of the national government when it signed oil production sharing agreements with ExxonMobil to develop 6 blocks in northern Iraq, some of which are in disputed border areas. The KRG has since signed additional contracts with majors such as Chevron, Gazprom, and Total. ExxonMobil withdrew from some of its projects in Iraq, notably the Common Seawater Supply Facility, and the company had been asked by the Iraqi government to choose between its involvement in the West Qurna 1 oilfield and its projects in the KRG.

The KRG had agreed to send 175,000 bbl/d of crude oil into the Iraqi northern oil export pipeline. However, the KRG began reducing their contribution in late 2011, charging that the central government failed to make agreed payments to cover foreign oil company development. The KRG contributions were halted altogether in April 2012, but they were later re-started in August.

Oil exports directly from the KRG are another unresolved issue. The KRG began exporting 15,000 bbl/d of condensate and 20,000 bbl/d of crude oil to Turkey by truck. The KRG is looking at building its own pipelines to export crude oil directly via Turkey, bypassing the national export pipeline system

**Since Iraq’s economy could benefit greatly from a unified oil policy for the entire country, the Committee is charged with developing such a policy in consultation with the Committee on Federalism and Autonomy to ensure that decisions in one committee do not cancel out the other.**

Water is another critical resource that Iraq needs to address. Currently, the country is dependent on its neighbors to the north for its flow of water, which is critical to its agricultural sector.

In 2009, 25% of the population was employed in agriculture, which generates 10% of GDP. In Diyala Province, one of Iraq’s most unstable areas, 70% of the province is dependent on agriculture. Iraqi agriculture was already in a weakened condition in 2003 after 12 years of UN sanctions which prevented any form of major development or improvements. By 2002, 80-100% of many of Iraq’s staples were imported. Even though Iraq’s three Kurdish provinces became an autonomous region in 1991, still Iraqi Kurdistan was importing 65% of its agricultural products in 2006 with its own agricultural sector only producing 35% of the region’s needs.

Although the northern part of Iraq benefits from greater rainfall than the south, this region has suffered from its own problems with water, which are both naturally induced and political in nature. Due to neglect and over pumping of wells, lack of government technical support, and political instability, many of the underground canals (karez/qanat) that have provided irrigation waters since time immemorial to Kurdish, Arab, Turkman and farmers of other ethnic groups in the north have been destroyed. A 2009 UNESCO study found that, after 4 years of drought, 70% of the karez that were still operating in 2005, the year the drought began, had been abandoned. This led to the displacement of 100,000 people in northern Iraq. Because so many farmers have been forced to leave their farms, many are now dependent on the KRG for their livelihoods as an estimated 90% of all jobs in the KRG are under the patronage control of the KDP and PUK. Because Kurds need to have ties to and influence (wasta) in one of these two parties, securing employment is often not easy. Much of this destruction of northern Iraq’s irrigation system occurred during the 1980s when Saddam Husayn decided to ethnically reconfigure the region of the Ninewa plains by removing Kurds who lived and farmed there. During the notorious Anfal Campaign, between 1986 and 1989, 3.5 million Kurds and other minorities were displaced and as many as 150,000 people died. Hundreds of villages were destroyed and with them the irrigation infrastructure that had supported them.

In the south, which has not received as much state attention to water resources as the north (e.g., it received much less electricity than Baghdad or Iraq’s Sunni Arab provinces during the 1990s), the situation is dire in many areas. Iraq’s signature agricultural crop, date production, one that has defined Iraq’s culture over time, has suffered not only from the persistent drought, but from the drop in the water level of the Shatt al-Arab, where the Tigris and Euphrates join, which has resulted in the increased salinization of the river water. Much of the south was also impacted when Saddam Hussein, in an effort to punish the Marsh Arabs, drained the southern marshlands, devastating the landscape.

In compliance with Sharia, Islamic tradition considered the sharing of water to be a "holy duty" and preserved two fundamental water rights. First, Islam recognizes the "right of thirst," which is juridically the right to take water to quench one's thirst or to water one's animals." Second, Islamic law recognizes the right of irrigation, which means "the right to provide water to land, trees, and plants.' Consistent with the "public trust" view of water, a person can use public water sources for irrigation, provided that he "does not infringe upon a third party or damage the community."

**The Committee is asked to create an integrated, long term National Water Master Plan.**

Another critical issue for Iraq is developing its infrastructure.

Iraq has begun to develop its oil and natural gas reserves after years of sanctions and wars, but it will need to develop its infrastructure in order to reach its production potential. According to estimates by Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister for Energy, capital expenditures of $30 billion per year in Iraqi energy infrastructure are required to meet Iraq's production targets. Progress has been hampered by political disputes and the lack of a law to govern the development of Iraq's oil and gas. The proposed Hydrocarbon Law, which would govern contracting and regulation, has been under review in the Council of Ministers since October 26, 2008, but has not received final passage.

Furthermore, Iraq's oil and gas industry is the largest industrial customer of electricity in Iraq. Large-scale increases in oil production would also require large increases in electric power generation. However, Iraq has struggled to keep up with the demand for electricity, with shortages common across the country. Significant upgrades to the electricity sector would be needed to supply additional power.

Like many developing countries in the Middle East and North Africa, Iraq faces a sharply rising demand for power. For most of the postwar period 2003-2012, Iraq has struggled to meet its power needs. Daily outages lasting 16 hours per day have not been uncommon. Although Iraq purchased 74 turbines, for a total of 10 gigawatts (GW) of capacity in 2008, no progress in installation was made until recently because of budgetary, contracting, and political difficulties. In addition, enhancements to the transmission and distribution networks are required to bring additional power to customers. A further bottleneck is that, while this power expansion is supposed to be fueled primarily by natural gas-powered turbines, the natural gas infrastructure enhancements to support this expansion have lagged.

With the growing number of Syrian refugees putting additional strains on local infrastructure and essential services, access to basic services for the Iraqi population itself remains problematic. Stagnant socio-economic development further affects daily life in Iraq, while institutional capacity remains limited.

**Given the infrastructure challenges facing Iraq, the Committee is asked to prioritize the country’s needs and create a plan to begin to address these issues.**

**Committee on Media**

By 2003 and the U.S. invasion of Iraq, non-state media had been banned for nearly 45 years, while Iraq’s state media was little more than a propaganda arm of the regime. This legacy has had a profound impact on the way that Iraqis conceive of the media and its role. The coalition’s expectation that Iraq’s new leaders would share their conception of a Western-style liberal media sector was not rooted in the historical experience of the country. There was no tradition of independent journalism in the country and the coalition’s assumption that the journalistic community would quickly adopt a set of independent and professional standards, if only the shackles of state control were removed, had little foundation. The explosion in the number of television – as well as radio and print – outlets can be seen as testimony to long pent-up demand for information and perhaps an even greater demand for self-expression. The diversity of the non-state media is the single greatest advance within Iraq’s media community over the last decade and is likely to be sustained. However, in keeping with earlier phases of Iraqi history, these outlets continue to operate at the forefront of political interests.

**Given the challenge of how media outlets are currently linked to politics and political interests, for the last three weeks before the election, what media guidelines should be put in place regarding election advertising and coverage? The Committee is asked to develop these guidelines.**

The current character of Iraq’s democracy has been, and will continue to be, mirrored and to some extent shaped by its media. The greatest obstacle to the removal of state control over the media is structural. Sitting on the third largest reserves of oil in the world, there is not the same incentive for a social contract between the state and its citizenry as might exist in other nations more dependent on its citizens for its tax base. With little need to tax them, accountability of the Iraqi state to its citizens can remain weak without effective checks and balances. In such circumstances, the health of institutions such as the media is likely to be critical to the effective functioning and accountability of government.

Abuses of journalistic freedoms continue, and the country was until recently one of the most dangerous in the world to be a journalist. Nevertheless, and despite accusations of growing authoritarianism, there is limited evidence to suggest that the government of Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki is pursuing a concerted and organized campaign to silence the press. Recent legislation drafted by the Iraqi parliament is confused, opaque and incomplete, lending itself to manipulation both by the authorities and the media. If the space that has been created for freedom of expression is to be maintained, the Iraqi parliament will need to revise old laws and pass new ones. What definitions of terms are important for a common understanding, from who is a journalist (from reporters to bloggers) to what is the meaning of freedom of expression?

**The Committee is asked to draft a new media law that addresses freedom of the press, freedom of expression, social media, the links between political organizations and media outlets, and the role of foreign entities (including countries, individuals and organizations) in Iraq’s media.**

International actors need to develop a deeper understanding of political realities and histories before designing media support initiatives. Media reform requires a holistic approach that takes into account Iraq’s broader political economy. Training will invariably form part of that reform agenda, but training alone can end up further entrenching institutional practices by creating the false impression that improving the media is only a matter of improving skills. Media reform programs should remain realistic about the economics of the media market in the Arab world and not assume that financial sustainability of independent media is easily achievable. At the same time, international actors should accept that the definitions of ‘public’ in the debate about public service broadcasting can vary significantly. Iraq’s audience is not necessarily looking for its media to act in the way that the Western media does.

Successful Iraqi media organizations are likely to be subsidized media organizations for the immediate future. It is the resources of indigenous Iraqi religious, sectarian and political actors, in combination with funding from competing regional powerhouses such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran and international actors such as the US, that are likely to bankroll non-state media houses. To what degree does this allow such media to act in the public rather than the partisan interests of their owners and backers?

**As Iraq aspires to a democracy as stated in its constitution, how can international actors best assist the country in developing the role of its media? The Committee is asked to make recommendations as to the scope of, and need for, international actors to both help finance and train Iraq’s media outlets.**