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The Iraqi Challenge and the Old Arab Public

In the aftermath of the first Gulf War, Arabs grappled with a set of profound interlocking questions. How could the Arab order have failed so horribly? To what extent did Iraq continue to pose a threat to its neighbors? Should international efforts be made to remove Saddam Hussein's regime from power? If so, how could Iraq's territorial integrity be guaranteed? What could—or should—be done to reconstruct the shattered official Arab order? What role should relations with the United States play in this order?

While some of these debates spilled out into the media, they were primarily intra-elite arguments, carried out in private, and only tangentially driven by publicity. The arguments that mattered took place at the official level, within the Arab League or the Gulf Cooperation Council, in private diplomacy between governments, at the United Nations, in consultations with Washington. Real arguments took place but in private, far from public scrutiny or participation.

Arab leaders as well as Americans had little reason to believe that public opinion would be especially significant to these debates. Arabism in this period seemed to most observers to be in deep decline. The Gulf War had shattered the Arab order and rendered the Arab League moribund, while the peace process divided Arabs in new ways. The massive street protests against the Gulf War were genuinely new for most Arabs, as protestors from Morocco to Yemen could see each other on CNN chanting the same slogans at the same time.

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For all the emotional power of this new recognition of the existence of an "Arab street," however, there was also a widespread recognition that this "street" had failed to sway Arab governments. While Arab regimes might summon the ghost of the street to support their own bargaining positions, or on occasion refrain from provocative actions to avoid domestic unrest, on balance states dominated society. Only Islamism posed a serious challenge to these states, and Islamism through the early 1990s focused primarily on domestic political and social issues in most Arab countries rather than on wider Arab international concerns such as Iraq. In short, Arab states pursued their interests in a broadly realist manner in this period, even as public opinion began to mobilize and converge in unprecedented and unexpected ways.

With regard to my argument about the importance of the new public sphere, chapter 3 tells a negative, counterfactual story: what Arab politics toward Iraq looked like in the absence of the new public sphere. Arab states acted in a realist fashion, except where local conditions intervened, such as in Jordan (Lynch 1999). But even without satellite television, changes were taking place—including both the liberalization of domestic publics and emerging communications and information technology—that facilitated a growing popular consensus on the tragedy of Iraq. Word began filtering out about the human suffering under sanctions—especially in Jordan and in the small neighboring Gulf states, where direct contact with suffering Iraqis through legal and illicit trade networks bypassed a relative media blackout. Word then began to be spread by activists, even if this was not yet a fully fledged social movement. Public discussion in the more liberal domestic medias began to seep into the more mainstream publications and media, reshaping the terms of everyday public debate. Their efforts prepared the ground, establishing a conventional wisdom, so that when al-Jazeera brought the story to a mass public, they were receptive, ready to hear it because the stories "rang true."

The introduction of this identity-based humanitarian narrative radically transformed the incentives facing strategic actors as well as more principled ones. Before this shift, the Realpolitik of Arab states and the high-politics focus on Saddam Hussein, the invasion of Kuwait, and weapons of mass destruction pushed public discussion toward pragmatic questions of various strategies of containment. As the

salience of the humanitarian crisis increased in Arab concerns, ambitious elites who hoped to win public approval had an entirely different set of incentives. Finding some way to rescue the "suffering Iraqi people," ending the "blockade," came to be seen as a core concern for any authentic Arab, and the failure to do so a key proxy vehicle for criticizing the performance of Arab regimes. The humanitarian frame also reversed the normative valence attached to supporting American policy. In the early 1990s, support for the containment of Iraq and Israeli-Arab peace agreements had been seen by some as courageous and novel, but as attention focused more and more on the human costs of the sanctions they tended to be seen instead as cheap opportunism, if not moral obtuseness. Awareness of the moral weight attached to the sanctions is crucial to understanding the political potency of a critique that combined identification with suffering Iraqis as fellow Arabs and blaming Arab regimes for their plight.

As described in chapter 2, the half-decade after the Gulf War represented a transitional period in the development of the Arab public sphere. Many key technologies emerged in this time—satellite television, electronic distribution of pan-Arab newspapers—but the public (defined in terms of arguments) remained relatively inchoate. Local politics and a domestic print public sphere took precedence over wider Arab issues such as Iraq or even Palestine. The emergence of these domestic publics had a paradoxical effect on the Iraqi issue. While more liberal media allowed for more open discussion of such issues, as well as for more activism and civil society organization, these newly open publics tended to focus political attention and discourse on long-suppressed local politics, while downgrading regional issues such as Iraq. Over time, however, popular concerns about the sanctions and the wider problem of Iraq began to intersect with wider concerns about Palestine and about domestic repression. Iraq and the Palestinian issue, in particular, served as extremely effective focal points for unifying otherwise highly diverse opposition movements: in Jordan and Egypt, for example, actions in support of the Iraqi or Palestinian people routinely attracted support from Islamists, Arab nationalists, conservative nationalists, liberals, and more. Islamists, in particular, were adopting a more international focus in response to their defeat at the local level. The decline of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process after the 1996 elec-

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tion of Benjamin Netanyahu helped to generate a renewed sense of crisis, which in turn encouraged worried regimes to clamp down on public political action. A series of crises between the United States and Iraq, including airstrikes in 1993, 1994, and 1996, punctuated this increasingly tense situation, although Arab public reaction did not reach the levels that would be seen in the later years of the decade.

As the decade ground on, Arabs protested the official inaction of their regimes in the face of these crises. These protests took place not only in the streets, but increasingly in political salons and in various kinds of media. Temporary press openings in many countries in the early 1990s offered the opportunity for many activists and commentators to publicly discuss the Iraqi issue, which (outside of Kuwait) increasingly meant discussing the impact of the sanctions and the injustice of the status quo. The Iraq story was given substance by opposition political parties and civil society activists, whose travels to Iraq and publicizing of their experiences there made Iraqi suffering viscerally real to elite Arab audiences.

Opinion change in this period, I argue, originated either in face-to-face personal experiences or else within these emerging domestic print public spheres, rather than with states (most of whose leaders prioritized relations with the United States and continued to fear Saddam's Iraq) or with the broader masses (which were far less exposed to information about Iraq). Where state policies changed, it generally came in response to the recognition of the suffering of a fellow Arab people rather than from actual pressure from below. Shaykh Abdullah bin Zayid of the UAE, for example, between 1992 and 1995 changed from staunch supporter of sanctions to critic, not because of the pressure of public opinion but because of his own empathy with the Iraqi people.[1] Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh similarly argued that "it is our duty as brothers in the Arab and Islamic countries . . . to take all necessary steps to ease the severe suffering of the Iraqi people and take a courageous stand to end the sanctions. It is very sad that scenes of misery and suffering of Iraqi children, elderly persons and women which were caused by the sanctions are shown on television . . . which makes it very hard to keep quiet."[2]

Over time, public concerns about the suffering of the Iraqi people began to crack the insular private deliberations of the ruling elites. As

they did, this public began to pose different, troubling questions that anxious regimes would have much preferred to avoid. Why did the Arab world fail so miserably to either resolve the Iraq-Kuwait crisis or to resist the American intervention in the region? How were Arab regimes able to so thoroughly ignore a massively mobilized Arab street? Why would—or could—the Arab order do nothing to help the suffering Iraqi people? As the decade wore on, the Iraqi issue was increasingly conflated with the Palestinian one, not only as an example of a suffering Arab people but also as a symbol of the failures of Arab regimes and their refusal to act on the will of the people.

It took time for the Arab public to prioritize Iraqi suffering. Still consumed with the divisions wrought by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and understandably obsessed with the developing peace process with Israel and on the challenge posed by rising Islamist movements, few Arabs had time for Iraq's internal problems. To the extent that Iraq was an issue for the elite print public, the focus was on the Security Council, weapons inspections, and ongoing raw wounds between Iraq and its Gulf neighbors. Kuwait—and to a lesser extent Saudi Arabia—stood firmly against any rehabilitation of Saddam's regime. With this Saudi/Kuwaiti veto on Arab reconciliation with Iraq firmly in place, pragmatic Arab regimes saw little reason to discuss it, to the distress of an emerging Arab public.

Television helped shape opinion by broadcasting powerful images of Iraqi suffering, but in general remained tightly controlled by states or by Saudi owners and offered little opportunity for public debate about the sanctions. The Western media, such as CNN, said little about the sanctions, while for several years state-run Arab television stations did little more. An early exception to this television silence came in February 1994, when Qatari television broadcast a four-part program "highlighting the effect of sanctions on ordinary Iraqis, a welcome break with the refusal of most GCC states to allow such information to be publicized."[3] This documentary caused something of a sensation throughout the Gulf. As Akeel Sawwar observed, "I do not believe people stayed up late in Bahrain debating the sanctions documentary . . . just because of its even-handed and professional production. Rather, their reaction reflects Bahrain's and the Gulf's hunger for a diet other than that offered by CNN. . . . The enthusiasm which the Qatari pro-

gram generated among the Bahraini people was akin to a referendum on the sources of knowledge available to us, and the results were not in favor of CNN. . . . The outcome of the 'referendum' also shows that the Bahraini and Gulf 'street' is concerned about happenings in Iraq and rejects the picture projected by 'the guided media.' "[4] Kuwait protested bitterly over the documentary, recalling its ambassador to Qatar and formally protesting to the GCC, while the Kuwaiti press denounced the program as "slanderous and distorted." The contrast in the public response to a seven-part Saudi documentary on the Gulf War—which downplayed the effect of sanctions and focused far more on Saddam's evils—broadcast by the MBC satellite station in early 1997 could not be more stark. Unlike the Qatari program, this one largely sank without a trace; few Arab viewers seemed interested by that point in another recitation of the "official" version of the Iraqi story.[5]

Whether in response to audience interest or because of shifting state policies, Arab television stations did begin broadcasting more and more footage of the humanitarian situation in Iraq in the mid-1990s. This usually came in the form of news coverage, without extensive analysis or discussion, but the cumulative impact of the images was devastating. This coverage, however, was not a public sphere as I have defined it. For all the emotional impact, and for all the support the images might have given to social protest against the sanctions, television in this period did not provide a forum for arguments, for disagreements, or for criticism of the political status quo.

The Arab press, by contrast, not only covered the suffering of the Iraqi people but also generated an elite public sphere around the issue by presenting real arguments and a variety of views about the sanctions. This had both the virtues and the drawbacks of a press-centered public: arguably more attention to reasoned arguments and careful thought instead of emotion, but much less mobilizational power and only very indirect influence over state policies. The major Arab newspapers, including the London press as well as the major national dailies, perceived themselves as part of a common argument and discussion, addressing common Arab issues before a common Arab audience while often responding directly to one another—in other words, this was a transnational print public sphere that predated the al-Jazeera revolution.

The London-based *al-Quds al-Arabi*, founded in 1989 and rising to prominence during the first Gulf War with its outspoken opposition to the American-led war largely absent from the other state-run or Saudi-owned media, wrote frequently and passionately about the sanctions.[6] Other London-based Arab papers, such as *al-Hayat* and *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, tended to follow the line of their Saudi owners against Iraq, but even there coverage and criticism of the sanctions began to break through. Unlike in the controlled electronic media, the press offered real disagreement and argument. *Al-Hayat* published numerous essays by both sanctions critics and supporters, with the argument generally staying within the mainstream of official opinion—i.e., rarely challenging the Arab states or the validity of the weapons inspection process itself. *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, while critical of the sanctions and of American policy toward Iraq, routinely published articles by Iraqi dissidents who criticized the Iraqi regime on human rights grounds.

In the newspapers of Jordan and the smaller Gulf states (especially Qatar, the UAE, and Bahrain), open arguments raged about the sanctions and the need for Arabs to find some solution to the crisis. Egyptian and North African newspapers also covered the Iraqi story heavily, again with an emphasis on the human toll of the sanctions. In May 1997 the Bahraini writer Hafez al-Shaykh marveled at the "extremely silly idea" that "some people still believe, even now, that public opinion in the Gulf can be persuaded to turn a blind eye to the agonies of the Iraqis resulting from the sanctions."[7]

Initially, the Iraq issue resonated very differently in these various domestic public spheres. The Jordanian public, for example, saw the issue of Iraq as a rare moment of unity between the regime and the people, and the occasion of great shared sacrifice, and did not hesitate to say so in its relatively free press. The regime's strategic decision to curtail its relations with Baghdad as part of its renewed alignment with the United States and Israel strained this popular unity and contributed directly to the crackdown on public freedoms in that period. The Egyptian press swung between the haughty Realpolitik of *al-Ahram*, which continued to scold Iraq for its behavior, and the sensationalist exposes of Iraqi suffering and official Arab perfidy that dominated the tabloids. In Kuwait, continuing fury with Iraq expressed in its relatively free media and Parliament constrained a regime that at

times seemed inclined to move toward a rapprochement for strategic reasons. Popular Kuwaiti anger at Jordan, for example, was so great that the Kuwait government reportedly refused American pressures to compensate the Hashemite Kingdom for lost Iraqi oil subsidies in exchange for a Jordanian role in overthrowing Saddam.

Over time, however, these discordant local narratives began to converge around an increasingly clear Arab popular consensus. The two driving forces were growing horror and outrage over the impact of the sanctions on the Iraqi people, and growing frustration with American and Saudi/Kuwaiti intransigence on the Iraqi file. The emerging transnational media made it easier for Arabs to see common concerns and actions in other Arab states, helping to link them together in a common protest. Arab elites increasingly found themselves in agreement that the Iraqi situation could not continue as it had been going, even if they could not agree as to whether for themselves this meant supporting an aggressive bid to change the Iraqi regime or moving to end the sanctions. At the mass level, stories of Iraqi suffering fit into a common narrative increasingly focused on the United States—with the sanctions on Iraq coming to be equated with American policies in Palestine. This established the baseline against which most Arabs experienced the military confrontations and crises that increasingly marked the Iraqi issue.

While the reality of Iraqi human suffering became a consensus, this did not lead to any agreement—even among the public, much less among states—on what should be done. Given an American policy seen as intransigent and implacably opposed to any real changes, and a widespread belief in the inability of most Arab states to defy American policies, the consensus on the injustice of Arab suffering led to anger and paralysis rather than to any clear plan of action.

It should again be emphasized that this emerging consensus did not prevent considerable dissent and disagreement in the Arab press. The Saudi-owned press, including *al-Hayat* and *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, published a full array of columnists who justified and supported a tough line against Iraq. In July 1993, for example, Abd al-Rahman al-Rashed warned that "lifting the Iraq sanctions now would be seen by Baghdad as a green light to go to war again."[8] Kamaran Karadaghi at one point warned that Iraq "had become a victim of its own propaganda. . . . It

tried to persuade [others] that the lifting of the sanctions was in sight and ended up deluding itself," and at another warned sanctions critics that "by challenging the embargo against Iraq they are encouraging aggression and dishonoring themselves."[9]

Many blamed Saddam for the suffering of his people, and took the new concern for them as offering greater urgency for regime change. And the sheer rage felt by Kuwaitis and members of the Iraqi opposition at an unsupportive majority, and their alienation from Arab public opinion, knew no bounds. As one angry Kuwaiti wrote in 2002, "The Arab street did not go out in support of Kuwait when it was occupied by Iraqi forces . . . but it went out supporting Saddam Hussein! In truth I can't trust the Arab street."[10]

Sanctions

> How we wish that humanitarian considerations would also figure into their calculations. . . . Ordinary Iraqis have been impoverished by the sanctions. . . . One thing is certain, that no child of a senior official has gone hungry or had to forgo medical treatment because of the embargo, which gives the lie to the assertion that the sanctions are aimed at the regime and not the people.
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> —*al-Quds al-Arabi*, November 1993[11]

The Arab public grappled with several interrelated aspects of the Iraqi issue. As noted above, over the course of the 1990s the sanctions on Iraq took on ever greater centrality in Arab public debates. While this section cannot offer a comprehensive overview of the sanctions regime, it attempts to put the Arab arguments into some context.

After the Gulf War ended, the United Nations placed Iraq under comprehensive sanctions that would stay in place until it complied with a set of demands that included the full disclosure and disarmament of its weapons of mass destruction programs (Graham-Brown 1999; Lynch 2001). Most observers expected that these sanctions would quickly bring down the Saddam Hussein regime, and would then be lifted. When Saddam survived post-war uprisings by brutally slaughtering Shia and Kurd rebels the sanctions became institutional-

ized as a seemingly permanent fixture of the Middle East equation. Their impact on the Iraqi people became evident early on, which initially was generally seen as a sign of success in the effort to undermine and challenge Saddam Hussein's regime rather than as a problem.

As early as March 1991, Under-Secretary-General Martti Ahtisaari reported that "the recent conflict has wrought near-apocalyptic results upon the economic infrastructure"; a follow-up report by Sadruddin Aga Khan expanded on these findings and urged massive humanitarian intervention (Rowat 2000). By 1993, disturbing reports began to filter out of NGOs and UN agencies about the impact of the sanctions on the Iraqi civilian population, including malnutrition and the near collapse of the public health system. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee of humanitarian NGOs began to study intensely the impact of sanctions. Reports by the FAO, UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Save the Children, and others painted an increasingly coherent picture of a humanitarian crisis that could not be dismissed as Iraqi propaganda. A 1997 FAO/WFP report found serious deficiencies in the oil-for-food program, including continuing malnutrition, insufficiently balanced diet authorizations, deteriorating agriculture, and severe deterioration of water and sanitation.[12] A 1999 UNICEF report documented escalating malnutrition, child mortality and morbidity, illness, and the breakdown of the educational system, with galvanizing effect. The conclusion by one of the authors of the UNICEF report that "half a million Iraq children have died because of the sanctions," though disavowed by the report's majority, was repeated widely in the Arab media.[13] So was the blunt resignation speech of UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq Dennis Halliday, who told the world, "We are in the process of destroying an entire society. It is as simple and terrifying as that. It is illegal and immoral."[14]

The growing impact of a seemingly endless sanctions regime, and popular fury over the escalating crises surrounding the UN weapons inspections, increasingly forced public opinion onto center stage. Arabs experienced the collapse of Iraqi society under sanctions both directly and vicariously, through the media as well as through stories from migrant workers (in Egypt and North Africa) and the increasing presence of impoverished Iraqi expatriates in the streets (in Jordan).

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Stories of impoverished families selling their possessions, babies dying for lack of medicine or infant formula, and untreated water carrying disease began to appear in the Arab press—particularly when United Nations workers or other Western reporters offered supporting data. The Iraqi regime encouraged these reports, providing access and information to reporters who spread the news, but this did not minimize the reality of the humanitarian crisis. Particularly vivid images, endlessly repeated, had a defining impact. For example, a televised procession through Baghdad of thousands of taxis with small, baby-sized coffins tied to their roofs on their way to a symbolic mass burial is an image that few who saw it could ever forget. This reporting framed the issue around the suffering of the Iraqi people, who were a fellow Arab people whatever the faults of their leadership, and pushed political differences as well as the memories of the invasion of Kuwait aside. The consensus that emerged was the result not of the impact of a single story or a single event, but of the impact of a constant stream of converging information from multiple sources.

The consensus did not appear of its own volition, of course: Arabs on all sides of the Iraq issue worked to shape public opinion to their advantage. As the Duelfer report on Iraq WMD concluded, "Saddam's primary goal from 1991 to 2003 was to have UN sanctions lifted, while maintaining the security of the regime."[15] Iraqi officials openly explained that their strategy was to erode the sanctions from below by encouraging Arabs to stop honoring them, since they could never hope to have the sanctions officially lifted by an American-dominated Security Council. By generating the perception that all Arabs opposed the sanctions, the Iraqi regime aimed to spark a self-fulfilling cascade, "through which expressed perceptions trigger chains of individual responses that make these perceptions appear increasingly plausible through their rising availability in public discourse" (Kuran and Sunstein 1999: 685). Iraq hosted countless "popular conferences" for foreign activists and scholars and trade shows for products that it could not yet legally buy, and heavily publicized every visit by a foreign businessman or politician, every statement of support by a foreign government, every demonstration against the sanctions in a foreign or Arab country, every criticism of the sanctions in the UN. Sympathetic Arab commentators picked up on any signal they could find of the im-

minent lifting of sanctions, pushing for ways to shape expectations in such a way as to generate a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Opponents, in turn, attempted to deflate such expectations by asserting that the United States would not allow sanctions to be lifted under any circumstances. Their success in arguing this point created perverse incentives for what I call "rhetorical free riding." The Clinton administration's credibility was not the issue. Because most Arabs were fully convinced of the American commitment to inflict harm upon Iraq, few questioned the belief that the U.S. would do anything it could to maintain the sanctions. At the same time, Arab leaders did not believe that the United States was serious about regime change, especially after it failed to support the 1991 uprisings and allowed its collaborators in a 1996 coup attempt to be slaughtered by Iraqi forces. This combination—the relative certainty that Saddam would remain in power and that the sanctions would remain no matter what, and the popular unhappiness with the humanitarian and political impact of the sanctions—made talk seem cheap, and encouraged ambitious politicians to indulge in strong rhetoric with little fear of their demands actually being met. This seemingly cheap talk, however, fueled the shifting background beliefs that slowly transformed the strategic environment.

Iraq's adversaries, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and parts of the Iraqi opposition in exile, and not a few other Arab regimes in private, initially denied the reality of the humanitarian crisis and subsequently blamed it on Saddam Hussein. Iraq's friends, on the other hand, blamed America for the sanctions, and demanded their immediate and unconditional lifting. Most Arabs occupied a middle ground of distaste for Saddam Hussein and his regime but a conviction that the sanctions were morally indefensible and bereft of any international legitimacy. They opposed American-imposed regime change, but were ambivalent about the existing regime. They appealed to the legitimacy of the UN Security Council, but were outraged that American manipulations of the council and the UNSCOM weapons inspections process gave Iraq little hope of ever escaping the sanctions. Whatever the faults of Saddam Hussein, the sanctions demonstrated the corruption and failure of the existing Arab order, and the illegitimacy of most existing Arab regimes. Sanctions became an ideal wedge issue that seemed to fully embody the juxtaposition of an

embattled, divided Arab people struggling against the United States, Israel, and complicit Arab regimes.

Growing Dissent

By the fall of 1994, dissatisfaction with the sanctions was widespread within the Security Council as well as within the Arab world. Even Arab realists not particularly inclined to support Iraq had begun to worry that Iraq's weakness was emboldening Iran, while also worrying that an Iraqi collapse under the pressure of sanctions might create highly disruptive spillover effects. Many simply wanted to put the Iraq divisions behind them and remove this potentially explosive issue from the mix.

Salama Ahmed Salama, reflecting the emerging view of the Egyptian foreign policy elite, argued that "three years after a war which destroyed the old Arab order without toppling the Iraqi regime or resulting in the emergence of a new Arab order . . . Arabs must seek new ways of bringing Iraq back into their ranks . . . [even though] the US and Britain seek to keep the Gulf war rift among Arabs alive."[16] And, warning that "by insisting that the UN sanctions are kept in place indefinitely and maintaining a posture of intense hostility and hatred to all things Iraqi, the Kuwaitis are fueling a sense of deep resentment among ordinary Iraqis that could come back to haunt them long after Saddam is gone," Riyadh al-Rayyes urged Kuwaitis not to let their passions get in the way of their interests.[17] At the end of June 1994, Gamal Mattar argued that current trends "suggest that the countdown to the lifting of the international siege of Iraq has started."[18] Such Arab pragmatists seemed increasingly reconciled to the easing of the sanctions, and were increasingly critical of Kuwaiti intransigence.

To dampen such expectations, in May 1994 (and again in October) U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher stated that "frankly it's not feasible for Saddam to comply (with UN Resolutions) and remain in office."[19] Martin Indyk described the American goal as "to establish clearly and unequivocally that the current regime in Iraq is a criminal regime, beyond the pale of international society and, in our judgment, irredeemable."[20] Christopher's successor, Madeleine Albright,

repeated this position on the sanctions in March 1997.[21] That Saddam himself came to believe this is suggested by a letter sent to Saddam by his European envoy Barzan al-Tikriti. According to this memo, after meeting with numerous European and Arab leaders, Barzan found "a near consensus that even if Baghdad complied in full with all the UN resolutions relating to the sanctions regime, the embargo on Iraq will not be lifted as long as the present regime remains in power."[22] As if to confirm this sense, Iraq's November 1994 recognition of Kuwait had little impact, despite Russian, French, and Chinese suggestions that this might allow them to more effectively argue Iraq's case. Arab critics used instances such as this to loudly question whether there was anything Iraq could do that would lead the sanctions being lifted.

By early 1995, pressure to ease the sanctions on Iraq had developed to a near-fever pitch. Russia and France both publicly expressed their impatience with the sanctions and their skepticism about American objectives and arguments. China, not usually a state that took the lead on Iraq issues, declared that "given recent developments, the international community should now consider the gradual lifting of sanctions against Iraq so as to ease the Iraqi people's sufferings."[23] The divergence between American policy and the mandate expressed in Security Council resolutions had become a central theme of public debate. At the same time, public discourse suggested that the international community must respond to the humanitarian crisis regardless of Iraqi compliance or noncompliance with UNSCOM. Tareq Aziz made a major push in the days before the March 1995 sanctions review, meeting with all council members except the United States and United Kingdom to push for an end to the sanctions on the basis of full Iraqi compliance. After a fierce debate, however, the status quo was maintained, to the considerable frustration of Iraq and much of the Arab public.

It was in this context that the United States pushed for an "oil-for-food" Security Council resolution to respond to the humanitarian concerns that were undermining support for the sanctions without giving up the core components of the pressure on Iraq. American officials readily admit that Arab public opinion was the primary reason for the passage of the Oil-for-Food resolution.[24] As Under-Secretary of State for Political Affairs Thomas Pickering explained to the U.S. Senate, "without the oil-for-food program . . . the Iraqi government would

continue to exploit the suffering of its people to force the international community to lift sanctions. . . . The oil-for-food program is the key to sustaining the sanctions regime until Iraq complies with its obligations."[25] National Security Adviser Sandy Berger's explanation that "we have a moral duty to [feed the Iraqi people]" rang false after the United States had spent years rejecting any recourse to humanitarian arguments with regard to the sanctions.[26] That the Clinton administration had been forced to accept the legitimacy of the humanitarian critique represented an important victory for transnational activists and, to a lesser extent, Arab public voices who had long struggled to bring such issues to the forefront (Lynch 2001).

Security Council Resolution 986 represented the minimum necessary to maintain the status quo of the sanctions, and also offered substantial benefits in terms of providing funds for the compensation committee, the administration of the Kurdish areas, and UNSCOM operations. The unanimous passage of the resolution on April 14 allowed the United States and United Kingdom to attempt to shift the burden of responsibility for the humanitarian problem onto Saddam Hussein's regime (or, later, the United Nations). Initially, the Iraqi regime decided to reject the resolution in the hopes of winning a total lifting of the sanctions, arguing that "it is quite clear to the members of the Council that the United States did not intend in pushing this resolution to help alleviate the humanitarian hardships of Iraq."[27] In June Iraq launched another round of lobbying to ease the sanctions, calling on Russia, France, Germany, Turkey, and others to take the lead.

The passage of the oil-for-food resolution, and Iraq's initial refusal to accept its terms, posed a significant challenge to Arab public opinion: to support a program that might alleviate Iraq's human suffering, or to support Saddam Hussein's political strategy. Arab argument was encouraged by internal disagreements within the Iraqi regime about the resolution's merits, and reflected real uncertainty as to whether the interests of the Iraqi people would be best served by implementing the resolution or by holding out for the complete lifting of sanctions.

In general, Saudi, Kuwaiti, and other hawkish commentators cheered the passage of resolution 986, assuming that Saddam would reject it and thereby place himself in confrontation with his own citizens. Resolution 986 seemed to be a no-lose proposition: either the

humanitarian crisis would be alleviated, reducing the demand for easing containment, or else Saddam could more credibly be blamed for the suffering because of his rejection of the program. Either way, "the attempt to provoke international public opinion to lift the embargo will [now] not succeed."[28] 986, by this argument, would respond to the real humanitarian concerns without handing Iraq a strategic victory. Members of this group tempered their enthusiasm with the possibility that oil sales might "create practical and psychological momentum that is bound to have long-term influence on the eventual complete return of Iraqi oil to the markets."[29]

More dovish Arabs seemed genuinely torn between the potential opportunity to help the Iraqi people and the Iraqi political demand for the total lifting of the sanctions. Fear that the American strategy of using "oil-for-food" to deflect pressure to lift the sanctions would succeed was compounded by Iraqi complaints about the substance of the resolution. Since all oil revenues would go not to the Iraqi government but to a UN escrow account, "oil-for-food" suggested direct Western control over Arab oil. In all, Arabs sympathetic to Iraq welcomed resolution 986 for its recognition of the needs of the Iraqi people and were hopeful that it would improve their condition, but remained deeply skeptical of American intentions.

The late summer 1995 defection of one of Saddam's key military aides, Hussein Kamel, and his revelations of systematic Iraqi deception toward UNSCOM, took the wind of out of the sails of efforts to lift the sanctions. Commentators, perceiving that the end of the Saddam regime might be imminent, began to openly speculate about the best future for Iraq. The idea of a Hashemite restoration was mooted—mostly by Jordan—and rather quickly dismissed by more powerful Arab players. Almost all Arabs rejected any role for the American-backed opposition. Arab intellectuals identified ethnic federation schemes, preferred by much of the Iraqi opposition in exile, with presumed Israeli interests in replacing strong, centralized Arab states with weaker, ethnically defined entities. Most neighboring states feared the potentially destabilizing effects of a weak or collapsed Iraqi state. Finally, most everyone—the United States included—worried that such a decentralized or divided Iraq would invite Iranian expansion into the Shia-dominated areas of Iraq and would remove the main check on Iranian influence in the Gulf area.

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The overwhelming sense of this debate was real uncertainty—the defection disoriented what had become a fairly well-entrenched set of positions. Most agreed that Kamel's revelations made the lifting of the sanctions unlikely, in contrast to the general expectation prior to the defection that lifting was inevitable. Indeed, some Arab commentators immediately assumed that Kamel's defection was an "American masterstroke" executed precisely because the sanctions were about to collapse.[30]

In February 1996, amid this blocking of moves toward reconciliation, increasingly vocal Jordanian hostility, and rapidly deteriorating internal conditions, Iraq agreed to begin negotiations on the terms of implementing the oil-for-food resolution. These talks set in motion a quick debate among both Arab camps. Sanctions supporters now worried that Saddam might be able to exploit clauses in resolution 986 if it went into practice. Concerned that Saddam might be able to spin it as a victory and thereby generate a pro-Iraqi bandwagon, they now emphasized the limits of the oil-for-food program, even if this paradoxically supported the Iraqi claim about its inadequacy. Sanctions opponents worried that the resolution had been carefully crafted to maintain American pressure on Saddam and would harm longer-range Iraqi interests, but generally welcomed an agreement because it would provide much-needed relief to the Iraqi people.

In the end, Iraq's agreement on May 20, 1996, to implement the oil-for-food program produced rare consensus between the two camps, although they welcomed it for different reasons. The creation of the oil-for-food program altered the strategic and normative environment dramatically. While the program contributed significantly to improving the lives of the Iraqi people, it strengthened Saddam Hussein's internal position and gave him considerable leverage with the outside world through his ability to negotiate contracts and to distribute lucrative oil vouchers.[31] As the Duelfer report on Iraqi WMD concluded, "OFF rescued Baghdad's economy from a terminal decline created by sanctions. The Regime quickly came to see that OFF could be corrupted to acquire foreign exchange both to further undermine sanctions and to provide the means to enhance dual-use infrastructure and potential WMD-related development."[32]

Shortly after Iraq accepted the resolution, U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry revealed that the United States, Jordan, and other re-

gional actors were working "to accelerate the demise of the regime in Iraq."[33] Many Arab analysts wondered why these groups were speaking so publicly about their regime-change activities, since this would seem to reduce their prospects of success. One answer, suggested by Ragheda Dergham, was that they were attempting to provoke Iraq into a foolish act that would again undermine its international support.[34] Either way, regime-change talk deflated when a coup attempt led by the Iraqi National Accord's Iyad Allawi (later interim Prime Minister) failed spectacularly.[35]

On October 2, 1996, Iraq used a UN General Assembly debate to again argue that it had met all the conditions for the sanctions to be lifted.[36] Tareq Aziz repeatedly ded ared that Iraq had done everything required by the UN resolutions and demanded that Iraq be ded ared in compliance and the sanctions be lifted. But in sharp contrast to the widespread expectation in 1994 that the sanctions would inevitably soon come to an end, it now seemed that all the major players, inc - ud ing the United States and Iraq "were content to keep both Saddam and the UN embargo in place" indefinitely.[37]

Throughout this entire period, the United States proved sadly deaf to the changing Arab attitudes toward Iraq. In part this was due to a focus on states rather than on a public opinion assumed to be both hostile and ineffective, and in part it was due to the higher priority of American domestic politics, where no policy toward Iraq could possibly be too tough. The Clinton administration failed to recognize the significance of rising Arab hostility to the sanctions until it was too late, leaving Americans to wonder how the United States had possibly lost a moral argument with a mass murderer (Pollack 2002). American diplomats could argue all they wanted that the dying babies on Arab television sets were Saddam's fault, or that there weren't as many as he claimed, but these arguments carried little weight compared to the horrifying pictures coming out of Baghdad.

Mobilization Beneath the Surface

To this point, I have focused primarily on the high politics of the Iraqi issue in the 1990s, with the Arab public playing only a minor role in

the analytical narrative. While this accurately reflects the overall balance of forces, the narrative above also suggests that Arab public opinion toward Iraq was evolving in this period. This happened differently in various Arab countries, with mobilization beneath the surface of events. Over time, these various national mobilizations increasingly viewed themselves as a coordinated movement. While planes carrying humanitarian goods and political activists to Baghdad had very little material impact on the circumstances of the Iraqi people, they graphically focused attention on the contradictions and human costs of a strategically motivated sanctions regime. Looking at several specific countries will help to flesh out the picture of how these domestic publics dealt with the Iraqi issue.

Jordan was the epicenter of mobilization on behalf of Iraq. With both massive economic interests at stake and important bonds of identity, Jordanian politics was often dominated by disagreements over Iraq policy; as noted above, the governments of Abd al-Karim al-Kabariti and Ali Abu Ragheb rose and fell upon the former's anti-Iraq profile and the latter's closer relations with Baghdad.[38] In September 1998, forty-seven (out of eighty) members of Parliament signed a nonbinding resolution calling on Jordan to stop honoring the sanctions, and in December fifty-three representatives backed a similar resolution.[39] Support for Iraq was based not only on the very real economic interests of the Jordanian state, but also on deeply held dimensions of Jordanian national identity—mobilized by a wide range of civil society actors in the vibrant Jordanian public sphere of the early 1990s. Liberalized press laws allowed a plethora of independent newspapers to emerge, many of which published extensively on the sufferings of Iraqis under the sanctions. Since support for Iraq extended deep into the heart of the Jordanian regime, even the government-dominated daily press published a large number of pieces in support of Iraq.

Jordanian public support for Iraq had deep roots. During the 1980s the economies of the two countries became tightly interlinked, while Saddam reportedly cultivated ties with many Jordanian journalists and politicians. After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, popular committees formed throughout the kingdom to support Iraq and to prepare to defend the country in the case of an Israeli incursion into Jordan on route to Iraq. The Committee to Defend the Nation, com-

prising activists at the popular level (political parties became legal only in 1992), linked the defense of Iraq to the defense of Jordan, articulating this as a single national issue. The leftist political party *Hashd* published a weekly newspaper, *al-Lajna al-Shaabiya,* which publicized the activities of the popular committees and issued some directives.[40] In May 1991 the Higher Committee to Defend Iraq brought together some three dozen popular figures and national personalities, establishing branches in all of the kingdom's governorates and collecting funds to distribute charitable contributions to Iraq. These activities tailed off in 1996, after the Iraqi government became reluctant to accept charity because of the beginning of the oil-for-food program and its preference to force the lifting of the sanctions.

Jordan's peace treaty with Israel signed on October 26, 1994, also shifted the strategic environment (Lynch 1998/99). As it built relations with Israel and grew closer to the United States, Jordan ostentatiously turned against Iraq in 1995. King Hussein gave a series of emotional speeches complaining of Saddam's treachery and arguing for an urgent need to bring the Iraqi stalemate to an end in the greater interests of the Iraqi people and the wider Arab order. Because of Jordan's importance to the Iraqi economy, its switch to the anti-Iraq camp harmed Iraq materially and signaled a decisive switch in regional expectations. Immediately after the signing of the treaty, President Bill Clinton toured the Gulf to hold discussions about Iraq, endorsing the GCC hard line, urging Gulf states to take a more proactive role in lobbying the Security Council, and warning against Arab slippage on enforcing the sanctions.

Jordanian Prime Minister Abd al-Karim al-Kabariti had staked his political fortunes on his ability to translate his highly unpopular turn against Saddam into generous Saudi and Kuwaiti compensation. But neither proved forthcoming, and in August 1996 serious disturbances broke out in the southern city of Maan. Frustrated over the failure of the American regime-change efforts it had so publicly backed and by the unfulfilled promises to secure Gulf oil to replace Iraqi oil, Jordan looked to rebuild its relations with Iraq. In March, King Hussein removed Kabariti from office in favor of more Iraq-friendly politicians, and renegotiated oil and trade protocols with the Iraqi regime. That these moves received tremendous popular acclaim graphically dem-

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onstrates the extent to which Jordanian public opinion remained impervious to attempts to change attitudes toward Iraq from above.

The professional associations, the primary civil society organizations representing the politically frustrated Jordanian middle classes most exposed to the new media, were extremely active on the Iraq issue even before 1998. In addition to holding regular political rallies and making statements, the associations collected charitable donations and offered functional expertise on behalf of the Iraqi people.[41] Bassam al-Dajani, a former president of the associations, explained that the associations had always been very active on the Iraq issue, collecting charitable donations, food, bread, and medicine. According to Dajani, these programs to help Iraqis enjoyed very wide support: "We collected a lot, but it was just symbolic. . . . What could we do, really, for a big country like Iraq? It was a drop in the sea, but it made for good feelings."[42] According to numerous activists, the Committee for the Defense of Iraq was one of the most active political committees of the professional associations. The government responded defensively to popular mobilization, periodically banning proposed rallies and pro-Iraq activities, and blamed Iraq for riots in summer 1996 which virtually everyone else attributed to economic and domestic political complaints.

In December 1998, in the face of the U.S.-U.K. bombing of Iraq, Jordanian activists formed the National Mobilization Committee for the Defence of Iraq with a more political than humanitarian mission. The NMCDI included both independent personalities and representatives of political parties, professional associations, unions, and popular organizations, and established branches in every governorate in the kingdom. Sulayman Arar, the first head of the NMCDI, and Hakem al-Fayez, who replaced Arar after his death, were senior Arab nationalist figures who lent stature to the efforts.[43] This offered a broad front; according to Hamza Mansour, Secretary-General of the Islamic Action Front, who served as the committee's vice president, "we cooperate with everyone with no problems—Arab nationalists, communists, centrists, liberals, women's groups—everyone who cares about Iraq. . . . For us, issue #1 is Palestine, issue #2 is Iraq, these two above all others."[44] The NMCDI, in coordination with antisanctions groups in other Arab countries, pushed for Arabs to unilaterally cease honoring the embargo.

Outside the NMCDI framework, popular committees in support of Iraq also formed in a less coordinated, grassroots fashion among activists frustrated with the shortcomings of the political parties.[45] In October 1999 these groups launched a coordinated campaign against the sanctions, the most prominent aspect of which was a large-scale pencil drive that ultimately collected 3.5 million pencils and generated great excitement among schoolchildren and ordinary people. A petition drive collected 171,000 signatures: "the goal of the campaign is to unite public opinion against the sanctions and encourage the conscious defiance of the embargo."[46] In September 2000 the committee began the Iraqi Book Campaign, collecting scientific and academic books to highlight the intellectual effects of the embargo and to rebuild Iraqi academic life.[47] The NMCDI also sponsored peaceful protests, conferences, visiting speakers, and art showings, while also issuing a regular stream of press statements and declarations. The coalition of eleven Jordanian opposition parties regularly included the Iraqi sanctions in their joint declarations, calling for "a strong popular movement to end the Arab countries' sanctions on Iraq and to open their borders to supply its people."[48]

Yemen also saw considerable activity against the sanctions and vocal expressions of solidarity with the Iraqi people. Like Jordan, Yemen refused to join the Gulf War coalition in 1990–1991, earning it considerable hostility from Kuwait and punishment by the United States. And as in Jordan, Yemen witnessed popular demonstrations on behalf of Iraq before and during that war. The Yemeni media covered the humanitarian impact of the sanctions heavily, with a broad consensus across the political spectrum supporting lifting the sanctions. While Yemeni Baathists had some role in coordinating these protests, a wider sense of identification with the Iraqi people transcended political lines. In a country struggling with unification and then civil war, such a rare point of consensus is not to be dismissed lightly.

Individuals and groups in Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the UAE also engaged in extensive mobilization against the sanctions. Each sent numerous ships loaded with food and medicine to Iraq in the mid-1990s, with the UAE the last to do so, in February 1996. In January 1997 the UAE sent its first official humanitarian mission to Iraq to great public approval, taking over $400,000 in charitable donations through a

widely publicized campaign.[49] In May 1997 a regular shipping line between Iraq's port of Umm Qasr and the UAE was established to carry medical supplies, food, and humanitarian assistance—although the UAE was at pains to emphasize that sanctions violations would not be tolerated. A Kuwaiti professor lecturing in an unidentified Gulf state was shocked in early 1994 to be "rebuked by people attending one of his lectures who demanded a lifting of sanctions 'for the sake of the innocent children of Iraq.' "[50]

Societal activism in Egypt began in 1993, "as the price of the sanctions started to become clear, as people began to learn and understand what was happening in Iraq."[51] Egyptian opposition parties, like their counterparts in Jordan, regularly issued joint statements and held rallies calling for a lifting of sanctions.[52] These efforts were again led by NGOs, political parties, professional associations, the media, and activists, while the government tolerated, if not actually encouraged, them.[53] Private activists sent humanitarian flights to Iraq carrying medicine and, often, high-profile artists and cultural figures, such as the film director Youssef Chahine. Women's group's played an important role, focusing upon the impact of sanctions on families, children, and the vulnerable in society. The Arab Women Solidarity Society, headed by the well-known writer Nawal al Sadawi, led an effort by the Egyptian syndicates to collect a million signatures against the sanctions. This organizing led to a massive march through the streets of Cairo in January 1998, with protestors holding baby-sized coffins, ending in a rally at the Cairo football stadium. One organizer claimed that the campaign had collected 18 million signatures across the Arab world.[54] These efforts were not as organized as the Jordanian ones—rather more informal, spread out, without centralized groups—but by the end of the 1990s there was, according to several Egyptian activists, "a very strong popular and elite consensus against the sanctions."[55] In December 1998, fourteen opposition parties and civil society groups released a joint statement with the ominous (for the Mubarak regime) title: "Free the Egyptian people to cooperate with the Iraqi people."

Morocco had a surprisingly large focus on Iraq as a core Arab issue, despite its physical distance from the Gulf. Marches with more than 100,000 participants declaring solidarity with Iraq were not uncommon. During the first Gulf War, more than half a million Moroccans

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had marched in support of Iraq. The National Committee for Supporting Iraq called for noncompliance with the sanctions in January 2000, and the speaker of the House of Representatives led a delegation of Arab Parliamentarians to urge the European Parliament to challenge the sanctions. The committee, combining political parties, civil society, professional associations, and prominent individuals, coordinated marches, rallies, petitions, and humanitarian aid collections.

Even Syria dramatically shifted its position toward Iraq in the second half of the 1990s after many years of extreme hostility between the two Baathist republics, although this clearly had less to do with popular opinion from below than with strategic calculations on the part of the regime. Syria opened up to Iraq beginning in early 1997, with a large Syrian business delegation visited Baghdad in May with great publicity. In 1998 Iraq began pumping oil through a Syrian pipeline, to considerable international concern. Syria formed its own Arab Committee for Lifting the Siege Imposed on Iraq, made up of intellectuals at the Arab Writers Union, in November 2000.[56] Its marches, such as a massive rally in Damascus in November 2003, were authorized and coordinated by the Syrian government, reducing their authenticity as expressions of public opinion.

Participation in the annual Baghdad Trade Fair (see table 3.1), which resumed in 1996, offers one glimpse into the growing economic allure of the Iraqi market—or at least the perceived attractions of a public endorsement of a potential return to Iraqi normality. This was as much public diplomacy as it was economic diplomacy, given the reality of the sanctions, although Iraq certainly dangled the prospects of enormous contracts in the postsanctions environment in front of potential supporters.

Still, the Iraqi regime pursued a wide range of economic opportunities inside and outside the oil-for-food program that no doubt contributed to at least some of the support for the Iraqi position. In at least one instance—the opening of an air link between Baghdad and Damascus by Qatari Hamad bin Ali al-Thani—secret Iraqi payments through oil vouchers have been publicly revealed.[57]

Cultural activists also brought the Iraqi issue into the public sphere. *Nur*, a journal focused on women's issues, published a special issue in the fall of 2001 focusing on the concerns of Iraqi women facing the embargo.[58] Numerous popular films and documentaries focused

Table 3.1. Baghdad Trade Fair Participants

Date	Number of Countries Represented
November 1996	16
November 1997	26
November 1998	30
November 1999	36
November 2000	45

attention on the suffering of the Iraqi people. For example, the Lebanese director Sayid Kaado's film *Taqasim min Baghdad* used graphic footage from hospitals to illustrate health problems among mothers and children in embargoed Iraq, while the Egyptian director Hossam Ali made several films about the lives of women and children under the embargo.[59] Art galleries and cultural centers hosted numerous shows of Iraqi artists and writers to raise consciousness of the Iraqi situation. Luminaries such as Nobel Laureate Naguib Mahfouz declared that "the embargo on Iraq now is illogical. . . . It is not logic to continue the siege until children die of hunger."[60] Even sports provided an arena for challenging the Arab isolation of Iraq. In 1999, for example, Jordan hosted the ninth annual Arab sports day. With Iraq invited, and even Saudi Arabia committed to attending, Kuwait found itself in a difficult position.

Functional inter-Arab organizations provided another venue for discussions and the issuing of Arabist documents. Professional associations cooperated in their realm of expertise—for example, doctor's associations from various Arab states coordinated campaigns to send medicine to Iraq.[61] In January 1999, representatives of Arab professional associations met in Baghdad to coordinate efforts against the embargo and created an executive committee based in Amman.[62] In 1998, the Arab Parliamentary Union held an emergency session in Amman, producing a consensus document calling for a lifting of sanctions and for determined Arab action to assist the people of Iraq. At the level of political parties, several conferences of Arab Popular Forces met in Baghdad to express solidarity with Iraq.[63] All of this

demonstrates how mobilization crossed state lines, contributing to the manifestation of a public Arab consensus, even in the absence of al-Jazeera and the satellite television revolution with which the new public sphere is often equated.

States Strike Back

To say that few Arab regimes welcomed these signs of life in public opinion around the Iraqi issue would be a vast understatement. Arab regimes regularly repressed public demonstrations, and in virtually all instances sought to keep their freedom of maneuver intact. In December 2002, for example, Tunisia prevented a planned march in downtown Tunis that was to be led by eleven opposition parties. The Jordanian government violently suppressed pro-Iraqi demonstrations in the summer of 1996, and banned all public rallies during the crises of 1998. The Palestinian Authority prevented expressions of sympathy with Iraq in November 1998. Such responses to a mobilized public were entirely typical.

Where public opinion could not be repressed, Arab regimes looked to exploit it for their own interests. The cynical approach that states took to this emerging public opinion can be vividly seen in Egypt's two-year term on the Security Council, beginning in January 1996, where it hoped "to appear as championing the alleviation of the Iraqi people's plight."[64] As it sought to win Arab approval without actually challenging American policies, for example, Egypt called for the implementation of resolution 986 without compromising Iraqi sovereignty—a clear attempt to find a middle ground acceptable in the inter-Arab context—and urged the United Nations to "deal more objectively with the suffering of the Iraqi people."[65] *Al-Ahram* called for an Arab League "mechanism to help the beleaguered Iraqi people," and urged Iraq to cooperate with UNSCOM in order to "earn relief from sanctions and rehabilitation in the Arab world."[66] Despite these initiatives, however, Egypt did not invite Iraq to the Arab summit held in June to discuss Netanyahu's election.[67] Its media regularly highlighted the suffering of the Iraqi people and the injustice of the Security Council practices. But for all of its public talk, according to several diplomats

who worked with the UN Sanctions Committee, Egypt did virtually nothing to challenge the sanctions regime.[68]

The crucial point here, besides the hypocrisy, is that by 1996 virtually every Arab political figure—no matter how hostile to Iraq in practice—felt the need to publicly declare sympathy with the Iraqi people. Such sympathy had become a core reference point, a defining quality of Arabness that was more firmly established with every iteration. The consensus bridged wide political divides. When Prince Saud bin Faisal began an interview by saying "We all sympathize with the Iraqi people in their ordeal," his sincerity was not the issue—it was that he felt compelled to say so at all.[69] Countless examples could be provided. Egypt's *al-Ahram* wrote that "regardless of [our] opinion of the ruling regime in Baghdad, [we urge] greater efforts to save the Iraqi people from famine, malnutrition, and epidemics."[70] Jordan's information minister affirmed that "Jordan supports all efforts aimed at alleviating the suffering of the Iraqi people."[71] Arab League Secretary-General Ismat Abd al-Meguid stated that "he felt deep sympathy with the Iraqi people, whose continuing suffering due to the sanctions was in no one's interest."[72] Oman's foreign minister declared that "everyone knows that the Iraqi people's suffering has exceeded extremes that no one can bear."[73] Even Kuwait made half-hearted efforts to offer assistance to the "suffering Iraqi people," even if such aid usually took the form of support for the opposition to Saddam Hussein. Saad Ajami, Kuwait's minister of information, for example, defended Kuwait on al-Jazeera by arguing that it had offered the assistance of the Kuwaiti Red Crescent to the victims of Saddam's chemical weapons, an offer Saddam refused.[74]

This did not mean that Arab states had reconciled their opinions on Iraq; on the contrary, Arab divisions were as sharp as ever. But sympathy for the suffering Iraqi people had become a core point of consensus on which very little dissent could be heard. Iraqi dissident Ghassan Attiyah warned as early as 1993 that "the pro-sanctions stance adopted by the bulk of the Iraqi offshore opposition groups had become a political and moral liability," isolating them from mainstream Arab opinion.[75] Such sympathy, and the changing strategic context it created, could only go so far, however. Iraqi officials complained that "it is meaningless for any Arab official to profess sympathy with us and declare an

understanding of our suffering under the unfair sanctions while at the same time reiterating the U.S. attitude."[76] While the ground of Arab politics gradually shifted from below, Iraq grew impatient for deeds to match the words.

Military Strikes: The Perverse Consequences

While the sanctions issue percolated from below, American attacks on Iraq offered galvanizing moments for Arab public opinion, both demonstrating and consolidating the emerging popular consensus. The military crises focused attention and crystallized the public consensus; one Arab ambassador explained, "The sanctions are worse than the bombing in what they do to the Iraqi people, but the bombings are dramatic and galvanize the public."[77]

The first unifying moment came with the late June 1993 American cruise missile attack on Baghdad that killed Iraqi artist Layla al-Attar. Most of the Arab world, except Kuwait, expressed skepticism and anger. Few believed the claim that Iraq had plotted to kill former President George Bush; this was instead seen as a pretext for Clinton to demonstrate his toughness to Saddam. Arabs complained bitterly about American double standards, and at the U.S. willingness to bypass the Security Council when it saw fit. As Abd al-Bari Atwan, editor of *al-Quds al-Arabi*, put it: "Arab opinion is disgusted at the way the United States keeps demonstrating its military prowess against Iraq while allowing the Serbs and Israelis to get away unpunished for murder on a grand scale."[78]

At this point some Arab observers were already arguing that the American action demonstrated that there was no value in cooperating with the UN inspections, since the United States would always find some excuse to maintain the sanctions.[79] They also argued that American military strikes inevitably strengthened Saddam Hussein by increasing popular sympathy with Iraq.[80] *Al-Hayat* editor Jihad al-Khazen worried that the attack "was a blow to Arab moderates" and that Kuwait had isolated itself even further by backing the Americans against an Arab consensus.[81] *Al-Ahram* asserted that "the raid won

virtually no support in the Arab world, while the announcement that Washington had contacted some of its Arab allies to discuss the attack with them only increased those governments' embarrassment."[82] And for Atwan, the silver lining of the attack was that "it put America's Arab allies on the spot. . . . Unable to justify it, they were with the sole exception of Kuwait reduced to an awkward silence, . . . [making clear that] the viewpoint of ordinary Arabs is completely at odds with that of the governments."[83] The response to the bombing offered a first demonstration of evolving Arab background beliefs, and thereby moved to shape expectations about the likely normative reward for adopting positions sympathetic to Iraq.

The muted response of Arab states to the 1996 American bombing of Iraq's south after Saddam's armies wiped out an Iraqi National Congress operation based in the Kurdish areas bears attention. Arab writers were quick to note the disparity between the official caution of the Arab regimes and the vocal opposition of other states and of the Arab public. As European states opposed the airstrikes, but "Arab leaders stay mum," writers in the pan-Arab press suggested that Arab states "ha[d] shown themselves to be the weakest party in the international community's response to blatant aggression against an Arab country," despite clear popular demands for a public response. A prominent writer in *al-Ahram* noted the "contrast between the vocal international criticism . . . and the meek silence maintained by most Arab countries. . . . Apart from the voice in the wilderness of Arab League Secretary-General Ismat Abd al-Maguid, all that was heard was an embarrassed whisper of protest from Cairo and a deafening silence in most other Arab countries."[84]

Most writers explained this silence in terms of American pressure, but more seemed to be going on. To the extent that Arab leaders had been engaging in rhetorical free riding, winning points with public opinion while publicly falsifying their preferences, the prospects of Iraqi success were far less appealing to these leaders than their public profiles would suggest. The surging Iraqi initiative worried Arab states as much as it emboldened Arab public opinion, leading many Arab regimes to tone down their rhetorical free riding, which now seemed to carry unnecessary costs.

The GCC: Reconciliation or Regime Change?

Efforts to overcome the Gulf crisis and to resolve the ongoing divisions in the Arab world proved fruitless, in part because of Kuwait's hardline stance toward those who had been inclined toward Iraq. The absence of a genuinely independent public sphere capable of mobilizing against these powerful states handicapped such efforts. Kuwait (and to a lesser extent Saudi Arabia) exercised a veto over any Arab gathering that might rehabilitate Iraq, and worked to focus attention on Iraqi perfidy rather than on Iraqi suffering. Kuwait aggressively policed public discourse to keep the focus on Saddam's evil. Over time, unyielding Kuwaiti rhetoric and policy became counterproductive, particularly as the new Arab public found its voice.

This part of the chapter takes the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) as a microcosm of Arab politics, and explores the repeated efforts by various smaller members—the UAE, Bahrain, Qatar—to adopt a more open policy toward Iraq. Concerned with the impact of the sanctions, and with the public's increasing anger, they advanced a series of initiatives that challenged GCC unity.

As early as June 1993, some Gulf newspapers began to call on the GCC "to abandon its obsession with the 1990–1991 Gulf crisis and the regime of . . . Saddam Hussein, and to throw its lot in with efforts to reunite the Arab world and reconcile with Iraq."[85] These early popular appeals had little impact on Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, however, who still perceived Iraq as a threat and were adamantly opposed to any softening toward it. Kuwait in particular was fiercely opposed to reconciliation even with what it termed "adverse states" such as Jordan, much less with Baghdad itself, and would consider mending fences with other Arab states only if they clearly adopted a rigorous array of hard-line anti-Iraq policies.[86] Mohammed al-Rumayhi spoke for many Kuwaitis when he rejected calls to "let bygones be bygones" as an insult to Kuwaiti suffering.[87] As Abd al-Wahhab Badrakhan noted, Kuwait's parliament, media, and public opinion were far more emotional and enraged with the Arabs than was the more pragmatic royal family—a striking example of public opinion working against Arab rapprochement.[88] King Hussein's calls for change in Baghdad begin-

ning in 1993 did not satisfy Kuwaitis, who noted Jordan's continuing economic relations with Iraq and took a vindictive line against Jordan under any circumstances. Tunisia's foreign minister cut short the first official visit to Kuwait since the war in June 1993 "after coming under a barrage of abuse from the emirate's press and legislators."[89]

In September 1993, the GCC rejected moves toward rehabilitating Iraq, "hold[ing] the Baghdad regime responsible for the suppression and sufferings being sustained by the brotherly Iraqi people as a result of the practices of the regime and its noncompliance with Security Council resolutions." There were already clear divisions within the GCC, however, with half its members hoping for a softer line.[90] Hopes that these expressions of concern might foster reconciliation with Iraq were routinely disappointed, however, as expectations of change in policy based on the positions of the UAE, Qatar, Oman, and Bahrain were dashed by the hard line of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. In December 1993 King Fahd made short work of the hopes for a rehabilitation of Iraq with a firm speech at the GCC summit condemning the Iraqi regime, demanding its compliance, and insisting on the maintenance of the sanctions.[91] Nevertheless, Qatar "rejected a direct request from the Clinton administration to stop contacts with Iraq." [92]

All these maneuvers by the small Gulf states took place within clearly circumscribed parameters, as GCC policy depended on Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Nevertheless, the smaller states established a tone of humanitarian concern and impatience with the ongoing Arab divisions that helped consolidate the background frame of a popular Arab position confounded by self-interested powerful Arab states and outside forces.

Over the winter of 1993–1994 the Arab—and especially Gulf—press increasingly took up the issue of the sanctions as an urgent Arab concern.[93] The two camps struggled to reconcile tough containment with humanitarian relief. In April 1994 the GCC reiterated that they "agree[d] on a common resolve to stand vigilant and determined" to enforce the sanctions despite the publicly expressed concerns of its members.[94] In August Egypt, the UAE, and Morocco each took futile initiatives to seek Saudi and Kuwaiti agreement on reconciliation with Iraq, but in September the GCC officially "praised the United Nations Security Council's decision to maintain economic sanctions on Iraq

until it complies fully with U.N. resolutions."[95] In this context, GCC members actively lobbied the Security Council to maintain a hard line on sanctions, despite the growing expressions of Arab dissent.[96] This hard public line—along with the Security Council's renewal of sanctions—had the desired effect on expectations, convincing most Arabs that there was little hope for the sanctions being lifted in the near term. But changes were beginning to break through the wall. In the same month that Kuwait Parliamentary Speaker Ahmed al-Saadoun said Kuwait would continue to press the international community to "accelerate its pressure and tighten the economic blockade on the Iraqi regime to force it into unconditional submission to all UN Security Council resolutions related to its aggression on Kuwait,"[97] the GCC for the first time expressed "total sympathy with the fraternal Iraqi people in their humanitarian sufferings."[98]

In December 1994 GCC dissension burst into the open as Bahrain publicly called on Kuwait to be more open to dialogue in the expectation that the UN Security Council would be easing the sanctions relatively soon.[99] Expectations of change at the global and Arab levels fed on each other, as trends against the sanctions suggested that "the GCC ought to brace for Iraq's eventual rehabilitation in the Arab world."[100] Numerous authors pointed out the need to adjust Arab positions to the likely changes at the international level, and warned of the political consequences of being seen as obstacles to the easing of the sanctions. They also pointed out the unacceptability of Arabs lagging behind other, non-Arab states in challenging the sanctions.

Even Kuwaitis recognized that their vigorous efforts to assign responsibility to Saddam were falling flat: "Despite all attempts to show that Saddam is to blame for that suffering, Arab public opinion increasingly calls for the question of sanctions to be decoupled from that of the Iraqi regime's behavior or survival."[101] After Kuwait's dismissal of a Moroccan reconciliation initiative, the Arab press filled with criticism of Kuwaiti intransigence: "By its behavior, Kuwait is not only antagonizing a growing number of Arab and Islamic states who consider the retention of sanctions against the Iraqi people unconscionable, but also damaging its ties with its five GCC partners."[102] Kuwait's refusal to reconcile with Jordan after its peace treaty with Israel played into the perception of its irrational intransigence.

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In the run-up to the December 1994 GCC summit, Qatar pushed to have the GCC recognize the need to deal with the humanitarian dimension of the sanctions, within the limits of the Saudi and Kuwaiti hard-line approach.[103] After the GCC ministers' meeting was—quite exceptionally—delayed because of the difficulty of reaching consensus, the final communiqué did acknowledge the changes in Iraqi behavior toward compliance, but attributed this to the tough line endorsed by the GCC, which appealed "to [the Security Council] to continue in these principled and firm stances and in their effective efforts to compel Iraq to take similar steps toward the serious implementation of all Security Council resolutions."[104] Egypt, while agreeing with the need for Iraq to comply with the resolutions, stated that it "was very annoyed by the suffering of the Iraqi people resulting from the blockade" and asserted that "there is a common feeling that we must do something."[105] Egyptians hastened to clarify that sympathy for the Iraqi people did not extend to Saddam's regime, however; *al-Ahram* editor Ibrahim Nafei's late September front-page commentary entitled "God save the Iraqi people from Saddam" was widely seen as standing in for Hosni Mubarak's personal sentiments.[106]

In January 1995 moves toward reconciliation with Iraq picked up steam, as Egypt worked to convene an Arab summit to discuss Iraq's return to the Arab fold. "We should extend the bridges of care for Iraq, whose people are suffering. We should not forget our history and pan-Arabism," UAE Defense Minister Sheik Mohammed bin Rashed al-Maktoum said, echoing calls from Qatar and Oman.[107] The Egyptian media, which had been filled with anti-Iraqi rhetoric, now opened to humanitarian and political critique of the sanctions. Omani Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Yousef bin Alawi said, "I and friends on the Security Council are looking for ways and means of lessening the sufferings of the Iraqi people" while maintaining the demand for full Iraqi compliance.[108] King Hassan of Morocco warned President Clinton of the dangers of ignoring the long-term consequences of the sanctions on the population of Iraq.[109]

Tellingly, when Warren Christopher came to the Gulf to discuss the eroding consensus, he dealt only with heads of state, with virtually no effort to engage Arab public opinion in any kind of direct dialogue.[110] The impact of Christopher's message to the GCC states could be seen

in the June ministerial declaration, which took a remarkably tough line and contained hardly a hint of the struggles behind the scenes. Still, the Gulf press continued to fill with articles criticizing the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait for their inflexibility.[111]

In October 1995 an initiative by the UAE for reconciliation with Iraq—"whether the West wants it or not"—met with strong resistance once again from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan of the UAE argued that "it is time to lift sanctions because it is the Iraqi people who were paying for [Saddam Hussein's] mistakes," a call endorsed by Ismat Abd al-Meguid, secretary-general of the Arab League, Yemen, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, and Egypt.[112] Alarmed, Kuwait took unusually strong measures to reinforce GCC discipline, with mixed success. In January 1996 GCC states again publicly argued over the terms of a rehabilitation of Iraq. Some reports indicated splits within the Saudi royal family on Iraq policy, suggesting that some Saudis were being swayed by Egyptian and Arab arguments that the sanctions were actually strengthening Saddam's internal position while harming the interests of Iraq's Gulf opponents.[113] These debates were reflected in the GCC communiqué of March 1996: "While the Council feel regret on deterioration of living and health conditions of the brotherly Iraqi people, it holds the Iraqi regime full responsibility due to its ill-conducted policy all the time and calls Iraq to implement resolution 986 with articles aimed at handling humanitarian needs of this people to alleviate its bitter suffering."

The UAE's November 1996 proposal for a route to normalizing Iraqi-Arab relations erupted into a major debate among GCC countries, playing out in opinion pages across the Arab world. The usual Gulf states stepped up their efforts toward rehabilitating Iraq, while Kuwaitis and Saudis traveled around the Arab world and Europe trying to shore up support for the sanctions. The UAE, reportedly with support from Egypt and Bahrain, "took issue with the sanctions on both humanitarian and political grounds."[114] Kuwait and Saudi Arabia insisted (following the American line) that the reason for the suffering of the Iraqi people remained Saddam, and not the sanctions. When the GCC secretariat asserted that the UAE ideas did not change official GCC policy, one Bahraini commentator responded that "the call for Iraq to be relieved of sanctions serves the strategic interests of the

Gulf states and expresses the feelings of their peoples. The secretariat's rejection of that call is, accordingly, damaging to GCC interests and contemptuous of public opinion."[115]

While it remained impossible to forge a political consensus, booming illegal trade in the Gulf suggested that many individuals as well as governments no longer felt any normative adherence to the sanctions regime.

On the Brink of Change

This chapter has tracked the interaction between Arab states and an emerging public dismay with the sanctions on Iraq in the period before the satellite television revolution. Public debates about Iraq remained primarily confined to domestic print publics and the elite transnational press, while states mainly argued in private over strategic issues rather than humanitarian ones.

Over the course of the decade, however, real developments could be seen in the cohesion and influence of Arab public opinion toward the sanctions. By 1996, virtually no discussion of Iraq could omit reference to sympathy with the suffering Iraqi people. As frustration grew with what was widely perceived as an unjust and devastating sanctions regime, Arab states found it harder to ignore or to repress the issue. When Richard Butler replaced Rolf Ekeus as chairman of UNSCOM in June 1997, a more confrontational period between Iraq and the UN immediately commenced.

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