First session of the
Körber Dialogue Middle East

“Scenarios for the Future Development of Iraq”
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The Körber Dialogue Middle East provides a platform for multilateral discussions on issues of regional security in the Middle East. It seeks to bring together on a regular basis representatives of the most important stakeholders in order to foster an open and policy-oriented exchange of ideas. In the first session of the Körber Dialogue Middle East, high-ranking representatives of leading think-tanks and former officials from Egypt, the European Union, Iran, Turkey and the United States gathered in order to discuss scenarios for the future development of Iraq.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION

I. Four Scenarios for the Future Development of Iraq

The timeframe of the scenarios comprises the years 2012–2015. Two main drivers determine the construction of the scenarios: US military presence/withdrawal and the formation of a national consensus on constitutional matters in Iraq.

“Belgium”
The “Belgium” scenario is based on a withdrawal of US troops and a high degree of national consensus in Iraq.

“Somalia”
The “Somalia” scenario is based on a withdrawal of US troops and a low degree of national consensus in Iraq.

US President John Edwards initiates a speedy US withdrawal. A conference to revise the Iraqi constitution fails. Former interim prime minister Iyad Allawi is appointed new Iraqi prime minister, but does not succeed in a vote of no confidence in the Iraqi parliament. Iraqi President Jalal Talabani steps down. By this time, the population of Baghdad has dropped to 50 per cent of pre-invasion level. The Green Zone is occupied by the “New Mahdi Army”. The situation in Sadr City is consolidated. Iraqi-Kurdistan remains more stable than the rest of Iraq. Turkey and Iraqi-Kurdistan agree on a permanent Turkish military presence in Northern Iraq. However, no peaceful solution to the Kirkuk question can be found. Kirkuk undergoes ethnic cleansing. The situation in Basra has been consolidated. However, Basra turns into a major stronghold of the Revolutionary Guards, to which Saudi Arabia takes offence. In response, Saudi Arabia extends its control over the Umm Qasr port and occasionally sends troops into Iraq. Consequently, the situation is marked by an “in and out” of foreign troops, not only Saudi-Arabian, but also Jordanian and Syrian forces. The Iraqi economy is on a downward spiral.

“South Korea”
The “South Korea” scenario is based on the continued presence of a large number of US troops and a high degree of national consensus in Iraq.

US President Mitt Romney prolongs the US military presence in Iraq, which is formally endorsed by an Iraqi reconciliation conference. There are some successes against Al Qaeda and other radical elements. Iraqi-Iranian tensions increase. The US succeeds in mustering the support of some Iraqi groups against Iran. Domestic Iraqi resistance is subdued, a “modified military regime” has been installed. The Shi’a bloc splits into two splinter groups: one opposing the “Cold War” with Iran, the other supporting a security agreement with the US.

“Thirty Years War”
The “Thirty Years War” scenario is based on the continued presence of a large number of US troops and a low degree of national consensus in Iraq.

The US confrontation with Iran continues under US President Hillary Rodham Clinton. The US retains strong fortified military bases with a view to a possible confrontation with Iran. Insurgency and civil war continue, popular forces grow increasingly radicalized. Regional tensions continue to develop. In the aftermath of an incident in the Strait of Hormuz in 2009, the US bombs military bases in Iran. In retaliation, Iran launches rockets on oil installations in Saudi Arabia. Israel fires rockets on Syria, where martial law is proclaimed. Neighboring states intervene in Iraq.
II. Domestic Consensus, Internal Fighting, Partition

- Internal fighting among Iraqi groups is ignited by external actors. Iraq, currently under occupation, is unable to act independently. Therefore, regional actors have to assume responsibility: if incitement from outside is halted, chances for national reconciliation will increase.
- Due to the strong influence of external forces on domestic Iraqi actors, the formation of a national consensus is dependent on a new regional balance of power.
- The parameters for the stabilization of Iraq are on the table. In theory, a revised Iraqi constitution could be drafted with relative ease. Yet, external powers apparently pursue a “hidden agenda” which undermines efforts to stabilize Iraq.
- No, it is doubtful whether external actors really exert a decisive influence on national reconciliation in Iraq. The main spoilers are domestic groups, especially the militias, which have a strong interest in the continuation of the conflict.
- In order to promote the forging of a national consensus and to support the stabilization of Iraq from inside, Iraqi militias should be integrated into the regular Iraqi armed forces; the US should withdraw from the Iraqi streets, i.e. the external signs of occupation should disappear; intelligence matters should be gradually handed over to the Iraqis; Iraqi border security should be increased.
- The Arab states should confer practical recognition upon the Iraqi government.
- Oil should be considered a uniting rather than a divisive factor. In the long run, common economic interests can constitute the basis of a shared national identity.
- In all probability, there will be no partition of Iraq by 202. However, the “Somalia” scenario delineates a de facto autonomy of the regions.
- The partition into Shi’a, Sunni and Kurdish entities, i.e. a formally divided Iraq, could have a positive effect and could ameliorate the negative scenarios (“Somalia”, “Thirty Years War”).
- The “natural” trend in Iraq is not towards partition as the majority of Iraqis wish to preserve an Iraqi nation-state. Yet, a minority of Iraqis favoring partition is sufficient to disrupt the general consensus.
- Public opinion in Iraq might not be in favor of partition. Yet, the developments “on the ground” point towards disintegration.

III. Policies by External Actors and International Coordination

United States

- The US policy towards Iraq is rather unpredictable since several centers of power are involved in the process of policy-making, i.e. there is no “one” US policy towards Iraq.
- The current US foreign policy is marked by a difficulty in prioritizing mutually contradicting policy goals. In order to be successful, the US should pursue only one goal at a time rather than attempting to implement several (at times mutually contradicting) objectives simultaneously.
- The US finds itself trapped in a dilemma: on the one hand, it seeks to establish a stable and united Iraq. On the other hand, a stable Iraq is likely to entertain normal relations with Iran. In order to
prevent Iraq from developing normal or even friendly relations with Iran, the US supports groups hostile towards Iran, thus accepting a consequent perpetuation of instability.

– The US commitment in Iraq will decrease in the coming twelve months. Expanded Iraqi demands for an accelerated withdrawal include the danger of a spinning out of control of an initially coordinated, controlled withdrawal.

– The “South Korea” scenario is certainly preferable to the “Somalia” option and the “Thirty Years War” scenario. Yet, US policy-makers are not likely to opt for it, as public opinion in the US is strongly in favor of US withdrawal from Iraq.

– The US administration has so far refrained from endorsing partition and has attempted to counter it. Regional powers seem strongly opposed to a disintegration of Iraq. If, however, regional powers adopt a positive attitude towards partition, this might also affect the US position.

– The “moderate Arab states” exert a considerable influence on US policy in Iraq as they wish to prevent a US – Iranian settlement “over the top of their heads”.

– If “the New Iraq” (i.e. Iraq after the US invasion) successfully completes its transition to a functioning democracy, it will present an attractive alternative to authoritarian regimes in the region, also to those allied with the US, and thus pose a challenge to their existence. Therefore, some of Iraq’s neighbors seek to bring about US failure in Iraq rather than success.

**Iran**

– The Iranian policy towards Iraq is driven by historical factors: the long-standing hostilities with Iraq and the oppression of Shi’a throughout the Middle East.

– Iran pursues three major goals with regard to Iraq: stability in Iraq, as Iraqi elements benevolent to Iran are weakened by instability; preservation of Iraqi unity by encouraging elements benevolent to Iran to promote national reconciliation; consolidation of the national unity government reflecting the entire political spectrum in Iraq.

– Iranian support is not limited to Iraqi forces in favor of the central government. Iran also supports other groups. Is this the product of a system capable of producing inconsistent behavior on the part of its representatives or a carefully modulated duality of approaches governing covert and open policies?

– Continuous instability in Iraq strengthens the Iranian influence. Is it not therefore in Iran’s interest to perpetuate instability?

– Iran is prepared to play a constructive role in Iraq without any preconditions. It would cooperate on Iraq even under mounting pressure from the UNSC in the nuclear area. However, it cannot accept an Iraqi state, hostile to Iran.

– No, Iranian cooperation on Iraq depends on concessions in the nuclear area.

– Will Iran stop threatening other countries in the region? Iran has been threatened for the past three decades. In return for a cessation of the hostilities, Iran would be ready to stop its interference in other regional countries. Yet, abandoning one’s regional clients is difficult.

– Does Iran want to be a revolutionary or a status quo power? The Iranian revolution is gradually fading, and a new generation of politicians is growing increasingly important.
– In the domestic discourse in Iran, Iraq does not play a central role. The most important concern of the Iranian population is the unhindered access to the Shi’a shrines in Iraq.

**Arab States**
– The members of the Arab League pursue varying and at times mutually contradicting policies towards Iraq.
– Among most members of the Arab League, especially among the so-called “moderate Arab states”, there is a basic consensus to cooperate with the US with regard to the stabilization of Iraq in order to minimize the costs of instability. The “moderate Arab states” support efforts at stabilizing Iraq in order to stop the radicalization of public opinion in their countries, prevent the spill-over of jihadist trends into their countries and reduce the Iranian influence.
– Some Arab states, especially Syria, are keen on seeing the US fail in Iraq as they fear to be “next on the US list”, i.e. to be the target of US efforts at regime change. To undermine the US policy on Iraq, some Arab states deny legitimacy and recognition to Iraq and allow Sunni extremists to infiltrate Iraq, while avoiding direct confrontation with the US. Syria uses Iraq as a bargaining chip vis-à-vis the US.
– Saudi Arabia pursues a dual approach: on the one hand, it is considered a close US ally in the region; on the other hand, it supports Iraqi insurgents in order to increase its influence in Iraq.
– Both Syria and Saudi Arabia have an interest in the perpetuation of violence in Iraq.
– Sunni Arab states might resort to the mobilization of sectarian tensions (Sunni – Shi’a) in order to enforce their positions.
– One has to differentiate between the “Old Iraq” (prior to the US invasion) and the “New Iraq” (after the US invasion). The “Old Iraq” was hostile towards Iran and contained it. Thus, the “Old Iraq” was instrumental in maintaining Sunni Arab supremacy in the Middle East while not aspiring to predominance in the Arab world. The “New Iraq” may establish friendly relations with Iran and might therefore be no longer a containing factor with regard to Iran.

**Turkey**
– Preserving the territorial integrity of Iraq is the major goal of Turkish policy on Iraq. However, there is an increasing debate regarding Turkey’s policy approach towards the Middle East in general and Iraq in particular.
– Due to the PKK issue, Turkey’s policy on Iraq is closely related to domestic policy issues.
– Representatives of the realist camp, closely affiliated with the secular military establishment in Turkey, are not prepared to accept a Kurdish state under any circumstances. They reject the inclusion of Kirkuk in the Kurdish regional government and regard the PKK as major threat.
– The governing AKP and liberal Turkish groups subscribe to a more constructivist approach: Turkey’s policy towards the Middle East should not be limited to the Kurdish problem, but should embrace the region in its entirety. A Turkish military intervention against PKK strongholds in Northern Iraq could jeopardize Turkey’s relations with the EU and the US. It is also likely to harm Turkey’s considerable economic interests in Northern Iraq.
– The AKP redefines Turkey’s interests in the Middle East. It does not totally reject the establishment of a Kurdish state. Given Turkey has a strong foothold in the Kurdish state, Turkey could thus expand its sphere of influence.
European Union

- There is no mentionable EU presence in Iraq. Only in Northern Iraq, the EU has some political leverage, as the Kurds take a great interest in EU policy. Yet, the EU influence on Northern Iraq diminishes as the negotiations on Turkey’s EU accession become increasingly complicated.

International Coordination

- Effective international coordination needs a process which includes all relevant actors and in the framework of which the contact between the actors is perpetuated. The US and Iran should embark on direct negotiations beyond Iraq (“grand bargain”); a US-Iranian-Iraqi working-committee on the security of Iraq should be established; a regional “security and cooperation arrangement”, including the US, Iran, Turkey and the Arab states, should be installed; the US, Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Great Britain should establish an economic arrangement for Iraq.

- A core group of Iraq’s neighbors should meet on a regular basis. It should be complemented by a contact group of additional external actors, holding stakes in Iraq. The number of contact group members should be limited in order to minimize frictions due to colliding interests.

- A system of gradually expanding interactive concentric circles should be established. The inner circle should comprise countries with military resources in Iraq, especially the US and Great Britain. The next circle should include the neighboring countries; in the outer circle, donors and countries with marginal political influence, e.g. India, should be represented.

- A permanent coordination mechanism with all stakeholders involved (representatives on working level, but with authority to take decisions) should be established in New York under UN auspices. This would guarantee the continuity and permanence of the coordination process.

- Should domestic actors also be part of this process? If so, should only the Iraqi government or all domestic actors be represented, e.g. within the framework of a Taif-style conference? A national reconciliation conference including all domestic groups should be held.

- No, the more political recognition one confers upon militant groups, the more influence they demand. Therefore, an inclusive national reconciliation conference is likely to lead to a perpetuation of violence in Iraq.