

## MADE IN CHINA

A humbly-clad Chinese woman scours the narrow streets of Cairo's Khan al-Khalili market for broken knickknacks. Meanwhile, rows of Nefertiti busts with curiously Chinese-looking eyes gaze out at her from shop-windows. Strangely, the two are indeed connected: Egyptian obelisks, glassware, alabaster, and silver are making their way to China, and Chinese manufacturers meticulously copy and re-export cheaper versions back to Cairo's main market. In some places, they outnumber Egyptian-made goods.

China's cultural presence is rising in Cairo. In 2006, Zhang Jiarui's film "The Road," won the top Golden Pyramid award at the Cairo Film Festival, which Chinese filmmakers attend annually. 18 Egyptians participated in the 2004 "Tell Stories in Chinese" competition at Cairo's Chinese Cultural Center (the first and only such institution in the Arab world, founded in 2002 by China's Ministry of Culture). The Chinese Department at 'Ain Shams University boasted 400 undergraduates as of 2003, one of several programs partly geared toward training Egyptians as guides for Chinese tourists. By 2020, the Egyptian Tourist Authority hopes to attract one to two million Chinese tourists annually.

China's Middle Eastern ties go far beyond Egypt, from Dubai's mile-long Chinese shopping mall to Saudi students studying martial arts and traditional medicine in China on government scholarships. Moreover, China and the Arab League expect bilateral trade to hit \$100 billion by 2010. Clearly, cultural enrichment enriches in more ways than one. ■ -JC

## THINKING SMALL

By Jon B. Alterman

Washington's discussions last week about whether the Iraqi government has met its benchmarks miss the point. The Iraq we have been seeking to build for more than four years is not coming to pass, and no combination of incentives, coercion, and U.S. effort will make it so.

From the start, the U.S. government invested in a strong central government in Baghdad to replace Saddam's centralized tyranny. We poured money into the Green Zone and built up a cadre of politicians who became ensconced there. We spoke a language of projects and markets and models and prototypes, and we threw some of our energetic young people into the mix. The Iraqis in the Green Zone became used to us and often humored us. After hundreds of billions of dollars, however, the trend lines are clear: the central government is less and less relevant to what happens in Iraq, and regional leaders—call them warlords, if you like—are grabbing the upper hand.

It didn't have to be this way, but what's done is done. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, like Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari before him, has revealed himself lacking any national vision. His vision, instead, is a small-scale sectarian one that balances diverse Shia interests among the various political parties and largely ignores others' concerns. While other Shia groups seem to tolerate him, his writ does not extend beyond the Shia. He has allowed militias and parties to infiltrate, if not completely take over, the ministries and other institutions of state power, thereby enhancing their power but decimating their legitimacy for millions of non-Shia Iraqis.

British troops tossed in the towel early on the Iraqi state building project. In Basra, they essentially gave up on the idea of quashing the militias and creating a depoliticized professional class. Fewer British troops were killed, and many Iraqis found a *modus vivendi* with the new order. When the British left, they didn't hand the keys off to a Baghdad-based bureaucrat; they left things in the hands of the factions competing for primacy in the city. Those parties—Fadila, the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, the Sadrists, and Hezbollah—have each parceled out their own fiefdoms, with varying connection to, and control by, powers in Baghdad.

(continued on page 2)

## THE GULF'S SHI'A: TOWARD LOYALTY OR REBELLION?

J.E. Peterson, an expert on the history and politics of the GCC states at the University of Arizona, addressed CSIS' third Gulf Roundtable on current trends facing Shi'a in the Gulf. Peterson argued that national identity trumps sectarian identity among the Shi'a populations of the Arab Gulf. He cautioned against viewing the Gulf Shi'a as a monolithic body, but rather as a mix of communities with unique histories, positions, and ties to local regimes. As a result of their diversity within the region, economic stake in the status quo, and superseding national identity, Peterson suggested that Shi'a communities pose less of a threat to the Gulf's monarchies than is commonly perceived. For the full summary please click [HERE](#). ■

The U.S. government is beginning to throw in the towel as well. The pressure to find and fund successful economic projects in Iraq inevitably sends U.S. officials up to the Kurdish regions of Iraq—"the other Iraq." Kurdistan is Iraqi in name only. The region has its own flag and passport checks, and many of its young people speak no Arabic. Kurdistan is Iraqi because it is mutually convenient for Iraqi Arabs and Kurds alike, not because the central government has any influence in the North, or because Kurds have any allegiance to Baghdad.

The most striking change is in Anbar Province, where the United States has taken to training and funding Sunni tribal militias to help fight al-Qaeda. Not only is this not a marriage of convenience, it is barely a date of convenience. The Sunni tribesmen welcome U.S. efforts to strengthen their military capacity, and they welcome U.S. assistance fighting their internal enemies. It is fanciful, however, to think that they have bought on to the U.S. vision for Iraq as a strong, unified, democratic, and non-sectarian state. The Shia government doesn't trust the intentions of these militias, and there is no reason they should. When fully operational, the tribal areas under the U.S. umbrella will create yet another "no-go" zone for the Iraqi central government.

All of this is headed in the direction where the government that the U.S. brought to life and nurtured becomes utterly irrelevant to most parts of Iraq, and even to much of Baghdad. Defending such a government against its internal enemies is not worthy of the blood and treasure of the United States.

For a variety of practical reasons, a *de jure* breakup of Iraq is not desirable by most parties. At the same time, heightened regional autonomy—a nice way of saying "warlordism"—seems increasingly unavoidable.

The United States faces urgent tasks in Iraq, but propping up the government in the Green Zone should not be one of them. Instead, the United States needs to quickly staff up its Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT's) in the rest of the country with qualified civilians and military advisers alike. These teams need to have the authority to deal with local elites, and sufficient resources to make a difference in their communities. Other countries will be funding their own proxies in the provinces; it is the task of vigorous regional diplomacy to put limits on such efforts and promote shared understandings of acceptable behavior.

In addition, the United States needs to look long and hard at the fact that sectarian violence in Iraq will likely increase in the near term. Whereas most of the violence up to now has been either suicide bombings or individual killings, it is quite possible that sectarian groups seeking to seize neighborhoods or towns will begin massacres meant to force huge refugee flows. The U.S. government has a humanitarian responsibility to prevent those massacres to the extent that it can. But as a practical matter, it needs to facilitate local reconciliation to the degree that it can, and smooth the flow of people to the extent that it must.

Over the longer term, it may be possible to truly stitch Iraq's constituent parts together into a unified whole, but it is unlikely to happen through the vehicle of the current government. Some day, that government could be one component of a larger system, but its foundation is too flawed to sustain a multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian polity that will give a voice to all Iraqis. After four years of thinking big, the time has come to think small. ■ 7/20/07

---

## Links of Interest

CSIS hosted [Kenneth Ballen](#), the president of Terror Free Tomorrow, who presented findings from a nationwide public opinion phone survey of Iraqis that Terror Free Tomorrow and D3 Systems conducted between June 5-18.

David Brooks, a columnist for the *New York Times*, and David Ignatius, a columnist for the *Washington Post*, spoke as part of the CSIS Commission on Smart Power's [speaker series](#).

CSIS hosted its first "[New York Leadership Dinner and Dialogue](#)" on June 14 featuring a discussion among Zbigniew Brzezinski, Henry Kissinger, and Brent Scowcroft.

Haim Malka was quoted by the *Financial Times* and Jon Alterman was quoted by *Time*, the *Associated Press*, and the *Washington Post* on the Israeli-Palestinian situation.

The *Middle East Notes and Comment* electronic newsletter is produced by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a private, tax-exempt institution focusing on international public policy issues. Its research is nonpartisan and nonproprietary. CSIS does not take specific policy positions; accordingly, all views, positions, and conclusions expressed in this publication should be understood to be solely those of the author(s). © 2007 by the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

### The CSIS Middle East Program

JON B. ALTERMAN, Director  
 HAIM MALKA, Deputy Director  
 GREG BROSMAN, Program Coordinator/Research Assistant  
 JOHN CHEN, NAWAL MUSTAFA, TIMOTHY SHRIVER, and  
 JONATHAN WEINBERG, Interns

Please visit our Web site at [www.csis.org/mideast](http://www.csis.org/mideast) to learn more about the program's work.