



Regional Spillover Effects of the Iraq War

By *W. Andrew Terrill*

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The Iraq war has been one of the dominant factors influencing U.S. strategic thinking in the Middle East and globally since 2003. Yet the problems of this highly dynamic and fluid war have sometimes forced U.S. policymakers to address near-term issues that cannot be safely postponed at the expense of long-term strategic thought. Such a technique, while understandable, cannot continue indefinitely as an approach to policy. Long-term planning remains vital for advancing regionwide U.S. and Iraqi interests following a U.S. drawdown from Iraq. Such planning must include dealing with current and potential “spillover” from the Iraq war. In this monograph, Dr. W. Andrew Terrill presents ideas, concerns, and strategies that can help to fill this gap in the literature and enrich the debate on the actual and potential spillover effects of the Iraq war that will face U.S. policymakers, possibly for decades. Regional spillover problems associated with the Iraq war need to be considered and addressed even in the event of strong future success in building the new Iraq. In less optimistic scenarios, these issues will become even more important. Spillover issues addressed herein include: (1) the flow of refugees and displaced persons from Iraq, (2) cross-border terrorism, (3) the potential intensification of separatism and sectarian discord among Iraq’s neighbors, and (4) transnational crime. All of these problems will be exceptionally important in the Middle East in the coming years and perhaps decades, and trends involving these issues will need to be closely monitored. Of these problems, Dr. Terrill clearly is especially concerned with the spread of sectarian divisions which, if not properly managed, can have devastating regional consequences. This monograph, however, forms an important baseline useful for considering future trends in each of the areas that he has identified. The Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to offer this monograph as a contribution to the national security debate on this important subject as our nation continues to grapple with a variety of problems associated with the U.S. presence in Iraq and the larger Middle East. This analysis should be especially useful to U.S. strategic leaders as they seek to address the complicated interplay of factors related to Middle Eastern security issues and the support of local allies. It may also be useful to those considering how to optimize the U.S. national interest in dealing with nonallied states within the region. This work may also benefit those seeking a greater understanding of long-range issues of Middle Eastern security. We hope this monograph will benefit officers of all services as well as other U.S. Government officials visiting Iraq and its neighbors.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

W. ANDREW TERRILL joined the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) in October 2001, and is the General Douglas MacArthur Professor of National Security Affairs. Prior to his appointment, he served as a Middle East nonproliferation analyst for the International Assessments Division of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL). In 1998-99, Dr. Terrill also served as a Visiting Professor at the U.S. Air War College on assignment from LLNL. He is a former faculty member at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, and has taught adjunct at a variety of other colleges and universities. He is a retired U.S. Army Reserve lieutenant colonel and foreign Area Officer (Middle East). Dr. Terrill has published in numerous academic journals on topics including nuclear proliferation, the Iran-Iraq War, Operation DESERT STORM, Middle Eastern chemical weapons, ballistic missile proliferation, terrorism, and commando operations. Since 1994, at U.S. State Department invitation, Dr. Terrill has participated in the Middle Eastern Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) Track 2 talks, which are part of the Middle East Peace Process. He also served as a member of the military and security working group of the Baker/Hamilton Iraq Study Group throughout its existence in 2006. Dr. Terrill holds a B.A. from California State Polytechnic University and an M.A. from the University of California, Riverside, both in Political Science. He also holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, California.

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