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## U.S.-Iraq treaty carries ominous parallels to events in Iran revolution

By SEAN FOLEY, Ph.D.

On Oct. 26, 1964, the Ayatollah Khomeini delivered one of the most significant political statements in Iranian history.

Khomeini chastised Iran's pro-U.S. monarch, Muhammad Reza Shah, for approving a status-of-forces agreement (SOFA) that provided U.S. military personnel and their dependents in Iran with full diplomatic immunity.

Khomeini charged that SOFA violated Iran's national sovereignty and reduced Iranians "to a level lower than an American dog." Although the shah immediately exiled Khomeini, the speech and the mass protests it inspired set in motion a series of events that would lead to the collapse of the shah's government and to Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979.

Iran's experience with its SOFA should give Americans and Iraqis pause as they consider a SOFA to define the long-term role of the U.S. military in Iraq and the legal status of U.S. personnel and bases there. There is little question that an agreement is urgently needed. The United Nations mandate authorizing the U.S. presence expires at the end of this year, and the legal status of foreign contractors, Iraqi prisoners in U.S. bases, and other critical jurisdictional questions remains unclear.

Yet, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki stated last month that the first draft of the SOFA had "reached a dead end." Echoing the demands of Iraq's most powerful religious leader, the Ayatollah al-Sistani, al-Maliki has insisted a SOFA must be approved by Iraq's parliament and that "any agreement that infringes on Iraq's sovereignty will be dismissed." If al-Sistani feels his demands have been ignored, he can effectively scuttle a SOFA.

### Iraqi suspicions may run deep

Importantly, al-Sistani's demands reflect Iraq's historical relationship with Britain, which wielded great influence through economic ties, political agreements and military bases from the 1920s until 1958. When Iraqi Prime Minister Rashid Ali refused to heed a British request to suspend Iraqi relations with Italy in 1940, the British government mobilized its forces in Iraq and toppled the country's government. For many Iraqis and others in the Middle East, the ouster of Rashid Ali demonstrated that national sovereignty did not exist as long as foreign troops were stationed permanently within national boundaries.

To their credit, U.S. officials are aware of this concern. The Iraq Study Group report in 2006 recommended the U.S. not build permanent bases in Iraq, and U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker has recently reassured Iraqis that no agreement would infringe on their sovereignty. These statements, however, may not be enough to assuage Iraqi suspicions about foreign troops or fears that a SOFA negotiated with the Bush administration either would not last or would be seen as an endorsement of

John McCain's presidential campaign.

The only realistic options may be to seek a six-month extension to the existing U.N. mandate, or for Iraq to agree to the U.S. presence without a SOFA and other formal terms. But both approaches carry risks. A new mandate would spark an intense international debate and might not be approved. By contrast, formal Iraqi consent would legitimize the U.S. presence but only under uncertain terms — the consent could be revoked at any time.

Indeed, it is possible U.S. soldiers could be without a legal mandate to remain in Iraq by January 2009.

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