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## FACT

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#### PLAN B

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As June 30th approaches, Israel looks to the Kurds.

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In July, 2003, two months after President Bush declared victory in Iraq, the war, far from winding down, reached a critical point. Israel, which had been among the war's most enthusiastic supporters, began warning the Administration that the American-led occupation would face a heightened insurgency—a campaign of bombings and assassinations—later that summer. Israeli intelligence assets in Iraq were reporting that the insurgents had the support of Iranian intelligence operatives and other foreign fighters, who were crossing the unprotected border between Iran and Iraq at will. The Israelis urged the United States to seal the nine-hundred-mile-long border, at whatever cost.

The border stayed open, however. “The Administration wasn’t ignoring the Israeli intelligence about Iran,” Patrick Clawson, who is the deputy director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy and has close ties to the White House, explained. “There’s no question that we took no steps last summer to close the border, but our attitude was that it was more useful for Iraqis to have contacts with ordinary Iranians coming across the border, and thousands were coming across every day—for instance, to make pilgrimages.” He added, “The questions we confronted were ‘Is the trade-off worth it? Do we want to isolate the Iraqis?’ Our answer was that as long as the Iranians were not picking up guns and shooting at us, it was worth the price.”

Clawson said, “The Israelis disagreed quite vigorously with us last summer. Their concern was very straightforward—that the Iranians would create social and charity organizations in Iraq and use them to recruit people who would engage in armed attacks against Americans.”

The warnings of increased violence proved accurate. By early August, the insurgency against the occupation had exploded, with bombings in Baghdad, at the Jordanian Embassy and the United Nations headquarters, that killed forty-two people. A former Israeli intelligence officer said that Israel’s leadership had concluded by then that the United States was unwilling to confront Iran; in terms of salvaging the situation in Iraq, he said, “it doesn’t add up. It’s over. Not militarily—the United States cannot be defeated militarily in Iraq—but politically.”

Flynt Leverett, a former C.I.A. analyst who until last year served on the National Security

Council and is now a fellow at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy, told me that late last summer “the Administration had a chance to turn it around after it was clear that ‘Mission Accomplished’”—a reference to Bush’s May speech—“was premature. The Bush people could have gone to their allies and got more boots on the ground. But the neocons were dug in —‘We’re doing this on our own.’”

Leverett went on, “The President was only belatedly coming to the understanding that he had to either make a strategic change or, if he was going to insist on unilateral control, get tougher and find the actual insurgency.” The Administration then decided, Leverett said, to “deploy the Guantánamo model in Iraq”—to put aside its rules of interrogation. That decision failed to stop the insurgency and eventually led to the scandal at the Abu Ghraib prison.

In early November, the President received a grim assessment from the C.I.A.’s station chief in Baghdad, who filed a special field appraisal, known internally as an Aardwolf, warning that the security situation in Iraq was nearing collapse. The document, as described by Knight-Ridder, said that “none of the postwar Iraqi political institutions and leaders have shown an ability to govern the country” or to hold elections and draft a constitution.

A few days later, the Administration, rattled by the violence and the new intelligence, finally attempted to change its go-it-alone policy, and set June 30th as the date for the handover of sovereignty to an interim government, which would allow it to bring the United Nations into the process. “November was one year before the Presidential election,” a U.N. consultant who worked on Iraqi issues told me. “They panicked and decided to share the blame with the U.N. and the Iraqis.”

A former Administration official who had supported the war completed a discouraging tour of Iraq late last fall. He visited Tel Aviv afterward and found that the Israelis he met with were equally discouraged. As they saw it, their warnings and advice had been ignored, and the American war against the insurgency was continuing to founder. “I spent hours talking to the senior members of the Israeli political and intelligence community,” the former official recalled. “Their concern was ‘You’re not going to get it right in Iraq, and shouldn’t we be planning for the worst-case scenario and how to deal with it?’”

Ehud Barak, the former Israeli Prime Minister, who supported the Bush Administration’s invasion of Iraq, took it upon himself at this point to privately warn Vice-President Dick Cheney that America had lost in Iraq; according to an American close to Barak, he said that Israel “had learned that there’s no way to win an occupation.” The only issue, Barak told Cheney, “was choosing the size of your humiliation.” Cheney did not respond to Barak’s assessment. (Cheney’s office declined to comment.)

In a series of interviews in Europe, the Middle East, and the United States, officials told me that by the end of last year Israel had concluded that the Bush Administration would not be able to bring stability or democracy to Iraq, and that Israel needed other options. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s government decided, I was told, to minimize the damage that the war was causing to Israel’s strategic position by expanding its long-standing relationship with Iraq’s Kurds and establishing a significant presence on the ground in the semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan.

Several officials depicted Sharon's decision, which involves a heavy financial commitment, as a potentially reckless move that could create even more chaos and violence as the insurgency in Iraq continues to grow.

Israeli intelligence and military operatives are now quietly at work in Kurdistan, providing training for Kurdish commando units and, most important in Israel's view, running covert operations inside Kurdish areas of Iran and Syria. Israel feels particularly threatened by Iran, whose position in the region has been strengthened by the war. The Israeli operatives include members of the Mossad, Israel's clandestine foreign-intelligence service, who work undercover in Kurdistan as businessmen and, in some cases, do not carry Israeli passports.

Asked to comment, Mark Regev, the spokesman for the Israeli Embassy in Washington, said, "The story is simply untrue and the relevant governments know it's untrue." Kurdish officials declined to comment, as did a spokesman for the State Department.

However, a senior C.I.A. official acknowledged in an interview last week that the Israelis were indeed operating in Kurdistan. He told me that the Israelis felt that they had little choice: "They think they have to be there." Asked whether the Israelis had sought approval from Washington, the official laughed and said, "Do you know anybody who can tell the Israelis what to do? They're always going to do what is in their best interest." The C.I.A. official added that the Israeli presence was widely known in the American intelligence community.

The Israeli decision to seek a bigger foothold in Kurdistan—characterized by the former Israeli intelligence officer as "Plan B"—has also raised tensions between Israel and Turkey. It has provoked bitter statements from Turkish politicians and, in a major regional shift, a new alliance among Iran, Syria, and Turkey, all of which have significant Kurdish minorities. In early June, *Intel Brief*, a privately circulated intelligence newsletter produced by Vincent Cannistraro, a retired C.I.A. counterterrorism chief, and Philip Giraldi, who served as the C.I.A.'s deputy chief of base in Istanbul in the late nineteen-eighties, said:

Turkish sources confidentially report that the Turks are increasingly concerned by the expanding Israeli presence in Kurdistan and alleged encouragement of Kurdish ambitions to create an independent state. . . . The Turks note that the large Israeli intelligence operations in Northern Iraq incorporate anti-Syrian and anti-Iranian activity, including support to Iranian and Syrian Kurds who are in opposition to their respective governments.

In the years since the first Gulf War, Iraq's Kurds, aided by an internationally enforced no-fly zone and by a U.N. mandate providing them with a share of the country's oil revenues, have managed to achieve a large measure of independence in three northern Iraqi provinces. As far as most Kurds are concerned, however, historic "Kurdistan" extends well beyond Iraq's borders, encompassing parts of Iran, Syria, and Turkey. All three countries fear that Kurdistan, despite public pledges to the contrary, will declare its independence from the interim Iraqi government if conditions don't improve after June 30th.

Israeli involvement in Kurdistan is not new. Throughout the nineteen-sixties and seventies, Israel actively supported a Kurdish rebellion against Iraq, as part of its strategic policy of seeking

alliances with non-Arabs in the Middle East. In 1975, the Kurds were betrayed by the United States, when Washington went along with a decision by the Shah of Iran to stop supporting Kurdish aspirations for autonomy in Iraq.

Betrayal and violence became the norm in the next two decades. Inside Iraq, the Kurds were brutally repressed by Saddam Hussein, who used airpower and chemical weapons against them. In 1984, the Kurdistan Workers Party, or P.K.K., initiated a campaign of separatist violence in Turkey that lasted fifteen years; more than thirty thousand people, most of them Kurds, were killed. The Turkish government ruthlessly crushed the separatists, and eventually captured the P. K.K.'s leader, Abdullah Ocalan. Last month, the P.K.K., now known as the Kongra-Gel, announced that it was ending a five-year unilateral ceasefire and would begin targeting Turkish citizens once again.

The Iraqi Kurdish leadership was furious when, early this month, the United States acceded to a U.N. resolution on the restoration of Iraqi sovereignty that did not affirm the interim constitution that granted the minority Kurds veto power in any permanent constitution. Kurdish leaders immediately warned President Bush in a letter that they would not participate in a new Shiite-controlled government unless they were assured that their rights under the interim constitution were preserved. "The people of Kurdistan will no longer accept second-class citizenship in Iraq," the letter said.

There are fears that the Kurds will move to seize the city of Kirkuk, together with the substantial oil reserves in the surrounding region. Kirkuk is dominated by Arab Iraqis, many of whom were relocated there, beginning in the nineteen-seventies, as part of Saddam Hussein's campaign to "Arabize" the region, but the Kurds consider Kirkuk and its oil part of their historic homeland. "If Kirkuk is threatened by the Kurds, the Sunni insurgents will move in there, along with the Turkomen, and there will be a bloodbath," an American military expert who is studying Iraq told me. "And, even if the Kurds do take Kirkuk, they can't transport the oil out of the country, since all of the pipelines run through the Sunni-Arab heartland."

A top German national-security official said in an interview that "an independent Kurdistan with sufficient oil would have enormous consequences for Syria, Iran, and Turkey" and would lead to continuing instability in the Middle East—no matter what the outcome in Iraq is. There is also a widespread belief, another senior German official said, that some elements inside the Bush Administration—he referred specifically to the faction headed by Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz—would tolerate an independent Kurdistan. This, the German argued, would be a mistake. "It would be a new Israel—a pariah state in the middle of hostile nations."

A declaration of independence would trigger a Turkish response—and possibly a war—and also derail what has been an important alliance for Israel. Turkey and Israel have become strong diplomatic and economic partners in the past decade. Thousands of Israelis travel to Turkey every year as tourists. Turkish opposition to the Iraq war has strained the relationship; still, Turkey remains oriented toward the West and, despite the victory of an Islamic party in national elections in 2002, relatively secular. It is now vying for acceptance in the European Union. In contrast, Turkey and Syria have been at odds for years, at times coming close to open

confrontation, and Turkey and Iran have long been regional rivals. One area of tension between them is the conflict between Turkey's pro-Western stand and Iran's rigid theocracy. But their mutual wariness of the Kurds has transcended these divisions.

A European foreign minister, in a conversation last month, said that the "blowing up" of Israel's alliance with Turkey would be a major setback for the region. He went on, "To avoid chaos, you need the neighbors to work as one common entity."

The Israelis, however, view the neighborhood, with the exception of Kurdistan, as hostile. Israel is convinced that Iran is on the verge of developing nuclear weapons, and that, with Syria's help, it is planning to bolster Palestinian terrorism as Israel withdraws from the Gaza Strip.

Iraqi Shiite militia leaders like Moqtada al-Sadr, the former American intelligence official said, are seen by the Israeli leadership as "stalking horses" for Iran—owing much of their success in defying the American-led coalition to logistical and communications support and training provided by Iran. The former intelligence official said, "We began to see telltale signs of organizational training last summer. But the White House didn't want to hear it: 'We can't take on another problem right now. We can't afford to push Iran to the point where we've got to have a showdown.'"

Last summer, according to a document I obtained, the Bush Administration directed the Marines to draft a detailed plan, called Operation Stuart, for the arrest and, if necessary, assassination of Sadr. But the operation was cancelled, the former intelligence official told me, after it became clear that Sadr had been "tipped off" about the plan. Seven months later, after Sadr spent the winter building support for his movement, the American-led coalition shut down his newspaper, provoking a crisis that Sadr survived with his status enhanced, thus insuring that he will play a major, and unwelcome, role in the political and military machinations after June 30th.

"Israel's immediate goal after June 30th is to build up the Kurdish commando units to balance the Shiite militias—especially those which would be hostile to the kind of order in southern Iraq that Israel would like to see," the former senior intelligence official said. "Of course, if a fanatic Sunni Baathist militia took control—one as hostile to Israel as Saddam Hussein was—Israel would unleash the Kurds on it, too." The Kurdish armed forces, known as the peshmerga, number an estimated seventy-five thousand troops, a total that far exceeds the known Sunni and Shiite militias.

The former Israeli intelligence officer acknowledged that since late last year Israel has been training Kurdish commando units to operate in the same manner and with the same effectiveness as Israel's most secretive commando units, the Mistaravim. The initial goal of the Israeli assistance to the Kurds, the former officer said, was to allow them to do what American commando units had been unable to do—penetrate, gather intelligence on, and then kill off the leadership of the Shiite and Sunni insurgencies in Iraq. (I was unable to learn whether any such mission had yet taken place.) "The feeling was that this was a more effective way to get at the insurgency," the former officer said. "But the growing Kurdish-Israeli relationship began

upsetting the Turks no end. Their issue is that the very same Kurdish commandos trained for Iraq could infiltrate and attack in Turkey.”

The Kurdish-Israeli collaboration inevitably expanded, the Israeli said. Some Israeli operatives have crossed the border into Iran, accompanied by Kurdish commandos, to install sensors and other sensitive devices that primarily target suspected Iranian nuclear facilities. The former officer said, “Look, Israel has always supported the Kurds in a Machiavellian way—as balance against Saddam. It’s Realpolitik.” He added, “By aligning with the Kurds, Israel gains eyes and ears in Iran, Iraq, and Syria.” He went on, “What Israel was doing with the Kurds was not so unacceptable in the Bush Administration.”

Senior German officials told me, with alarm, that their intelligence community also has evidence that Israel is using its new leverage inside Kurdistan, and within the Kurdish communities in Iran and Syria, for intelligence and operational purposes. Syrian and Lebanese officials believe that Israeli intelligence played a role in a series of violent protests in Syria in mid-March in which Syrian Kurdish dissidents and Syrian troops clashed, leaving at least thirty people dead. (There are nearly two million Kurds living in Syria, which has a population of seventeen million.) Much of the fighting took place in cities along Syria’s borders with Turkey and Kurdish-controlled Iraq. Michel Samaha, the Lebanese Minister of Information, told me that while the disturbances amounted to an uprising by the Kurds against the leadership of Bashir Assad, the Syrian President, his government had evidence that Israel was “preparing the Kurds to fight all around Iraq, in Syria, Turkey, and Iran. They’re being programmed to do commando operations.”

The top German national-security official told me that he believes that the Bush Administration continually misread Iran. “The Iranians wanted to keep America tied down in Iraq, and to keep it busy there, but they didn’t want chaos,” he said. One of the senior German officials told me, “The critical question is ‘What will the behavior of Iran be if there is an independent Kurdistan with close ties to Israel?’ Iran does not want an Israeli land-based aircraft carrier”—that is, a military stronghold—“on its border.”

Another senior European official said, “The Iranians would do something positive in the south of Iraq if they get something positive in return, but Washington won’t do it. The Bush Administration won’t ask the Iranians for help, and can’t ask the Syrians. Who is going to save the United States?” He added that, at the start of the American invasion of Iraq, several top European officials had told their counterparts in Iran, “You will be the winners in the region.”

Israel is not alone in believing that Iran, despite its protestations, is secretly hard at work on a nuclear bomb. Early this month, the International Atomic Energy Agency, which is responsible for monitoring nuclear proliferation, issued its fifth quarterly report in a row stating that Iran was continuing to misrepresent its research into materials that could be used for the production of nuclear weapons. Much of the concern centers on an underground enrichment facility at Natanz, two hundred and fifty miles from the Iran-Iraq border, which, during previous I.A.E.A. inspections, was discovered to contain centrifuges showing traces of weapons-grade uranium. The huge complex, which is still under construction, is said to total nearly eight hundred

thousand square feet, and it will be sheltered in a few months by a roof whose design allows it to be covered with sand. Once the work is completed, the complex “will be blind to satellites, and the Iranians could add additional floors underground,” an I.A.E.A. official told me. “The question is, will the Israelis hit Iran?”

Mohamed ElBaradei, the I.A.E.A. director, has repeatedly stated that his agency has not “seen concrete proof of a military program, so it’s premature to make a judgment on that.” David Albright, a former U.N. weapons inspector who is an expert on nuclear proliferation, buttressed the I.A.E.A. claim. “The United States has no concrete evidence of a nuclear-weapons program,” Albright told me. “It’s just an inference. There’s no smoking gun.” (Last Friday, at a meeting in Vienna, the I.A.E.A. passed a resolution that, while acknowledging some progress, complained that Iran had yet to be as open as it should be, and urgently called upon it to resolve a list of outstanding questions.)

The I.A.E.A. official told me that the I.A.E.A. leadership has been privately warned by Foreign Ministry officials in Iran that they are “having a hard time getting information” from the hard-line religious and military leaders who run the country. “The Iranian Foreign Ministry tells us, ‘We’re just diplomats, and we don’t know whether we’re getting the whole story from our own people,’” the official said. He noted that the Bush Administration has repeatedly advised the I.A.E.A. that there are secret nuclear facilities in Iran that have not been declared. The Administration will not say more, apparently worried that the information could get back to Iran.

Patrick Clawson, of the Institute for Near East Policy, provided another explanation for the reluctance of the Bush Administration to hand over specific intelligence. “If we were to identify a site,” he told me, “it’s conceivable that it could be quickly disassembled and the I.A.E.A. inspectors would arrive”—international inspections often take weeks to organize—“and find nothing.” The American intelligence community, already discredited because of its faulty reporting on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, would be criticized anew. “It’s much better,” Clawson said, “to have the I.A.E.A. figure out on its own that there’s a site and then find evidence that there had been enriched material there.”

Clawson told me that Israel’s overwhelming national-security concern must be Iran. Given that a presence in Kurdistan would give Israel a way to monitor the Iranian nuclear effort, he said, “it would be negligent for the Israelis not to be there.”

At the moment, the former American senior intelligence official said, the Israelis’ tie to Kurdistan “would be of greater value than their growing alliance with Turkey. ‘We love Turkey but got to keep the pressure on Iran.’” The former Israeli intelligence officer said, “The Kurds were the last surviving group close to the United States with any say in Iraq. The only question was how to square it with Turkey.”

There may be no way to square it with Turkey. Over breakfast in Ankara, a senior Turkish official explained, “Before the war, Israel was active in Kurdistan, and now it is active again. This is very dangerous for us, and for them, too. We do not want to see Iraq divided, and we will

not ignore it.” Then, citing a popular Turkish proverb—“We will burn a blanket to kill a flea”—he said, “We have told the Kurds, ‘We are not afraid of you, but you should be afraid of us.’” (A Turkish diplomat I spoke to later was more direct: “We tell our Israeli and Kurdish friends that Turkey’s good will lies in keeping Iraq together. We will not support alternative solutions.”)

“If you end up with a divided Iraq, it will bring more blood, tears, and pain to the Middle East, and you will be blamed,” the senior Turkish official said. “From Mexico to Russia, everybody will claim that the United States had a secret agenda in Iraq: you came there to break up Iraq. If Iraq is divided, America cannot explain this to the world.” The official compared the situation to the breakup of Yugoslavia, but added, “In the Balkans, you did not have oil.” He said, “The lesson of Yugoslavia is that when you give one country independence everybody will want it.” If that happens, he said, “Kirkuk will be the Sarajevo of Iraq. If something happens there, it will be impossible to contain the crisis.”

In Ankara, another senior Turkish official explained that his government had “openly shared its worries” about the Israeli military activities inside Kurdistan with the Israeli Foreign Ministry. “They deny the training and the purchase of property and claim it’s not official but done by private persons. Obviously, our intelligence community is aware that it was not so. This policy is not good for America, Iraq, or Israel and the Jews.”

Turkey’s increasingly emphatic and public complaints about Israel’s missile attacks on the Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip is another factor in the growing tensions between the allies. On May 26th, Turkey’s Foreign Minister, Abdullah Gul, announced at a news conference in Ankara that the Turkish government was bringing its Ambassador in Israel home for consultations on how to revive the Middle East peace process. He also told the Turkish parliament that the government was planning to strengthen its ties to the Palestinian Authority, and, in conversations with Middle Eastern diplomats in the past month, he expressed grave concern about Israel. In one such talk, one diplomat told me, Gul described Israeli activities, and the possibility of an independent Kurdistan, as “presenting us with a choice that is not a real choice—between survival and alliance.”

A third Turkish official told me that the Israelis were “talking to us in order to appease our concern. They say, ‘We aren’t doing anything in Kurdistan to undermine your interests. Don’t worry.’” The official added, “If it goes out publicly what they’ve been doing, it will put your government and our government in a difficult position. We can tolerate ‘Kurdistan’ if Iraq is intact, but nobody knows the future—not even the Americans.”

A former White House official depicted the Administration as eager—almost desperate—late this spring to install an acceptable new interim government in Iraq before President Bush’s declared June 30th deadline for the transfer of sovereignty. The Administration turned to Lakhdar Brahimi, the United Nations special envoy, to “put together something by June 30th—just something that could stand up” through the Presidential election, the former official said. Brahimi was given the task of selecting, with Washington’s public approval, the thirty-one members of Iraq’s interim government. Nevertheless, according to press reports, the choice of



Iyad Allawi as interim Prime Minister was a disappointment to Brahimi.

The White House has yet to deal with Allawi's past. His credentials as a neurologist, and his involvement during the past two decades in anti-Saddam activities, as the founder of the British-based Iraqi National Accord, have been widely reported. But his role as a Baath Party operative while Saddam struggled for control in the nineteen-sixties and seventies—Saddam became President in 1979—is much less well known. "Allawi helped Saddam get to power," an American intelligence officer told me. "He was a very effective operator and a true believer." Reuel Marc Gerecht, a former C.I.A. case officer who served in the Middle East, added, "Two facts stand out about Allawi. One, he likes to think of himself as a man of ideas; and, two, his strongest virtue is that he's a thug."

Early this year, one of Allawi's former medical-school classmates, Dr. Haifa al-Azawi, published an essay in an Arabic newspaper in London raising questions about his character and his medical bona fides. She depicted Allawi as a "big husky man . . . who carried a gun on his belt and frequently brandished it, terrorizing the medical students." Allawi's medical degree, she wrote, "was conferred upon him by the Baath party." Allawi moved to London in 1971, ostensibly to continue his medical education; there he was in charge of the European operations of the Baath Party organization and the local activities of the Mukhabarat, its intelligence agency, until 1975.

"If you're asking me if Allawi has blood on his hands from his days in London, the answer is yes, he does," Vincent Cannistraro, the former C.I.A. officer, said. "He was a paid Mukhabarat agent for the Iraqis, and he was involved in dirty stuff." A cabinet-level Middle East diplomat, who was rankled by the U.S. indifference to Allawi's personal history, told me early this month that Allawi was involved with a Mukhabarat "hit team" that sought out and killed Baath Party dissenters throughout Europe. (Allawi's office did not respond to a request for comment.) At some point, for reasons that are not clear, Allawi fell from favor, and the Baathists organized a series of attempts on his life. The third attempt, by an axe-wielding assassin who broke into his home near London in 1978, resulted in a year-long hospital stay.

The Saban Center's Flynt Leverett said of the transfer of sovereignty, "If it doesn't work, there is no fallback—nothing." The former senior American intelligence official told me, similarly, that "the neocons still think they can pull the rabbit out of the hat" in Iraq. "What's the plan? They say, 'We don't need it. Democracy is strong enough. We'll work it out.'"

Middle East diplomats and former C.I.A. operatives who now consult in Baghdad have told me that many wealthy Iraqi businessmen and their families have deserted Baghdad in recent weeks in anticipation of continued, and perhaps heightened, suicide attacks and terror bombings after June 30th. "We'll see Christians, Shiites, and Sunnis getting out," Michel Samaha, the Lebanese Minister of Information, reported. "What the resistance is doing is targeting the poor people who run the bureaucracy—those who can't afford to pay for private guards. A month ago, friends of mine who are important landowners in Iraq came to Baghdad to do business. The cost of one day's security was about twelve thousand dollars."

Whitley Bruner, a retired intelligence officer who was a senior member of the C.I.A.'s task force on Iraq a decade ago, said that the new interim government in Iraq is urgently seeking ways to

provide affordable security for second-tier officials—the men and women who make the government work. In early June, two such officials—Kamal Jarrah, an Education Ministry official, and Bassam Salih Kubba, who was serving as deputy foreign minister—were assassinated by unidentified gunmen outside their homes. Neither had hired private guards. Bruner, who returned from Baghdad earlier this month, said that he was now working to help organize Iraqi companies that could provide high-quality security that Iraqis could afford. “It’s going to be a hot summer,” Bruner said. “A lot of people have decided to get to Lebanon, Jordan, or the Gulf and wait this one out.”✦