

Chatham House Briefing: Iraq at a Crossroads: Challenges for the new government

Posted on Wednesday 26th January 2011

[Stefan Wolff \(/staff/profiles/government-society/wolff-stefan.aspx\)](#), Professor of International Security, contributed to a Chatham House briefing on 26 January 2011 on the challenges that the new Iraqi government faces, discussing the complexities of the energy question and the disputed territories.

Professor Wolff's overview started out with the observation that the challenges related to managing Iraq's hydrocarbons resources and its disputed territories are among the longest standing and most divisive problems consecutive Iraqi governments have had to grapple with. As significant hydrocarbons resources are located in the disputed territories and as Iraq remains dependent on the exploitation of these resources to contribute to increasing its revenue, the importance of managing these challenges has, if anything, become more urgent.

In light of the volatility of the new government coalition to internal fractionalism, of regional external influences, and of the impending conclusion of the withdrawal of US combat troops, three scenarios are possible, Professor Wolff noted. Two involve a major escalation of tensions into violence between Arabs and Kurds, while a third, most probable for the short to mid-term, foresees a 'muddling through' of the coalition government.

However, Professor Wolff added, 'muddling through' does not resolve any of the big questions, but it avoids 'solutions' that are worse than the problems they are targeted at. In the long run, the main parties will need to find a compromise and they will need to sell it to their constituents. As this is going to be a lengthy process with several uncertainties and pitfalls, it will require consensual management of the status quo.

More information: www.stefanwolff.com (<http://www.stefanwolff.com/talks/iraq-at-a-crossroads-implications-of-the-new-government>)