



Post -ISIL Iraq: National Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

In post-ISIL Iraq the country has little chance to remain as unified democratic state. The foreign intervention and Iranian expansionist policies in the form of building buffer of satellite states on its borders in particular, will leave a permanent impact on the nature of the emerging regime in Iraq. Besides, the issue of growing sectarianism, and ethnic polarization and wil create low intensity conflicts which will be a salient feature of the future political system. It is our contention that unless Iran is restrained in its regional hegemonic policies, Iraq will be disintegrated into two or three entities along sectarian and ethnic lines, and this will have regional consequences with far-reaching consequences.

Keywords: *Iraq, ISIL, Iran Foreign Policy, Kurds, Shiite Militias, US Foreign Policy, Federalism.*

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DAEŞ Sonrası Irak: Milli Tehditler ve Fırsatlar

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Özet

DAEŞ sonrası Irak'ta ülke birliğinin ve demokratik devlet olma özelliğinin devam etme şansı oldukça azalmış durumdadır. Irak'a gerek yapılan dış müdahaleler gerekse İran'ın ülkenin başta sınır bölgeleri olmak üzere bazı alanlarında uydu devleti haline dönüştürecek şekilde etkinliğini artırması Irak'ta doğal seyrinde ortaya çıkacak olan rejime kalıcı bir tesir bırakacaktır. Bunun yanında artan mezhepçilik ve etnik ayrışma ülkenin ileride belirgin bir özelliği haline gelecek olan düşük çatışmalara da gebe olacaktır. Bundan dolayıdır ki üzerinde durmamız gereken konu; İran'ın artan bölgesel hegemonya politikaları durdurulmadığı sürece, Irak'ın iki veya daha fazla parçalara ayrışacağı ve bunun da bölgede geniş kapsamlı sonuçlara neden olacağıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Irak, DAEŞ, İran Dış Politikası, Kürtler, Şii Milisleri, ABD Dış Politikası, Federalizm.*

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Introduction

Based on the reading of what is going on in Iraq, one can argue that country has a very little chance to rebuild itself as a unified federal democratic state as provided for in its 2005 constitution. Nevertheless some form of loose confederation would be better than splitting the country into three separate entities as suggested by some political circles. Regardless of the form which policy makers prescribe for post-ISIL Iraq, the issue of growing sectarianism, ethnic polarization, and regional expansionist policies need to be addressed. It is our contention that unless Iran is restrained in its regional hegemonic policies, Iraq will be disintegrated into three or two entities along sectarian and ethnic lines, and this will cause regional consequences with far-reaching consequences.

The difficulty in sustaining Iraq as a unified and viable state lies in the way the British empire have built it as nation out of the three former Ottoman provinces of Baghdad, Basra and Mosul which had a population of mosaic nature with conflicting identities. Of the nation-states carved in the aftermath of the World War 1 out of the remains of the Ottoman Empire, none was more heterogeneous, or have borders which were arbitrarily drawn, than Iraq¹. King Faisal I (1921-1933), the founder of modern Iraq, after two decade of painstaking work to create a patriotic feeling among Iraqis had this to say:

There is still—and I say this with a heart full of sorrow—no Iraqi people but unimaginable masses of human beings, devoid of any patriotic idea, imbued with religious traditions and absurdities, connected by no common tie, giving ear to evil, prone to anarchy, and perpetually ready to rise against any government whatever...”²

1 Iraq between Occupations Perspectives from 1920 to the Present. Zeidel, R. Baram, A. Rohde, Achim Eds. (Palgrave Macmillan, Nature America Inc.2010). This is the most up to date scholarly work which provides a vivid account of the extent of violence and repression used by different regimes in Iraq to maintain the country from falling apart. To gain a thorough understanding of various regimes that ruled modern Iraq, one cannot dispense with the still standard study of Charles Tripp, A History of Modern Iraq, and 2n.ed. Cambridge University Press, 2003.

2 Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978): 25

Observers of the Iraqi scene still maintain the same view which Faisal had expressed eloquently seven decades ago about Iraq. It was solely the use of rude power and repressive measures, which were employed by the British authorities and subsequently by the military and totalitarian regimes in pre-2003 that had kept the country intact³. Over the last decade, the once ironclad structures of dictatorship and suppression that kept ethnic and sectarian tensions of Iraq from explosion have disappeared by the US invasion and subsequent fall of Saddam's regime which placed Iraq at a critical threshold in its history⁴. The subsequent opportunity for democracy was quickly overshadowed by the chaotic circumstances and outside intervention which have created an environment full of challenges to keep Iraq as a nation.

Compared to the early years' of occupation by US and allied forces, Iraq has experienced during the years 2007-2011 an improvement in the security situation and a sharp decline in the levels of violence. In fact, by mid-2007 the casualties resulting from sectarian violence had declined by 90 percent. The number of terror-related deaths also dropped from an average of 2,300 per month in 2006 to an average of 322 per month by 2011⁵. After several rounds of successful elections for the Iraqi National Assembly and the provincial ones, the country was believed to be on the path of democracy during the period. Contrary to the 2005 elections, where Sunnis boycotted the vote, in 2009 elections, for instance, there was a strong participation by all ethnic, sectarian, and political groups. In general, there was some

3 Iraq's Culture of Violence: Middle East Quarterly - Middle East ...
www.meforum.org/101/iraqs-culture-of-violence ;Ivan Eland Not Out Of The Woods Yet In Iraq , <https://eurasiareview.wordpress.com/category/iraq/>

4 The author maintains that it is important to note that the three very different states in any country of federal nature have never been able to peacefully co-exist under the same flag for a long time and have required tyrannical control from strong rulers. The Kurds revolted against control of the Arab government in Baghdad in 1920, 1923-1932, 1935-1936, and 1945, 1958-1962, 1964-1970, 1974-1975 and 1991. The Shiites have done the same against the Sunni dominated government in 1920, 1927, 1930-1933, 1935-1936, 1956, 1969, 1974, 1977 and 1991. Yet still the Bush and Obama administrations are attempting to form a federal state that will allow the withdrawal of American troops without falling immediately thereafter into chaos. (See, <http://www.amazon.com/Partitioning-Peace-Exit-Strategy-Iraq/dp/1598130250>

5 Excerpted From Identity and Nation in Iraq, Sherko Kirmanj, Identity and Nation in Iraq - Lynne Reiner Publishers <https://www.rienner.com/uploads/511e6527daedf.pdf>

progress in political and economic fields during the period. Combined Iraqi and US counter-insurgency efforts led to almost total defeat of the Qaeda-led insurgency in Iraq⁶. This was achieved through the use of Arab Sunni Sahawat militias⁷ and by giving the Kurds key positions in Baghdad to have stake in Iraq.⁸

By the end of 2010 US administration and its allies thought that Iraq had finally a workable formula for democracy and the country would serve as a model to what US intervention could achieve in promoting democracy in the Middle East.⁹

6 Ibid.

7 During the early part of the insurgency following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, as al-Qaeda's fighters tightened their grip on Ramada, it is reported that they became increasingly repressive and challenged the tribal leaders' power. Soon they were kidnapping and beheading tribal Sunnis as part of a campaign of extortion and intimidation. Abdul Sitar's own father and two brothers were killed by al-Qaeda. During the late summer of 2006, he began enlisting his fellow sheikhs in *Sahawat al-Anbar* and encouraging members of his tribe to join the local police force. The U.S. forces under Lt. Col. Tony Deane encouraged Sitar and provided security for the initial meetings of the Al Anbar tribal meetings at Sattar's compound in western Ramadi; these early meetings were the beginning of what grew into the Anbar Salvation Council by the fall of 2006; in March 2007 the Council counted 41 clans from Anbar province. The development led to a sharp reduction of violence in the province and forced many al-Qaeda fighters to flee to other regions of Iraq .(see. "Sunni Sheiks Join Fight Vs. Insurgency". <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/25/AR2007032500600.html> ; Turning Iraq's Tribes Against Al-Qaeda, by Mark Kukis Tuesday, Dec. 26, 2006. <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1572796,00.html>

8 During the years 2003-2010 Kurds were instrumental in toppling Saddam's regime and had worked relentlessly with the US-led coalition to re-build Iraq. They were described by K.Katzman, an American writer, as "kingmakers in Baghdad" (see. The Kurds in Post-Saddam Iraq , <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS22079.pdf> - ; *Managing Arab-Kurd Tensions in Northern Iraq After the Withdrawal of U.S. Troops* Larry Hanauer, Jeffrey Martini, Omar Al-Shahery, RAND Corporation, 2011; Remarks about Iraq made by then-National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice in 2004 sum up the early hopes which the Kurds had. "What has been impressive to me so far," Rice said, "is that Iraqi's—whether Kurds or Shia or Sunni or the many other ethnic groups in Iraq—have demonstrated that they really want to live as one in a unified Iraq... I think particularly the Kurds have shown a propensity to want to bridge differences that were historic differences in many ways that were fueled by Saddam Hussein and his regime..." . Do 'Syria,' 'Iraq' and 'Lebanon' Still Exist? by Jonathan Spyer, February 2014. <http://www.meforum.org/3751/syria-iraq-lebanon-nation-states>

9 In 2010, Vice President Joe Biden was confidently insisting that Iraq "is going to be one of the great achievements of this administration," lauding Iraqis for "us[ing] the

However, with US withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 things suddenly fell apart. Experts on Iraq attribute this to a multitude of factors: the in-built problems of Iraqi state, the flawed nature of US policy towards the country in post-Saddam Iraq, and the Iranian intervention¹⁰. Nouri al-Maliki, former Iraqi Prime minister (2006-2014), pursued a policy based on sectarianism and totalitarianism. This policy, which put effectively all democratic institutions, built by the US-led coalition in Iraq on halt and established one person rule, had marginalized the Sunni Arabs and alienated the Kurds¹¹. Al-Sahawat forces were dismantled and disarmed after al-Qaeda's defeat. After heavy U.S. pressure, Baghdad accepted to absorb up to 20 percent of al-Sahawat fighters into the security forces, with others to be given government jobs. The disarming of al-Sahawat has left Sunni populations vulnerable in a country where militias are growing increasingly powerful¹².

Al-Maliki's heavy dependence on Iran enabled the latter to establish full hegemony in Iraq's internal affairs. These policies have given rise to large scale Sunni resentment which was organized in form of rallies by al-Hirak al-Shabi (popular Action Committees). This continued in peaceful way from 2012 until it was ended violently by forces loyal to al-Maliki¹³. The latter's unilateralism and centrist policies have also increased Kurds' distrust of the Baghdad government and enhanced separatist tendency

political process, rather than guns, to settle their differences.” (Iran's Shiite Militias Are Running Amok in Iraq | Foreign Policy foreignpolicy.com/2015/.../irans-shiite-militias-are-running-amok-in-iraq...).

- 10 U.S. Policy in Post-Saddam Iraq: Lessons from the British Experience First Edition by Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Michael Eisenstadt, Eric Mathewson (Editors). 2003; What Went Wrong in Iraq | Foreign Affairs, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/.../iraq/.../what->. Iraq: Post-Saddam Governance and Security <https://books.google.iq/books?isbn...> Kenneth Katzman – 2009; The Democracy Boondoggle in Iraq | Foreign Policy, foreignpolicy.com/.../the-democracy-boondog. What went wrong in Iraq? An interview with David Petraeus rudaw.net/english/interview/22.03.2015,
- 11 The Rise of Nouri al-Maliki | World Policy Institute, www.worldpolicy.org/.../rise-nouri-al-maliki; www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/04/28/what-we-left-behind; Al-Maliki Looks at a Third Term in Iraq studies.aljazeera.net/.../201442211509688896.
نوري المالكي.. موسم الخسارة والاحتماء بإيران – الجزيرة
www.aljazeera.net/.../موسم-الخساسة-المالكي-نوري/.
- 12 <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/analysis/2015.10.27/Iraqi-Sunnis-ready-to-fight-ISIS-but-lack-support-tribal-leader.html>
- 13 Iran's Shiite Militias Are Running Amok in Iraq | Foreign Policy, foreignpolicy.com/2015/.../irans-shiite-militias-are-running-amok-in-iraq...

among them. Kurds contend that they have decided of their own free will in 2005 to remain within Iraq. This was based on the understanding that Iraq will be democratic and federal as provided for in the 2005 constitution and Erbil Agreement¹⁴ which were signed between Kurdish and Iraqi leaders with US encouragement. With the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) and its subsequent occupation of most Sunni Arab regions of Iraq, Kurds extending their control to the disputed areas between KRG and Baghdad. Thus the de-facto-division of Iraq into three zones along ethnic and sectarian lines was accomplished.

The current government of Haider al-Abadi, which was formed in September 2014 as a national coalition government,¹⁵ has made some roads against ISIL whose influence seems to be receding. ISIL has lost several key towns since Baghdad and KRG have started fighting back after the devastating offensive of ISIL in 2014¹⁶.

Despite the recent security gains, Iraq remains in a delicate condition. The ISIL still hold 17% of Iraq's territory including Mosul city, the second largest in Iraq. The Sunni Arabs have joined al-Abadi government on the understanding that their following demands will be addressed: 1) the release of thousands of Sunni prisoners held on terror charges (under law No.4 on terror) that human-rights groups said are dubious; 2) the repeal of de-Bathification laws, which are barring ex-supporters of the Saddam Hussein regime from politics and administrative positions; 3) and greater representation in key state institutions such as the military¹⁷. In spite of

14 Sponsored by Masud Barzani, the head of Kurdistan region(KRG) ,and the White House, the agreement was a set of written agreements signed by Maliki, □Allawi, and Barzani on November 11. Collectively known as the *Erbil agreement*, the accords were signed in Erbil in November 2010, Maliki remained as Prime Minister, and Jalal Talibani remained as President. Various Iraqi groups agreed to commit themselves to national reconciliation. Maliki also agreed to address the 19 points Kurdish demands including the implementation of article no.140 of the Iraq constitution with regard to the disputed regions. (See, Khalid Oman ,Sectarianism in Iraq: The Making of State and Nation Since1920 .(New York :Rutledge , 2015).155-56

15 PM Hider al-Abadi: A New Era in Iraq? - Atlantic Council, www.atlanticcouncil.org/.../pm-haider-al-abadi..

16 <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015.12.23/iraq-islamic-state-ramadi/77843676/>.

17 <http://www.wsj.com/articles/fragile-iraqi-government-faces-sunni-demands-for-reforms-1410293505v>

being in power for more than a year al-Abadi has failed so far to meet any of the mentioned demands and Sunni leaders' patience is growing thin and they are gradually losing credibility with their own constituencies.

The defeat of al-Qaeda in Iraq in 2007 did not end the Sunni resentment and the unsettled Sunni grievances provided the fertile ground for spread of ISIL's influence. By withdrawing US forces from Iraq in 2011, Mr. Obama inadvertently helped to consolidate Iranian influence within Iraq and forced an alienated Sunnis to the nearest strongmen. "Alas, that was the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Isis) — al-Qaeda's lethal offspring."¹⁸

The ISIL Defeat and Sunnis

The defeat of ISIL by military means alone will not settle the growing gap between Sunnis and Shiite-dominated regime in Baghdad as well. There are hardly any indications on the horizon that Baghdad government is willing to address Sunni grievances. Al-Abadi, being fettered in his policies towards the Sunnis by the pro-Iranian circles in Baghdad, cannot take any initiative without risking his post. Ali Khedery sums up this state: "The Iraqi government is hopelessly sectarian, corrupt and generally unfit to govern what could be one of the world's most prosperous nations."¹⁹

As time passes Sunni concerns are growing and it has become complex and difficult to address. The National Guard law, for example, which the Sunni National Coalition, has proposed with the US support was not ratified yet in Iraqi parliament. This project is to give the provinces some say in security affairs of their regions and it has been blocked for several months by pro-Iranians Shiite leaders who want to keep the monopoly of having power. In addition, the tens of thousands of Sunni populations of the areas recaptured from ISIL have been barred from returning to their homes. Finally, the process of sectarian cleansing has not been stopped under al-Abadi government²⁰. In fact, the Sunni residents in Baghdad and around, and those of the mixed regions of Diyala province lost all hope of

18 <http://www.foreignpolicy.com> 19-2-2015

19 Ibid

20 Samarra, Amnesty International, October 2014

returning to their homes which have been razed to ground or being resettled by Shiites²¹.

Nevertheless, the sustainability of Iraq as a nation is not beyond redemption .It needs leaders who can initiate bold endeavors and have visions and the will to rise above the narrow sectarian and ethnic tendencies. There are a complex set of political and economic challenges which need to be dealt with. Sherko Kirmanj, an Iraqi writer, has summarized these in the following:

“the political reconciliation between different ethnic and religious groups; laws needed to regulate the distribution of revenue gained from the country’s natural resources; management of Iraq’s oil reserves; resolution of the long-standing territorial dispute between the Kurdistan region and the rest of Iraq, including the fate of the oil-rich areas around Kirkuk...” although these issues pose the greatest threats to Iraq’s stability, no significant practical measures have yet been taken to resolve them. Iraq remains fragile primarily because the underlying sources of instability have yet to be resolved.²²

The Iranian Factor

The foreign policy of Iran towards Iraq in post- Saddam era has an exacerbating impact on the already strained relations between various Iraqi groups. Iran, some analyst believe, was quick to fill the political vacuum which was created by the fall of Saddam’s regime. The withdrawal of US and allied forces from Iraq in 2011, and Obama’s policy of ineffective and low military and diplomatic engagement in Iraq, has enabled Iran to fill the void. ²³. Having depended largely on the Shiites exiled groups to topple Saddam’s government, the US authorities in Iraq were well aware that

21 مصطفى حبيب ، "ما بعد داعش مصير مجهول... فوضى وانتقام" <http://www.niqash.org/ar/articles/security/3633/>

22 Excerpted from Identity and Nation in Iraq, Sherko Kirmanj , Identity and Nation in Iraq - Lynne Rienner Publishers, <https://www.rienner.com/uploads/511e6527daedf.pdf>

23 Iran’s Shiite Militias Are Running Amok in Iraq | Foreign Policy, foreignpolicy.com/2015/.../irans-shiite-militias-are-running-amok-in-iraq...

these groups have close links to Tehran and it cannot rule country to the exclusion of Iran.²⁴ The Shiite groups were instrumental in convincing US-led Coalition Provisional Authorities (CPA) to dismantle Iraqi army and other security forces. This paved the way for the Shiite groups to raise a new army recruited mainly from the Shiite militias which have close and organic link with the revolutionary Guards in Iran²⁵. These militias, which were renamed Iraqis' new regular army, were subsequently trained and well-equipped by the US-led coalition. Thus the US has inadvertently facilitated Iranian takeover of Iraq²⁶. Although the US officials in Iraq tried to make this army inclusive, al-Maliki regime had purged most of its high command Kurdish and Sunni officers²⁷. Today the army and the other federal security forces in the country, for all intent and purposes, is a Shiite one²⁸.

Besides, the formation of al-Hashid Shabi, (Popular mobilization units- PMU) as response to the ISIL threat in Iraq in 2014 has given Iran one more card to strengthen its influence and hegemony in Iraq²⁹. The PMU

24 L. Paul Bremer & Malcolm McConnell: *My Year In Iraq: The Struggle to Build a Future of Hope*, 1st edn. (Canada: Simon & Schuster, January 2006) 165-67

25 Ahmad Chalabi, Iraqi Politician Who Pushed for U.S. ... www.nytimes.com/.../ahmad-chalabi-iraq-dead....

26 Iraq's Armed Forces: An Analytical History - Page 1
<https://books.google.iq/books?isbn=1134145640> ; United States. Congress. Senate. Committee on Armed Services, Independent Commission on the Security Forces of Iraq - 2008 - Snippet view -127-28; Withdrawal from Iraq: Assessing the Readiness of Iraqi ...<https://books.google.iq/books?isbn=0892065532> Anthony H. Cordesman, Adam Mausner - 2009

27 Chiyuki Aoi. Legitimacy and the Use of Armed Force: Stability Missions in the Post-Cold Era, (New York: Routledge, 2011).127-28

28 الجيش-العراقي-رحلة-التحول-من-جيش-الأمة/ <http://altagreer.com/> What's wrong with the Iraqi army? - CNN.com ; www.cnn.com/2015/05/.../iraqi-army-explaine...

29 The PMUs maintain between 60,000 and 90,000 men under arms on a rotating basis. Indeed, the concept of al-Hashd al-Shaabi was launched not by the state but by a so called al-wajib al-kifai fatwa issued in June 2014 by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq's most influential Shia leader. The Popular Mobilization Committee was headed by Jamal Jaafar Mohammad, better known by his nom de guerre Abu Mahdi al-Mohandis, a former Badr commander. Mohandis is the right-hand man of Qasem Soleimani, head of the Quds Force., it is becoming increasingly influential in shaping the Iraqis' future. Most of the groups followed a call to arms by Iraq's leading Shiite sheikh Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. But Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader of Iran, had also an important in the decision to PMU. (see , Renad Mansour "from militia to

is an ideologically motivated group of militias which have been fashioned after Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Basij. They have been effective in evicting ISIL fighters from many of its strongholds. Elite PMU leaders are supported by Iranian Revolutionary Guards and Lebanese Hezbollah, who supply them with intelligence, advisors, logistics, and weapons. This has given them an edge over the Iraq's regular army. Beyond the fighting, the groups within PMUs are gaining popular influence among the Shiites and could become a major political force, with members benefiting from their association with battlefield successes³⁰.

Hadi al-Aamiri, leader of the "Badr" group of the Iraqi parliament, is the supreme leader of the PMU. He does not shy away from the close ties which exist between his militias and Iranian Quds Force commander Qasim Suleimani³¹. In an interview with Asharq al-Awsat newspaper, he said, "The Iranian advisers accompany us on the battlefield and give us the best counseling, and we are proud of them, because they will help us to liberate the provinces of Nineveh and al-Anbar fully after we liberate Tikrit and Kirkuk,..." he continued. He is critical of those who oppose their presence in Iraq. "For without them and without Qasem Suleiman, Iraq would be under ISIS rule." He adds³² Ali Khedery expresses his surprise

state force: the transformation of al-hashd al-shaabi " , <http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrisis/?fa=61986> monday, november 16, 2015, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/hashd-al-shaabi.htm>; A New Controversial Actor in... - Ortadoğu Stratejik,(Report)ANewControversialActorinPost-ISILIraq:Al-HashdAl-Shaabi,Bilgay Duman, <http://bit.ly/KhXURx> ; أذرع إيران تهيئ أرضية احتلال العراق في مرحلة ما بعد داعش; www.ankawa.com

30 Iranian Influence in Iraq: Between Balancing and Hezbollahization? *Michael Knights, Phillip Smyth, and Ahmed Ali* , www.washingtoninstitute.org/.../iraq-and-iranian-influence-between-bala...

31 Qasim Solaymani promoted to the rank of Major General in 2011, the highest rank in the Revolutionary Guards, who is actual ruler of Iraq. The New York Times newspaper published in October 2012 wrote about Soleimani and considered him to be the architect of Iran's foreign policy initiatives, namely: exercise and expand Tehran's influence in the internal political affairs of Iraq, and to provide military support to the regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

32 "Iran Deepening Involvement in Iraq's War on ISIS" <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/192583#VpSjwrZ97IU> ; Qasim Soleimani. promoted to the rank of Major General in 2011, the highest rank in the Revolutionary Guards, he is the actual ruler of Iraq according to The New York Times, October 3 / October 2012. Soleimani who is termed by NEW YORKER as "the Black Prince" "is believed to be

that in spite of this apparent link between Iran and PMU and the other Iraqi security forces, “The United States is now acting as the air force, the armory, and the diplomatic cover for Iraqi militias that are committing some of the worst human rights abuses on the planet. These are “allies” that are actually beholden to our strategic foe, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and which often resort to the same vile tactics as the Islamic State itself”³³.

Iran views its control of Iraq through Shiites militias as a step towards broader hegemonic policies in the Middle East. “Today we see signs of the Islamic revolution being exported throughout the region, from Bahrain to Iraq and from Syria to Yemen and North Africa,” Suleiman said to Semi-official Fars news agency on Feb.12.2105. Furthermore, PMU serves as a convenient tool to the process of Hezbollization of Iraq.

There is no reason to believe that the militias will disarm and disband after ISIL’s defeat. In fact, they are beyond Abadi government control and mostly loyal to al- Maliki who coordinate with Iranian in running them³⁴. Indeed, with the central government weaker than ever, and a lot of oil wealth up for grabs, and the absence of a large US military there to constrain them, the militias have more incentive than ever to stay in business. It is in Iran’s strategic interest to use these militias to consolidate its gains over Iraq and the Middle East to advance its ambitions for regional hegemony, “which Iranian commanders are now publicly flaunting. Iraq is the new, much larger, much wealthier Lebanon, and its battle-hardened militias are the new, much larger, much wealthier Hezbollah”³⁵.

behind major initiatives in Iran’s foreign policy, in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.(See , The Shadow Commander - The New Yorker

www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013.09.30/the-shadow-commander

33 Iran’s Shiite Militias Are Running Amok in Iraq | Foreign Policy, foreignpolicy.com/2015/.../irans-shiite-militias-are-running-amok-in-iraq...

34 “لما لكي والعامري يقودان حملة لإسقاط العبادي ويوظفان الحشد...” www.sotaliraq.com/mobile-news.php?id=193939

35 Iranian Influence in Iraq: Between Balancing and Hezbollahzation? *Michael Knights, Phillip Smyth, and Ahmed Ali* <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/experts/view/knights-michael>

Iraq's Future Option as a Nation

Analysts familiar with Iraq paint a dim and gloomy picture for the future for Iraq. "The post-IS era will not be any less dangerous than the organization itself," independent Iraqi politician, Wael Abdul-Latif, told NIQASH. The ISIL group will be driven underground, Abdul-Latif thinks but after this there will be further conflict – about borders, money and power. After all the ISIL group itself has taken many "actions – some deliberate, some coincidental – that have worsened existing rifts in Iraq's social structure. These won't go away just because the group does". Iraqi Kurdish politicians have said the same thing in a different way, pointing out that Iraq cannot return to the state it was in before the fall of Mosul on 10th of June 2014 to ISIL. This has been in reference to Iraq's "disputed territories". These are areas that the Kurds say belong to their autonomous region but which the federal authorities in Baghdad say belong to Iraq proper.³⁶

Perhaps the newest challenge to emerge in Kirkuk is the tension between the predominately Shia Hashd al-Shaabi and the Kurdish-led administration. The PMUs have been gradually working their way up the Baghdad-Kirkuk road since September 2014, liberating Shia Turkmen towns which were overrun earlier by ISIL and "garrisoning Sunni settlements with a heavy hand"³⁷. In addition, Masud Barzani said in a meeting in 2015, "We do not need Hashdi Shabi and if we were in need, we would tell them". His comments followed recent remarks made by Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi that the PMU represent all Iraqis and they should free to operate any where they want.³⁸

The options for future of Iraq in post-ISIL era are limited and it ranges between keeping the present Federal regime, creating loose confederation, and partition along ethnic and sectarian line. Even before the rise of al-Maliki to power and the emergence of ISIL, several people have put forward formulas to enable Iraqis to live together to prevent control of power by one sect or ethnicity. Joe Biden , the current vice president of US

36 مصطفی حبيب ، "ما بعد داعش مصير مجهول...فوضى وانتقام" ، <http://www.niqash.org/ar/articles/security/3633/>

37 "Kirkuk foreshadows challenges for a post-ISIL Iraq" - www.aljazeera.com/.../kirkuk-foreshadows-challenges-post-isil-iraq-150..

38 <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/hashd-al-shaabi.htm>

and the then senior Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee proposed in January 2006 that Iraq be divided into three separate regions — Kurdish, Shiite and Sunni — with a central government in Baghdad. In an op-ed essay edition of *The New York Times*, Sen. Joseph Biden, D-Del., wrote that the idea “is to maintain a united Iraq by decentralizing it, giving each ethno-religious group ... room to run its own affairs, while leaving the central government in charge of common interests.”³⁹ Biden and co-writer Leslie H. Gelb, acknowledged the opposition, by many Iraqis to their suggestion and said the Sunnis “have to be given money to make their oil-poor region viable. The Constitution must also be amended to guarantee Sunni some privileges as “sweetener”. The rationale which was given in their joint op-ed essay edition was a historical one:

A decade ago, Bosnia was torn apart by ethnic cleansing and facing its demise as a single country. After much hesitation, the United States stepped in decisively with the Dayton Accords, which kept the country whole by, paradoxically, dividing it into ethnic federations, even allowing Muslims, Croats and Serbs to retain separate armies. With the help of American and other forces, Bosnians have lived a decade in relative peace and are now slowly strengthening their common central government, including disbanding those separate armies last year.

Only three year later, Ivan Eland , an American scholar wrote a book called *Partitioning for Peace: An Exit Strategy for Iraq*, (Oakland,CA: Independent Institute, 2009) in which the author called for a negotiated partition (soft partition) of Iraq into a confederation of autonomous regions, with a weak central government. Eland defended his view by arguing that an artificial country, such as Iraq, with a history of one ethno-sectarian group commandeering the government and using it to oppress the other groups, a weak central government would make all groups feel more secure and lead to greater stability. He also predicted that if Iraq were not partitioned softly, it would be face partition by war (a hard partition). The author acknowledges that partition will not be easy, and he offers 15 guidelines for

39 Unity Through Autonomy in Iraq by Joseph R. Biden Jr. and Leslie H. Gelb, Published: May 1, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006.05.01/opinion/01biden.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0;usatoday.com - Biden: Split Iraq into 3 different regions usatoday30.usatoday.com/.../2006-05-01-biden.

those seeking a confederation modeled after the European Union.⁴⁰

Marco Vicenzino, a writer of the *Huntington Post*, half-a decade after Biden's mentioned suggestion, asks for more decentralization than Biden and Gelb had asked for Iraq. He writes: "In historical hindsight, one cannot exclude the possibility that Iraq is already beyond the point of no return. De-facto partition may already exist and fragmentation is irreversible. In fact, the line may have been crossed some time ago rendering futile current efforts to maintain national unity". The writer suggests that the current Iraqi constitution to be amended to make Iraq "confederation". However, he cautions against the partition option and recommends that Iraq to be reorganized as a "loose confederation" of autonomous provinces with considerable decision-making powers.⁴¹ The editorial board of *Bloomberg Review* expresses a similar caution and argues that should Iraq to be partitioned, Baghdad government would easily fall under the sway of Iran, which is involved in a sort of proxy war for regional hegemony with Saudi Arabia and its Gulf-state allies and Turkey. An independent Kurdistan, on its part, would face threats and aggression from its neighbors and have to be dependent on the U.S. for its security. Furthermore, the US and international community would be forced to intervene to mediate conflicts between Kurd and central government over control of oil fields and Kirkuk. As for the Sunni areas the writer has this to say: "Even assuming Islamic State is defeated, they would remain a hotbed of discontent and a potential safe haven for al-Qaeda and other Sunni terrorist groups".⁴²

However, others have suggested outright partition of Iraq and consider Iraq a failed state and the "borders of blood" have been already drawn. As early as 2006 Peter W. Galbraith wrote a book titled, "the End of Iraq", the writer called for immediate partition of Iraq. Galbraith, who have been involved in US policy on Iraq, concludes that the breakup of Iraq is a *fait accompli* and he maintains that this is due to a large extent to the miscalculated policies and mismanagement of Iraq by the American after

40 Partitioning for Peace: An Exit Strategy for Iraq
www.independent.org/store/book.asp?id=79

41 Iraq's Muddled Future | Marco Vicenzino - *Huffington Post*
www.huffingtonpost.com/marco.../iraqs-muddled-future_b_7081106.ht..

42 Ramadi's Fall, Obama's Strategy, Iraq's Future - *Bloomberg*.
www.bloombergview.com/...05.../obama-s-iraq-strategy-needs-attentio

the occupation of the country. As for Shiites, the writer thinks they will try to get as much as they could to rule as their own of state to the exclusion of the Sunnis. He writes, “In short, an independent Kurdistan, a theocratic south, militias, sectarian control of the police and the army—all are facts of life”⁴³. He says Kurdistan’s “independence could be more like Czechoslovakia’s’ velvet divorce than Yugoslavia wars”⁴⁴

Recently more American and western political and military leaders, who have been involved in Iraq, have come to the same conclusion that Galbrath did in 2006. For instance, General Raymond Odierno, US Army’s former chief of staff, warned that reconciliation between Shiites and Sunnis in Iraq is becoming harder and that partitioning the country “might be the only solution.”⁴⁵ Some has argued that attempts by the US to keep Iraq a united country is as futile as it was to keep fighting in South Vietnam to prevent the inevitable fall of Saigon to the communist north. It is futile because the Shiite militias and their Iranian backer are the ones who are dictating the policy on the ground not the US and al-Abadi.⁴⁶

43 The End of Iraq: How American Incompetence Created a War Without End . (NYC : Simon & Schuster,2006) 214

44 Ibid 216.

45 Departing US army chief says Iraq may have to be partitioned
news.yahoo.com/departing-us-army-chief-says-iraq-may-partitioned-19182...

46 <http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/obama-fall-saigon>; Ali Khderly writes, “Despite Washington’s delusions and countless Americans’ sacrifices, Saigon was eventually overrun by Chinese-backed communists — just as Baghdad has already been overrun by Iranian-backed Shiite militias advancing Islamic rule”. (See Iran’s Shiite Militias Are Running Amok in Iraq | Foreign Policy foreignpolicy.com/2015/.../irans-shiite-militias-are-running-amok-in-iraq...; Prime Minister Abadi and senior members of his cabinet, including Finance Minister Hoshyar Zebari and Oil Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi, genuinely represent the finest of Iraq’s technocratic, nationalist political elite. However, they simply do not have the critical mass to overcome the hard-liners within their own government, let alone the Iranians.

Conclusion

Iraq's colonial history and the series of repressive dictatorial regimes have denied its citizens to develop a national consciousness and a pluralistic culture to enable its various constituencies to live together in harmony. The US-led coalition's administration policies in post-Saddam were ill-conceived and it had further exacerbated the differences within the country. The Islamic Republic of Iran was quick to avail itself of the short comings of US policies to use it in establishing its hegemony in Iraq. With their country falling under total Iranian tutelage and control through the use of its influence with Shiite political groups and the security apparatus in, Sunnis Arabs and Kurds have very few options: 1) to succumb to this reality and accept their status to be relegated to a status similar to that of their counter parts living in the Islamic Republic ; 2) or resort to US-led coalition and the recently founded Saudi-led Islamic Military Alliance for protection and helping them to establish their own federal regions within Iraq ; 3) and ask US to take more assertive role in Iraq to roll back Iranian influence. This involves bringing back more US troops and advisors to Iraq .The al-Abadi government and pro-Shiite groups have already rejected this strongly and Obama's administration policy of "no more boots on the ground and no new American wars" makes this option unrealizable too. Either, the Sunnis and the Kurds have to wait for Republican to come to power in US to take a forward policy in Iraq to curb Iranian influence. Or they have to convince the US and the international community, through the Saudi-led Islamic Alliance, to convene an international conference similar to that of Dayton on Bosnia. None of these are easy to pursue but they are the least of the worse. The alternative to these will be that of leaving Iraq to bleed and create unstable circumstances with potential for regional wars.

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