IRAQ AT A CROSSROADS

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IRAQ AT A CROSSROADS

Beware; for I am fearless, and therefore powerful.
—**Mary Shelley,** *Frankenstein*

Back in December 2014, Casa Árabe and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung held the seminar *Iraq at a crossroads*, with the participation of a heterogeneous group of Middle East analysts and observers. A year before we had organized, with the participation of FRIDE, another important seminar on the state of affairs in Syria. It is clear that both countries have had their fates sealed by the dismemberment of state institutions and the power vacuum spurred by autocratic rule and badly planned foreign interventions.

A pause is needed to reflect upon the major mistakes of the 2003 US-led invasion and its aftermath: the marginalization of Sunni Arabs, the failure to "win hearts and minds" (George W. Bush *dixit*) and the collapse of Iraq as a nation-state however artificial its colonial origins and binding might have been. Enter the rise of violent jihadism, Al-Qaida and its newest brethren Islamic State (Daesh, ISIL, ISIS or simply IS): a non-state actor which wraps Iraq and Syria in its utopian political project, a pseudo-caliphate that embraces Iraq and the Levant with savage and post-modern methods and an ability to attract, absorb and transform new members.

After the fall of Mosul in June 2014 and the self-proclamation of the IS caliphate, the situation has become more alarming than ever. The forces that are playing and redrawing the lines in the sand will remain in Iraq and Syria for years to come, if not decades. The international order inherited from the First World War is all but history. Neighbors such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey are – and should be – extremely wary of IS expansion. Lebanon is also in the eye of the storm. The profusion of non-state actors is mind-boggling, just like their complex relations with Gulf countries, Russia, the US and Iran, to name

the most important. Actors such as the Popular Mobilization Forces *(al-Hashd al-Shaabi)*, sponsored by Baghdad and Tehran, or the Army of Islam (*Jaysh al-Islam*), funded by Saudi Arabia, offer a case in point.

The balance of power on the ground is in constant turmoil. Fresh IS recruits come from as far as Australia or France but also from closer grounds like Tunisia and Yemen. Affiliates which now pledge allegiance to the Daesh flag have mushroomed in the area and beyond: Egypt, Libya, Somalia, Nigeria, Kenya, Afghanistan. On the other side, the Kurds seem to be constantly "skipping the rope", negotiating their positions in Syria, Iraq and in a more traumatic manner, with Turkey. The assertive role of Iran in this real "game of thrones" is to be reckoned with, whilst the US and other Western actors appear more like disoriented gamblers betting in a frenzied horserace.

Sectarianism, another subject explored in-depth by Casa Árabe and published in its bi-annual journal *Awraq* (No. 8, 2nd semester, 2013), has exponentially grown from theological differences and geopolitical struggle to situations of fully-fledged religious war. The *takfiris*, the so-called Muslims who follow a Salafi-Wahhabi interpretation of Islam deeply impregnated in IS, easily accuse other Muslims (and other "people of the Book") of apostasy and obliterate lives accordingly. In addition, the role of media networks and the propaganda machine that has been perfected by IS fans the flames by showing off its bloody exploits like trophies.

Islamic State has found a fertile ground to expand its ideology in underdeveloped areas such as Raqqah and Deir ez-Zor in Syria, but also in Iraqi provinces such as Mosul or al-Anbar. Its draconian but pragmatic approach to achieve law and order seems to be successful in some areas, in comparison to Baghdad's previous dismal governance. For instance, reports from Mosul indicate an improvement in services under IS rule: electricity supply, food markets, distribution of oil derivatives have been re-established. It's a strategy of gaining legitimacy that is fear-induced but result-oriented.

At the same time, Shia militancy and its armed offshoots, which pre-dated the 2003 US-led invasion, have multiplied over the last decade and flexed their muscles. Hezbollah in Lebanon is a major player; in Iraq, the above-mentioned Popular Mobilization Forces, the League of the Righteous *(Asaeb Ahlil Haq)* or even the now co-opted Badr Brigade, which hardly receive any media attention, may be useful examples of this changing balance of power. On June 13, 2014, Ayatollah al-Sistani issued a historic *fatwa* calling Iraqi citizens to defend Iraq from IS. The "fatwalization" of public space is a well-established reality on both sides, further complicated by the fact that Sunnis lack a proper hierarchy in the issuing of religious edicts.

With plentiful of military and financial resources to fuel these centrifugal forces – in sharp contrast with the austerity imposed on a large part of the world economy – dangerous fragmentation is more ominous than the Iraqi 2006-07 conflagration initiated with the bombing of al-Askari shrine in Samarra. The humanitarian cost is stranger to no one, both the result of decades of war and sanctions in Iraq and the fresher hemorrhage in Syria. Deep mental health problems in the region, affecting both victims and victimizers, remain understudied but should also be highlighted.

In this shifting context, publishing this collection of articles became a question of urgency. Some chapters tackle the Iraqi conundrum by delving deep into current affairs, while others take a few steps back to bring in some historical perspective. In our view, they complement one another to give us a better insight, although the final picture might still come across as blurry, due to the evolving nature of the conflict.

With its blunt protagonist role, it is not hard to understand why most of these articles gravitate around Islamic State, despite the fact that finding reliable sources to explain what goes on inside Daesh is a very difficult task. Its brutal leader and self-proclaimed caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, remains shrouded in darkness like a villain from Star Wars, except that instead of special effects we are fed harrowing images of real inhumane actions widely distributed on the Internet. *Terror 2.0*. The Pandora Box has been opened.

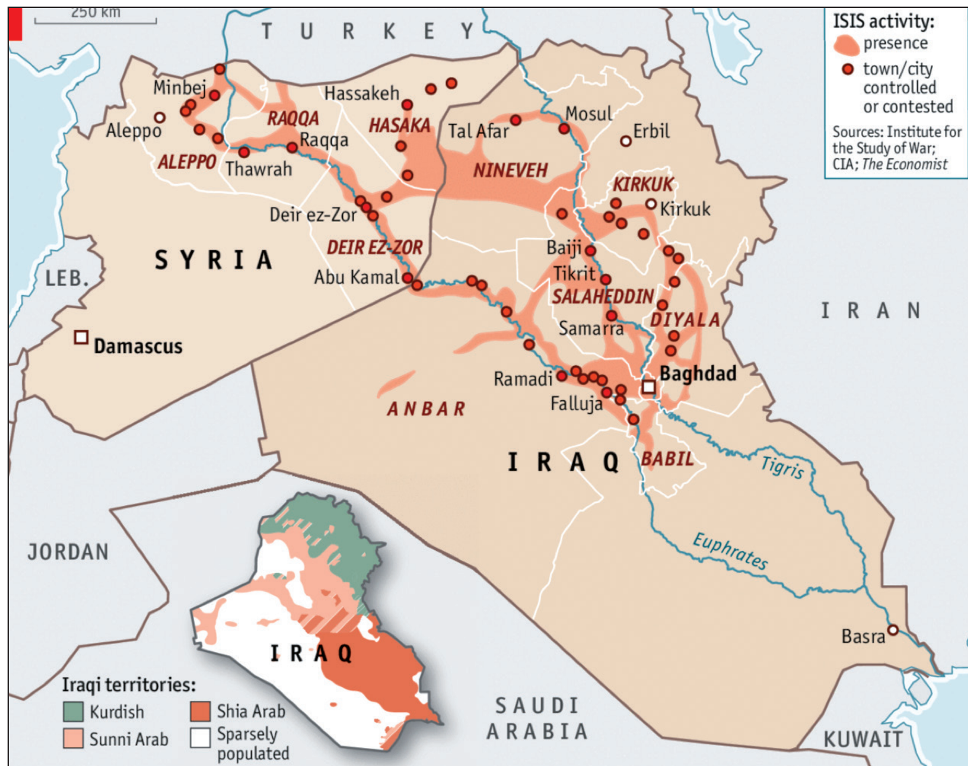
What is certain is that domestic, regional and international dynamics have all contributed to bringing about such a disastrous outcome. Another conclusion is that regional states, encouraged by international patrons, implemented dysfunctional development models, forced identity politics on their diverse populations, promoted corruption and endemic repression and ended up creating marginalized minorities and disenfranchised peoples that have given rise to powerful non-state actors. These mutating organizations have jumped at the opportunity that others neglected.

Fighting ISIS will require time, resources, boots on the ground, creative options and narratives to lure would-be recruits, and probably the ironic twist of fate of encouraging continuity in Damascus. Mostly, it will require addressing the root causes behind the emergence of this phenomenon, rather than solely focusing on the symptoms.

The chapters in this volume follow this order: the internal (Sunni, Shia, Kurds) followed by the regional (Iran, Syria, Turkey) and international (US, EU) dimensions and a final reflection on the humanitarian aspects. We have deliberately left the authors use the different terminologies to refer to this terror organization, as we believe the least of problems in dealing with IS is deciding how to call it.

The Spanish version of this publication will hopefully include a chapter on the Gulf's role in this conundrum and will be published in *Awraq*, during 2016. Many thanks to our original contributors and to those who joined at a later stage, as well as to María Pallares from Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Barah Mikaïl from FRIDE who helped organize the seminar.

Karim Hauser
Head of Governance, Casa Árabe
Madrid, September 2015



Source: The Economist, June 16, 2014.
Available in: http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2014/06/daily-chart-9

DAESH: A LONG DECADE OF SUNNI ARAB ALIENATION IN IRAQ AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Myriam Benraad[1]

Is Islamic State's expansion in the Middle East and the broader Arab and Muslim world still likely to be contained? This uneasy question has, for months, lingered in all minds. Indeed, while the international coalition led by the United States announced until recently significant setbacks inflicted on the jihadist group, now the first world terrorist threat, in May 2015 its combatants seized the two towns of Ramadi in Iraq and Palmyra in Syria. Daesh[2] today controls forty per cent of Iraqi territory (Al-Anbar, Nineveh and Salahaddin provinces) and over fifty per cent of Syria (Deir Ezzor, Raqqah, Hasakah, Aleppo and Hama). In addition to spectacular attacks, its members have shown their absolute determination to complete both their regional and global "caliphate". Western capitals, for their part, are overcome by this inexorable advance and deeply confused as to the means required to fight against this phenomenon. Pondering the limits of the strategy implemented so far would provide a better understanding of the nature of the enemy, which is far from obvious despite the abundance of information available since the beginning of the crisis. Beyond its numerous despicable atrocities, Islamic State remains a highly political, ideological and even socio-cultural entity, whose roots can be traced back to the context of the conflict borne out of the Iraq War in 2003.

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2 Acronym of the Arabic *Dawla islamiyya fi al-'Iraq wa al-Sham* (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant), used in the Iraqi-Levantine dialect for several years and today commonplace in the West to refer to the group.

With impressive speed, the group has succeeded in transcending its original base to export itself across borders.

In its wake, Daesh has also triggered an unprecedented sequence of instability in the region, where the colliding trajectory of Sunni Arabs, faced with the irrepressible rise of Iran and Shia forces, has yet to see its final outcome. In Iraq, Sunni Arabs have been relegated to the background of a political transition more widely condemned by the Iraqis. They desperately sought ways to avert their fate and eventually inducted Islamic State as an instrument of collective revenge. In addition to their fight against the United States, deliberately re-attracted to Iraqi soil, the jihadists have placed in the foreground of their armed struggle the Shia and Iran, considered "disbelievers" and equally responsible for the status of pariahs that Sunni Arabs have been confined to. Regional powers, in turn, are divided in the face of this "Frankenstein", which they have sometimes directly helped to create and which is now catching up with them. For Daesh is also the monstrous infant of the wars that neighbouring states of Iraq and Syria have waged for several years, one that has brought together the disaffected, marginalised and dispossessed of all stripes.

Without a detailed and documented analysis of the phenomenon unfolding before our very eyes, of its complexity and of the tangled web of responsibilities, connivance and calculations it covers, no way out of the crisis can reasonably be envisaged. If the answer is necessarily global, it will above all depend on the normalisation, or at least the evolution, of the situation of Sunni Arabs in Iraq and other countries in the Middle East.

Deep Sunni Arab resentment

Since 2003, the question of Sunni Arab participation has never ceased to poison the entire transition in Iraq. From the beginning of the occupation, because of the choice made by US civil administrator Paul Bremer to proceed with the blind dismantling of the Iraqi army and the dissolution of the Baath party, many Sunni Arabs found themselves excluded from Iraqi political life and institutions without any hope of a turnaround. In 2015, the effects of their stigmatisation and marginalisation have become nearly insurmountable. Nevertheless, to guarantee genuine political change in Baghdad, Washington deemed it necessary to transfer power from this "dominant minority" (20 to 30 per cent of the population) to the Shia and Kurdish "dominated majority". De-Baathification, largely copied on the denazification of Germany in 1945, was emblematic of this desire to build a wholly new order, but immediately assimilated by its targets to the "de-Sunnification" of Iraq. Indeed, these measures reduced Sunni Arabs to an inferior status, coupled with military operations of rare intensity in all Sunni Arab regions (including those that were not directly related to the Baath party) that laid the groundwork for the ultimate disaster named Daesh.

Ten years before the jihadist assault on Mosul, Iraq's second largest city known for its religious conservatism, the two battles of Fallujah, in the western sanctuary of the insurgency, led to a massive Sunni Arab electoral boycott. Any participation was then seen as legitimising not only foreign occupation but also its partners, referred to as "collaborators". In January 2005, the first elections were thus marked by widespread abstention from voting

among Sunni Arabs, both out of anger and under the pressure of hardened insurgents. Shia Islamists and Kurdish nationalists emerged triumphant from this critical political episode, while Sunni Arabs confirmed their greater insulation.

The drafting of a new constitution in the summer of 2005 only accentuated this trend, to the extent that underrepresented Sunni Arabs were blamed for most of the crimes attributed to the former despot. In October the same year, two thirds of Al-Anbar and Salahaddin governorates rejected the text, while Sunni Arab fighters – nationalists, Islamists or those nostalgic for the old authoritarian order – started to radicalise and move closer to Salafist spheres. Concurrently, Al-Qaeda in Iraq made the struggle against the United States and Shia "apostates" its priority objective. This sectarianisation culminated during the clashes of 2006 in confrontations involving Sunni insurgents and Shia militias in Baghdad – a symbol of Islam's past glory that the jihadists wish to restore at all costs, even through the use of the most extreme and abject violence.

Following this outbreak of violence, the years 2007 and 2008 were characterised by a rather brief interlude of hope for Sunni Arabs with the emergence of the tribal "Awakening" (*Sahwa*), in which many Sunni sheikhs cooperated with US troops. Nevertheless, Sunni Arabs remained on the margin of the political system, entirely rooted in Shia dominance, while the Kurds strengthened their autonomy in the north. Once "transferred" to the Iraqi government, the Sunni Arab tribes that rose up against the Islamic State of Iraq (in its initial form, proclaimed for the first time in the fall of 2006), were stalked by Baghdad, neither willing to integrate them into the military apparatus, nor ready to concede any political representation to their leaders. At that stage, nothing stood any longer in the way of former Baathists and Salafists to present themselves as the only representatives of Sunni Arabs, the guarantors of their future in Iraq and in the Middle East, "besieged" by "miscreant" interferences. Among the self-proclaimed protectors of Sunni Arab populations was Islamic State, which, albeit weakened by tribal resistance and US counter-insurgency, had not said its last word.

In early 2010, on the eve of symbolic elections (the last held under occupation), Sunni Arabs wished to believe again that a return to Baghdad was possible and relied on the secular Shia candidate Iyad Allawi, leader of the Iraqi National Movement (Iraqiyya), a pluri-communal platform, to express their many grievances. Their confidence was, however, scuttled when, following months of stalemate and fruitless talks, the Shia Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, invested in 2006, refused to endorse his opponent's victory, undertook a quasi-coup and concentrated all powers while reactivating de-Baathification – from then on, his rivals all became "Baathists" and "terrorists". For Sunni Arabs, this was the last straw and a terrible humiliation: although won through the ballot box and thus perfectly legitimate, their victory had been stolen from them.

Iraqiyya did not survive this snub and declined, eventually falling apart under the weight of al-Maliki's political manoeuvres and those of his allies, anxious to thwart the resurgence of a potentially threatening Sunni Arab constituency in Iraq. Allawi, for his part, left behind him a population scalded by the government's discriminatory and repressive policies, and eager to challenge al-Maliki by all means possible.

From protest to armed jihad

Baghdad's anti-Sunni campaign peaked in December 2011 when the Supreme Court issued an arrest warrant against Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, a leading figure and member of the Iraqi Muslim Brotherhood. Accused of terrorist activities, the latter went into exile, first in Kurdistan and later in Turkey. All the Sunni Arab provinces were placed under surveillance, while al-Maliki reduced the scope of their prerogatives by deploying the army, police and security forces. Economic projects were intentionally slowed down in these territories. Once again, Sunni Arabs failed to organise a viable opposition, allowing al-Maliki to act as he saw fit. In December 2012, however, the bodyguards of Sunni Arab Finance Minister Rafi al-Issawi, a native of Al-Anbar, were arrested. This was the breaking point, which instigated a large protest movement among Sunni Arabs.

Initially peaceful, this movement called for both a reform of de-Baathification, which had relentlessly targeted civilian populations, and for a less overwhelming presence of Baghdad in provincial affairs. While some expected a dialogue with al-Maliki, Sunni Arabs already contemplated a territorial and political secession on the basis of their identity, no longer believing in reconciliation nor in their own political representatives. Rather, it was the local leaders, tribal and religious (such as imam Abd al-Malik al-Saadi, whose fatwas were followed for some time) who attempted mediation. Yet, in April 2013, al-Maliki dispatched Iraqi security forces to crush a camp of protesters in Hawija, in the province of Kirkuk. Through this blind use of force, the Prime Minister sounded the death knell for any serious negotiation with Sunni Arabs. In mid-2013, the protest movement subsequently turned into a new insurgency.

Such militarisation obviously served the rise of more radical formations calling for an armed revolt, some Salafist-jihadist, others neo-Baathist – such as the Army of the Men of the Naqshbandi Order (*Jaysh Rijal al-Ṭariqa an-Naqshabandiya*), created in 2006 in the aftermath of Saddam Hussein's hanging and led by his late deputy Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri.

Active in the north of Iraq and in Syria, a number of jihadists and Baathists joined Daesh very early on, which did not in fact mean that the whole Sunni Arab community supported the group's ideology and ultraviolent methods. Populations had largely rejected the first Islamic State of Iraq in 2006, but simmering discontent among Sunni Arabs in 2013 offered the jihadists a new opportunity to build popularity and expand their influence. At the end of the year, the ingredients of a vast Sunni Arab uprising were in place, and raging war in Syria allowed the Islamic State's Iraqi vanguard to export its project beyond the border and capitalise on similar Sunni Arab resentment in this country. A transnational impetus of ethno-sectarian solidarity took shape against the two regimes of Baghdad and Damascus.

Daesh is therefore not only a terrorist group; it is also a direct outcome of Iraq's advanced decay and, to a lesser extent, of the neighbouring Syrian conflict. The Sunni Arab question in Iraq has remained unresolved for more than a decade and ended up pushing Sunni Arabs into the arms of the most brutal player on the field, the one which, in this case, promised them a reversal of their condition and the satisfaction of all their demands. Daesh is not, as has often been said and written, an outgrowth of the war in Syria; it is in Iraq that

the group historically appeared, and it is also in Iraq that its heteroclite elite formed itself: longstanding Salafists, embittered former Baathists, officers and paramilitaries, all of whom converged toward a project, the so-called "caliphate," stamped with the seal of instant and timeless Sunni revenge.

Genuine popular anchorage

The limits of the coalition's operations targeted at Daesh since 2014 have much to do with this strong local anchorage, which led to the fall of Fallujah, Mosul and numerous other cities. In most cases, an agreement was made ahead between tribes, notables and jihadists, to "liberate" territories against what was perceived as "occupation" by the Iraqi army, following that of the US military. In Syria, the leaders of Islamic State were able to convince Sunni Arab populations in the border provinces of the rightness of their design, particularly as the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad intensified its repression and the ranks of the opposition crumbled. Many armed factions tended either to side with Daesh for the sake of tactical victory against the regime, its allies and Iran, or to continue fighting in other lands as yet unconquered.

As a result, when Islamic State launched its conquest, it was on favourable ground. The first factor to its success was unprecedented dissatisfaction among Sunni Arabs with the centres of power, mixed, in the case of Iraq, with the mourning of an era when a faction of Sunni Arabs controlled the state apparatus and the sense that Shia only sought to erase Sunnism. From this standpoint, Daesh was seen as the instrument, although openly barbaric, to recapture power and "re-Sunnify" Iraq. Such an evolution contrasted with the nationalist discourse that Sunni Arabs had traditionally embraced. Islamic State cleverly exploited resentment in the regions it penetrated to garner popular support (or at least a passive attitude from the population), while at first offering repentance to the tribes that had formerly allied themselves with the US and the Iraqi authorities.

Once established, Islamic State strove to win hearts and minds by replicating a strategy used by many other Islamist groups: restoring security, justice and basic services (electricity, drinking water and sewage), creating jobs, fighting corruption. The quest for security and justice was particularly vivid among Sunni Arabs, repressed and virtually stripped of their citizenship by the central government. In 2013, just before the final assault, sixty per cent of Sunni Arabs in Iraq had lost confidence in the existing judicial system, while eighty per cent of Mosul's residents did not feel safe faced with an army that had multiplied checkpoints, extorted local inhabitants and maintained shortage. Sunni Arabs also feared Shia militias coming to their neighbourhoods – including the Popular Mobilisation Forces, *al-Hashd al-Shaabi*, comprising between 60,000 and 120,000 men – sponsored by Baghdad and Tehran. In this environment, Daesh was primarily seen by a majority of Sunni Arabs as a remedy for all ills.

At the same time, adhesion to the so-called "caliphate" has substantially differed from one region to the other, and diminished as the abuses committed by jihadists have spread. A number of Sunni Muslims, including insurgent forces like the Islamic Army in Iraq, which repeatedly refused to swear allegiance to Islamic State's emir Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, have

never identified with the rigid and quasi-totalitarian view of Sunni Islam that the group advocates and have therefore bore the brunt of its violence. Many accounts show that Sunni Arabs do not all consent to the jihadist project and have opposed the centralisation of religious and political authority within a single entity; their submission to Daesh is, in most instances, purely circumstantial and intended to escape death. Similarly, the security and development strategy enforced by jihadists has come across certain obstacles. In addition to their exactions and regime of terror (which, in practice, very few cope with in the regions they control), jihadists did not keep most of their promises. All in all, Sunni Arabs are much divided, both about the notion of a caliphate and what a "post-Islamic State" would actually mean. This reality is not alien to the essence and traditions of Sunni Islam itself, in which the concept of authority has always been fragmented, unlike Shiism which is more centralised.

On the one hand, a significant proportion of Sunni Arabs continues to support Islamic State for reasons that oscillate from ideological and political membership to the lack of credible alternatives; Sunni Arab politicians have, for the most part, lost all legitimacy because of their past alignment with the government, notably during the 2012-2013 protests, or conversely their failure to protect their fellow citizens from the jihadist shockwave. Accordingly, to suggest greater "inclusion" of Sunni Arabs in the existing political process is delusionary in many respects, all the more as only a fraction of Sunni Arabs consider a return to national politics. On the other hand, a growing number of Sunni Arabs reject the Islamic State and call for arming men and tribes willing to expel their members. Many feel that the Iraqi Army, which collapsed in Mosul and Ramadi, as well as the security forces are not only unable to defeat Daesh, but that their redeployment in the regions held by the jihadists is not desirable in view of their past record. The counterpart of counter-mobilisation is, however, regional autonomy for these players, inspired by the Kurdish model, which Baghdad has so far always opposed.

Narrowing strategic options

In an ideal but unfortunately fictional scenario, the defeat of Islamic State would mean the total reversal of the conditions that initially fuelled its emergence and explain why, in 2015, there is still so little resistance to its advance. At this point, mention must be made of the devastating dismantlement of the Iraqi Army in 2003, never since reconstituted and marred by scandals and affairs, de-Baathification and anti-terrorism laws that have targeted Sunni Arabs first and foremost, with thousands of arrests that provided a fertile breeding ground for the "Salafisation" of inmates on US bases and in Iraqi and Syrian prisons. A horizon of national reconciliation in Iraq and Syria is nevertheless unlikely in view of the *dramatic sectarianisation* of their societies. Since its offensive, Daesh has also turned toward the destruction of all the symbols still attached to these fragile nations: museums, such as in Mosul, ransacked by the jihadists, archaeological sites and ancient cities (Nimrud, Hatra and Palmyra).

Since the beginning of the crisis, three key forces have manoeuvred on the ground and remain in relative positions of strength: the Kurds, the first to have mobilised against

Daesh both in Iraq and in Syria, with air and humanitarian support from the US and European countries; Shia militias, which took back a number of territories but whose predominant role in the battle is controversial since it largely feeds the discourse, resilience and redeployment of Islamic State; Iran, which, although challenged as a regional power, won the Iraq War of 2003 and is set to win this new struggle due to its direct involvement led by the major general Qassem Soleimani, head of the division of the Guardians of the Islamic Revolution responsible for military and clandestine operations abroad. In the middle of this equation, one decisive variable is irretrievably lacking: Sunni Arabs, who have lived for months under the yoke of Islamic State and must become part of the military campaign. Without such a rebalancing of forces, no revival of the political process can truly come about in Iraq and, by extension, in Syria.

Several questions are thus raised: how to release Sunni Arabs from the grip of Daesh by inducing them to become the principal actors of its defeat? Who are the players likely to be mobilised in sufficient numbers to cope with this unprecedented challenge? What should be the terms and guarantees of such mobilisation? More importantly, is it possible to curb the dynamic of Sunni secession beyond the fight against the jihadists? Clearly, Sunni Arabs will not rally the battle if any "after" means a return to the previous *status quo*, which was unbearable to them.

By late summer 2014, the US launched a series of discussions with Iraqi Sunni Arab tribes so they would cooperate again with both Washington and Baghdad. The idea was to put together, within a year, a new tribal force inspired by the *Sahwa* and able to effectively fight Islamic State. Retired General John Allen, former deputy commander of US forces in Al-Anbar and appointed as special presidential envoy for the coalition to counter Daesh, aimed to press his close contacts with the tribes to set in motion a "*Sahwa* 2.0." and make it a pillar of his strategy. This time, the tribes would be mobilised within an institutional framework, namely a national guard flanked by American military advisers and Special Forces, and cooperating with the army, the Kurdish peshmergas as well as other self-defence groups.

While promising, so far this policy has hardly materialised. Firstly, the *Sahwa* left a legacy darker than it appears at first sight, borne out of rivalries between Sunni sheikhs, suspicions of corruption and financial dependence on the US and the Iraqi government. Secondly, the tribes have been divided between support to jihadists and their outright rejection, some sheikhs having even "lost" members of their clans along the way. This dynamic makes the creation of a coherent force an extremely complex process. Daesh also anticipated the threat and murdered hundreds of tribesmen who had declared their readiness to take up arms against its members. Much was expected from the new Iraqi cabinet headed by Haidar al-Abadi, chosen to normalise relations with Sunni Arabs and supposed to supply arms to Sunni Arab provinces. However, the latter received no serious military equipment from Baghdad and often had to go and purchase their weapons on the black market. The Islamic State literally disaggregated entire tribes, reducing Sunni tribal influence in Iraq even further. The gap between opposing Sunni Arabs and the government may have now become unbridgeable. Many saw al-Abadi's accession to power as a mere perpetuation of the legacy of his predecessor, Nouri al-Maliki, who had not

armed the tribes despite his promises. And many have denounced the "militiasation" of the state apparatus, whose leaders, mostly Shia, have refused since 2011 to concede regional autonomy to Sunni Arab populations.

The lack of relays in Baghdad and in the provinces further complicates this situation and incites neighbouring Sunni Arab regimes to multiply interferences to counter the rise of political Shiism and Iran. Amid succession and intervention against Houthi rebels in Yemen to reaffirm its primacy, Saudi Arabia has provided continued support to Sunni Arabs in Iraq since 2003, more particularly on a financial level. Because of the threats made by Daesh (which includes several thousand Saudi fighters), the kingdom has recently turned to large Sunni tribal confederations (such as the Shammar, related to the ruling family and present in both Iraq and Syria) to mobilise them against Islamic State. Jordan has followed a similar policy and shelled Raqqah in April 2015, Islamic State's Syrian stronghold, in response to the murder of Jordanian pilot Mouath al-Kassasbeh. With regard to Turkey and Qatar, these countries formally support the Sunni Arab armed opposition, unrelated to Daesh but mostly jihadist, and continue to display an ambiguous attitude. Ankara is indeed suspected of providing backing to Islamic State, passive (as in Kobane when the Turkish army remained motionless and did not assist Syrian Kurds) or active (in the form of arms transfers and flows of fighters). Doha, meanwhile, is reported to have funded some elements of Daesh.

As a conclusion

Islamic State's longevity in spite of a sustained campaign of air strikes has elicited significant worry within the highest spheres of Western decision-making, especially among those who, somehow naively, thought they were waging a war on a "classic" terrorist organisation. In June 2015, at a forum in Doha, General Allen himself acknowledged that the battle could take a generation or more. In the first semester of 2015, jihadist recruits have increased from 10,000 to more than 30,000 in both Iraq and Syria according to reliable sources. Such an increase is not benign: it testifies to the strength of Islamic State's political enterprise and its capacity to mobilise and regenerate. Moreover, if the solution remains irrevocably political in the long run, it will certainly not be the one that the West wishes for. For over a decade, Sunni Arabs in Iraq have been marginalised in relation to all matters concerning their future and the crisis of representation affecting them is deep, if not already irreversible. Struck by measures deemed unjust, they have no real hope for a change today, especially when Baghdad calls on Shia militias to "free" them.

The formation of a new and legitimate Sunni Arab leadership, offering a substitute to both Islamic State and Shia predominance in Iraq, is the cornerstone of any way out of the current crisis. For now, Sunni Arabs have not been unable to say who represents them and who is legitimate. Nationalists? Baathists? Islamists, such as the Muslim Brotherhood? Jihadists? They no longer seem interested in appeasing relations with Baghdad and Damascus, and instead appear to be engaged in open secession, which, with or without Daesh, should persist, thus forcing the international community to entirely rethink both its strategy and vision.

IRAQ AFTER ISIS: SHIA MILITANCY AND IRANIAN INFLUENCE

Hayder al-Khoei[1]

The fall of Mosul to the so-called "Islamic State" in June 2014 was a watershed moment in Iraq's modern history not just because the terrorist group was able to rout tens of thousands of Iraqi soldiers and federal police but also because it came at a time when Iraq's political parties were deadlocked in trying to form the new government after the successful general elections held in April of that year. The crisis and its immediate aftermath set in motion forces that may remain in Iraq for years – if not decades – to come.

The collapse of the Iraqi armed forces and the pleas of the Iraqi caretaker government for military assistance sped up and consolidated existing trends in Iraq; the increased influence of Iran as well as the empowerment and legitimization of Shia militia groups that rely on Iran for support.

Sensing weakness in Baghdad, the United States refused to offer military assistance to Iraq because it wanted to see the fall of Prime Minister Maliki. This happened despite the real danger of the Iraqi capital falling to ISIS militants. In March 2015, the United States publicly acknowledged that their assessment in Iraq last summer was that Baghdad could have fallen "within 72 hours" just a few days after Mosul fell to ISIS and they prepared for the worst by evacuating 1,500 staff from the US Embassy in Baghdad. Brett McGurk, the Deputy Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter-ISIL, stated at the American University of Iraq's Sulaimani Forum, that without the effective

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response of Iraqi people and the historic fatwa by Ayatollah Sistani, the future of Iraq would have been in doubt.[2]

Iranian vs. US backing

The Iranians, in stark contrast to the US, immediately sent weapons, advisors and mobilized their own forces to protect Baghdad from the ISIS threat. The Iranians also fully supported Maliki's bid to stay in power for a third term after he won the elections with an impressive margin. Maliki won a clear plurality, over 700,000 personal votes in Baghdad and three times the number of seats his nearest rivals won, but he still did not have the majority needed to form a government nor was he able to form a coalition government with the other political parties. More crucially, he was out of favour with the Shia religious establishment in Najaf – headed by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani – which wanted to see a change at the top.[3]

Eventually, the Iranians were forced to abandon their hopes of having Maliki stay on as prime minister after Sistani sent clear messages to both Maliki's Islamic Dawa Party and Tehran that a third term was a red line. The Shia Islamist parties had to agree on an alternative candidate. Regardless of the political impasse, Baghdad found itself in the eye of the ISIS storm. On one hand, the Americans were reluctant to offer any help whilst, on the other, the Iranians continued and increased their military assistance, mainly due to their own national security interests.

Speaking to this clear juxtaposition, a senior Iraqi politician said that whilst both the Americans and Iranians are strategic allies, the Iranians did not let Iraq down in its time of need. By immediately coming to Baghdad's rescue, the Iranians made themselves indispensable to the Iraqi government even after Maliki stepped down and was replaced by Hayder al-Abadi. Whatever leverage Iran may have lost due to being the last player to let go of Maliki, they more than made up for this through its extensive military assistance to Baghdad. Besides sending arms and assistance to both the regional government in Kurdistan and the central government in Baghdad, Tehran also increased the mobilization of the Iraq Shia militias that had already been active in both Syria and Iraq.

Another interesting development to note in Iraq is the increased coordination between the US and Iran when it comes to fighting ISIS in Iraq. Though neither side will admit publicly to coordination in Iraq, it has become clear since the liberation of Amerli and Tikrit in the north that neither the US nor Iran can fight ISIS alone in Iraq without the help of the other.

The US and Iran have an extremely awkward relationship in Iraq. Unlike in Syria, they share both common enemies and common friends. Many analysts view the relationship as "coordinated deconfliction" – being aware of each other's movements in Iraq and preventing potential clashes – but whilst this may have been the case in the summer of 2014, it is certainly no longer the case today. It has gone beyond mere deconfliction and

2 See: *Strategy to defeat Daesh; end game or seeds for new conflict*. Available in: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ZGjCTuxIN8, 12 March, 2015.

3 Al-Khoei H (2014). Iraq's Maliki: Out of favour with Shia allies? *Al-Jazeera*, 30 July.

this trend of cooperation will continue given the successful nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1 in July 2015. Of course, it's politically sensitive for either side to admit they're working together in Iraq as Iran is still viewed as a state sponsor of terrorism for the US and many in Iran still view the US as the "Great Satan".

Despite the rhetoric from both Washington and Tehran, there is clearly intelligence cooperation in Iraq – albeit "indirectly" through the Iraqi government. US intelligence to the Iraqis is shared with the Iranians. The Americans know this and the Iranians know the Americans know this. The Americans even paved the way for the liberation of Tikrit in April with anti-ISIS airstrikes as Iranian-backed paramilitaries groups were supporting the Iraqi government forces.[4]

A pool of Shia militias

Shia militancy in Iraq has a long history and they were not – by and large – a product of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Armed groups in Iraq initially began as a reaction to the sectarian policies of the Ba'ath regime in the 1970s, even before the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which was – and continues to be – a source of funds, arms, training and support for these groups.

Tehran galvanized and bolstered these groups as Iraqi Shia began fleeing the Ba'athist government crackdowns to neighboring Iran. As with Lebanon, in Iraq there were splits within the Shia Arab community over the direction they would take vis-à-vis Iran. In 1982, Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim officially split from the Dawa Party to form his own political party – the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq – and a paramilitary group – the Badr Brigade – under the tutelage of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Both Dawa and Hakim began organizing military units that fought against Saddam's regime after the breakout of the Iraq-Iran war. In Iraq itself they were driven underground until the 2003 Iraq invasion gave them an opportunity to flourish again.[5]

Hakim returned to Iraq and his armed wing – the Badr Brigade – played a key role in the post-2003 order, taking important positions in the newly established security apparatuses after the Americans officially disbanded the previous military. However, Badr also continued to operate outside the state as a distinct armed group. Added to this, Iraq saw the emergence of the Mehdi Army born out of the large Sadrist movement that hardly anyone outside of Iraq understood. Iran also found in the Sadrist movement a useful ally that could cause the Americans serious damage.

Up until 2008, the militias and their control of large swathes of territory went relatively unchallenged. They even took part in bloody skirmishes with each other and against the new Iraqi state. In March 2008, Maliki tackled the militias head-on, first in Basra and later in Baghdad and across the south. His operation was backed by the US and resulted in a decisive victory for the government, as the nascent state was able to reassert lost authority.[6]

4 Parker N (2015). Iraq claims victory over Islamic State. Reuters, 2 April.

5 For an overview of Shia militias in post-2003 Iraq, see: Thurber C (2014). Militias as sociopolitical movements: lessons from Iraq's armed Shia groups. *Small wars and insurgencies*, Vol. 25, No. 5-6, pp. 900-23.

6 Cochrane M (2008). *The battle for Basra*. Institute for the Study of War.

Maliki's broken promises

Maliki took a massive gamble and risked his own life during the military campaign but his strategy paid dividends. By re-establishing security, he became Iraq's most popular politician and managed to win a plurality of votes in both the provincial and national elections in 2009 and 2010, respectively. Because the Sunni tribes in Iraq also turned against Al-Qaeda before the surge of US troops, things were beginning to look good for Iraq.

However, after the civil war began to break out in Syria and the Americans pulled out of Iraq in 2011, it all went downhill. Maliki reneged on promises made to Sunni tribes and treated much of the Sunni community with suspicion. His heavy-handed security measures pushed many into the open arms of ISIS, which in turn mobilized the Shia militias to respond to this threat.

To add to this toxic mix, Maliki, in order to consolidate his grip on power, had already splintered both the Sadr and Hakim blocs in Iraq, pushing key military actors away from their political wings. He did this by co-opting the Badr Brigade to join his government and empowering Asaeb Ahlil Haq in order to weaken his biggest Shia rivals Moqtada al-Sadr and Ammar al-Hakim.[7]

As the Syrian crisis escalated, many Sunnis in Iraq sensed an opportunity to challenge the government and the Shia saw a threat to the post-2003 political order in Baghdad. Shia militias were mobilized to fight in Syria, and by early 2014, months before ISIS took over Mosul, hundreds began returning to help contain the jihadists who were gaining ground in Iraq. These militias not only assisted the Iraqi security forces, they also spearheaded many of their security operations. Senior army officers could not challenge these groups because they knew they had the backing of Maliki and even more powerful sponsors in Iran.

Popular Mobilization Forces and a historic fatwa

In June 2014, Maliki created the Popular Mobilization Committee, the Hashd Al-Shaabi, to serve as the official umbrella for various militia groups to operate in support of the Iraqi security forces. Overnight, the militias went from being unofficial armed groups to a state-sponsored paramilitary force.

Another key development was the June 13 fatwa of Ayatollah Sistani in Najaf. He called on Iraqis to bear arms and defend Iraq from ISIS. Though much of the regional and international media spun the call to arms as a Shia call to arms against Sunnis, the statement by Sistani was actually made with secular terms of reference, not just religious. He called on all Iraqi "citizens" to protect and defend Iraq.[8] I met Sistani the day after he issued his fatwa, and he clarified that even the call to defend "Iraq's sacred sites" was not a reference to only the Shia shrines, but Sunni, Christian and other places of worship. ISIS, Sistani said, was "a threat to all in Iraq."

To put this historic fatwa into perspective, it is worth noting that the last time the religious establishment made a similar call to arms was 100 years ago when the British

7 Al-Khoei H (2012). Decoding Iraq's Sectarian Rivalries. *Foreign Affairs*, 31 January.
8 Al-Khatteeb L, Kadhim A (2014). What do you know about Sistani's fatwa. *Huffington Post*, 10 July.

invaded Iraq in 1914. Sistani saw Iraq on the verge of another abyss, one that was even more dangerous than the 2006-2007 civil war, and that he had to act to save the country.

After the fatwa, tens of thousands of volunteers rushed to army recruitment centres. Due to the lack of infrastructure and state capacity to absorb these new recruits, the large Shia Islamist political parties in Iraq, as well as offices of the Iranian-backed militias in Iraq, took them on. It is difficult to confirm the number of Popular Mobilization forces but estimates have ranged from 50,000 to 124,000.

In addition to the most powerful of the Iranian-backed militia groups such as the Badr Brigade, Asaeb Ahlil Haq and Kataeb Hezbollah, there are now tens of thousands of volunteers who operate under the command of the Hashd al-Shaabi Committee but who chose not to join the existing Iranian-sponsored militias. These volunteers also answered Sistani's call but are affiliated to the holy shrines in Najaf and Kerbala, which operate under the supervision of Sistani.

They receive little or no attention from mainstream media and many analysts who focus on Iraq because they do not employ the same sophisticated media communication networks and outreach tools that are used effectively by the Iranian-backed groups.

Whilst the Hashd al-Shaabi was an exclusively Shia force in June 2014, the paramilitary organization now includes thousands of Sunni tribal fighters in its ranks after a concerted effort by Abadi's government to reach out to the Sunni tribes to desectarianise the paramilitary forces and empower Sunni fighters to take the fight to ISIS. In March 2015, Sunni tribal fighters from Salah ad-Din played a crucial role in liberating Tikrit. In Anbar – where Sunni tribes have a long history of fighting against Al-Qaeda in Iraq – it was local Sunni tribes themselves, together with local politicians, who publicly called for Baghdad to send in the Shia-dominated paramilitary forces after the Iraqi security forces suffered another major setback in May 2015 with the fall of Ramadi. Saleem al-Juburi, Iraq's speaker of parliament and the highest-ranking Sunni politician, has stated that the official numbers of the Hashd Al-Shaabi is 124,000, and the Sunni Arab tribal component is 17,000.[9]

When discussing Sunni-Shia cooperation in Iraq, it's important to note that the Iraqi army itself is mixed. Both the officer corps and rank-and-file are heavily mixed. The Minister of Defense himself is a Sunni and the US-trained commander of the elite Iraqi Special Forces is a Kurd. So Sunnis and Shias are fighting side-by-side wherever the Iraqi army is active even if we ignore the roles played by Sunni tribal fighters and Shia paramilitaries.

Abadi's reforms and popular protests

In summer 2015, as temperatures soared above 50 degrees Celsius with little electricity provided by the government, Iraqis across the capital and south took to the streets to condemn corruption and the lack of basic services. Patience was running thin and terrorism was no longer an acceptable excuse to justify the government's poor performance. The spontaneous popular protests started in Basra and rapidly spread to Baghdad and the

9 BBC (2015). Iraqi speaker: Prime minister can't control Shia forces. *BBC News*, 1 June.

southern provinces acted as a wake up call to the government. Though there were fears that destabilizing elements would exploit these protests, they were, by and large, peaceful and cross-sectarian in nature.[10]

On 7th August, Ayatollah Sistani made the unusual and uncharacteristic move of singling out Abadi by name and criticizing him for not doing enough to push the reforms that he had promised. Sistani warned Abadi to be "bolder and more courageous" in combating corruption. The real message, however, was aimed at Abadi's rivals and partners. The instruction to Abadi to "name those who stand in the way" of reform was essentially a warning to everyone else to move out of the way and allow the Prime Minister to get the ball rolling.[11] In a rare written statement, Sistani also warned Iraq's politicians that the country would face dire consequences – including possible "partition" if "true reform is not realized by fighting corruption without mercy".[12]

Though Abadi responded very positively to Sistani's message by scrapping a third of cabinet posts[13], his reform initiatives are only going to be so successful.[14] Abadi essentially is going to combat the very system that put him in power. The real obstacles in his reform efforts are going to be those closest to him, starting with his own circle, political party and his Shia partners in government. The shrinking of cabinet, and sacking over 100 director generals from various ministries is a welcome step in the right direction, but it is not going to fundamentally change the systematic corruption that plagues Iraq unless some big heads start to roll. Though Abadi has been given a boost by both Najaf and a largely supportive protest movement that welcomed his reform, it remains to be seen whether or not he is strong enough to move against increasingly powerful rivals, and partners.

Given all these challenges, Abadi faces a mammoth task and many view this as Iraq's last chance. There is a sense now across Iraq now that if Abadi fails, Iraq is finished. It may seem like a slightly sensationalist assessment but it reflects the real fears of many across Iraq.

Iraq's future

Today, the question of what will happen next with the Popular Mobilisation forces is inextricably linked to the future of the Iraqi state itself. If ISIS is dealt a heavy blow, and the Iraqi state is able to once again reassert its control over one-third of its territory which it lost in June 2014, it is likely that the Shia-dominated paramilitary forces will be split and the schism may be as deadly as the violence Iraq witnessed in 2008. The wording of Sistani's fatwa, which mobilized the majority of the fighters, was limited to a form of collective responsibility in Shia jurisprudence known as *wajib kifa'i*, which can roughly be understood as needing enough men for as long as is needed to confront the danger. If

10 Habib M (2015). Senior Iraqi cleric "saves" the Government – And Iraq from Iran? *Niqash*, 12 August.

11 Al-Masdar (2015). "Sistani representative to Abadi: be brave in combating corruption and name those who impede reform", 7 August. Author's translation.

12 Merhi KA, Dunlop WG (2015). Iraq could face "partition" without reform: top Shiite cleric. Agence France-Presse, 20 August.

13 Dunlop WG (2015). Iraq PM scraps third of cabinet posts in reform drive. Agence France-Presse, 16 August.

14 Al-Ali Z (2015). Premature excitement about Iraq's new government reforms. *Washington Post*, 14 August.

this danger no longer exists, Sistani will likely issue a follow-up fatwa asking for the fighters to lay down their arms or officially join the security forces if the state has the capacity to absorb and integrate them. Whilst tens of thousands of fighters will respond to this call, it will also be resisted heavily by those groups that wish to maintain the independence of the Iraqi state and remain directly linked to Iran.

For Baghdad, this will represent a clear national security threat as the government has formally placed the paramilitary forces under its hold through the control of its finances and having the umbrella committee fall under the office of the Prime Minister himself. However, even if they do acquiesce to the government, those groups will want a larger stake in the country they would have helped survive. Whatever does happen, the rise of ISIS and the response to this existential threat will permanently change the political and security landscape of Iraq.

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THE KURDISH QUESTION AND THE FIGHT AGAINST ISLAMIC STATE

Wladimir van Wilgenburg[1]

The Kurds are one of the biggest nations without a state, having been divided over Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey in the aftermath of World War I. As a result of the political upheavals in Iraq and Syria, the Kurds have attained significant degrees of autonomy in those countries, while also participating in the electoral system in Turkey. Only the Kurds in Iran do not seem to have benefited much from the recent uprisings in the Middle East, after Tehran managed to reach an agreement with the West over its nuclear programme.

Nevertheless, the Kurdish semi-states in Iraq and Syria faced a new challenge when they found themselves in the crosshairs of the caliphate of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. At the start of August 2015, the militant group Islamic State (IS) attacked the Kurdistan region of Iraq, taking over significant amounts of territory (ICG 2015: 1). The group had also previously attacked the Kurds in the Syrian Kurdish city of Kobane on September 15, 2014, almost taking the city (Van Wilgenburg, 2014). Western airstrikes in Iraq and Syria prevented the Kurdish cities from falling into the hands of the pan-Islamist group IS, and the Kurds are now seen as the de-facto "Western" ground troops against IS; but who are the Kurdish groups fighting IS in Syria and Iraq? And why does Islamic State fight the secular Kurdish groups? Moreover, what are the prospects for peace in Turkey?

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The birth of Rojava

The Kurds in Syria significantly benefited from the Syrian civil war after Assad pulled most of its troops out of the Syrian Kurdish areas on July 19, 2012, with the exception of Qamishli. The main Kurdish militia, the People's Protection Units (YPG), formally announced its existence in July 2012; although it had operated in secrecy since 2011 (Lund, 2013) in the form of armed Kurdish committees of the political branch of the PKK in Syria, the Democratic Union Party (PYD). The group has clashed with the Syrian government and also with Islamist rebel groups over control of northern Syria, which the Kurds refer to as Rojava, or western Kurdistan. But their main conflict was and is with Islamic State.

The group is closely linked to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) that has mainly fought against the Turkish state since 1984, and follows the ideology of confederalism of the imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, which was adopted by the PKK in 2005 (Jongerden and Akkaya, 2012: 5). The PKK's main aim since 2005 has been to set up local administrations in Syria, Turkey, and Iraq. The civil war in Syria gave the PKK its first chance to implement Ocalan's theoretical frameworks in practice. Moreover, the PKK leader Ocalan also adopted feminism as one of its main principles, which explains the high number of Kurdish female fighters operating in the name of the female counterpart of the YPG, the Women's Protection Units (YPJ). In November 2013, the PYD moved forward with the creation of three canton administrations in three non-contiguous areas in Afrin, Jazira, and Kobane (Rojhelat, November 12) with the ultimate aim of connecting these areas in the future.

However, both Turkey and the neighbouring Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq did not welcome the announcement of autonomy by the PYD in Syria. While Turkey feared the presence of a PKK-linked enclave on its borders, Masoud Barzani, the president of KRG, and leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), wanted the PYD to share its power with Barzani's Syrian Kurdish ally, the Kurdish National Council (KNC), an umbrella organization established in Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan in October 2011. From 2011 to 2014, the KNC signed several agreements with the PYD to share power, which were not implemented. As a result, the Kurdish administrations in Syria continued to be dominated by the PYD, while KNC politicians mainly operated from neighbouring Iraqi Kurdistan, and joined the Turkey-backed Syrian opposition group, the Syrian National Coalition in August 2013 (Al Monitor, August 2013).

As a result, tensions remained between the KNC and the PYD in Syria, and the YPG did not allow Syrian Kurdish fighters controlled by the KDP to enter Syria, fearing this would lead to territorial divisions between the KNC and PYD in Syria. As a result, it was mostly the YPG that fought Islamic State in Syria, and not KDP's forces. Furthermore, both sides attacked each other in the media, with the KDP accusing the YPG of working with the Syrian government of Assad, while the PYD accused the KDP of working with Turkey to undermine the Rojava revolution (Van Wilgenburg, May 2013). This led the PYD security forces to arrest many supporters of the KDP in Syria, while the KDP closed the borders – controlled together with the Syrian Kurdish areas – to PYD use and trade.

As a result, the PYD created better relations with the Iraqi government, in order to use the Iraqi border crossing in Rabia (Van Wilgenburg, June 2014).

The jihadist threat to Rojava

With Islamic State capturing more territory from rival rebels as from January 2014, conflicts increased between the Kurds and Islamic State. While IS wanted to control the Syrian-Turkish border for its foreign fighters to cross the border from Turkey, the YPG wanted to control the Syrian-Turkish border in order to connect the three disconnected Kurdish enclaves of Kobane, Afrin, and Jazara, which were often under siege by rival rebel groups. The worst conflict between the two groups started when Islamic State launched its attack on Kobane on September 15, 2014 (Van Wilgenburg, September 2014). Islamic State launched the siege in response to the formation of a joint FSA-YPG operations room to attack Islamic State in the countryside of Aleppo and Raqqah (Van Wilgenburg, July 2015). According to IS, "Ayn al Islam [Kobane] became a haven for every enemy of the Khilafa [Caliphate]" (Van Wilgenburg, January 2015).

However, the IS attack on Kobane inadvertently led to US airstrikes supporting the Kurdish rebels, leading them to recapture the town completely in January. The YPG alliance with Free Syrian Army rebels capitalized on the anti-IS air support, expanding its reach and capturing Tal Abyad on June 15, connecting the administrations of Kobane and Jazira (Van Wilgenburg, July 2015). Turkey responded to these advances by making clear that any attempts by the YPG to advance more towards the town of Afrin would be crossing a redline (Bianet, July 2015). Turkey feared that the Kurds would be able to connect all three enclaves in Syria and cut off Turkey from large parts of the Syrian-Turkish border. Furthermore, Turkey complained about ethnic cleansing of Arabs and Turkmen living in the area, which the YPG denied.

The Peshmerga forces and the KRG

While the fight against Islamic State is dominated by the PYD, in Iraq other Kurdish parties play a dominant role. The Kurdish militia forces in Iraq are linked to the two ruling parties: the Kurdistan Democratic Party led by Masoud Barzani which is ruled by the Barzani tribe; and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan headed by Jalal Talabani, that split from the KDP in 1975 and is led by a more urban intelligentsia.

The term "Peshmerga" (which means "those who face death") was first coined in Iran in 1946 by the short-lived Mahabad republic. Kurdish forces since then have been known as Peshmergas in both Iran and Iraq after Mullah Mustafa Barzani, the grandfather of Masoud Barzani, moved his forces from Iran to Iraq.

The Iraqi Kurds fought several wars against the Iraqi state in the 1970s, and the 1980s. After 1991, the Iraqi Kurds managed to establish their own Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), after the withdrawal of Saddam Hussein's forces following the implementation of the no-fly zone by the West to protect the Kurds (Devigne 2011: 50). The Kurdish parties fought each other in a brief civil war over resources in the 1990s. This led to the Kurdistan region being divided into two administrations, with the PUK controlling Suleymaniyah and the KDP Erbil and Duhok.

After the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the Iraqi Kurdish administration was recognized by the Iraqi constitution, and the Kurds fought together with the Americans against the Iraqi army. In 2006, the PUK and KDP reached a political agreement to share power, and the administrations were slowly unified under the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) banner. Moreover, the Kurdish parties promised to integrate and unify their security apparatus, and to form a non-partisan force. However, in reality the Kurdish territories and security forces and intelligence remain de-facto divided between the PUK and the KDP. Both the KDP and the PUK used the Peshmergas as a vehicle for patronage and electoral support. As a result, the professionalism of the Peshmerga forces was severely weakened due to the corruption and nepotism of the PUK and KDP, and many Peshmerga fighters were untrained or were employed as ghost soldiers, receiving cash salaries while not serving as Kurdish soldiers (House of Commons Defence Committee, January 2015: 28). Furthermore, many of them had to pay for their own bullets and weapons (Knights, January 2015: 36).

PUK dissidents in 2009 founded the Change Movement modelled on Barack Obama's presidential "Change" campaign to combat this corruption (ICG 2015: 6). The party wanted to reform the KRG and end corruption and political patronage within the two parties. Until 2014, the party played the opposition role in the KRG parliament, and in 2014 it joined the Kurdish government, receiving the Minister of Peshmerga portfolio in June 2014 (Knights, January 2015: 35).

Turkish versus Iranian competition

Meanwhile, the KDP and PUK maintained their own foreign policies. While the KDP has built better economic ties with Turkey, the PUK was forced to build ties with Iran since all of its territories border the Iranian state. As a result, the PUK Peshmerga forces supported an Iranian-backed assault of Shia militias to break the Islamic state siege of Amerli on August 31, 2014 (ICG 2015: 22). Moreover, the PUK has adopted a more conciliatory approach towards Baghdad than the KDP, which pursued a policy to make the Kurdistan region more independent from Baghdad by exporting oil independently through Turkey. Turkey's president Recep Tayyip Erdogan also backed Barzani's quest to unseat Maliki (ICG 2015: 14). However, due to the lack of Turkish support when Islamic State attacked Kurdistan in August, Barzani was forced to request Iranian military help (*Ibid*.).

Nevertheless, Turkey continued to cooperate with the KDP and Turkey's Special Forces started to train the KDP Peshmerga forces in November (Hurriyet, November 2014). Furthermore, Turkey continued to support Barzani as a counterweight to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), whose affiliate, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), controlled most Kurdish areas in Syria after Assad's forces pulled out from most Kurdish cities, apart from Hasakah city and Qamisli (ICG 2015: 14). As a result, the PUK now heavily backs PKK-affiliates in Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. The PKK also started to play a more prominent role after the KDP Peshmergas fled Sinjar in August, after YPG and PKK fighters coming from neighbouring Syria evacuated thousands of Yezidis (Hawramy, December 2014). Moreover, the PKK sent fighters to repell Islamic State in Kirkuk, and Makmur (Hawar

News, May 2015). This led president Barzani to thank the PKK for its help in Makmur (Van Wilgenburg, August 2014). But almost one-year later high-level KDP officials were no longer as happy with the PKK, and claimed they were guests (Waarmedia, July 2015).

The Peshmerga war against Islamic State

Initially, when Islamic State carried out a blitzkrieg campaign in June 2014 and captured the provinces of Mosul, Tikrit and many of the surrounding Sunni areas, as the Iraqi Army was defeated (ICG 2015: 1), the Kurds did not counterattack IS due to disagreements with Baghdad. By July, the Iraqi state was practically divided into a Sunni caliphate ruling the Sunni areas, while Baghdad controlled most of the Shia areas in the South, and Baghdad, and the Kurds controlled the Kurdish dominated-areas, and secured territories from the Iraqi army in the disputed provinces of Salahuddin, Kirkuk, and Mosul (*Ibid.*).

However, this does not explain why Islamic State attacked the Iraqi Kurds in August. While the PUK Peshmergas, with Iranian support, have battled IS in a slowly escalating battle since June 2014, the KDP has maintained an undeclared truce with IS (Knights, January 2015: 30). This changed, when IS attacked the Peshmergas of the KDP in August 2014 (Knights, January 2015: 30), resulting in the massacre of the Kurdish religious minority of Yezidis in Sinjar by IS.

Just as in Syria, the Iraqi Kurdish territories presented a threat to IS control over Mosul, due to the fact that the Kurds controlled most of the territory around Mosul, including significant swaths of border areas between Iraq and Syria. Therefore, Islamic State glanced nervously at the prospect of Baghdad-Erbil agreements (Van Wilgenburg, August 2014). After a Kurd was once again selected as Iraqi president, Islamic State attacked the Kurds in August 2014 to secure the stronghold of Mosul, capture more border territories on the Iraqi-Syrian border, and safeguard Mosul from future attacks.

Islamic State even briefly threatened Erbil, and was only saved when the United States decided to intervene and launch airstrikes to defend the Kurds in Erbil on August 7, 2014 (Knights, January 2015: 15). Therefore, Islamic State made a strategic mistake by attacking the Kurds, not expecting that this would lead to more US-support, and even an anti-IS coalition of 60 countries (Payne, September 2015).

After IS attacked the Kurds in Iraq, US President Obama even approved overt and covert programs to resupply the Kurdish forces against the jihadist threat (Parkinson & Entous, September 2014), and a Kurdistan Training Coordination Centre (KTCC) was created by Western countries that supported the Kurds with training (MacDiarmid, February 2015).

"We intend to stay vigilant, and take action if these terrorist forces threaten our personnel or facilities anywhere in Iraq, including our consulate in Erbil and our embassy in Baghdad," US President Obama said in his speech on August 7, 2014 (White House, 2014).

Currently, there are 120,000 active Peshmerga forces in Iraq, with rotating frontline forces estimated at 60,000. There are also 60,000 reserve forces (Gehlen, 2015). Forty thousand of these Peshmerga forces, consisting of 14 brigades, are directly linked to the Ministry of Peshmerga, while the remainder are directly linked to either

the KDP or the PUK. While the Gorran minister wants to end partisan divisions and turn the Kurdistan Peshmerga forces into a non-partisan army, the PUK and the KDP continue to maintain control of most Kurdish security forces, and the battle against IS is hampered by these parties conflicting policies.

Despite these internal weaknesses, the Peshmerga forces managed to regain most territories with the support of US airstrikes. In fact, the Kurds are now seen as the most effective ground force. "The Peshmergas show the will to fight and the capability to fight," US Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter said in June 2015 (Basnews, June 2015). "The Kurdish forces are what we aspire to with respect to the Iraqi security forces in general," he added.

The presidential crisis

However, a new crisis could threaten Kurdish stability and the unity between the Kurdish parties in their fight against Islamic State. Amidst the war against IS, a new crisis erupted in the Iraqi Kurdistan region over the future of the presidency of Masoud Barzani, who is also the leader of the KDP. This could destabilize the region. Barzani's presidential term is supposed to end on August 20 2015 the law limits the presidency to two terms (Barwari, August 11 2015). The PUK and Gorran want to turn the presidential system into a parliamentary system and to limit the president's power. But the supporters of the KDP argue that Barzani should stay amidst the crisis with Islamic State, and could lead the Kurds to independence. In mid August, the president released a statement that the KDP would call for early elections if a consensus was not reached between the political parties (Hawler Times, August 11 2015). If a consensus is not reached, this could destabilize the political system and break up the majority government, which was formed by all the political parties.

The peace process in Turkey

While the fight against Islamic State continued in Iraq and Syria, in Turkey the Kurds waged a more political struggle. In Turkey, the main Kurdish party is the People's Democratic Party (HDP), which is very close to PKK rebels. The HDP benefited from the relative peace in the country as a result of a ceasefire declared by the PKK in March 2013 (BBC, July 27 2015) as a result of peace talks between the ruling AKP-party and the PKK.

The HDP participated in the elections on June 7, 2015, and passed the 10 per cent threshold; thereby denying the Justice and Development Party (AKP) a majority government. For the first time since 2002, the AKP did not obtain 276 seats to form a majority government on its own (IRIN, July 2015). The AKP was counting on the HDP not to pass the electoral threshold, which would have meant that all its votes would go to the AKP. In this scenario, the AKP would have had a super-majority government to alter the constitution and implement a presidential system through a referendum (Hurriyet June, 2015). Instead, the HDP passed the threshold by giving the Turks a difficult choice: vote for a pro-Kurdish party and deny AKP a majority government, or vote for other parties and give the AKP the chance to form a majority government. As a result, the AKP is forced to either form a coalition government with different parties, or call for early elections.

The Syrian civil war and the fight against IS is further complicated by the political situation and peace in Turkey (BBC, July 27 2015). In July 2015, a suicide bombing perpetrated by IS killed at least 32 activists in the town of Suruc who were preparing to help the Syrian Kurdish town of Kobane. Kurds blamed the government for the attack and killed two policemen in response. This resulted in Turkish airstrikes targeting the PKK in northern Iraq, killing several fighters and even civilians, ending the fragile peace that had lasted for at least two years. Moreover, Turkey returned fire on IS forces, after they killed a Turkish soldier on the border on July 23, 2015 (Reuters, July 23 2015). This followed talks with US officials, which gave the US permission to use Turkey's Incirlik airbase to attack IS militants (Guardian, July 23 2015). But Turkey said it would not only target IS but also the PKK, thus complicating the fight against IS in Syria.

Turkey also said it would go ahead with plans to create an IS-free safe zone in northern Syria to prevent YPG expansion from Kobane to Afrin and to protect rebels from IS. Turkey reportedly wants the last remaining IS strongholds along the Syrian-Turkish border to be occupied by FSA rebels, and become a safe area for refugees who are still streaming into Turkey (Daily Sabah, July 27 2015). This is strongly opposed by the PKK and the PYD, which fear Turkish plans to undermine their Kurdish autonomy in Syria. Earlier, on July 24, Turkish tanks fired at YPG positions to prevent them from taking Jarabulus (YPGRojava.com, August 1 2015), which is intended to be part of the future safe-zone planned by Turkey. This shows that more problems will soon erupt between the Kurds in Syria, and Turkey. This will also complicate efforts by the anti-IS coalition and the US to defeat Islamic State, since the Kurdish territories all border IS positions in Syria. Furthermore, more violence is expected inside Turkey with the PKK targeting the police forces and military targets.

Conclusion

The Kurds continue to be stateless, but enjoy more political autonomy than in the past. They have also received increasing support after Islamic State's miscalculated attacks against them in both Iraq and Syria. The Kurds have thereby become the leading ground forces against IS, receiving airstrike support from the US; and even training and weapons in Iraq. However, the end of the peace process in Turkey will make it more difficult to defeat Islamic State in Syria. Turkey fears a Kurdish semi-state on its borders with Syria, whilst the YPG and the PKK have to fight simultaneously both IS and the Turkish state – this being one of Islamic State's key objectives. Without any agreement between the Kurds and Ankara, it will be more difficult for the anti-IS coalition to destroy IS in Raqqah, since the Kurds control most territories close to the city. There could also be future clashes between Turkish-backed rebel groups and the Kurds in Syria over disputed territories. Additionally, Kurdish disunity in Iraq over the future of the KRG presidency could threaten the stability of Iraqi Kurdistan, and damage the Iraqi Kurdish image as a democratic Kurdish semi-state.

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IRANIAN POLICY TOWARDS POST-SADDAM IRAQ

Mohammad Ali Shabani[1]

Broader parameters of Iranian interests

It is difficult to discuss a state's influence without discussing the state in question's interests. This particularly holds true for discussion of Iran's regional influence, which in recent years has suffered from an outsized sectarian reading. In order to grasp Iranian influence in Iraq, it is necessary to gain an understanding of Iranian interests. Namely, what does Tehran seek in its western neighbour? Broadly speaking, the answer to this question can be divided under three parameters: maintaining Iraq's territorial integrity, seeking qualified stability and expanding Iran's economic sphere.

Maintaining Iraq's territorial integrity

Iranian interest in Iraq's territorial integrity can be traced to one basic assumption: beyond federalism, a Pandora's Box may be opened with potentially dire consequences.

The primary focus of political scientists has overwhelmingly been the future of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). The prospect of the KRG declaring independence is widely portrayed as a matter of concern to various regional states, including Iran, mainly because of the resulting impact on other Kurdish communities in the region, and also, future dynamics between an independent Kurdistan and an Arab government in Baghdad. Regional states view the latter with different degrees of concern because of their differing views of regional equations, but more so, because of their different experiences with their own Kurdish communities. These experiences, and resulting attitudes, go both ways: the manner in which Kurdish communities view central governments diverge depending on the contexts. On a fundamental level, Kurds

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in Turkey and Iran, for example, have faced wholly contrasting experiences, which have shaped them accordingly.

Two years before the death of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the modern Turkish Republic, the governor of Dersim, General Abdullah Alpdoğan, coined the term "Mountain Turk" in reference to Kurds inhabiting Turkey. "Mountain Turks" would later be referred to as "Eastern Turks".[2] This basic denial of Kurdish identity has been systematic, and not wholly relegated to the distant past. Indeed, "as late as the 1980s, it was a crime in Turkey to claim that a people called 'Kurds' existed because such a claim was seen as tantamount to propagating 'separatism' and even 'terrorism.'" Moreover, Law 2932, which was only annulled in 1991, banned publishing and broadcasting in the Kurdish language, while Law 1587 banned Kurdish names for children.[3]

In Iran, the founder of the modern Iranian state, Reza Shah Pahlavi – whom in many ways sought to emulate Atatürk – as well as his successor, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, also pursued identity politics with far-reaching consequences. The Pahlavi dynasty's "Persianism" had the profound effect of turning non-Persian Iranians into minorities. The Islamic Republic of Iran has sought to mitigate the consequences of the "Persianism" of the Pahlavi state, but at the same time continued to pursue many aspects of it, leading to the continued marginalization of non-Persian Iranians, including Kurds. Recent moves to mitigate the "Persianization" of Iran – a multicultural and multi-ethnic nation – include efforts to introduce Kurdish-language schoolbooks. However, Iranian Kurds, as both an ethnic – and largely – religious minority, continue to face marginalization.

It would be overly simplistic to reduce the long and complex experiences of the Turkish and Iranian Kurdish communities to those described in the paragraphs above. Indeed, the sole intention here is to present a basic idea of the reality that Kurds are not a monolith and harbour vastly different political views and ambitions depending on the context.

The prospect of an independent Iraqi Kurdish state aside, another often neglected, but for various states concerning development – including Iran – would be the secession of the southern, Shia-majority sector of Iraq. While discussion of Southern secession only occasionally surfaces in political debates, this scenario is worthy of further examination – less so because of its prospect, but more so to gain an understanding of Iranian influence, and by extension, interests.

Contrary to popular perceptions of Tehran being in favour of outright Shia domination, the secession of the South presents both challenges and opportunities for the Islamic Republic.

For Iran, the concern is not only the subsequent likely emergence of a Sunni-dominated central Iraqi region. The reality is that 90% of Iraqi oil, which accounts for 90% of central government revenues, is exported through the South, and not via territory controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in the North. A simplistic sectarian reading of regional politics would have one believe that the emergence of a small, oil-rich Shia

2 Reicher S, Hopkins N (2001). *Self and nation*. London: Sage, p. 156.

3 Aktürk S (2012). *Regime of Ethnicity and Nationhood in Germany, Russia and Turkey*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 117.

state would be a bonanza for the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, it should be borne in mind that such a region would directly border Iranian territory primarily inhabited by marginalized ethnic Iranian Shia Arabs, who sit on the vast majority of Iran's oil reserves. Iranian law stipulates that a mere few percentage points of oil proceeds go directly back to oil-producing regions. In the context of the history of destruction in this region during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War, and the Iranian government's subsequent failure to fully pursue investment, the emergence of an independent Arab Shia state awash in oil wealth is likely to cause concerns in Tehran that on some levels touch the same nerves as an independent Iraqi Kurdistan would.

Search for qualified stability

Discussion of Iranian interest in Iraq's territorial integrity leads to the question of Iran's interest in qualified stability in Iraq. The term "qualified" is used here to explain what Iran seeks by outlining what it does not seek.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has no interest in witnessing the emergence of an Iraqi central government capable of constituting a direct threat to Iranian national security. The 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war was the longest armed conflict since World War Two, costing hundreds of thousands of lives and immense material damage. This conflict greatly shaped the Islamic Republic, including its discourse, and continues to do so to this very day.

At the same time, Iran has a vital interest in preventing the emergence of breeding grounds for the emergence of lesser, but also concerning, threats such as the Islamic State in Iraq and Shaam [the Levant] (ISIS). In other words, while Tehran has no interest in a formidable Iraqi state, it also has no interest in the Iraqi state being incapable of exercising sovereignty in the most basic sense of the term: i.e. the state monopolizing violence. The outcome of the dynamic between these two interests is directly linked to the aforementioned discussion of Iranian views towards Iraqi territorial integrity. It is also highly relevant to the formation of grander Iranian policy towards Iraq.

Expansion of Iran's economic sphere

Lost in the debate on Iranian influence in Iraq, which overly focuses on sectarianism and security considerations, is discussion of important economic interests.

Economics plays a considerable part in the shaping of Iranian views towards Iraq, which is a multi-billion dollar market for Iranian goods and services. Beyond pursuit of interdependence as a long-term approach to reduce the potential for conflict, economic ties are viewed as a tool to leverage and diversify political influence. Over a decade after the American-led overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, Iran is Iraq's second-largest non-oil trading partner. Iran is only surpassed by Turkey in terms of Iraq's non-oil trade with the world. Importantly, the majority of this trade is carried out via territory controlled by the landlocked KRG.

Beyond non-oil trade, Iraq's energy sector holds great consequence for the Iranian economy. Iraq possesses one of the world's largest oil reserves, and despite continuous instability and violence, has steadily developed its energy infrastructure over the past

decade. In parallel, Western-led sanctions on Iran's energy sector have had a devastating impact in recent years. Iranian crude oil production has been cut from some 3.8-4 million barrels per day (mbpd) in 2011 to 3 mbpd in 2015. Exports have also been hit; in 2011, Iran exported 2.5 mbpd of crude oil, while it currently exports some 1.4 mbpd.

There has been plenty of debate on the role stepped-up Saudi oil production has played in enabling the effective implementation of Western sanctions on Iran. This has been put into the context of greater Saudi-Iranian rivalry for political influence, and has even been given a sectarian layer. Yet, few have paid attention to the parallel reality that Shia-led Iraq has during the past years also played a great role in enabling Western sanctions on Iran. Iraq is currently producing over 4 million barrels per day of crude oil, the most ever recorded in the country's history. Moreover, Iraq is currently selling twice as much oil as Iran, much of it to important Iranian customers, including in Asia. This dynamic shatters the overly sectarian, one-sided reading of contemporary Iranian-Iraqi relations, and reveals the foundations for what can logically be termed an Iranian predisposition to view the development of the Iraqi oil sector as not wholly benign for Iranian interests.

However, it is important to note that Iran has reportedly chosen to counter this challenge via cooperation rather than confrontation. There are numerous reports of Iran having evaded Western sanctions by disguising its oil as Iraqi crude via ship-to-ship transfers in the Persian Gulf. The Iraqi financial system has also reportedly been used to lessen the pressure of Western sanctions on Iran. Whether these measures have been coordinated on a state-to-state level is unclear, but nonetheless suggest one aspect of a probable give-and-take approach to the issue of Iraq's rising oil export proceeds.

More importantly, Iranian energy policy towards Iraq has resulted in the promotion of oil swaps, exports of natural gas, sales of electricity as well as plans for Iraq to act as a conduit for potential future Iranian natural gas exports to Europe via Turkish territory. In short, Iran has assumed a proactive position in terms of how it deals with the development of the Iraqi economy.

Key aspects of Iranian influence

The fundamental outline of Iranian interests in Iraq discussed above provides a basis for a grasp of how the Islamic Republic seeks to achieve those interests. In practical terms, Tehran largely follows five basic guiding principles in the formation and implementation of its policy towards Iraq:

Playing the long game

The Islamic Republic of Iran's relations with its Iraqi partners and other political players oftentimes go back decades, and not years. Dawah, the main Shia Iraqi political player, has a longstanding and complex relationship with Tehran. Prominent Dawah official, and former Iraqi Prime Minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki spent time in Iran following his exile from Iraq, prior to his relocation to Syria. The aforementioned applies to numerous other current senior Dawah officials.

Other notable examples which convey Iran's longstanding ties with Iraqi factions and figures include Tehran's relationship with the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI). This group, which was known as the "Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq" (SCIRI) until a few years ago, was formed in Iran in the early 1980s. Its armed wing – the Badr Brigade – was for decades formally under the command of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). The current incarnation of this force, the Badr Organization, and its commander – Hadi Ameri – now lead the Popular Mobilization Force (PMF), which is at the forefront of countering ISIS in Iraq.

Iran also enjoys longstanding and deep ties with numerous Iraqi Kurdish figures and parties. As an example, President of Iraqi Kurdistan Massoud Barzani, whom also serves as head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), lived in a suburb of Tehran in the early 1990s.

Assertion amid hesitation

Over the years since the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iran has repeatedly proven itself adept at seizing opportunities provided by the inertia of other external actors. The most recent and poignant example of how Iran has expanded its influence via an assertive approach – amid the hesitation of other actors – is its reaction to the onslaught of ISIS. Current Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has been clear about what the latter means in practical terms: "the day Baghdad was threatened, the US hesitated, the Iranians did not", while referring to how he is not ready to disrupt relations with Tehran in line with the demands of certain external actors. This approach has drastically increased Iranian influence at the expense of other external regional actors, notably Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

Seizing on limited alliance options

A defining feature of post-Saddam Iraq's regional policy is the limited alliance options. Some external regional actors, such as Syria, adopted policies post-2003 which were largely geared towards securing short-term objectives, such as the expulsion of American military forces. Other actors, such as Saudi Arabia, responded to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, whom while an enemy was regarded as containing Iranian influence, with refusal to recognize the reality of the new political order in Iraq. A case in point in relation to the latter is Riyadh's refusal to even dispatch an envoy to Baghdad for years.

In contrast, Iranian policy has been geared towards securing both short-term objectives, such as the expulsion of the US military, without allowing policy to turn single-tracked and short-sighted enough to poison bilateral relations. The result is clear: having seized on the new Iraqi political order and the changing regional landscape, Iran has effectively positioned itself to benefit from post-Saddam Iraq's limited alliance options. Neither Iraq nor Iran have any illusions on the nature of this dynamic. Referring to ISIS's onslaught, Prime Minister Abadi has frankly stated: "Our alliance with Iran was strengthened because of ISIS." This matter-of-fact recognition of the practical realities assisting the emergence of the Iranian-Iraqi relationship once again conveys Baghdad's limited alliance options, and its consequences.

Hedging, hedging, hedging

Iran's long-standing relationship with two-term former Prime Minister Maliki led some to assume that his side-lining in the summer of 2014 would result in lessened Iranian influence. On the contrary, the continued – and expanded – Iranian influence, despite Maliki's side-lining, has revealed another key component of Iranian strategy: hedging.

Tehran has never been wedded to a single individual in its pursuit of its objectives. Rather, for the Islamic Republic of Iran, the bottom line in its view of the Iraqi Premiership has been that it be assumed by a member of the leading Shia Iraqi faction, i.e. Dawah in the post-2003 context to date. It should be noted here that the division of the posts of President, Speaker and Prime Minister along ethnic/confessional lines in Iraq is an Iraqi arrangement.

Less than two weeks after facilitating Abadi's assumption of the Iraqi Premiership, Maliki – who currently serves as Vice President – was invited to Tehran to meet with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei. This hedging and continued cultivation of ties with various factions and figures in Iraq is on-going, and more importantly, not exclusive to Iran's approach to the Shia Iraqi community. As mentioned above, Iran enjoys longstanding ties with Iraqi Kurdish leaders, and post-2003, Tehran has also increasingly established contact with Sunni Iraqi leaders.

Venerating the Sayyid

Much of available analysis of relations between Iran and post-Saddam Iraq is decidedly one-sided in its perceptions and illustrations. Influence is portrayed as one-way, originating from Iran. While Iranian influence in Iraq is paramount, Iraqi influence on Iran should not be discounted. Nowhere is the two-way nature of influence in the contemporary Iran-Iraq relationship more evident than in Tehran and Baghdad's approaches to Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Husseini Sistani. The balance sheet of Grand Ayatollah Sistani's influence in clerical circles in Iran vis-à-vis Iran's influence in clerical circles in Iraq is more complex than perceived by many observers. The most recent expression of Iranian recognition of the limits of its influence was evident in Tehran's reported acquiescence in the summer of 2014 to Grand Ayatollah Sistani's disapproval of then-Prime Minister Maliki's efforts to secure a third term in office.

It should be noted that some of the things which have allowed Iran to expand its influence also inherently limit its influence. Playing the long game means it is not in Iran's interests to see its friends and partners becoming overly dependent, or seen as Iranian cronies. The evolution of ISCI's branding, as mentioned above, is a case in point.

Iranian decision making on Iraq

To further gain a grasp of the circumstances which cause Iran's role in Iraq to be constructive versus disruptive, it is imperative to gain an understanding of Iranian decision making. Like other states, Iran's foreign policy is fundamentally dictated by two factors: grand strategic preferences and domestic politics.

The broader parameters of Iranian interests in Iraq, as briefly detailed above, provide a rudimentary understanding of Iranian grand strategic preferences in the Iraqi context. But how does Iranian domestic politics shape policy towards Iraq?

The consequence of the Islamic Republic of Iran's unique blend of elected and unelected authority in its governance has given rise to the concept of "decision shaping". While playing a great role in decision making, "decision shaping" is distinct from decision making.

The primary institution for decision making on issues pertaining to Iraq is the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC). This decision-making body, which gathers the heads of the three branches of government along with leading civilian and military officials, is headed by the President, whom appoints its Secretary. The executive branch has multiple representatives in the SNSC, the most important of which are the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Defense, Intelligence and Interior. Thus, the incumbent cabinet has several avenues to exert influence on the shape of decisions being made.

On major foreign policy issues, including Iraq, the Supreme Leader sets the framework for policy. However, this framework is broad, and allows various actors to exert influence on its shape. The process is such that the framework is discussed among relevant SNSC members, whom, subsequent to internal discussions, submit decisions to the Supreme Leader for final review. While possessing a veto, the Supreme Leader rarely vetoes SNSC decisions.

Many observers summarily dismiss the relevance of the executive branch in shaping policy towards Iraq, pointing to the IRGC as both shaper and executor of Iranian policy. This approach ignores important aspects of Iranian decision making.

The evolution of Iranian policy towards Iraq over the past year illustrates one important consideration: along with expanded influence comes expanded responsibility. Managing a problem is very different from owning it. Iran has no wish to end up in the quagmire which compelled the withdrawal of the US military. Along this vein, Iran's role in the orderly appointment of Abadi as Iraqi Prime Minister is a prime example of Tehran's desire to manage rather than "own" the issue of Iraq. The latter also reflects the impact of the executive branch on decision making: key figures close to Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, including SNSC Secretary Ali Shamkhani, played an important role in facilitating consensus for a peaceful transition of power. Key SNSC members close to President Rouhani have indeed increasingly played a role in shaping policy towards Iraq, and managing relations with both Baghdad and Erbil.

Further evidencing the relevance of a multitude of actors, including the executive branch, in the formation of policy towards Iraq – and Iraqi cognizance of this reality – is Grand Ayatollah Sistani's reception of various Iranian officials. Under heavy media coverage, then Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad made a landmark trip to Iraq in the spring of 2008. Even though a visit to the holy city of Najaf was reportedly on Ahmadinejad's agenda, his reported failure to secure an audience with Grand Ayatollah Sistani essentially cut short the official visit. Of note, a key political rival of Ahmadinejad, Tehran Mayor Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, had met with Ayatollah Sistani in the weeks prior to Ahmadinejad's visit.

In contrast, Iraq was the first foreign destination of current Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif upon his appointment in August 2013, and a key feature of this visit was indeed an audience with Grand Ayatollah Sistani.

There are of course many and complicated layers and aspects of the aforementioned decision making process, but the point here is to highlight the importance of Iranian domestic politics, and the manner in which both Iranians and Iraqis not only comprehend how this affects policy and relations but also adapt accordingly.

Conclusion

In conclusion, when reviewing Iranian influence in Iraq, it is necessary to look beyond mainstream discourse of sectarian amity or ethnic enmity between the two countries. In the grander scheme of things, Iran and Iraq have the potential to form part of the backbone of an alternative regional order. The interconnected nature of the fates of these two countries is the reason why Iranian officials such as Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei have stated that "the security of Iraq is that of Iran." To truly understand the nature of Iranian influence in Iraq, there is a need for better understanding of Iranian interests and domestic politics.

DAESH IN SYRIA: MAJOR POTENTIAL FOR EXPANSION

Fabrice Balanche[1]

With Daesh, jihadism has changed strategy. The aim is no longer to build an international network, but to secure territory. This new strategy is supported by Bin Laden's death and the dislocation of the al-Qaeda network, particularly since the self-proclaimed caliph al-Baghdadi broke off relations with Bin Laden's successor, Ayman al-Zawahiri. This strategy is in strict line with the one al-Zarqawi used in Iraq since 2006. It consists of taking root by sharing the fights of local Sunni populations, rather than undertaking spectacular attacks against international interests. Back then, a first "Islamic State" in Iraq was proclaimed by supporters of al-Zarqawi, led by one al-Baghdadi. American troops were a favourite target, but the main enemies were Shiites and Kurds. In Iraq, like in Syria, conflicts between the communities outweighed universal jihad and the destruction of Israel encouraged by Ayman al-Zawahiri. Al-Qaeda's ideologist criticised this approach, which would lead to a *fitna ta'ifiyya* (communal strife) between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, distancing them from the supreme objective and weakening jihad. Shiite Muslims are heretics who must be eradicated, but their turn will come later. [2]

When it entered Syria, Daesh had already established solid support bases in Mosul and al-Anbar, Iraq's Sunni provinces, which acted as a source of fighters and financial resources. It had already set-up a parallel tax system to the Iraqi state. The Sunni Arab populations of Northern Iraq felt marginalised by the government in Baghdad. Used to leading the country, they were unhappy with the Shiite community having come to power in 2003.

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2 Kepel G (2008). *Terreur et martyre: relever le défi de la civilisation. [Beyond terror and martyrdom: the challenge of civilisation]*. Paris: Flammarion.

Kurdish pressure on Mosul, Kirkuk and other disputed areas were also a cause for concern. The victory General Petraeus secured against al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia was fragile as it was founded on a balance of power between the Shiite government in Baghdad and the Sunni tribes who played a role in the counter-insurgency. When American troops left Iraq at the end of 2011, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki revived the tendency to marginalise Sunni Arabs. This trend was reinforced by a "Shia" nation-building process in Iraq.

Daesh blossoms in the Euphrates valley

Since the summer of 2011, Daesh fighters (then belonging to the al-Nusra Front), began infiltrating Eastern Syria, leading the army to intervene in the Deir ez-Zor province. Some of these fighters were Syrians who had gone to fight in Iraq after 2003 and had become *personae non gratae* in Syria. The al-Nusra Front seemed to be a group like all the other myriad rebel groups that proliferated in the widespread militarisation of the opposition in spring 2012. Al-Nusra and Daesh were a single outfit until spring 2013, when al-Julani, the Syrian, clashed with al-Baghdadi, the Iraqi. Strategic divergence or clash of egos? It seems as though the Syrians in the jihadi group were increasingly unhappy about being led by foreign fighters and wanted to command the movement as they were fighting on Syrian soil. But al-Baghdadi maintained there was no longer any difference between Syria and Iraq – justifying his hegemony over a militia which was renamed as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL is its English acronym and Daesh is the acronym in Arabic), while al-Julani and his supporters kept the al-Qaeda franchise in Syria: the al-Nusra Front. It was not an easy divorce as the two groups were mixed together in the provinces of Idlib, Aleppo, Raqqah and Deir ez-Zor. On the other hand, al-Nusra was the only one of the two present in southern Syria (Damascus and Daraa). During the 2013-2014 winter, the Islamic Front, a pro-Saudi coalition led by Ahrar al-Sham, made an alliance with the al-Nusra Front to kick Daesh out of Syria. Al-Baghdadi's organisation was chased out of the province of Idlib and Western Aleppo, including the city itself. However, Daesh eliminated the other factions from the provinces of Raqqah and Deir ez-Zor, reigning over the whole of the Euphrates valley.

In Syria, the city of Raqqah became its capital and the centre for Daesh's expansion into the North East. With a third of the population illiterate, a birth rate of eight children per woman and over fifty per cent of the active population working in agriculture, the provinces of Raqqah and Deir ez-Zor suffer from low levels of development. While the Baathist state had failed to dissolve the tribal system, which relied on patronage, it successfully manipulated the local population to its own ends, notably through the Euphrates irrigation programme and fear. The construction of the Tishreen Dam on the Euphrates and a vast irrigation system designed to develop Eastern Syria absorbed nearly 20% of Syria's national budget from 1970-1990.[3] One of its objectives was to buy the loyalty of the Euphrates population by distributing agricultural land and water, two rare commodities in this semi-desert region. The development was designed as a political strategy rather than an end in

3 Ababsa M (2009). *Raqqah: territoires et pratiques sociales d'une ville syrienne. [Raqqah, land and social practice in a Syrian city]*. Beyrouth: Ifpo.

itself, leading to waste and blockages as soon as the state reduced the money for maintaining and extending the irrigation programme. At the same time, the local population continued to grow due to high birth rates. Social unrest and the archaic nature of local society were particularly favourable to Daesh, which, having eliminated Baathist regime troops and secular opponents, imposed "authentic" Salafism on the population. It is worth underlining that the traditional way of life was not far removed from the lifestyle preached by Daesh, supported by a particularly strict form of Sharia law.[4]

Establishing Islamic courts is Daesh's best weapon when it comes to seducing the population. Having been ignored by the previous system,[5] victims of its arbitrary and corrupt nature, the lower classes regained their dignity under Daesh. Justice is fast and rulings are executed immediately. Nobody breaks the law and security reins in Daesh-held territory. Security is the primary demand of populations afflicted by three years of fighting – whether this is guaranteed by Daesh or the Syrian government. Daesh is also careful to provide food to the population. Its first actions were to empty the state's grain silos to supply bakeries, which are obliged to provide bread at modest prices. Water, God's gift, is now free for farmers in irrigated land, unlike the years leading up to the crisis when irrigation reform[6] accentuated a dissatisfaction heightened by drought and economic liberalisation. The last twenty years in North East Syria were particularly unstable as the change in economic policy and the end of major irrigation works hit this agricultural area hard. The villages expanded with no accompanying increase in public service or employment. The lack of water for irrigation and its increasing cost prompted thousands of peasant farmers to leave their lands, with no hope of finding work in the boomtowns. Paradoxically, North Eastern Syria is the main oil producing region in Syria, generating immense frustration among the local population. While Syria is not Iraq (it only produces 380,000 barrels a day), this situation led to all kinds of fantasies. Local inhabitants believed that the large numbers of Alawites in the Syrian Petrol Company were stealing their riches.

Control of Syria's oil wells

Islamic State also re-distributes some of the finance from the Gulf's oil monarchies, rich private admirers or the states themselves – when they share strategic interests. But it is not satisfied with external resources – which make it too dependent, so it also taxed the movement of goods and trade and confiscated goods belonging to displaced populations. Petrol sales play a role in Daesh's financial autonomy.

As of spring 2015, control of the oil wells in the Euphrates valley between Deir ez-Zor and al-Bukamal provide a new source of revenue estimated as worth $1-2 million

4 Ababsa M (2009). La recomposition des allégeances tribales dans le Moyen-Euphrate syrien (1958-2007). [The re-working of tribal allegiances in Syria's Middle Euphrates Region]. In: Bonte P, Ben Hounet Y. *La tribu à l'heure de la globalisation, Etudes rurales [Tribes in Globalisation, Rural Studies]*. July-December, No. 184. Paris: EHESS, pp. 65-78.

5 Balanche F (2011). Géographie de la révolte syrienne [Geography of the Syrian Revolution]. *Outre Terre*. No. 27, September.

6 Balanche F (2013). Le programme de modernisation de l'irrigation en Syrie [The Programme to Modernise Irrigation in Syria]. *Méditerranée*. Montpellier: Spring, 2013.

(€800,000 - €1.6 million) per day.[7] Crude or semi-refined oil feeds the illegal oil trade to Iraq, Turkey and even into the area controlled by Damascus. But local consumption is what provides Daesh with most of its revenue. Crude oil is sold to small local refineries that provide petrol to the Syrian and Iraqi population controlled by Daesh – roughly 3 million Syrians and 4 million Iraqis. This fuel is used for vehicles, the motorised pumps essential for irrigation and private generators. Syrian oil production collapsed with the conflict. It has now fallen to less than 50,000 barrels a day, having reached 380,000 barrels a day in 2011. The coalition against Daesh has bombed oil wells and local refineries, reducing production, but to an unknown extent. There are no oil wells burning, which means that strikes target facilities but not the wells themselves. And as the refineries are small-scale, they are easy to re-build. These facilities are not of a comparable size with Syria's only official refineries at Banias and Homs. There was no official refinery in North East Syria.

In Autumn 2014, Daesh made two attempts to seize the Shaer gas fields between Palmyra and al-Salamiyah that supply gas to the power stations at Homs and Damascus. The aim of these raids was purely military, not financial, as Daesh has no interest in selling gas. Raids into South West Syria indicate that the jihadi group has no intention of remaining confined to the Euphrates valley.

The strategy of avoidance between Bashar al-Assad and Daesh

In Syria, Daesh's number one objective is not the fall of the Assad regime, but to unify other rebel groups under its banner. It therefore initially refrained from fighting the Syrian army. But in summer 2014, once the last insurgents in the Euphrates valley had been eliminated or converted, it attacked military bases at Deir ez-Zor and Raqqah, taking control of the Tabqa military airport. Daesh fighters took a base, famous for its defences thanks to two suicide attacks and executed 150 soldiers from the garrison.[8] This traumatised the Syrian army as state television had announced that the Tabqa airport was impregnable only the night before. Why would Daesh want to attack the Syrian army directly? It seems like these attacks were a response to the aerial bombardments suffered since July 2014, although Bashar al-Assad's air-force had avoided hitting them until that date.

This strategy of mutual avoidance allowed the Syrian opposition to accuse Bashar al-Assad of having created Daesh to divide and discredit the uprising. It supported this argument with the fact that Daesh's founders were released from Syrian prisons in 2011. The Syrian president did indeed release prisoners to calm international pressure and the rioters in 2011. Those freed included jihadis, but these were mainly behind Ahrar al-Sham and other fundamentalist movements – not Daesh. The Syrian security services undoubtedly believed that freeing these activists would accelerate incipient radicalisation and division, which could do away with the potentially dangerous moderate opposition

7 Bannier P (2015). *L'État islamique et le bouleversement de l'ordre regional [The Islamic State and the Overturning of the Regional Order]*. Brussels: Editions du Cygnes, 2015.

8 Syrie: l'Etat islamique enlève le dernier bastion du régime dans la région de Rakka [Islamic State Overturns the Régime's Last Bastion in the Raqqah Region]. *Le Monde*, 24 August 2014. Available in: http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2014/08/24/l-etat-islamique-enleve-le-dernier-bastion-du-regime-syrien-dans-la-region-de-rakka_4475910_3218.html

supported by the West. However, they did not manufacture jihadist movements or ship in Chechen fighters. They may also have underestimated these activists' capabilities. Was Abdullah II of Jordan aware of what he was doing when he released al-Zarqawi along with a hundred other prisoners to celebrate his accession in 1999?

If the regime has not attacked Daesh as much as other groups, this is because they do not threaten the front line it defends between Lattakia, Homs, Damascus and Jordan. It is only directly fighting Daesh in Deir ez-Zor and al-Hasakah, elsewhere the steppe acts as a buffer between the two armies. Daesh also serves a perfect dissuader for the Syrian population. It allows the Syrian government to rally hesitant or even hostile populations behind its counter-insurgency strategy as they do not want to fall under Daesh control. Since spring 2014, Daesh has been threatening the Ismaili city of al-Salamiyah, to the East of Hama. The people of al-Salamiyah have always been hostile to the Assad regime. Riots have shaken the city since spring 2011 and young Ismailis refuse to do their military service. Faced with the threat of Daesh, Ismaili leaders petitioned the Syrian president for protection. He replied that over 20,000 young people in the region were refusing to do their military service, so all they had to do was to convince them to join the army or national defence forces, and they would be drafted to protect the city.[9] The same scenario has been repeated in several locations threatened by the jihadis.

Since winter 2014-2015, Daesh has been infiltrating the region of Damascus and Qalamoun, demanding local rebels' allegiance. Could this be a prelude to an offensive against the Syrian capital? Or is it part of a strategy to lead the Syrian uprising and eliminate al-Nusra? Their hated brother now commands rebel groups in the West of the country. It eliminated the "moderate" Hazm group and the Syrian Revolutionary Council from Jabal al-Zawiyah. Both groups had been supported by the West and received sophisticated weapons.[10] Damascus expects the two jihadi groups to confront each other once they have rallied or eliminated moderate rebels, which will leave its foreign critics with no alternative. Nevertheless, the danger is that al-Nusra and Daesh could join forces – as nothing separates them on the ideological front. But to date, the factors dividing them are too strong and the Syrian regime is perfectly capable of maintaining competition between both players, as it has done between the Lebanese militias for years.

Kurds, Shiites and Christians: victims of ethnic cleansing

In Syria, Daesh is pursuing the same policy al-Zarqawi used in Iraq: sharing local battles in order to establish an Islamic State. The main threat to Sunni Arabs in North Eastern Syria are the Kurds. The creation of Kurdish territories and autonomous governments is a reversal of power that Arabs, who are used to ruling over the Kurds, find unacceptable. Daesh, like previous Baathist regimes, uses this anti-Kurd sentiment, subjecting this minority to a clear strategy of ethnic cleansing. It does not matter to them that the Kurds

9 Interview with an al-Salamiyah resident, February 2015.

10 Un groupe de rebelles syriens modérés jette l'éponge. [Moderate Syrian Rebel Group Throws in the Towel]. *Le Temps*, Genève, 7 March 2015. Available in: http://www.letemps.ch/Page/Uuid/5717edf2-c447-11e4-a445-d520cd1a7313/Un_groupe_de_rebelles_syriens_mod%C3%A9r%C3%A9s_jette_l%C3%A9ponge

are Sunni Muslims, for al-Baghdadi does not find their form of Islam sincere. It is true that the Marxist-Leninist Democratic Union Party's (PYD) domination over Syrian Kurds indicates a distance from religion that is tantamount to apostasy for the jihadis. But not all Kurds are militant atheist Marxists, most Syrian Kurds are believers.

As for the Shiites, they are simply to be eliminated as heretics. After centuries of domination, Sunnis in Iraq have been unable to bear the Shiite rise to power following the fall of Saddam Hussein. In Syria, the Sunni majority contest Alawite domination resulting from the 1963 Baathist revolution. This is one of the parameters of the Syrian revolt. In the Euphrates valley, a few Shiite communities have in fact recently converted from the Sunni faith, under the influence of Iranian preaching. The Iranians have founded mosques across Syria, along the route of the prisoners (Hussein's wives and daughters who were taken to Damascus in captivity after the battle of Karbala), or to commemorate Shiite wisemen. This is the case in Raqqah where the construction of a major Shiite tomb in the 1990s led to the conversion of a few hundred families in the region.[11] Those that did not flee before Daesh arrived were massacred. This was the case in the village of Hatlah,[12] which lies between Deir ez-Zor and Raqqah, in June 2013.

Raqqah, Tabaqa and Deir ez-Zor are home to Christian communities, notably descendants of the survivors of the 1915 Armenian genocide, when the Ottomans led Anatolian Armenians into the Syrian desert and left them to die of hunger. In principle, Christians are considered "people of the Book" and should be tolerated as *dhimmi*, so long as they pay a special tax: the *jizya*. In Deir ez-Zor, the Armenian memorial complex and the city's churches have been destroyed. The city church in Raqqah is closed and the few remaining Christian families have been banned from practising their faith. Most of the Christian population has fled Daesh-held territory, as their safety may come under threat at any time – Christian Assyrians in the Khabur valley are subject to murderous raids and hostage-taking missions.

Daesh wants to eliminate any community that could be used to support a later re-conquest: the Sinjar Yazidis are seen as heretics, but the mountain range in this part of Iraq is above all a strategic location that threatens Mosul and ensures continuity between Syrian and Iraqi Kurdistan. The Kurdish enclave of Ayn al-Arab (Kobane) is hindering Daesh progress towards Aleppo; it is therefore vital to eliminate this threat before making progress towards the South West. Al-Salamiyah, to the East of Hama, is inhabited by Ismailis (Shiites) and Alawites, and will surely be the next target, more because of its strategic position on the new route connecting Homs to Aleppo than due to its "heretic" population. Al-Baghdadi wants to reign over a territory cleansed of non-Arab and non-Sunni elements to guarantee his security: he is not interested in Baghdad, with its Shiite majority, unlike Aleppo, which is a more accessible target.

As in Iraq, in Syria Daesh is made up of local fighters, primarily recruited from the younger members of the lower classes, who dream of reversing the traditional power

11 Ababsa M (2001). Les mausolées invisibles : Raqqa ville de pèlerinage chiite ou pôle étatique en Jazîra syrienne? [Invisible Mausoleums: Raqqa, City of Shiite Pilgrimage or a Pole for the State in Syrian Jazira]. *Annales de Géographie*. No. 622, pp. 662-79.

12 Available in: http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/syrie/la-france-et-la-syrie/actualites-2013/article/syrie-massacre-de-60-chiites-dans

structure of patriarchy and tribalism, for their own benefit.[13] But it does not overlook traditional territorial structures: tribal chiefs are asked to marry their daughters to Islamic State's "emirs" and to send their sons to fight in their ranks. As a result, the entire support network tips towards Daesh, which risks complicating any counter-insurgency strategy based on Sunni tribes – like that used by General Petraeus in 2006.

How far can the international coalition go in supporting the Kurds in Syria?

Following their victory in Kobane, the Kurds managed to take back most of the region's villages, deserted by those who fled to Turkey before the advancing Daesh. The US supported PYD in Syria because they fought Daesh, despite the fact that this movement is linked to the PKK, which is on the official list of terrorist organisations. The fight against Daesh and US pragmatism has overcome moral considerations. Support was given without any commitments from PYD as the US needed effective supporters to fight Daesh in Syria. This questions the situation of the Free Syrian Army – who had received US support since the start of the Syrian crisis. In fact, the West has run out of supporters in a Syrian rebellion that has become dominated by fundamentalist groups. In collaboration with Turkey, the US decided to train "moderate" fighters to fight against Islamic State, and, at Turkey's express request, against Bashar al-Assad (without great conviction). But it is not enough to train Syrian rebels; they also need to want to fight, and they have no desire to confront Daesh.

Rebels likely to fight Daesh are those whose territory is under threat or who were involved in fighting in the winter of 2013-2014, an episode that left its mark in the Aleppo region. The West can therefore only count on resistance to Daesh where locals are under threat, but it is impossible to rely on these rebel groups to go on the offensive. What's more, these rebel groups share the same fundamentalist ideology as Daesh (al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham), and the Pentagon cannot arm them. Al-Nusra and its allies recently eliminated acceptable groups to prevent the West from using them as support.

As a result the PYD is the only remaining option – their Marxist-Leninist ideology is unlikely to bring them alongside Daesh. But their objective is not to advance as far as Raqqah and Deir ez-Zor to chase Daesh out. Like the Iraqi Peshmerga, their aim is to free Kurdish territory from the Arabs so as to build a single autonomous region stretching from Afyrn to the Tigris, which involves occupying Arab (Tell Abyad and Jarabulus) and Turkmen (Azaaz) territory, pushing these populations into the arms of Daesh. After re-taking Kobane, the PYD's objective is to join up with the Kurdish canton of Jezireh. To do so, they need to take Tell Abyad, a small city with a majority Arab population.

In the spring of 2013, the PYD seized control of Tell Abyad for a few days, angering the Arab population who called on Daesh for help. The Kurdish militia fighters were rapidly chased from the city, along with the Kurdish families living in Tell Abyad, whose houses were pillaged then burned. A return of PYD Kurdish militiamen could be accompanied by these families' revenge, forcing the city's Arabs to flee.

13 Lund A (2014). Who are the Soldiers of the Islamic State? In: Carnegie Endowment [online]. Available in: http://carnegieendowment.org/syriaincrDaesh/?fa=57021

Towards an alliance between the international coalition and Bashar al-Assad?

Western intervention against Daesh is not an easy task, as relying on local populations means involvement in ethnic, religious and tribal conflicts in this complicated region. In Iraq, Sunni Arab populations in the North see the army as an occupying Shiite force, while the Kurdish Peshmerga who now control Kirkuk are also rejected as they are accused of wanting to carry out ethnic cleansing in order to extend the territory of the Kurdistan Regional Government into these "disputed" areas. The same is true in Syria, where Kurdish strategy is to create an uninterrupted territory stretching between their three cantons in the North, which means that Arab and Turkmen populations in these areas would have to accept their new minority status or leave the future Rojava. Supporting the Syrian Army is a consideration for the West, as they cannot effectively fight Daesh in Iraq without forcing them out of Syria; their Kurdish allies have no desire to fight Daesh outside Rojava and they cannot rely on "moderate rebels" as these no longer exist.

A programme to train an army of moderate rebels was launched in Turkey in the spring of 2015. But at least a year is needed to train 5,000 fighters, and there is no guarantee that they will be capable of fighting Daesh, or whether they will have any desire to do so. For the Syrians did not take up arms against Daesh, but against Bashar al-Assad The inevitable "collateral damage" to the civil population has brought him new support. With no terrestrial support in Syria, coalition strikes will soon prove ineffective, and even be counter-productive. The international coalition is therefore faced with a Cornelian dilemma: renew relations with Bashar al-Assad or allow Daesh to prosper in Syria and risk it spreading to Jordan and Lebanon. Operations in Iraq, led in coordination with Iran, should prepare the ground for an alliance reversal as Daesh has now become the main threat in the region, making authoritarian regimes the lesser evil. The United States priority is to preserve Syrian institutions in order to avoid a Libyan scenario,[14] yet Bashar al-Assad (who retains the support of Iran and Russia) is the keystone in a system that must be preserved in the face of jihadism and chaos.

14 Speech by a US State Department representative at a seminar at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy in Washington on 12 February 2015.

TURKEY'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS IRAQ

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Relations between Turkey and Iraq provide an ideal framework for reflecting on Turkey's main foreign policy principles in the field. To give some examples, in 1958 when General Qasim's coup occurred in Iraq, prompting the withdrawal of Iraq from the Western-supported defence organization, namely the Baghdad Pact of which Turkey was a member, Turkey reacted through the lense of the Cold War by seeing this coup as an instrument of the Eastern Bloc, led by the Soviet Union, to dominate the Middle East. This evaluation was undoubtedly the consequence of the general perception dominant in Turkish decision makers' minds, which was in turn determined by the Western Bloc's security perception during the 1950's. On the other hand Turkey evaluated the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988 independently of Cold War parameters, perceiving the war as competition between two regional powers in the Middle East and applying its policy of non-interference. This was a foreign policy approach that had been sown by Turkey in the 1960s.

The developments related to Iraq in the post-Cold War period were nevertheless significant for Turkey insofar as they revealed the main challenge Ankara faced in this new period. In effect, the country's deviation from its non-interference policy, which had been the basic principle underpinning Turkey's foreign policy since the 1960s, was first observed with the outbreak of the Gulf crisis in 1990. This deviation from the non-interference policy inherited from the Cold War period gained momentum with the Iraq War in 2003. The aftermath of the war in particular has made it incumbent on Turkey to adopt a much more comprehensive approach towards Iraq. From this perspective, the importance of Iraq is undeniable insofar as it offers a perfect reflection of how Turkey's foreign policy has evolved.

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With the foregoing in mind, this chapter, which aims to examine Turkey's approach towards Iraq in the post-Cold War period, is divided into two main sections. The first section looks at the Gulf crisis, which serves as a basis for investigating the main challenge Turkey faced with the end of the Cold War and to briefly describe the new strategy it attempted to apply. The second section of the chapter studies the Turkish approach to the Iraq War in 2003, and its aftermath, by revealing elements of continuity and change in Turkey-Iraq relations, and at the same time serves as a platform for understanding current relations between Ankara and Baghdad in light of recent developments.

The Gulf crisis in 1990-1991 and its aftermath

The inevitable impact of the end of the Cold War on Turkey's foreign policy was the country's deviation from the non-interference policy it had been hitherto applying. In effect, Turkey had developed a foreign policy mainly based on the notion that regional problems were to be solved by regional countries, that Turkey was to adopt the principle of non-interference in other states' domestic affairs, as well as regional crises, and was to rely on diplomacy for the resolution of conflicts. According to this policy, Turkey was to refrain from "appearing to administer the business of others"[2] and was to act in as neutral a manner as possible. It was largely believed by the then Turkish decision makers that this was the only way for Turkey to minimize the costs of surviving in a world ideologically and strategically divided by two superpowers. According to them, this policy was also the only way for Turkey to reconcile "the requirements of Turkey's NATO alliance with the need for good neighbourhood relations".[3] The ultimate consequence of the adoption of Turkey's foreign policy approach in the 1960s was revealed in subsequent decades by its neutrality; "the equidistance" that Turkey endeavoured to adopt in regional conflicts by keeping itself at a similar distance from parties in regional conflicts, despite both its NATO membership and close relations with the US.[4] During the Cold War period, Turkey's non-interference policy was inevitably facilitated by a series of circumstances, namely the fact that international society was divided between two camps, the UN Security Council was trapped between two superpowers and therefore paralyzed and, lastly, due to the prioritizing of state objectives over human rights' issues.

A new world order

However, the outbreak of the Gulf crisis in 1990 coincided with the beginning of a new period in world politics. Within this framework, the end of the division of world politics into two ideological and strategic camps and the subsequent evolution of international society into one that embraced human and global concerns much more comprehensively than before had an unprecedented impact on Turkey's foreign policy, and which was ultimately felt in Iraq.

2 Aykan MB (1994). *Turkey's role in the organization of the Islamic Conference: 1960-1992*, New York: Vantage Press, p. 62.

3 Aykan MB (1996). Turkish perspectives on Turkish-US relations concerning Persian Gulf security in the Post- Cold War Era: 1989-1995. *The Middle East Journal*. Vol. 50, No. 3, p. 348.

4 Altunışık MB (2009). Worldviews and Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East. *New Perspectives on Turkey*. No. 40, p. 175.

The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in August 1990 was not only significant in the sense that it represented the violation of sovereignty of an independent country by another independent country, it was also important because it revealed the extent of the threat of repressive and authoritarian regimes for both human and global security. In this period, there was an increasing perception in Turkey that regimes that applied repressive measures to their own populations could pose a danger not only to their own peoples and security but also to the peoples of the region and even to the peoples of the world. In that respect, it would not be incorrect to state that there was a growing awareness in Turkey's decision makers' minds that democratic states were indispensable for achieving human and global security. It was undoubtedly a radical change of perception for Turkey, which had not hitherto been interested in the domestic affairs and types of regimes of other states. In fact, Turkey's realization of the strong connection between a state's domestic affairs and its foreign relations could therefore be traced back to the outbreak of the Gulf crisis, which makes Iraq a critical neighbour for Turkey.

In addition to this, the fact that the UN Security Council was unprecedentedly unified on the issue of condemning Iraq's actions and subsequently on the imposition of an economic embargo to convince Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwaiti territories, was a crucial factor that prevented Turkey from adopting a neutral stance vis-à-vis this crisis. In effect, Turkey had always acted in conformity with the general tendency and the dominant norms and beliefs of international society ever since its foundation. In that sense, it was obvious that the adoption of a neutral stance on the part of Turkey with respect to the Gulf crisis might trigger the alienation and even the exclusion of Turkey from international society by endangering its alliances. Here it is worth noting that Turkey felt the need to act in conformity with the decisions of international powers not only through a sense of obligation, but also because of a growing belief that the new world order was to be built on democracy and peaceful foreign relations. In that sense, the intense discussions on the close connection between democracy and world peace initially held in the Turkish Parliament were remarkable.[5]

Abandoning non-interference

This radical change in Turkey's perception of the new nature of world politics on the one hand and the unprecedented unified position of international society against Iraq on the other paved the way for Turkey's deviation from its non-interference policy in the wake of the invasion. Within this scenario, the Gulf crisis represented a milestone in Turkey's foreign policy and a challenge that Turkey had not faced until then. Turkey's deviation from its non-interference policy was consolidated by its decision to take part in Operation Desert Storm to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait by opening up Turkish air space and military bases for use by the international coalition, as well as the transfer of a large number of armed troops to its frontier with Iraq. In the post-Cold War period, Turkey would often come to realize that it could not stay neutral in crises. In that sense, the Gulf Crisis was important insofar as it constituted the first example of that realization.

5 The period both on the verge and in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War was characterized by intense discussions in the Turkish Parliament. One of the most highly-charged debates took place on 20 January 1991. See *Turkish Grand National Assembly Official Reports*. Period. 18, Vol. 55, 20 January 1991, p. 373.

In fact, Turkey's approach vis-à-vis Iraq in the 1990s was confirmed by consecutive resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council. In the aftermath of the Gulf War, which took place between 16 January and 28 February 1991, and which ensured the withdrawal of Iraqi armed forces from Kuwait while leaving Saddam Hussein in power in Baghdad, Turkey continued to maintain the embargo against Iraq despite its economic losses, in tandem with the UN. Turkey also supported the establishment of UNSCOM, a special commission responsible for inspecting Iraq's compliance to disarmament through the destruction of its Weapons of Mass Destruction facilities. Most important of all, during this period Turkey did not refrain from initiating with France the establishment of a "safe haven" in Northern Iraq, a special zone exempted from Iraq's sovereignty to protect Kurdish civilians from the Iraqi leader's repressive measures. The roots of this project launched by Turkey can be traced back to 1988. In fact, 1988 was a hard year for Turkey, as it had to deal with thousands of Kurdish refugees fleeing from the Kurdish town of Halabja, where Saddam Hussein had ordered the use of chemical weapons – notably poison gas – against the Kurds. In addition to the atrocities suffered by the population in Halabja due to the use of chemical weapons, Turkey faced tremendous social, economic and security-related problems in the aftermath of the Halabja massacres. From Turkey's perspective, a similar crisis could probably occur in the aftermath of the Gulf War, leaving the country facing a humanitarian crisis. Despite contending approaches in Turkish Parliament and many discussions on the establishment of such a special zone in Northern Iraq,[6] this zone was established in 1991 through Operation Provide Comfort and continued to exist until the war in 2003.

From containment to deterrence

The main concern shaping Turkey's approach vis-à-vis Iraq during the rest of the 1990s dwelt upon the probability of the central government in Baghdad losing its sovereignty and territorial integrity, potentially fuelling similar aspirations among the almost 15 million Kurds living in Turkey. Indeed, all the steps taken by Turkey up until then, and which were also in conformity with the resolutions of the UN Security Council, had undermined the authority of the central government in Baghdad, a fact that was directly felt by Turkey. In particular, the fact that Turkey faced crucial security problems due to the growing terrorist activities of the PKK, a Kurdish separatist terrorist organization in Turkey active since 1984 and emanating from Northern Iraq, in subsequent years revealed the difficulty for Turkey to act in conformity with human and global security while preserving its own national interests and national security. Although Turkey had been engaged to contain Saddam Hussein through various strategies ranging from the economic to the political, and had been involved in Iraq in tandem with international powers, Turkey would balance its involvement to protect its national interests in the ensuing years. The policy hitherto applied by Turkey towards the central government in Baghdad could be defined as "deterrence" in the eyes of the latter, which also had a negative impact on Turkey. Therefore, Turkey's main purpose in the following years would be to balance this deterrence with inducements towards Baghdad.

6 See, for instance, *Turkish Grand National Assembly Official Reports*. Period. 19, Vol. 26, 24 December 1992, p. 419.

In that sense, all cautious steps taken by Turkey – particularly from the second half of the 1990s onwards – towards Iraq were remarkable. Turkey supported the appeasement of the economic embargo against Iraq to both compensate the economic losses Turkey had suffered for many years and lessen the humanitarian impact in Iraq caused by the embargo.[7] Moreover, although Turkey supported the activities of UNSCOM, it did not take part in Operation Desert Fox when the US bombarded Baghdad's arms production sites in December 1998. Turkey also made huge efforts to create political and economic ties with Northern Iraq and its Kurdish leaders. The cooperation between Turkey and Northern Iraq became so strong that Kurdish economic dependence on Turkey was an undeniable fact in the mid 1990s and Turkey was defined as the "only gateway of Northern Iraq to the outside world" by Kurdish leader Mesud Barzani in 1994.[8] The successive visits of Turkish delegations in Erbil, in the centre of Northern Iraq, and the large amounts of humanitarian assistance provided by Turkish governments paved the way for the emergence of a remarkable relationship between the two sides.

The core of the Turkish strategy was in fact to ensure Iraq's territorial integrity by demonstrating to the Kurdish leaders in the North that it would be much more beneficial for them to have Turkey as an ally instead of an enemy. The message transmitted from Turkey to the Kurds through these strategies was that Turkey would be an ally of the Kurds as long as they did not seek independence and stayed within the national boundaries of Iraq. In return, these inducements of economic cooperation and humanitarian assistance on the part of Turkey were replaced by elements of deterrence when a belief grew in Turkey that Northern Iraq had become a safe haven for PKK. Turkey did not refrain from launching military operations in Northern Iraq during the 1990s in order to expel the PKK and did not hesitate to sign regional pacts with regional states such as Syria, Iran and even Russia to deal with Kurdish separatist organizations.[9] In that sense, it was undeniable that the Gulf crisis had posed a great challenge for Turkey, which started to be involved in Iraq in the early 1990s. But this involvement was based on a balanced strategy of synchronic use of inducements and deterrence towards both Baghdad and Erbil, which was internalized by several coalition governments in Turkey during the 1990s.

7 Apart from the economic losses Turkey suffered due to the embargo against Iraq, the fact that Iraqi people were deprived of their basic needs was another reason for Turkish decision-makers to appease the UN Security Council's decision on the embargo. See, for example, the following reports on the health and malnutrition problems of the Iraqi people: World Health Organization (1997). *Press Release WHO/16*, 27 February 1997. Available in: https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/202/42509.html.

8 Kirisci K (1996). Turkey and the Kurdish safe haven in Northern Iraq. *Journal of South Asian Studies and Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol. 19, No. 3, p. 31.

9 Olson R (1995). Kurdish question and Turkey's foreign policy 1991-1995: from the Gulf War to the incursion into Iraq. *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 4, 9, 12.

The Iraq War in 2003 and its aftermath

Turkey's balanced strategy synchronically applied towards Baghdad and Erbil sought to preserve Iraq's territorial integrity and national sovereignty, but was unable to solve Turkey's security problems with the PKK,[10] which continued in the 2000s. Nevertheless, Turkey's efforts to reconcile human and global security with its own national interests and security, despite all its shortcomings in the early 2000s, faced a critical impediment when the US adopted unilateralism and pre-emptive strikes as its main foreign policy strategy after 9/11. In effect, the fact that with the invasion of Iraq the US became a protagonist in the Middle Eastern stage has been the second challenge for post-Cold War Turkish foreign policy. Since then, it has become difficult for Ankara to adopt a balanced strategy reconciling both human and global security requirements with those of its national security.

Turkey's approach towards Iraq after 2003 was consolidated within the framework of the power vacuum created in Iraq by the invasion, which required a more comprehensive approach. Despite US insistence, Turkey did not participate in the invasion of Iraq by the US-led "coalition of the willing" between 20 March and 1 May 2003, which also lacked UN Security Council authorization and the support of world public opinion in general. Nevertheless, Turkey did not refrain from adopting at least a partial involvement policy in the re-construction process of Iraq after the invasion, a motivation that was mainly due to growing concerns amidst Turkish decision makers regarding potential loss of control in Iraq. Indeed, the US alliance with the Iraqi Kurds in the process of overthrowing Saddam Hussein's regime revealed significant suspicions in Turkey relating to the future of Iraq. According to the overriding perception in Turkey, the likelihood of the rise of Kurdish aspirations to form an independent Kurdish state in Northern Iraq, which could also trigger a similar trend among Kurds in Turkey, was the incontrovertible consequence of the collapse of the regime in 2003.[11] This overriding concern in Turkey, mainly based on the territorial integrity of Iraq and therefore on Turkey's national security, was quite successful in rekindling Turkey's dormant concerns about Iraq during the 1990s, and old questions resurfaced in the Turkish Parliament regarding the foreign policy Turkey had to adopt towards Iraq.

Turkey, the KRG and the Kurdish opening

After long periods of discussions, Turkey's approach vis-à-vis Iraq manifested itself through a much more comprehensive policy that aimed to transform Turkey into a strategic neighbour for Iraq, able to control and even lead regional affairs in the Middle East in general, and the internal dynamics of Iraq in particular. Turkey's active

10 In effect, Turkey's terrorism problem with the PKK constituted one of the country's most fragile problems during the 1990s. The increasing number of terrorist attacks against not only Turkish soldiers and policemen but also civilians prompted a strong reaction within Turkish public opinion against the PKK, while the PKK argued that it was acting in the name of the Kurdish population in Turkey whose political and social rights had long been disregarded by the Turkish state. For a detailed analysis of the Kurdish problem in Turkey in the 1990s, see Barkey H (1997). Turkey's Kurdish question: critical turning points and missed opportunities. *Middle East Journal*. Vol. 51, No.1, 1997, pp. 59-79.

11 On the contending approaches in the Turkish Parliament on the verge of the invasion, see, for example, *Turkish Grand National Assembly Official Reports*. Period. 22, Vol. 4, the session of 4 February 2003, and also *Turkish Grand National Assembly Official Reports*, Period. 22, Vol. 5, the session of 20 February 2003.

engagement in Northern Iraq, resulting in the establishment of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in the wake of the invasion, has become an inseparable component of this comprehensive approach.

Particularly from 2005 onwards, Turkey has launched numerous noteworthy political and economic initiatives targeted at the KRG. The key figures of the Justice and Development Party (JDP), the single political party in power in Turkish politics since 2002, have established close relations with leading figures in the KRG, have made many diplomatic visits to Erbil and, more importantly, have been the initiators of huge economic investments in the region.[12] It would not be an inaccurate reading of the history if one stated that Turkey's rapprochement with Kurdish leaders in Northern Iraq in the 2000s are reminiscent of events in the 1990s. Conversely, the difference with respect to the relations established this century is that they constitute a much more "institutionalized" framework that has resulted in a pattern of continuity in Turkey's foreign policy, as highlighted by leading experts in the field.[13]

Moreover, another important difference in Turkey's relations with the KRG in the 2000s when compared with the 1990s is that the close linkage between domestic politics and foreign policy that had appeared in Turkish decision makers' minds in the 1990s has acquired a concrete dimension and had a substantial impact on Turkish patterns of behaviour. In that sense, the democratization package adopted by the Turkish government towards its Kurdish population, known as the "Kurdish Opening", and which started in 2009, should be accepted as a component of Turkey's approach towards Iraq. Taking this argument one step further, it would not be wrong to state that Turkey, by meeting some of the political, social and cultural demands of its Kurdish population, has aimed to transmit a message to the Kurdish populations of both Turkey and Iraq that it would be much more beneficial for them to stay within the boundaries of those countries.

Foreign and domestic policies: a delicate balance

Turkey's security concerns vis-à-vis Iraq are certainly behind the Kurdish Opening, but its closer relations with the European Union also played an important role. Put differently, it became clear that Turkey's failing grade on the human rights issue in the EU Commission's yearly progress reports was a motivating factor to adopt a specific framework of reforms to improve Kurds' rights. This is because EU membership had become one of Turkey's main foreign policy goals in the 2000s. It is also true that the formation of a customs union between Turkey and the EU in 1996 and the subsequent economic changes in the traditional economic structure of the Turkish state in the 2000s served to create "a trading state", as put by Kirisci, i.e. a state in which national interests are not

12 Many studies have been published by leading scholars and experts on the Middle East focusing on Turkey's partnership with the KRG in the 2000s. See, for example, Barkey HJ (2011). Turkey and Iraq: the making of a partnership. *Turkish Studies*. Vol. 12, No. 4, pp. 663-674. See, from the same athor, Turkey's new engagement in Iraq: embracing Iraqi Kurdistan. *The United-States Institute of Peace Special Report* 237, May 2010.

13 Olson R (2005). *The goat and the butcher, nationalism and state formation in Kurdistan-Iraq since the Iraqi War*. California: Mazda Publishers, pp. 12-15, 24.

only determined by security concerns but also through economic needs.[14] In that regard, it is possible to argue that the intensification of relations with the EU played an important role in Turkey's rapprochement with the KRG, not only through democratization reforms for the Kurds of Turkey but also through the increasing number of economic initiatives adopted by Turkey for the benefit of the KRG.

It seems appropriate to mention here that Turkey's main motivation for reconciling human-global security with its own national interests and security was consolidated after 2003 with the country's comprehensive approach towards Iraq, including institutionalized relations with the KRG and democratization reforms within Turkey. Nevertheless, this strategy did not progress smoothly and Turkey faced significant difficulties in the subsequent years. The problem between the JDP and the Maliki government in Baghdad on the protection in Turkish territory of the former Sunni vice-president of Iraq, Tariq Al-Hashimi, who was sentenced to death in his home country, was the first of these difficulties. The tension between Ankara and Baghdad mounted when Turkey began to cooperate with the KRG on energy matters, to the extent that it became an uncomfortable matter for central government in Baghdad. Indeed, for the first time in their diplomatic relations, an Iraqi prime minister declared that Iraq would take action against Turkey for cooperating with the KRG, which it saw as a material breach of Iraq's constitution, as well as for intervening in the internal affairs of Iraq.[15] It seems possible to state here that Turkey attempted to apply a balanced strategy based on both inducements and deterrence towards Baghdad and Northern Iraq during the 1990s but it is obvious that maintaining this balance became much more complicated for Turkey after 2003. The gravity of the situation for Turkey lies in the difficulty in maintaining stable relations with both Baghdad and Erbil.

At this point, it is also worth highlighting the role played by the JDP, which has been in power in Turkey since 2002. Particularly in the period when Ankara and Baghdad had tense relations between 2012 and 2014, the JDP received strong criticism for having damaged Turkey's balanced approach towards Iraq. The opposition political parties and many experts in the domestic politics of Turkey, as well as foreign policy experts, suggested that the JDP had launched a superficial democratization process to gain the votes of Kurdish nationalist parties in the elections and had therefore used the Kurdish issue as an instrument to consolidate power for itself. The fact that the JDP embarked on what several analysts consider a sectarian policy has also attracted substantial criticism. Recently, Turkey's late reaction to the rise of ISIS, an extreme Sunni terrorist organization operating in the northern regions of both Iraq and Syria, has aggravated the existing criticism, sparking new discussions on Turkey's foreign policy and also revealing its Achilles' heel due to the comprehensive approach that Turkey had internalized towards Iraq from 2003 onwards.

14 Kirisci K (2009). The transformation of Turkish foreign policy: the rise of the trading state. *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No. 40, pp. 29-57.

15 Irak, Türkiye'ye dava açacak", [Iraqi will proceed against Turkey]. *Milliyet* [A Turkish daily newspaper]. 18 January 2014.

Conclusion

This study has examined Turkey's foreign policy towards Iraq, particularly after the end of the Cold War. It has reaffirmed that Turkey deviated from its non-interference policy with the end of the Cold War and that the first example of this deviation came with the Gulf crisis. It is possible to surmise that in light of the changes within international society throughout the 1990s, Turkey sought to reconcile human and global security with its own national interests and national security. Major steps taken towards Iraq by different Turkish coalition governments during the 1990s, as well as by the JDP during the 2000s, certainly reflect this search on the part of Turkey, and should be accepted as an element of continuity in Turkey's foreign policy towards Iraq.

However, the first important difference in Turkey's approach towards Iraq in the 2000s with respect to that adopted in the 1990s is that Turkey is engaged in Iraq in a much more comprehensive way than before, due to the invasion of Iraq by the US. The institutionalization of relations with the KRG seems to be the most evident outcome of the foregoing. The second difference, however, is Turkey's search for new instruments as a component of its approach towards Iraq. Democratization reforms vis-à-vis the Kurdish population inside Turkey since 2009 could thus be linked to Turkey's changing perception of the interrelation between domestic politics and foreign policy and consequently Turkey's search for new tools to resolve the Kurdish problem, including in the southern part of Turkey and Northern Iraq. In that sense, it would not be wrong to state that Turkey's approach towards Iraq has always developed within the framework of the Kurdish problem inside Turkey. Turkey's ultimate goal with all these components is to preserve Iraq's territorial integrity and state sovereignty. Whether this goal changes or not, only time will tell.

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BOMBING FROM BEHIND?
AN ASSESSMENT OF US STRATEGY VIS-À-VIS ISIL

Jean-Loup Samaan[1]

It's harder to end a war than begin one. Indeed, everything that American troops have done in Iraq – all the fighting and all the dying, the bleeding and the building, and the training and the partnering – all of it has led to this moment of success. Now, Iraq is not a perfect place. It has many challenges ahead. But we're leaving behind a sovereign, stable and self-reliant Iraq, with a representative government that was elected by its people.

President Barack Obama,

"Welcome Home" speech at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, 14 December 2011.

On 15th December 2011, as the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq fulfilled one of the main Obama campaign promises, the future of the country looked at best uncertain. The Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), negotiated by the US Department of Defense with the Iraqi authorities, was below the level of the security demands identified by the planners in Washington. Additionally, the government of Nuri al Maliki was implementing a series of controversial sectarian policies that raised concerns of a new civil war between Sunni and Shia communities.[2]

Meanwhile, in neighbouring Syria, the initially peaceful, spontaneous revolution against the Assad regime was turning into a bloody civil war. Soon the void engendered

1 Researcher at the Middle East Faculty of the NATO Defense College (Rome, Italy). The views expressed here are his own, and do not necessarily reflect those of NATO or the NATO Defense College.

2 On Maliki's political style, see Dodge T (2012). *Iraq: from war to a new authoritarianism*, London: Routledge.

by the US military withdrawal from Iraq and the fragmentation of Syria progressively left room for local militias to gain control of vast areas of both countries.

In June 2014, after months of indecisive attempts by the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)[3] to capture major cities in Iraq, the group took control of Mosul and Tikrit. Despite American expectations, the Iraqi Army proved incapable of holding its territory and, by the end of the same month, ISIL had announced the creation of its caliphate.

The murder of American journalist James Foley in late August 2014 then triggered the creation of a US strategy against ISIL. A few weeks later, President Obama delivered a speech to the nation from the State Floor of the White House that could be marked as a milestone in the US strategy vis-à-vis ISIL. Obama said in clear terms: "Our objective is clear: we will degrade, and ultimately destroy, ISIL through a comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy".[4] He emphasized the trigger for US action: "This is a core principle of my presidency: If you threaten America, you will find no safe haven". According to official documents, this strategy includes five lines of effort: providing military support to local partners; impeding the flow of foreign fighters; stopping ISIL's financing and funding; addressing humanitarian crises in the region; and exposing ISIL's true nature.[5]

Nevertheless, the US strategy remains mainly a military one. The logic is twofold: at strategic level, building a wide coalition of allied countries and partners on the ground to avoid a massive American footprint; and at operational level, relying primarily on the use of airstrikes to stop ISIL's momentum.

Coalition games

As the Obama administration made sure that it would not get bogged down in a new war in the Middle East, it tried as much as possible to share the burden of the fight against ISIL. To that end, it quickly reached out to its international allies and partners so as to build a coalition. Obama appointed retired General John Allen to be his Special Envoy to coordinate with coalition partners. A former commander of US forces in Afghanistan, Allen had publicly called for an American response earlier in 2014.[6]

According to the State Department, up to 60 countries are today members of the coalition. The number may seem impressive, but in many cases this is token participation for diplomatic purposes. This is reminiscent of the situation in 2003, when the Bush administration built a "coalition of the willing" to launch the invasion of Iraq that included no less than 49 members. This time, according to sources in US Central Command, only "about 30 really play[ed] a role at the operational level".[7]

3 The group is also known as "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria" (ISIS), as the "Islamic State" (IS) or by its Arabic acronym Dae'esh, which stands for *Dawlat Islamyya lil Iraq wa ach-Cham*. On 14 May 2014, the US Department of State announced its decision to use "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL) as the group's primary name, making this the most commonly used name in security politics. This is the name used in the present paper.

4 The White House Office of the Press Secretary, Statement by the President on ISIL, 10 September 2014.

5 US Department of State. The five lines of effort. Available in: http://www.state.gov/s/seci/index.htm.

6 Allen J (2014). Destroy the Islamic State Now. *Defense One*, 20 August 2014.

7 Interview with the author, Doha, February 2015.

It was noticeable this time that no transatlantic disagreement emerged, as all NATO countries joined the coalition. NATO even hosted the first meeting of foreign ministers from the countries participating, in December 2014. The Obama calculus thus relies on the expectation that both regional and local partners will help achieve a breakthrough on the battlefield. However, the coalition against ISIL faces significant obstacles such as an imbalanced division of labour, conflicting security priorities among its members and limited effectiveness of partners on the ground.

On the division of labour, the US is by far doing most of the work. By the end of September 2014, after two months of bombing ISIL targets, the US share of the coalition's airstrikes already accounted for 74% of the total (177 out of 240). By February 2015, this had increased to 81% (1820 out of 2247).

In addition, there have been various political and operational issues between the US and some of its partners. The crash of a Jordanian F-16 fighter aircraft on mission near Raqqa in December, and the subsequent capture of its pilot, triggered concerns among the partners involved in the air campaign. As a result, the UAE, which was among the most active Arab partners in the coalition, suspended its combat missions, fearing for the pilots' safety. Specifically, UAE authorities demanded that the US should bring its search-and-rescue teams in northern Iraq closer to the battleground. In February, the Pentagon confirmed it was moving its assets closer. But although this provides the UAE forces with sufficient reassurances, it also deepens the imbalance between the US and its allies regarding the risks taken. The existence of different national caveats and rules of engagement is nothing new, as witnessed in Afghanistan, but the absence of an international framework (whether UN, NATO or EU) makes coordination even harder.

These operational constraints are minor compared to some fundamental political divergences. In particular, US-Turkey cooperation against ISIL proved to be a very sensitive issue. The government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been repeatedly accused of letting foreign fighters cross its border with Syria. The logic was that the fight against Assad took priority over the extremist nature of these combatants.

But soon the fight against ISIL coalesced with the Kurdish question. The siege of Kobane in the fall of 2014 evidenced a significant gap between US and Turkish interests. Whereas the American government increased its airstrikes and arms supplies to help the Kurdish forces counter the ISIL offensive, the Turks showed reluctance to allow any flow (of fighters or weaponry) to reach the Syrian Kurdish area. Two concerns were driving the Turkish calculus: first, the fear that open support to US-backed Kurdish forces against ISIL would be read by Sunni Turks as a way to weaken any potential Sunni influence in Syria; second, the understanding that strengthening Syrian Kurdish forces such as the PYD, an affiliate of the PKK, would impact the domestic stability of Turkey.

Eventually, in February 2015, Turkey and the US signed an agreement to train and equip moderate Syrian fighters. Few details on the programme have been made public and it is not clear when the training is supposed to start. Moreover, public statements by Turkish and American officials showed different expectations. Whereas Turkish authorities included Assad's forces as one of the targets of this new programme, the Pentagon made

clear that it was focusing exclusively on the fight against ISIL.[8] This exemplifies the difficulties facing the US when it comes to accommodating the interests of all its partners.

War and its own grammar

In addition to these difficulties, the US has to cope with its potential local partners. So far only the Kurdish forces have demonstrated credible military strength. In Syria, their forces pushed ISIL out of Kobane after weeks of bloody urban combat. In Iraq, the Peshmerga fighters also protected the city of Kirkuk against a surprise offensive. However, the Kurdish military performance comes at a price: by January 2015, it was estimated that 1,000 men had been killed in the fights.[9]

But the effectiveness of other partners is more problematic. The Iraqi armed forces remain poorly trained, lacking in motivation, and torn by sectarian rivalries. They have proved unable to deliver, as witnessed by the major debacle of June 2014 in Mosul. In response, in the late summer of 2014 the US sent an initial force of 1,500 non-combatant soldiers to train and advise Iraqi forces. In November 2014, the White House sent a new request calling for additional 1,600 advisers, amounting to US $ 1.618 billion. The major test may come with the planned offensive to retake Mosul in the spring of 2015. According to information released by the Department of Defense, the plan would include five Iraqi Army Brigades (about 10,000 troops) in conjunction with Kurdish Peshmerga.[10]

With regard to the so-called “vetted” Syrian rebels trained by the CIA in Jordan, results have again been inconclusive. They lost some battles against factions like Jabhat al Nusra and, in other cases, merely sided with those they were supposed to fight against.[11] These resulting uncertainties surrounding the fight on the ground raise another issue: the strategic significance of US airstrikes.

Airstrikes have been part of the operation named Inherent Resolve, conducted by the US Central Command since 8 August 2014. They target ISIL leadership, military sites and economic infrastructure. As of 30 January 2015, the cost of the operation was US $ 1.5 billion, with an average daily cost of $ 8.4 million.[12]

If we look more specifically at the selection of targets, they are more or less equally distributed in Iraq and Syria. In the latter case, 70% of the strikes have focused on the Kurdish city of Kobane, which came under siege by ISIL in September 2014. According to US sources, these strikes killed as many as 1,000 ISIL fighters in the surroundings of Kobane, leading some journalists to query their effectiveness. The magazine *Mother Jones* stated ironically that “almost 600 airstrikes killed around 1,000 ISIS fighters in Kobani: That’s less than one strike per TWO PEOPLE”.[13]

8 Idiz S (2015). Questions remain over Turkey’s training of Syrian opposition. *Al Monitor*, 24 February 2015.
9 Caryl C (2015). Want to hurt the Islamic State? Here’s how. *Foreign Policy*, 6 February 2015.
10 Gordon M, Schmitt E (2015). Mosul battle will be test of US plan against ISIS. *New York Times*, 23 February 2015.
11 Stein J (2014). Inside the CIA’s Syrian Rebels Vetting Machine. *Newsweek*, 10 November 2014.
12 US Department of Defense. Operation inherent resolve: targeted operations against ISIL terrorists. Available in: http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2014/0814_iraq/.
13 McLaughlin J (2015). Most US airstrikes in Syria target a city that’s not a “strategic objective”. *Mother Jones*, 23 January 2015. Available in: http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/01/airstrikes-syria-kobani-statistics-operation-inherent-resolve.

This heated discussion relates to a broader one, which is the ability of airpower to obtain decisive results on the ground. As a matter of fact, the overreliance on air campaigns to break the morale of enemies and to destroy it is deeply rooted in the US military culture. But in spite of an enduring faith in this approach inside the US Air Force, there is little evidence that strategic bombing has ever decisively determined victory in war.[14] Unfortunately, with indecisive partners, there is no reason yet to think that Operation Inherent Resolve will prove any different. Although officials from the Obama administration have argued that airstrikes disrupted ISIL command, we have seen in the first few months of 2015 that terrorist groups were still able to launch new assaults on the route between Syria and Lebanon, or in Al Anbar province in Iraq.

The ambiguous end state

The initial objective of the Obama strategy – "degrade and eventually destroy IS" – encapsulates one core belief: that the elimination of the terrorist organization would solve the predicaments of both Iraq and Syria. For that reason, the US intended not to design a Syria-Iraq strategy, but two approaches that are disconnected from each other. This reflects a failure to understand that ISIL is the symptom, not the root cause, of the turbulences in the region.

While the US openly cooperates with the Iraqi government, it still dismisses the Syrian regime as illegitimate. Nevertheless, the previous inflexibility of Washington on the idea of engaging with Bashar al Assad clearly evolved during the months following the launching of Operation Inherent Resolve. At the operational level, the US Air Force launched strikes in places where Syrian aircraft would also fly only a few hours later. By the end of 2014, the rumour in Damascus was that Iraqi officials were channeling American communications to Assad's circle.[15] The Syrian president also conveyed this information during his February interview with the BBC.[16]

Progressively, the US administration became less categorical in its condemnation of Assad and his allies (Iran and Hezbollah). On December 3, when asked about Iranian strikes against ISIL, Secretary Kerry said that the "net effect is positive".[17] He specified, though, that the US and Iran were "not only not coordinating militarily right now, but there are no plans at this time to coordinate militarily". Still, Kerry's statement epitomized the evolving order of priorities with regard to Syria. Since the end of 2014, the Obama national security team has been clearly reconsidering the idea that Assad may stay in power and it has been reviewing its potential courses of action accordingly.

This new thinking comes from the realization that, after four years of conflict, moderate Syrian rebels are not managing to prevail. Revealingly, Brett McGurk, the Deputy

14 See Pape R (1996). *Bombing to win: air power and coercion in war.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, and one of its critics, Watts B (1997). Ignoring reality: problems of theory and evidence in security studies. *Security Studies.* No. 2, Vol. 7, Winter, pp. 115-71.

15 Phone interview with source in Damascus, December 2014.

16 Bowen J (2015). Assad says Syria is informed on anti-IS air campaign. *BBC.com*, 10 February 2015. Available in: http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-31312414.

17 Michaeli I (2014). Kerry calls Iran airstrikes on Islamic State "positive", *Al Monitor*, 7 December 2014.

Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL, told the House Foreign Affairs Committee in December 2014: "We do not see a situation in which the rebels are able to remove him [Assad] from power".[18] A month later, the US backed the Syria peace talks held by the Russian government in Moscow, thus underlining that Washington was quietly abandoning its demand that President Assad step down as part of any settlement.

In Iraq too, the endstate is uncertain. The destruction of ISIL will not in itself settle the core issue, namely the question of the social contract by which all communities agree to live together. The US administration has acknowledged the problem created by Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki's sectarian policies. After months of deteriorating relations between Maliki and Obama, the former accepted not to run for a third term and endorsed the Prime Minister-designate Haidar al Abadi. In return, Obama called on the new Iraqi government to seize "the enormous opportunity of forming a new inclusive government".[19]

However, this inclusiveness is not yet visible. Today, Sunni tribes oppose ISIL's brutal rule, but that does not mean they trust the government in Baghdad. Although al Abadi has distanced himself from Nuri al Maliki on many issues, the latter is still part of the regime (as Vice-President) and remains influential in the Prime Minister's office through the extensive entourage he nominated before his resignation. Furthermore, Maliki is already preparing his return to office for the not so distant future.[20]

In any case, apart from replacing Maliki, the US policy vis-à-vis the Iraqi regime has not been dramatically transformed and focuses on reactive measures (airstrikes and military training) to the rise of ISIL, rather than on governance measures that would eventually address the deeply rooted discontent in the Sunni community.

Therefore, to believe that destroying ISIL means ending the conflict amounts to strategic short-sightedness. Tackling the issue of Sunni discontent in Iraq will require long-term reforms, while the conflict in Syria may well go on even after ISIL has been weakened or removed. This inability of the American government to design a clear endstate leads us to a more profound question on the way the US envisions its military interventions in the Middle East today.

Making sense of US strategic inconsistencies

In November 2014, General Dempsey declared in testimony to the House Armed Services Committee: "I'm not predicting at this point that I would recommend that those (Iraqi) forces in Mosul and along the border would need to be accompanied by US forces, but we're certainly considering it".[21] Dempsey's wording was carefully chosen not to imply any imminent American ground intervention, but the simple idea that the highest-ranking general in US armed forces was thinking about that possibility did stir up some controversy.

18 Hudson J (2014). State Dept.: rebels are never going to defeat Assad militarily. *Foreign Policy*, 10 December 2014.

19 The White House Office of the Press Secretary. Statement by the President, 14 August 2014, available in: http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/08/14/statement-president.

20 Arango T. Iraq's premier narrows divide, but challenges loom. *New York Times*, 15 December 2014.

21 Ackerman S, Jalabi R (2014). US military considers sending combat troops to battle Isis forces in Iraq. *The Guardian*, 13 November 2014.

In today's Washington, the contemplation of such scenarios is perceived as politically toxic. Last February, Obama made clear that this option was off the table:

"The resolution we've submitted today does not call for the deployment of U.S. ground combat forces to Iraq or Syria. It is not the authorization of another ground war, like Afghanistan or Iraq. […] As I've said before, I'm convinced that the United States should not get dragged back into another prolonged ground war in the Middle East. That's not in our national security interest and it's not necessary for us to defeat ISIL. Local forces on the ground who know their countries best are best positioned to take the ground fight to ISIL – and that's what they're doing."[22]

Even as President Assad used chemical weapons in August 2013, crossing a "red line" which Obama himself had defined, the US administration expressed extreme caution. During a press conference a few days later, Secretary of State John Kerry went as far as to promise "a very limited, very targeted, very short-term effort, an unbelievably small, limited kind of effort". Such statements hardly qualify as demonstrations of force.[23]

To understand the logic – or lack of logic – of the US strategy vis-à-vis ISIL, we may need to go back to the political trauma that the 2003 invasion of Iraq engendered in the American political community. One of the consequences of the post-Iraq invasion era is the increasing belief that any new commitment of US armed forces should be limited in scope and should at all costs exclude any ground presence. The latest National Security Strategy issued by the White House, in February 2015, clearly states this goal: "We shifted away from a model of fighting costly, large-scale ground wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in which the United States – particularly our military – bore an enormous burden. Instead we are now pursuing a more sustainable approach that prioritizes targeted counterterrorism operations, collective action with responsible partners."[24]

The case supporting this narrative is the presumed success of the allied operations in Libya in 2011. The very fact that Libya unravelled afterwards and became a failed state should raise doubts about the relevance of the "leading from behind" approach.[25] But even putting Libya aside, the problem is that in Syria and Iraq the US faces a conundrum that does not fit into this intellectual framework. Backed by allies with limited capabilities and helping local forces whose military readiness is fragile, the US is left as the sole power able to make a difference. Beyond the fight against ISIL, it is likely that Washington, whether it likes it or not, will remain deeply enmeshed with the future of the Middle East. In the end, with all the talks of a pivot toward Asia, the Obama administration may have thought it was out of the Middle East but may yet have to recognize that it actually never left.

22 The White House Office of the Press Secretary. Remarks by the President on Request to Congress for Authorization of Force Against ISIL. 11 February 2015, Available IN: http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/11/remarks-president-request-congress-authorization-force-against-isil.

23 Blake A (2013). Kerry: Military action in Syria would be 'unbelievably small. *Washington Post*, 9 September 2013.

24 The White House. *National Security Strategy*. February 2015, p. 9. Available in: www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2015_national_security_strategy_2.pdf, accessed on 20 February 2015.

25 Krauthammer C (2011). The Obama doctrine: leading from behind. *Washington Post*, 28 April 2011.

THE EU'S DIVERGING STRATEGY FOR A CHANGING IRAQ

Oz Hassan[1]

The European Union's (EU) relationship with Iraq is mired by a complex history and tainted by the greatest source of public disagreement between Member States in modern times. Indeed, the British decision to join the United States (US) led invasion of Iraq in 2003, joined later by Spain and Italy, was in direct opposition to the positions adopted by Germany and France. Whilst the EU largely remained above the fray until after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, there were certainly recriminations between Member States. Within this context the EU, during the preliminary post-Saddam period, remained a peripheral international player in Iraq. Having failed to convince the wider international community that the United Nations (UN) should lead Iraq's post-war reconstruction, as opposed to the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), the EU was somewhat withdrawn from events. That is to say, the EU became a key actor in humanitarian relief and foreign aid, and contributed to election funding and technical support inside the country, but the EU remained side-lined towards issues beyond these spaces (see Salem, 2013, pp. 28-9).

Being side-lined led to the EU becoming complacent and neglecting its Iraq strategy. How, after all, was the EU to help shape Iraq, when following the end of the US military surge in 2007, the Obama administration was eager to expediently withdraw American forces from what the President termed "a war of choice"? Yet, as one analyst has described, if the US was caught "napping on Iraq, then the EU can only be described as suffering from narcolepsy" (Burke 2010: 1). As a result, Iraq has slipped into crisis, becoming fused with the neighbouring civil war in Syria. On the tailwinds of external challenges presented by the

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Arab revolutions and a resurgent Russia, and internal challenges from a possible "Grexit" and "Brexit", it would appear that the crisis in Iraq is happening at a deeply challenging time for the union. Moreover, with the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), also known as Daesh or ISIS, it would appear that the EU is paying a price for its inattention, as a serious threat within the Southern Neighbourhood has emerged. It is within this context that the EU's evolving Iraq, Syria and ISIL strategy has emerged. Identifying the contemporary challenges to the EU's external and internal security, Europe has sought to devise a more comprehensive strategy in response to the crises in Iraq and the wider region. However, what has emerged is a two-tier strategy where the EU has retreated to a more comfortable declaratory policy with regards to external relations with Iraq, and internally, is increasingly conflating its "Iraq strategy" with a domestic "ISIL strategy". These two-tiers risk diverging in if the EU fails to recognize the growing tensions within its strategy. Moreover, allowing this to happen would be a mistake that risks undermining the EU as a significant actor in Iraq and in a wider environment of new and evolving international challenges.

The EU's external Iraq strategy

The EU's external strategy for the post-Saddam Iraq has been developing incrementally. It began gently in 2004 with the *EU and Iraq: a framework for engagement* plan and the 2005 *EU-Iraq joint declaration on political dialogue*. However, it was not until Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's period in office, which succeeded the Iraqi Transitional Authority in 2006, that the EU was able to gain at least a modicum of traction towards creating a closer relationship. Initially, this was evident in the European Commission's 2006 *Recommendations for renewed European Union engagement with Iraq*. This progressive trend was continued in 2010, when the EU signed a memorandum of understanding with regards to strategic energy cooperation. This was intended to act as a "political framework for reinforcing energy relations" (Europa, 2010). Yet, this was only an outline of the potential shape cooperation could take, with Iraq prospectively becoming a "natural gas supplier for the Southern Corridor" and as "an energy bridge between the Middle East, the Mediterranean and the EU" (Europa 2010). It was approaching nearly a decade after the US invasion when the EU and Iraq signed their first ever framework agreement. The *EU-Iraq Partnership and Cooperation Agreement*, signed in May 2012, aimed at establishing a "comprehensive platform" ranging from "political matters such as countering terrorism and promoting human rights, to trade and investment in key areas such as energy and services" (Europa, 2012).

Upon signing the 2012 framework agreement, Catherine Ashton, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, remarked that "This agreement is above all a symbol of the EU's wish to be a positive partner for Iraq in its democratic efforts. It is a fitting testament to the EU's determination to build a long-term partnership, not just today or tomorrow, but for many years to come" (Europa, 2012).

This statement was in line with what the EU termed its "overall medium-term objectives". These included "the development of a secure, stable and democratic Iraq where human rights and fundamental freedoms are respected"; "the establishment of an open, stable, sustainable and diversified market economy and society as a basis for human security,

economic growth, employment, poverty reduction, with resources to promote equitable economic and social development"; and "Iraq's economic and political integration into the wider region and the international economic system" (European Comission, 2011, p. 7). However, these objectives and the EU's Iraq strategy have been thrown into turmoil by a growing crisis in Iraq and the rise of ISIL.

As the EU adapts to the realities of a changing political and security situation in Iraq, Member States have increasingly sought to work together in recognition that the 2012 framework agreement has faltered. The EU's aim has been to develop a more comprehensive strategy to the region that is able to deal with increasing complexity within Europe's Southern Neighbourhood and the growing dangers emerging from Iraq and Syria. This has not only led to the development of Europe's 2015 *Regional Strategy for Syria, Iraq and the ISIL/Da'esh Threat*, but also the EU backing US-led coalition airstrikes on ISIL targets. Problematically, however, the EU's external approach to Iraq remains limited and thin on tangible details. For example, the European Council's March 2015 conclusions on Iraq amounted to a mere four paragraphs. This was meagre even compared to the twelve paragraphs concluding the EU's approach to Syria (European Council, 2015). Moreover, it is clear that the EU has moved towards its more comfortable diplomatic approach of misconstruing concrete strategy with declaratory policy.

The EU has made clear that it supports Iraqi unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and has called on governments in the region to do the same in support of the Iraqi government and the restoration of peace and stability. The EU has also called on Iraqi society to fight against ISIL, whilst urging a comprehensive and inclusive national dialogue and reconciliation process take place. Similarly, the EU has maintained the need for all armed groups in Iraq to come under the control of the Iraqi state, and that Iraqi Security Forces in turn become inclusive and democratically controlled. Where the EU has been more specific, is in its traditional and comfortable humanitarian role, pledging to increase the level of urgent humanitarian aid to Iraq from the €63 million provided in 2014 (European Council, 2015, pp. 10-1). Reverting to this declaratory and humanitarian role demonstrates the limits of the EU's external capabilities. Europe is struggling to define both its role and a clear strategy to the changing external relationship with Iraq. At the core of EU-Iraq policy still lays the 2012 framework for cooperation agreement that is provisional and being applied on a partial basis. With this framework being applied incrementally, there is a risk that the EU's external Iraq strategy becomes subsumed into an "ISIL strategy" as Europe's focus turns towards a domestic terrorism agenda. That is to say, that the EU and its Member States are increasing constituting their Iraq policies through the prism of rising threats to Europe itself.

The EU's internal Iraq strategy

In April 2013, under the leadership of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, splinter forces from the al-Nusra Front fighting in Syria and the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) merged to form ISIL. Within months, ISIL began focusing on taking territory in Iraq, and with the assistance of tribal networks and former Baathist regime loyalists, the group was able to seize control of

the city of Fallujah by the end of December. By June 2014, this group was able to extend its reach to the northern city of Mosul, advance south to capture Tikrit, and head towards Baghdad. With momentum behind them, and Iraq and the international community in disarray, ISIL designated their seized territory a "Caliphate" and rebranded the group simply as the "Islamic State".

As ISIL moved forward, it became increasingly evident that international law was being violated, with systemic human rights abuses being committed along with the systematic destruction of cultural heritage. As a result, by August 2014, the US and Britain launched a humanitarian mission to save thousands of members of the Yazidi religion on Mount Sinjar in northwest Iraq. This was followed by US airstrikes in Iraq, which were later expanded to Syria, leading to a renewed round of US intervention in the region. It was within this context that the EU was forced to re-evaluate its Iraq policy and draw up a wider regional strategy for Iraq and Syria. A significant part of the European Council's August 2014 plans included developing more effective means of dealing with the threat posed by foreign fighters and returnees to Europe from Syria and Iraq. As a result, the EU was explicitly acknowledging that the crisis in Syria and Iraq was not just a regional problem, but was spilling over into Europe itself. Indeed, as the European Council made clear, ISIL presents a "clear threat to our partners in the Middle East, a threat to wider international security *and to Europe directly*" (European Council, 2015, p. 2).

Evidently, ISIL is undermining stability and security in Iraq and Syria, yet within Europe's Southern Neighbourhood, the EU fears that this threat could spill over into Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey (European Council, 2015, p. 16). More widely in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the threat from Iraq and Syria is becoming evident through ISIL affiliates and inspired terrorist attacks which have already occurred in Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. Indeed, the rise of violent extremism in Libya, which includes the brutal slaughter of Egyptian Copts, attacks on the Corinthia Hotel, car bombings in Qubbah, an attack on the Iranian embassy, and a seizure of a critical power plant, places ISIL perilously close to Europe's Southern border (Wehrey and Alrababa'h, 2015). Indeed, from occupied cities, such as Sirte and €abr€ah in northern Libya, ISIL has been able to train jihadists willing to carryout atrocities in North Africa, including for example an attack on a Tunisian beach in Sousse that saw 38 tourists murdered. As Libyan jihadists return from Syria and Iraq this problem is clearly intensifying, raising questions regarding what these trained, combat-experienced and radicalized individuals do within any post-conflict scenario.

The scale of the direct terrorist threat to the EU, from Syria and Iraq, is by its clandestine nature unknown. However, fears of foreign fighters entering Europe have been heightened following the March 2015 attack in the Tunisian Bardo Museum. The attack not only saw the murder of tourists from Britain, Germany, Poland, Italy and Spain, but a Moroccan-born suspect in the attack, Abdelmajid Touil, was later arrested in Northern Italy having crossed the Mediterranean for a second time on a refugee boat (Politi and Saleh, 2015). This case has led to the increased securitization of Europe's southern border and Europe's refugee policy, due to concern that foreign fighters crossing the Mediterranean could carryout terrorist

activities within Europe itself. Moreover, with only 210 miles between Damascus and the nearest European capital, and the continued trafficking of people and money through a porous Turkish-Syrian border, the EU has become deeply concerned about the flow of foreign fighters from Syria and Iraq crossing into Europe by both land and sea.

Deeping the EU's concern is the growing trend of ISIL affiliated attacks beginning to occur within the borders of the Eurozone. Following Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's calls to "capture Rome", in July 2014, there have been multiple ISIL inspired attacks, ranging from the murder of Charlie Hebdo, an attack on a kosher supermarket and an attempt to blow up a gas factory in France. These attacks in Paris followed the May 2014 murder of four people at the Jewish Museum in Brussels, vividly demonstrating a strong anti-Semitic current behind the attacks within Europe. Indeed, this trend became all the more evident in February 2015 when a gunman targeted a synagogue, along with a café hosting a free speech discussion, in Copenhagen. Beyond Europe's Jewish community, other ethnically motivated violence has spilt into European streets, with clashes between pro-ISIL supporters and members of the Kurdish community in the German city of Hamburg. As such, European security fears are not simply focused on terrorist attacks themselves but also seek to maintain social cohesion and order as the ethnic and religious fault lines from the MENA become felt directly within the EU.

This situation raises particularly pertinent question for Europe's Iraq strategy and how Europe deals with the consequences of the crisis. US government estimations put the flow of foreign fighters into Syria and Iraq at approximately 20,000 individuals from around the globe (Archick *et al.*, 2015, pp. 4-5). Whilst it is estimated that only around 150 of these individuals are from the US, various estimations place between 3000-4000 EU citizens as having crossed into Syria and Iraq globe (Archick *et al.*, 2015, pp. 4-5). The potential return of these individuals to Member States, and within Europe's Schengen Area, raises internal security risks to the EU. Their return also provides the basis for a larger transatlantic threat, as twenty-three Member States participate in the US Visa Waiver Program (VWP) globe (Archick *et al.*, 201o, pp. 38-9).

Working through both the EU system and the UN, European governments have been quick to act. In accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2170, calling on UN Member States to "suppress the flow of foreign fighters, financing and other support to Islamist extremist groups in Iraq and Syria" the EU has rapidly attempted to make up for lost time in dealing with the threat from ISIL and affiliated groups within its southern neighbourhood (Security Council, 2014). Under the purview of the Justice and Home Affairs Council (JHA), which deals with cooperation and common policies on various cross-border issues, the EU has outlined a series of more detailed policies designed to deal with foreign fighters and returnees (Security Council, 2014). Under the categories of "prevention of radicalization", the "identification and detection of travel", "criminal justice response", and "cooperation with third countries" the EU is developing a more coherent and integrated internal and peripheral strategy (Security Council, 2014, pp. 2-20). As a result, the EU has come to see this internal strategy as "an integral part of the EU regional strategy" (Security Council, 2015; p. 3). This strategy certainly reflects the blurring and porous nature of the EU's borders. However, it is also a product of the EU having higher-level competencies within and around its borders, which allow it to construct governance

structures that its weaker external instruments do not allow. Similarly, within the current international environment and the emergent threat within the Eastern Neighbourhood, there have been concerns that attention has been diverted away from Iraq and the Southern Neighbourhood more broadly (Politi and Barker, 2015). As a result of these factors, there is a very real risk that the EU's Iraq strategy has become "internalized" and predominantly focused on ISIL.

A diverging two-tier strategy

Whilst the EU's 2012 framework agreement with Iraq remains in place, the instability of the Iraqi government in Baghdad has led to regression on issues of combating terrorism, countering proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and promoting human rights. As a result, the EU has moved towards declaratory policy making, which is a demonstration of its limited external capabilities and inability to meet new and emerging threats beyond its borders. It would of course be a mistake to assert that the EU, or indeed the US, can provide the solution to the Iraq crisis and the rise of ISIL. However, the EU's neglect of Iraq for over a decade, and hesitance in accepting that the old geopolitical order in the region is eroding, has meant that the EU has been particularly slow in constructing a detailed response to the crisis. This has undermined the EU as an international actor capable of playing a more positive role vis-à-vis Iraq. This is further undermined by a conflict between the EU calling for the promotion of human rights in its external relations with Iraq, whilst allowing its Iraq strategy to become subsumed by its emphasis on ISIL and refugees at home.

With many EU governments concerned about migration and the costs of rescuing refugees in the Mediterranean, the Italian-led air and sea search and rescue mission, termed Operation Mare Nostrum, ended in October 2014. In its place, Frontex has conducted Operation Triton, which is predominantly focused on border protection. There was a shift in focus from a policy that had a core humanitarian objective to one focusing predominantly on security issues. The consequences of this shift became evident in early 2015, which saw a threefold increase in the number of refugee deaths in the Mediterranean; rising from 588 in the first six months of 2014, to 1867 in 2015 (*The Guardian*, 2015). Whilst the EU has begun trying to organize greater cooperation between Member States, it is clear that it is struggling to deal with a significant refugee crisis. There is clearly a tension within the EU's external and internal approaches to the crisis in Syria and Iraq as a result. Externally in Iraq, the EU is calling for the respect of human rights and providing humanitarian assistance, but as the problems from the region approach Europe's edge, the EU has shifted to favouring security whilst many Member States fail to provide adequate humanitarian assistance for refugees. Symptomatic of the diverging approach is Britain's role in actively carrying out and humanitarian rescue missions in Iraq, participating in a bombing campaign against ISIL, and seeking further involvement in Syria, whilst only accepting 187 refugees from the conflict and refusing to participate in a wider European refugee redistribution scheme. The EU and its Member States failure to provide a coherent, detailed and consistent agreement over how to respond to the crisis in Iraq is therefore some way off, and is feeling the strain of new and evolving international challenges.

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THE HUMANITARIAN DISASTER IN IRAQ: BEYOND THE ATROCITIES OF DAESH

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The human element in Iraq continues to be alienated by the circles of power that have been involved in decision-making processes for over 30 years. Before the string of conflicts began, with the 1980 Iran-Iraq war, Iraq was the envy of the region and boasted financial and social indicators likening it to Western countries. However, its geographical location, wealth of raw materials and the ambitions of regional powers and their leaders have submerged its people into a seemingly never-ending spiral of suffering. First the Iran-Iraq war and the loss of over a million human lives, followed by the invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War, the terrible humanitarian consequences of the international embargo imposed after the war with Kuwait in 1991 that caused the death of half a million children[2] and the lethal legacy of the depleted uranium bombs used in the war and again in the 2003 invasion.[3] Finally the subsequent US occupation, which, instead of signalling the start of the prosperity it promised, amounted to nothing more than a million deaths, according to some reports.[4]

The widely reported grave human consequences loom large over the Iraqi people, generated by the latest factor of oppression: Daesh, or Islamic State. In this article our aim

1 Arabist and President of the Al Fanar Foundation for Arab Knowledge in Madrid (www.fundacionalfanar.org).

2 UNICEF (1999). *Results of the 1999 Iraq Child and Maternal Mortality Surveys*.

3 "According to a UN report, the effect of projectiles launched in Iraq is six times greater than the effects of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima at the end of World War II". In: Al Yafal O (2012). Iraq, ten years after 2003: human banquets of hellish substances. *Al Safir*, Beirut, 13/09/2012. Translated from Arabic at www.boletin.org.

4 *Major studies of war mortality*. MIT Center for International Studies, Cambridge [online]. Available in: http://web.mit.edu/humancostiraq/.

is to map out a timeline of the humanitarian catastrophe Iraq has lived through, taking as our point of departure the most recent events, at the hands of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's army, while also defining the deteriorating humanitarian situation that now weighs heavily on Iraq.

Human rights violations

Numerous reports in the media have described the details of Daesh's systematic human rights violations in Iraq and Syria: "including killings of civilians, abductions, rapes, slavery and trafficking of women and children, forced recruitment of children, destruction of places of religious or cultural significance, looting and the denial of fundamental freedoms, among others. (…) Many of the violations and abuses perpetrated by ISIL may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and possibly genocide," informs a report by the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).[5] Moreover, not only are these events very serious, they also repeatedly affect people whose living conditions and human rights standards have been deteriorating for 30 years. The fierce control and repression against any dissident voice speaking out against the Saddam Hussein regime was replaced in the aftermath of the occupation by a seemingly democratic process. This, however, was sectarian and the share of power was distributed on the basis of the influence of each sect or religion, prioritising denomination over the human being.

It is worth remembering that Islamic State returned to Iraq after gaining strength in Syria[6] through the power vacuum resulting from uprisings in the provinces of Anbar, Nineveh, Salahuddin, Diyala and Kirkuk, with people tired of the human rights violations systematically carried out against them by the Iraqi security forces. These new security forces were created after the Iraqi national army and the security structures of the Baath Regime were dismantled, in fulfilment of Order number 2 from May 2013 by the highest authority of the occupation, Paul Bremer. Once more, political agreements were given priority over the Iraqi citizens and new security forces were constructed, the cornerstone of which were sectarian militias with links to the pro-Iranian parties that arrived with the occupation. The systematic violations by these security forces, which put their efforts into generally punishing the population and systematically punishing Sunni "rivals", hindered the creation of a true state, where all citizens feel represented and protected, regardless of their origin or denomination, as reported by Amnesty International:

"The Iraqi central government authorities bear a significant part of responsibility for the crimes committed by these militias. Militias have been armed, and/or allowed to be armed, by the state; successive governments have all owed and encouraged militias to operate outside any legal framework; and they have not been held accountable for the crimes they have been perpetrating. The existence of these sectarian, unregulated and unaccountable militias is both a cause and a result of the country's growing insecurity and instability. They preclude any possibility of establishing effective and accountable security

5 *Report on the Protection of Civilians in the Armed Conflict in Iraq: 11 September-10 December 2014*. UNAMI/OHCHR [online]. Available in: http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/UNAMI_OHCHR_Sep_Dec_2014.pdf.

6 Rojo P (2014). Iraq: Revolution, Jihadism or Partition. *Newsletter Al Fanar*, 29 July 2014. Available in: http://www.fundacionalfanar.com/iraq-revolucion-yihadismo-o-particion/

and armed forces able and willing to protect all sectors of the population and enforce the law equally and undermine the establishment of a fair justice system that upholds equality before the law and other human rights".[7]

The appearance of Daesh has caused a role reversal in these militias, which previously operated under the armed forces, and now Al-Hashd al-Shaabi (the Shia militia created in 2014 for the express purpose of fighting against Daesh) acts outside not just the laws of the Iraqi State, but also the international laws of war, giving rise to a higher degree of human rights violations that "have escalated in recent months. Residents have been forced from their homes, kidnapped, and in some cases summarily executed".[8]

The situation for Iraqi women

The worsening situation of women in Iraq has occurred in parallel to their country's destruction over the last 30 years. In the 1960s and 1970s, Iraqi women experienced significant progress after the promulgation of the Personal Status Law in 1959 (known as Law 188), which implemented completely new measures for women such as the chance to request a divorce, the minimum marriage age being set at 18, the prohibition of forced marriages and highly specified conditions of polygamy. During the governments ruled by the Baath Party these guidelines were upheld, supporting education, universal access to health care, the possession of land and property and women's incorporation into the labour market.[9] However, after the war with Kuwait and the arrival of the embargo the difficult economic conditions were exacerbated, particularly among women, the weakest link in the labour chain. The US invasion and occupation not only worsened the situation for Iraqi women, it also relapsed back to what happened during the embargo. Conservative political parties, followers of Iranian theses, governed without an on-going solution since the arrival of the occupiers, who sacrificed the human agenda for geo-politics and the defence of freedoms and human rights for an agreement with Iran in issues related to high politics. The lack of attention to gender issues is now apparent from the first governing body, known as the Governing Council, where only 3 of the 25 members were women; this would be a clear indicator of the influence issues related to women were going to have in the policies of the occupiers. This same Governing Council attempted to pass resolution 137, which transferred issues related to personal status to the direct control of the ulemas in each religious community. Another attempt to stall the progress of Iraqi women came with the Jaafari Law, approved by the Council of Ministers on 25 February 2014, which sanctioned, amongst other measures, the marriage of 9-year-old girls, or covert prostitution, religiously known as the *mut'a* marriage.[10] The transfer of the personal status to the religious sphere was protected by Article 41 of the new Iraqi Constitution from 2005, which would undermine

7 Amnesty International (2014). *Militia rule in Iraq*. 14 October 2014.

8 Human Rights Watch (2015). Iraq: militias escalate abuses, possibly war crimes. In: HRW [online]. Available in: http://www.hrw.org/news/2015/02/15/iraq-militias-escalate-abuses-possibly-war-crimes

9 Fischer-Tahir A (2010). Competition, cooperation and resistance: women in the political field in Iraq. In: *International Affairs.* Oxford: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, p. 1381-94.

10 منى حسين، "قانون جعفري لتدمير حقوق نساء العراق"، *العرب*، لندن، 2013/10/30.

the principle of equality before the law and gradually marginalise women in public and economic life, an inescapable occurrence in the private sector where only 2% of employees are women.[11] This same Constitution imposed a 25% share for women's presence in all government bodies elected by vote, but the presence of this share, the majority of which was taken up by regressive parties, has served for little more than to paper over the hindrances in women's status. This is summed up in the comments of the Minister of Women's Affairs, Abtihal Alzidi: "I am against the equality between men and women. If women are equal to men they are going to lose a lot. Up to now I am with the power of the man in society. If I go out of my house, I have to tell my husband where I am going. This does not mean diluting the role of woman in society but, on the contrary, it will bring more power to the woman as a mother who looks after their kids and brings up their children".[12]

The high number of NGOs and women's associations created in the advent of the occupation have not been able to exert any influence and remain trapped between a lack of importance in Iraqi society, which considers them products of foreign occupation, and pressure from militias and conservative parties in power. Only through their international contacts have they managed to attract media attention regarding the most extreme issues, for instance the aforementioned Jaafari Law, which was eventually rejected due to the breakup of the Iraqi parliament in 2014. Since 2003, the history of Iraq has been defined by chaos, corruption and scant security, with women bearing the brunt and finding themselves with limited basic freedoms and the subject of kidnappings, murders, torture, forced marriages and sexual violence. The forced emigration of more than five million Iraqis, the outcome of sectarian policies from diverse militias, has broken a significant part of the social structures that protected the weakest elements in Iraqi society, such as women and children. Over one and a half million widows[13] have had to provide for their families in this environment, in a State that is virtually absent.

This terrible panorama became ever darker with the arrival of Daesh and the generation of a new wave of refugees. Their extremist vision of the law, imposed upon the inhabitants in the territories they control, has almost completely condemned Iraqi women to being ostracised; the images of women dressed in black and sold by Daesh with a sign bearing their price have been seen around the world. This is a highly graphic image, a nightmare within a nightmare that Iraqi women suffer in these territories: sexual violence, trafficking, kidnappings, scant access to health care services, limited freedom of movement, prohibited jobs and brutal punishments resulting from any breach of law.

The misfortune of being a child in Iraq

"The type and scope of violations against children, women and minority communities in Iraq in the past weeks is one of the worst seen in this century, and is completely unacceptable by any standards or codes of conduct that govern conflict", these are the

11 *Women in Iraq factsheet*. UN Iraq, March 2013.

12 Abdulla M (2012). Outrage as Iraqi women's affairs minister opposes equality for women. In: *Kurdistan Tribune* [online]. Available in: http://kurdistantribune.com/2012/outrage-iraqi-womens-affairs-minister-opposes-equality-for-women/.

13 *Women in Iraq Factsheet - Displaced women and women in conflict*. UN Iraq, March 2015.

words of Marzio Babille, UNICEF Iraq representative in the 2014 report, and concern the suffering under the yoke of Islamic State. The execution of children, forced recruitment of minors, extremist indoctrination and combat techniques taught at a very early age are some examples of the children's rights violations at the hands of Daesh corroborated in recent months. As with women, Iraqi children have been suffering escalating punishments since the effects of the embargo in the 1990s and the consequences brought about by the invasion,[14] resulting in the breakdown of the social and family framework that could have sheltered them from the chaotic security situation and the government's sectarian policies. In 2001, UNICEF estimated the number of orphaned children to be at 800,000, while other organisations believed the number was closer to four million.[15] The lack of services and the general absence of the Iraqi state in social issues since 2003 have marginalised many of these young people, who are unable to form part of society through a labour market in which they are generally exploited. This marginalisation means they become a rich source of recruitment by criminal gangs and militias that use them (like Daesh) as informants, fighters and, in some cases, in suicide attacks. The effects of such a drawn-out conflict on Iraqi children has only been analysed in a few studies, for instance the one carried out by the organisation War Child in 2010. The conclusions drawn from the answers of children interviewed stressed how: "The most common fears expressed by the children were conflict-related. Many mentioned guns, explosions, kidnappings and tanks as the main things that scare them".[16] This situation has nurtured the recovery of tribes with power and influence that had been slowly losing ground since the 1950s. This power, patriarchal, random and heavily influenced by conservative traditions, has had a critical effect on the situation of women and girls, while the increase in honour crimes, the return to arranged marriages, the limitations on their movement and girls' access to education has become widespread in the most tribal areas, undermining future possibilities for Iraqi minors.

Health care and education in Iraq

The health care and education system the Americans inherited was in a precarious situation in terms of physical infrastructures. Nevertheless, it still had a robust human structure that had been deserving of various mentions around the world. This was acknowledged by Gro Harlem Brundtland, Director General of the World Health Organisation, on 2 May 2003: "In the past days and weeks, we have seen the commitment of Iraqi health workers to public health. They have continued to work under some very difficult conditions. Now we must ensure that their dedication and bravery is not wasted. Iraq's health system must not collapse for want of finance and support." Unfortunately, this was not the case, and the US response: "was paralyzed by a mixture of inter-agency

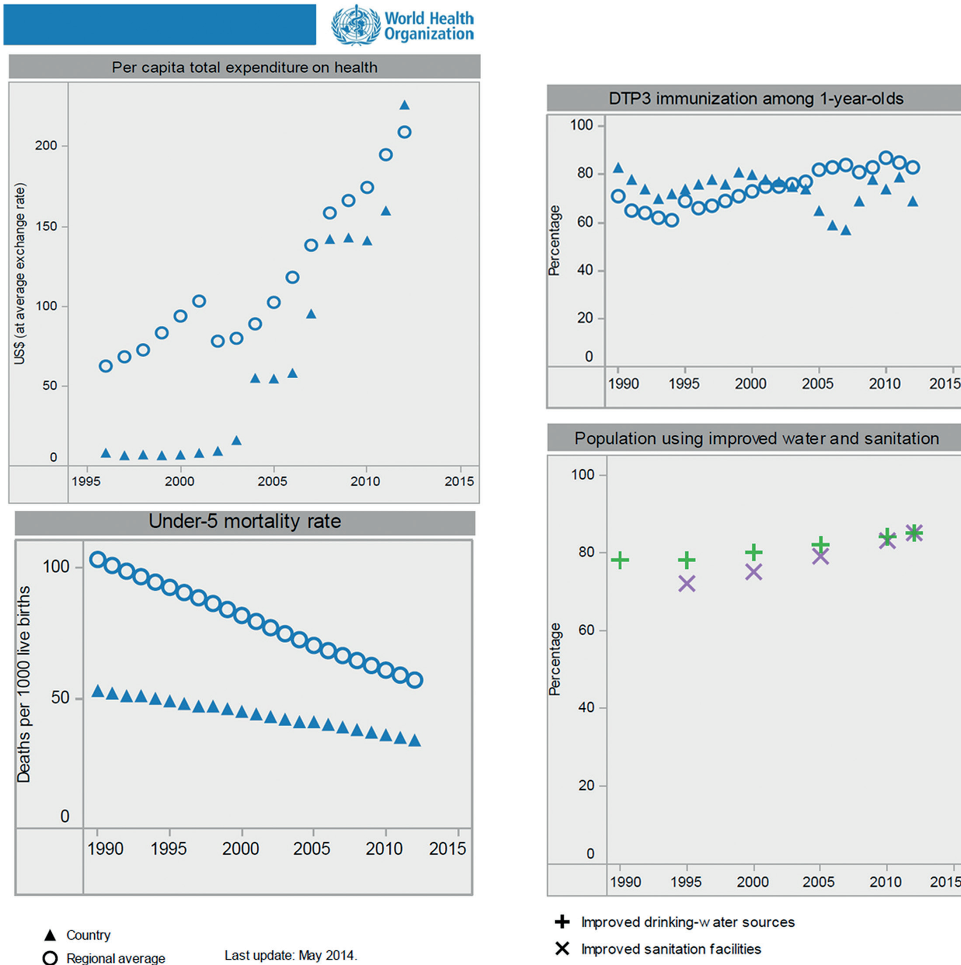
14 Al Maqdadi H. The genetic future of Iraqi children threatened by radioactive weapons from the US. London, 13 November 2012. Translated from Arabic at www.boletin.org.

15 "في العراق مليون أرملة و4 ملايين يتيم"، *الحياة*، لندن، 2010/7/14. http://international.daralhayat.com/internationalarticle/162665

16 Armed conflict: spotlight on Iraq (2014). In: CRIN [online]. Available in: https://www.crin.org/en/library/publications/armed-conflict-spotlight-iraq

conflicts and political agenda and failed to effectively shore up health services in an effective way".[17]

This was not down to a lack of funding. In the Iraqi budget, as seen in the graph attached, the increase in per capita spending in Iraqi budgets did not materialise in a similar improvement to such important indicators as child mortality, which maintains the same trend as during the embargo, or access to drinking water and sanitation.



17 Burkle F, Noji E (2004). Health and politics in the 2003 war with Iraq: lessons learned. *The Lancet*, 9 October 2004, pp. 1371-4.

A report published by the International Journal of Health Planning and Management in 2011 points to how the deteriorating quality of health services and violence towards doctors was protracted beyond the episodes of defence in the hospitals that were seen in the days after the fall of Baghdad. These attacks were systematically repeated until 2006, returning to worrying levels in 2009 and 2011 and leaving a health system that was unsuitable for a country with Iraq's resources: "Up to 75 per cent of Iraq's doctors, pharmacists and nurses have left their jobs since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003. Almost 70% of critically injured patients with violence-related wounds, die in emergency and intensive care units due to a shortage of competent staff and a lack of drugs and equipment".[18]

According to reports and stories that appeared in the press,[19] in addition to this difficult situation, doctors also have to deal with tribes taking the law into their own hands against doctors they accuse of negligence when treating their immediate family. The conflict provoked by Daesh has done little more than worsen the situation in zones under their control, with professionals fleeing and hospitals being bombed,[20] as well as a lack of medicine.

The in-depth analysis of the education system in Iraq is almost identical: during the previous governments there was a State policy strongly backing public education for all Iraqis, both male and female. The system and structures were damaged by the embargo and war but still maintained very good percentages of school attendance and university students: "Iraq used to have one of the best education systems in the Middle East," asserted Roger Wright, UNICEF representative in Iraq. "At the moment we have clear proof of how much this system has deteriorated. Now millions of children in Iraq go to schools that don't have water or health services, and have walls and windows that are destroyed or leaking roofs. The system is overloaded".[21]

The arrival of sectarianism in the occupying governments has seen the control of education system become a number-one priority: curricula have been changed, religious practice has been introduced in schools, university professors have been hounded with a murder campaign that has caused at least 324 deaths[22] and thousands have migrated. Universities have come to form part of the distribution of power between new political parties and their militias, who control the campus terrorising students and teachers.[23] Schools have gone from being one of the cornerstones of Iraqi society to a place of

18 UNICEF (2011). *Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey*.

19 وسيم باسم، "أطباء العراق: حماية ذاتية أو هجرة... أو موت برصاص عشائري"، *إيلاف*، 12/11/5. http://www.elaph.com/Web/news/2012/11/771943.html?entry=Iraq

20 The Fallujah General Hospital has been bombed by the Iraqi army 36 times since the city was taken over by rebels in January 2014. Source: director of the Fallujah University Hospital, phone conversation, 17 March 2015.

21 UNICEF (20014). Iraqi schools suffering from neglect and war. In: UNICEF [online]. Available in: http://www.unicef.es/actualidad-documentacion/noticias/las-escuelas-en-iraq-victimas-tambien-del-abandono-y-la-guerra

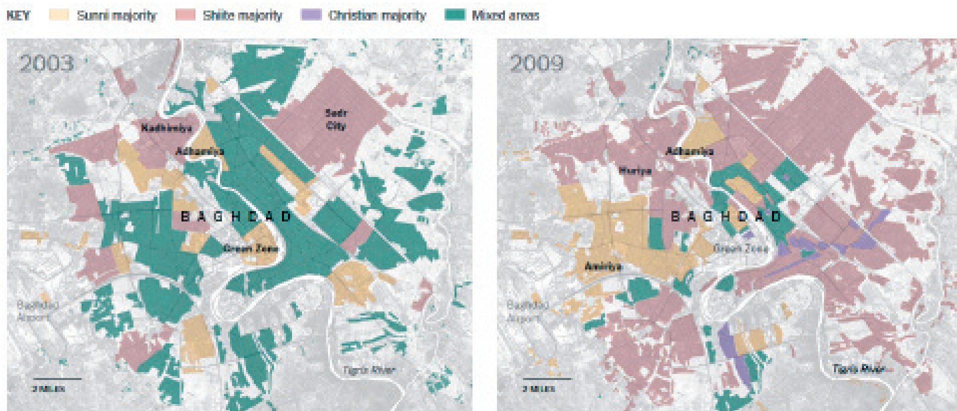
22 CEOSI (2013). List of university teachers murdered in Iraq during the occupation period. In: Iraqsolidaridad.org [online]. Available in: http://www.iraqsolidaridad.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Lista-de-docentes-asesinados-noviembre-de-2013.pdf

23 "وضع العلوم الاجتماعية في الجامعات العراقية"، *الشرق الأوسط*، لندن، 2008/2/6.

religious indoctrination, where children are packed into overcrowded classrooms lacking resources. There is also a high rate of children dropping out: the net attendance ratio in secondary school participation (2008-2013) is 53% of boys and 45% of girls. The problem is not financing (57% of investment in education in 2011 was not made), but rather the political volition of governments obsessed by the role of religion in society and barely interested in well-trained citizens that oppose the discourse of clergyman and ayatollahs. The biggest victims of this situation are once again Iraqi girls, who have more difficulties attending school and university due domestic obligations, their families' financial problems in bearing the costs, early marriages, the conservative view of their role in society or a lack of security in the country, which means that parents don't allow their children to go to school alone.

The double wave of displaced Iraqi people

In contrast to the other aspects studied in this article, the issue of forced displacement was a completely new humanitarian issue for Iraqi society in 2003. The security chaos that ensued after the fall of Baghdad on 9 April 2003 gave rise to the proliferation of armed groups of every kind. In addition to the aforementioned militias linked to political parties involved in the occupation, armed groups of resistance against the occupation emerged. In the middle of this chaos, another phenomenon appeared that was unknown to the moderate Iraqi society: extremist groups with ties to Al Qaeda. In the early years of armed conflict the focus was essentially between resistance and occupying forces (both soldiers and the private security companies providing them with coverage), while the militias and Al Qaeda were implementing their respective sectarian agendas. The attack against the Mosque of Samarra (22 February 2006) was the catalyst that saw this low-intensity sectarian war hurled into the foreground. Threats and murders based on religious origins created the biggest displacement crisis since the Second World War, with five million Iraqis fleeing their homes. The "Shi'ization" policy of Baghdad, always denied by the Iraqi government, leaves few doubts when observing the demographic changes in the Iraqi capital, as shown in the following map:



The concentration of people according to religious denominations was not only produced in the capital but also in the other Iraqi provinces. Despite the fact that the bulk of the 2.77 million internal displacements, according to figures by UNHCR, occurred in 2006 and 2007, returning home has not been feasible. Their displacement was not the result of one-off circumstances, but rather calculated policies of transformation and geographical regrouping by sectarian parameters in the population.

According to a report by the International Rescue Committee (IRC), from February 2011, prior to the outbreak of the Iraqi Revolution the situation of displaced people continued to be reflected in the Iraqi government's lack of interest in providing a solution: "Despite an improved security situation in Iraq and the development of a new government, few Iraqis are able to go home. The situation of internally displaced Iraqis—particularly those living in squalid informal settlements—remains an emergency that is yet to be properly addressed by the Government of Iraq or the international community."[24] In the meantime, the majority of those migrating to another country did not consider moving back to Iraq and instead attempted to start a new life in the place they settled. IRC points to the lack of security as the main reason for those that were displaced and migrated not wanting to return home, as well as the bureaucratic hurdles within a framework where: "The Government of Iraq has yet to meaningfully address the IDP problem: there is no comprehensive or actionable government plan to do so".

In January 2014 the Iraqi Revolution, previously non-violent, took up arms against the Iraqi military, causing an indiscriminate military response by the Baghdad government, which included bombing the civilian population, and caused a new wave of displacements, the majority from Fallujah or Al Anbar towards Iraqi Kurdistan. When Daesh joined the conflict in June 2014 and began to exert control over more territory, the situation of those displaced worsened, registering between January 2014 and 26 February 2015 more than two and a half million new internal displacements.[25]Fear of Daesh and the bombings of the international coalition and Iraqi government heightened, as did the fear of the atrocities committed by the infantry of the Iraqi army and the militias as they liberated cities such as Amerli[26] and Samarra from Daesh. Of the families displaced, 20% need critical medical care, including psychological treatment for dealing with sexual violence-related traumas. The outlook is not promising for these 2.5 million Iraqis since there are minimal resources to deal with the situation and UNHCR has only raised 0.3% of the 405 million dollars needed to cover the needs of this crisis.

The current situation of neglect for internally displaced Iraqi people and women and children is, as we have seen, a result of the decades-old disregard for the human side of the conflict, and this is not just since the emergence of Daesh. As Nickolay Mladenov, Special Representative for Iraq, has requested: "Iraqi leaders need to move immediately and implement the Government's agenda of national unity and reconciliation in order

24 International Rescue Committee (IRC) (2011). *Iraqi displacement: eight years later durable solutions still out of reach*.

25 2,536,734 IDP according to: *Displacement Tracking Matrix, Round XV* (2015). OIM, February 2015.

26 *After Liberation Came Destruction: Iraqi Militias and the Aftermath of Amerli* (2015). In: HRW [online]. Available in: http://features.hrw.org/features/HRW_2015_reports/Iraq_Amerli/index.html

to put an end to the heinous crimes committed by ISIL, and ensure that all armed groups are under state control". Yet this would only go some way towards ending the latest evil devastating the Iraqi people. In order for Iraq to operate once again as a rich and prosperous country, there must be a real democratic transition, where foreign powers restore sovereignty for Iraqis so they can return to being at the centre of their policies.

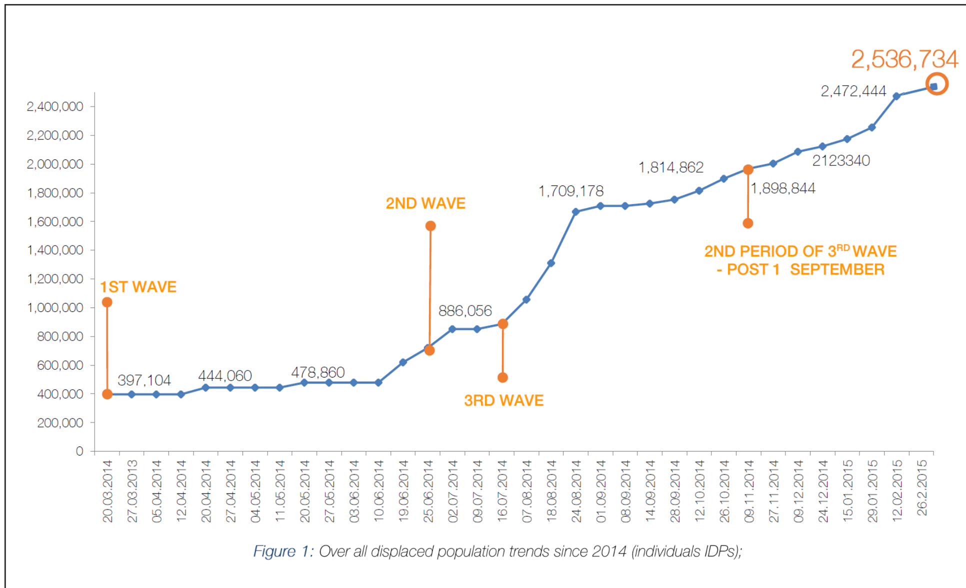


Figure 1: Over all displaced population trends since 2014 (individuals IDPs);

OIM, Displacement Tracking Matrix | DTM, Round XV, February 2015.

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