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Iraq from occupation to the risk of disintegration

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the longstanding and recent intentions of the United States to include Iraq into its spheres of influence. The American occupation of Iraq in 2003, however, not only changed the regime but also led to the destruction of the whole country. A most regrettable outcome of the US occupation of the country was the instigation of sectarian and ethnical differences, as well as the prolonged and continuing struggle between the centre and the peripheries. More harmful was the embodiment of all these negative and divisive phenomena into the permanent constitution of the country. In the final analysis, there have been many unsuccessful initiatives to solve the Iraqi dilemma throughout the last 13 years since the occupation. This article examines these initiatives in detail.

The US–British–Israeli (Zionist) responsibility for overthrowing the Iraqi state and encouraging its disintegration

The occupation of Iraq in 2003 was neither a sudden decision nor the result of the 9/11 attacks, as propagated at the time; rather, it was the culmination of US plans going back as far as the 1950s that aimed at including oil-rich Iraq into America's sphere of influence.

What in fact facilitated the occupation were the developments the region and Iraq, in particular, were undergoing, allowing the successive US administrations feel that undisciplined Iraq, with all its might and capability, would present a threat to America's influence and interests in the region.

It could be said that the Arab Baath Socialist Party coming to power for the second time in July 1968 constituted a major turning point in the history of Iraq and the region, in addition to American designs on the country. Analysts initially thought that this change was influenced and backed by Britain and the United States, due to the relations some of the leaders of this change were known to have with intelligence circles in the two countries. This belief changed, however, 13 days later when the Baath Party leaders managed to remove all the non-Baathists from the government. Immediately, a new era characterized by hostility to Western–US policies began. The new regime also looked like it was strengthening itself by taking new and daring measures. A new front comprising the Iraqi Communist Party was established, a peaceful solution for the Kurdish problem was introduced, very ambitious development plans were initiated and a treaty of friendship with the former Soviet Union was signed. Nonetheless, this period also witnessed brutal measures used against anti-Baath elements, and sometimes some Baathist ones. It ended with the total domination by one person – Saddam Hussain – over power and

the party.

The Iraq–Iran war (1980–88) was the event that turned the region and its future on its head. This sterile and senseless war, which could easily have been averted, was the incident that allowed foreign influence, especially that of the United States, Europe and Israel, to return in strength to the region, as both warring sides were in need of arms and logistic assistance. It could be also said that the leaderships of Iraq and Iran bear equal responsibility for the war flaring up and its continuation for eight barren years. Hussain thought that the fall of the shah in Iran and the prevailing chaos and instability was a golden opportunity to nullify the Algiers Treaty of 1975, which he signed with the shah. In this treaty he conceded half the Iraqi river Shatt al-Arab to Iran. He felt that he needed to rid himself and Iraq of this treaty, which he regarded as an unpleasant phase that had haunted him all his life. On the other hand, Ayatollah Khomeini believed that his success in overthrowing the strong regime of the shah should enable him to do the same with the Baath regime in Iraq. In his opinion, all he needed was to ignite the fuse (al-Khayoun 2015). Thus, both countries rushed into a fierce war that consumed the human and economic resources of both sides.

Israel was the first to speak in 1982 about the need to divide Iraq into three different entities during the intensity of the Iraq–Iran war. This came in an article written by the Israeli journalist and former diplomat Oded Yinon, first published in Kivunim in February 1982 (Yinon 1982). His paper spoke about the need to split Iraq into Kurdish, Shiite and Sunni entities in order to protect Israel’s security.¹ He also thought that this objective would be achieved indirectly through the continuation of the Iraq–Iran war. His hopes were dashed, however, when the war ended with a clear Iraqi military victory. Nevertheless, his ‘plan’ remained useful for all those who opposed a strong Iraq. It was not surprising, therefore, that the neo-conservatives were quick to revive this plan following the occupation of Iraq in 2003. Thus, it could be concluded that the plan to divide and fragment Iraq was older than the occupation by at least two decades.

Two major factors that assisted and encouraged US designs were the downfall of the Soviet Union and the arrival of the neo-cons to power. The neo-cons thought that they could dominate the world through different methods: the use of economic and military blockades, claims of spreading democracy, using creative chaos and deposing despotic regimes on the pretext that they possess ‘weapons of mass destruction’ (WMDs) and supporting terrorism. Fukiyama (2006) states that this deceptive illusion was what encouraged the neo-con leaders, the majority of whom were Zionist Jews, to do anything in order to serve the interests of Israel that were not in the interest of the United States.

Despite all that has been said above, the invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 by the Iraqi Republican Guards, and the refusal to withdraw from it, gave the United States and Britain the excuse they needed to wage a destructive war against Iraq. Although the war did succeed in this regard and in driving the Iraqi forces out of Kuwait, it also had two important byproducts: the first was the decision of Hussain to fire 39 long-range missiles on Israel, an action that not only exceeded all limits but also initiated a new strategy in the Arab–Israeli conflict which put a definitive end to the idea of a safe Israel. It also proved that the then Iraqi president was not ready to succumb to American and Israeli ambitions. The second byproduct was that the ability of the Iraqi competencies and know-how was capable of rebuilding what the war had destroyed in an efficient and speedy manner, something that had never before been envisaged by the West and the United States. This was clear in the prompt reply of former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright when asked about the feasibility of continued inhumane sanctions on Iraq following the destruction of all its capabilities: ‘Yes, but the brains are still there.’ But neither the inhumane sanctions, which lasted for almost 13 years and that claimed the lives of 1.8 million Iraqis, mainly children, women and elderly people, nor the continued

aerial bombardments of Baghdad succeeded in changing the defiant attitude of the late Iraqi president. On the contrary, he increased his assistance and support to the Palestinian Intifada by generously compensating the wounded and the families of those killed. He also refused to comply with America's plan to create a new Middle East in which Israel would be a central partner. The decision to change the regime by force was officially taken by the United States in 1998 when the Bill Clinton administration issued the Iraq Liberation Act. At the same time the United States and Britain continued to fabricate pretexts in order to tighten the sanctions on Iraq as a prelude to occupying it. In spite of the fact that the United Nations (UN) teams, which included many Zionists – whose mission was to observe Iraqi compliance with the resolutions to rid Iraq of its WMDs, affirmed offstage that Iraq did not possess such weapons, the United States and Britain still continued to claim that Iraq was still concealing WMDs. It was also revealed later that the United States interfered on many occasions to force the heads of the UN teams still to declare Iraq in possession of WMDs and the ability to manufacture them (e.g., Ritter 2004; Blix 2004; Blair 2010; Information Clearing House 2003).

To justify the plan to occupy Iraq, the United States and Britain initiated many inventive reasons which included possessing a secret programme to manufacture WMDs, and having links with al-Qaeda (Senate 2006). Other reasons were also added afterwards such as the miserable state of human and women's rights (al-Assaf and Jawad 2013), which could only be described as 'right' reasons to justify 'wrong' objectives. To all reasonable and impartial researchers, however, there were two main reasons for the occupation: Iraq's oil wealth and the security of Israel (Zbigniew 2007).

In preparation for the war, American, British and Israeli intelligence services recruited a number of Iraqi stooges, presented as Iraqi nuclear scientists, who alleged that Iraq still possessed WMDs and programmes to manufacture them. Despite the fact that all these intelligence services were certain that these stooges were lying and that their main objective was to obtain the nationality of the countries to which they sought to flee, the governments of these services regarded their fabricated information as crucial facts to justify the war on Iraq. Even more harmful was that all the Western media, even the respected ones, accepted these lies and published them. Up to the present day, we still have not heard or seen any of those who put forth these lies taken to account, whether they be officials, media representatives or journalists alike. Even the Chilcott Committee in Britain, investigating the war on Iraq, has failed so far to publish its findings in the six years since it was established.

From the outset, all the efforts of the American, British and Israeli intelligence services were concentrated on the Iraqi elements living in the West who introduced themselves as the opposition to the Baath regime. These elements were supported materially and morally to act as a facade to the moves against the Baath regime. All the differences between these elements were muted by US and British pressure. The so-called Iraqi opposition in the West consisted of three elements:

- . Religious sectarian parties and personalities.
- . Some secular ones, such as the Iraqi Communist Party, who were in the minority and who ultimately succumbed to the religious parties and American influence.
- . Some personalities who were notorious for their tarnished reputation and long-established connection with the American, British and even Israeli intelligence services.

Thus, sectarianism, chauvinism, selfish personal interests and submission to foreign intelligence services, as mentioned above, constituted the vast majority of this opposition. Furthermore, it was clear that the majority of this opposition had no support or influence inside Iraq. More harmful than the role these elements played was the one played by some Iraqis inside Iraq; some were members of the Baath Party. They were successfully recruited by Western and Israeli intelligence services between 1998 and 2003 and

played a crucial role in providing the invading forces with valuable information before, during and after the invasion.

The occupation of Iraq, the policy of the occupying forces and their Collaborators

In March 2003 the operation to occupy Iraq by the international coalition forces, mainly comprised of US and British forces stationed in Kuwait, got under way. This operation had no international legal cover, especially from the UN. It was also ineffectively opposed by some members of the UN Security Council. The administrations concerned even adopted a disparaging attitude to the opinion of the millions who took to the streets, especially in the United States and Britain. After two weeks of heavy fighting, Baghdad was occupied on that fateful day of Wednesday, 9 April.

Right from the early days of the occupation it was clear that America's and Britain's sole aim was to remove the regime of Hussain and to destroy Iraq to the extent that would prevent it from becoming a regional power. What facilitated the application of this policy were the people who were designated to govern Iraq. For example, the first US civil governor of Iraq, Jay Garner, knew nothing whatsoever about Iraq and neither did the team that came with him. Chaos prevailed as there was no plan to administer the occupied country. Even the traffic police were not allowed to carry out their job. Public service men were treated in the same manner. Moreover, the occupying forces did not declare the necessary curfew, something very normal in such cases. Banks, museums and public places were looted and burned before the eyes of the occupying forces which did nothing to stop these activities. In addition to this, armed contingents of the so-called opposition converged on Baghdad and other cities and began to take the law into their own hands.

People were terrorized and a systematic wave of assassinations ensued. This wave was mainly directed against scientists, academics and members of the Iraqi armed forces (Jawad and Al-Assaf 2014). Iraq's borders were left open and this allowed different militias to infiltrate Iraq from neighbouring countries. Al-Qaeda was the first organization to take advantage of this situation. The new incoming militias from Iran strongly supported the religious and sectarian parties, something that gave them the upper hand in Iraq. The Iranian influence became excessive, giving the impression to many analysts that Iraq was being presented to Iran on a golden platter.

It was clear that the policy of the new US administration in Iraq and its supporters was operating on five basic principles.

. It regarded whoever was living in Iraq as a stooge of Hussain and the Baath Party, even if they were efficient people, known for their integrity; and whoever accompanied the occupying forces, no matter how ignorant they were and how tarnished their histories, they had the right to govern Iraq.

. The old regime was regarded as Sunni, discriminating against the Shiites and the Kurds, and only these latter two elements now had the right to dominate Iraq at the expense of the Sunnis.

. All Sunnis were seen as Baathists or 'terrorists', and there was no objection to them being annihilated.

. The newcomers had the right to confiscate public places without any accountability or legal consequences.

. All public places could be ransacked, except the Ministry of Oil and the intelligence headquarters; the latter was protected until certain elements confiscated all its records, especially the ones relating to Israel, and was later burned down. When chaos prevailed the US administration removed Garner and appointed Paul Bremer as the undisputed civil governor of Iraq. It could be said that Bremer, who could be

regarded as the one who institutionalized the sectarian and quota policy, was very much aware of what to do in Iraq in order to implement the US–Israeli plot for the country.

Bremer was another who had no knowledge about Iraq and its affairs. He admitted later in a book he published in 2006 (Bremer 2006) that the most important and critical decisions he took, which were devastating to the Iraqi state, were actually prepared for him in advance by the Pentagon or the State Department. In addition to the five basic principles of rule mentioned above, he also added his own ignorant opinion in describing the Iraqi state. He regarded Iraq as a fake and artificial state created by the British after the First World War, emphasizing that it was a diverse ethnic blend founded on a sectarian basis. Equally harmful was his belief that there was no such thing as an ‘Iraqi people’; instead, there were Shiites, Sunni, Kurds, Turkomans, Assyrians, Christians and Yazidis. Thus, he erased the presence of Arabs or the Arab national character in Iraq, despite the fact that this identity constituted 80% of the population.² More harmful still was his idea that the Arab Shiite population of the southern provinces was more attached to Iran than to Iraq, intentionally neglecting the fact that the population of these provinces were, and still are, proud of their Arab origin and heritage. Bremer also kept repeating that the Sunnis had ruled Iraq for over 400 years, and that the time had come to relinquish their political domination (Shaban 2011). Needless to say, these ideas were very much welcomed by the Kurdish and the Shiite parties who collaborated with him, as they viewed them as victories over their opponents.

Bremer immediately put his ideas and thoughts into practice. He established the Governing Council (GC) and selected 25 members for it. His choice was made on a sectarian, ethnic and quota basis. Its members comprised 13 Shiites, five Sunnis, five Kurds, one Turkoman, and one Assyrian Christian. To confirm his policy, he mentioned the sect of each member after his name, instead of citing his or her qualifications. It was really ironic, for example, to see the word ‘Shiite’ written after the name of the Secretary General of the Iraqi Communist Party; the same was applied to members who had always been known to be secularist. Yet, this was not applied to the Kurdish members of the council; they instead were kept as one nationality. This arbitrary policy was also followed when he formed the first transitional cabinet and the national assembly, which he wanted to ratify the laws he issued. During his term in office Bremer issued 100 compulsory laws, two of which were harmful. The first was a law that disbanded the Iraqi army. This resulted in evicting 1.5 million well-trained and experienced servicemen from the army, security and intelligence services into the street, and without any compensation. This decision explains the effectiveness of the Iraqi armed resistance that erupted during the first two years of the occupation, and later on, the successes of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which included a fair number of Iraqi officers from the old army. The second law he enacted was to dissolve the Baath Party – the ‘De-Baathification law’ – which resulted in firing thousands of efficient people from their jobs. In the meantime the De-Baathification law, which had a very terrifying synonym in Arabic – ‘uprooting the Baath’ – was used haphazardly to annihilate those who opposed the occupation. Bremer declared on many occasions that the Shiite and Kurdish parties that cooperated with him strongly supported his decisions and, on some occasions, even proposed similar ones to him.

Shortly after dissolving the armed forces Bremer issued a law to form the National Guards to replace the old army. In fact his choice of the word ‘guard’ was very indicative of his intentions, as he wanted the new force to simply be guards and not a real army. Moreover, he did not build the new force on professional considerations but on an ethnical, sectarian and quota basis, and by mainly amalgamating the militia forces that were established abroad before 2003 and who had come to Iraq later on. These militias were

given the right to give ranks and positions to their members who were, in general, without any professional military training or experience. It should also be stated that there was no real military discipline or law to organize these militia contingents, and all remained loyal to the parties to which they belonged. The new alleged Iraqi army, therefore, consisted of the Badir Brigade which was initially formed in Iran and fought with the Iranian army during the Iraq–Iran war; the Free Iraqi Forces which were composed of Iraqis trained by Americans in Bulgaria and airlifted to Iraq after the occupation; the Peshmarga Kurdish forces stationed in Iraqi Kurdistan which were almost independent and who never followed orders from Baghdad; and the al-Sadr militia which later fought against the American and British armies, as well as other militias belonging to other parties taking part in the political process.

As was expected, corruption and sectarian affiliations were the main characteristics of the new National Guards which was now called the ‘Iraqi Army’ by the government, after the American withdrawal. The occupation of Mosul by the ISIL fighters – better known now as ‘Da’ish’, revealed all the defects that this force had, as it fled the battles in Mosul, Takrit and Anbar. The current prime minister, Haidar al-Abadi (2014 to present) declared, after he took office, that the new force had as much as 60–70% of personnel who were not actually in service but who were receiving salaries. He said that in one initial calculation he made of some forces serving in Mosul revealed that there were 50,000 imaginary or non-existing members of these forces whom he called ‘ghost recruits’.³ The Minister of Interior made the same declaration about the police force. Not only was this force dispersed following the Mosul incident, but also even before many contingents of it had left the service and joined their own rebelling militias in Baghdad and other southern cities.

As soon as the US–British occupation of Iraq was completed, both countries obtained a resolution from the UN (1483/May 2003) that deemed Iraq as an occupied country; a resolution that made Bremer even more authoritarian. As an example, he told a reluctant UN official responsible for Iraq’s frozen assets to hand him over the money. When the official refused to release the assets belonging to the Iraqi government, Bremer replied: ‘I am the Iraqi government, and I am asking you to free the money immediately’ (Bremer 2006, 36). Bremer was also accused of corruption and mishandling of vast amounts of Iraqi money put at his disposal. About US\$8.8 billion were never accounted for after he left his post (“So, Mr Bremer, where did all the money go?” 2005). The Iraqi politicians who came after him followed his example. One could also say that the US and British administrations in Iraq laid the foundations for a corrupt system by distributing large amounts of money to their collaborators for fake projects, or by paying huge salaries to people who never earned them. Both administrations also turned a blind eye to those who were stealing public money and transferring it to European countries of which they were nationals, regardless of the fact that up to 2003 these people were living in these countries on social benefits. On one particular occasion a private security company working with the US Army abducted from prison a former Iraqi minister who was serving a prison sentence for corruption and smuggled him out of jail in broad daylight through Baghdad’s international airport.

Although Bremer was directly responsible for what happened in Iraq after 2003, this does not exonerate the Iraqis who took over from the responsibility after him for maintaining the sectarian, ethnic policies and encouraging corruption, nepotism and foreign interference. Due to the fact that the vast majority of the Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish newcomers had little or no support inside Iraq, they used sectarian and ethnic discourses to lure the people. For example, Ahmad al-Jalabi, who was known as secularist and a person who never practised religious rites, established the ‘Shiite House’ in Baghdad to secure the backing of the Shiite parties and population. While one of his partners,

Mudhar Shawkat, who has never been known for his adherence to religion, and who, since returning to Iraq after the invasion, mainly focused his efforts on greedily collecting a huge fortune, courted the Sunni component, in a distasteful sectarian manner, by holding a big meeting for the displaced Sunnis in Erbil to promote the idea of a Sunni region.⁴ On the other side of the spectrum, the Shiite politicians encouraged Shiite sectarian discourse to gain the trust of Iran, while their Sunni counterparts presented themselves as the guardians of the Sunni sect to court the Arab Gulf rulers as a source to generate huge amounts of money. The Kurdish parties, on their part, were more than happy with this fragmentation that served their objective of establishing de facto independence. All they were concerned about was how much the Kurdish region could get from the centre. Moreover, the Kurdish region strengthened its relations with Israel, the only entity that openly supported the separation of Iraqi Kurdistan. The existence of Israeli companies, military trainers and advisers was no longer a secret (Abdelhadi 2006).⁵

The divisive nature of the new constitution

The damage that Bremer's policies and decisions had done to national unity and to the fabric of society became even more harmful and lasting as these divisive issues were enshrined in the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), issued in 2004 by Bremer, and later in the permanent constitution of 2005. It was clear in these two documents, especially the constitution, that the American desire to establish a weak central government alongside strong regional entities, as well as asserting other controversial issues, would cause blood-letting and would take ages to resolve. Perhaps the most dangerous thing asserted in the TAL was the shortness of the timetable it fixed to write the permanent constitution and to carry out the first legislative elections (15 August 2005 to complete the drafting, and the elections in December of the same year.)

It is worth noting that the insistence on such a short time to draft the constitution was not because the interest of the Iraqis was a primary concern, or because the United States wanted to establish democracy in Iraq. It was rather because of the escalating Iraqi resistance which claimed the lives of 4487 American soldiers according to US statistics, and more than 10,000 according to other statistics, let alone the number of people who were disabled ("Iraq War in Figures" 2011). This fact drove the American government to think seriously about an early exit strategy. It wanted the permanent constitution to be approved quickly, followed by general elections, only to be able to claim that it withdrew after it had established democracy in Iraq.

There was much controversy about who wrote the permanent constitution of Iraq. Although the leaders of the Iraqi parties involved in the political process insisted that they were the ones who drafted it, two facts subsequently emerged proving the contrary. Firstly, it was said that the 32-year-old orthodox Jew and US academic Noah Feldman drafted it. He himself confirmed this fact indirectly when he admitted that he had been an adviser in writing the draft (Feldman 2004). The late Edward Said, relying on the US media, also confirmed the fact that it was Feldman who wrote it (Zangana 2008). The second fact was that the permanent constitution was almost identical to the TAL, in which the Iraqis had no real say and which was approved by the GC on an order from Bremer.

A committee of 55 members was chosen to 'draft' the constitution, or in fact to discuss the blueprint presented to them. The committee was set on 13 June 2005, which meant that it had only two months to complete its task. According to the quota system, the committee included 28 members from the Shiite coalition, 15 from the Kurdish coalition, eight from al-Iraqia list, which included a majority of Shiites, one communist, one Turkoman and one Christian. A month later, and in the face of strong protests from the Sunni community,

14 Sunnis were added to the committee. A few days after their inclusion four members of the Sunni representatives were assassinated; the others suspended their work in the committee (Jawad 2013). In the end the actual time to write the constitution did not exceed one month.

More important were the discussions that took place inside the committee. While the Shiite members were concentrating on sectarian and religious issues, such as the role of their supreme religious institution, al-Marja'iah of Najaf, and the right of their sect to perform their own religious rites, the Sunni members were insisting on emphasizing the Arab nature of Iraq; it being part of the big Arab nation. For their part, the Kurdish members – the only group with a team of international advisers⁶ – insisted on retaining the privileges bestowed on their region by the TAL and on getting any other prerogatives that supported the independence of their decisions. The US embassy in Baghdad followed the discussion closely, while any request to extend the drafting period was vehemently refused by Bremer and the embassy.

Going back to discussing the crux of the constitution one can see that it was a unique document in the way it caused harm to Iraq's national unity. This document stirred up parochial sectarian and ethnic feuds, contained ambiguous clauses, and was difficult or impossible to amend. It needed countless laws to activate 60 clauses in the constitution, and was replete with ambiguous clauses regulating the relationship between the central government and the Iraqi Kurdistan region. The main problematic issues are as follows:

- . The preamble was unusually long (330 words) and could only be described as a sectarian and divisive political communiqué.⁷ It begins with the phrase: 'We the people of Mesopotamia' (not Iraq),⁸ then it emphasizes the role of al-Marja'iah al Diniya, only to end by reviving old, deep hatreds that in turn reignite feuds, instead of putting stress and emphasis on brotherhood and national unity.

- . The constitution states in two places sectarian affiliations and differences. This was also mentioned in the preamble and is something that had never been mentioned in former constitutions. Moreover, it only mentions the right of Shiites to perform their own rites (Article 43-A).⁹

- . The articles discussing the relations between the central government and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) were the most outlandish and encouraged the division of Iraq. Article 115, for example, states: 'The priority goes to the regional law in case of conflict between other powers shared between the federal government and regional governments.' Article 121–2 states: 'In case of a contradiction between regional and national legislation in respect to a matter beyond the exclusive powers of the federal government, the regional authority shall have the right to amend the application of the national legislation within that region.' Finally, Article 126–4 states: 'The articles of the Constitution may not be amended if such amendment takes away from the powers of the regions that are not within the exclusive powers of the federal authorities, except by the approval of the legislative authority of the concerned region and the approval of the majority of its citizens in a general referendum.' The same tone was used in drafting Article 112–1 concerning the exploitation and exploration of national wealth. It states: 'The federal government, with the producing governorates and regional governments, shall undertake the management of oil and gas extracted from present fields, provided that it distributes its revenues in a fair manner.' The reader's attention is drawn here to the word 'present'. This means that all new fields will be exploited by the region. It should be noted that the government of Iyad al-Alawi in 2004 issued a law by which it granted the Iraqi KRG 17% of the Iraqi budget, as well as covering the expenses of the Kurdish military forces – the Peshmarga. This decision could explain why a province like Basra – the biggest oil-producing region – insisted on becoming a federal region like Iraqi Kurdistan, as it appeared that this province received

a little over 1% of the Iraqi budget.

. The TAL invented the term 'disputed areas', and this was adopted by the constitution, only to become a continued bone of contention between all successive governments and the KRG; a problem that cannot be solved under the present constitution. As part of the perennial problem between central governments and the Kurdish parties, the area of Kirkuk was not the only one to be designated a 'disputed region', but other areas in Mosul, Tikrit and Diyala were also designated, although the latter four were not part of the Kurdish region that existed prior to 2003.¹⁰

. To amend the constitution it was stipulated that any amendment should not be rejected by three provinces. This will remain the main obstacle as the Kurdish region is made up of three provinces, and the Kurdish parties have showed no willingness to amend the constitution or to relinquish any of the region's powers.

Enumerating the shortcomings of the constitution would take more space than this article will allow, but the above-mentioned examples suffice to explain the hidden intentions behind the drafting of the constitution in such a divisive way, as well as explaining the reasons for the endless and continuing crises that the country has undergone since 2003. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the Iraqi people, with the exception of the parties taking part in the political process, were left in the dark about what was going on concerning their country's constitution.¹¹ They knew nothing about the details, and went to vote for it on the demands and appeals of the leaders of the parties that took part in finalizing it; Shiite, Sunnis and Kurds alike. As a matter of fact, the role the mainly Sunni Islamic Party played in calling upon the people of the dominated Sunni areas to vote for the constitution, only 24 hours before the referendum was held, was what made a fair number of the Sunni community vote for the constitution, and this despite the protests voiced by the Sunni members of the Constitution Committee. For all the relentless efforts of the parties interested in passing the constitution in complicity with the US embassy in Baghdad, there are indications that the draft was refused by at least four provinces: Anbar and Tikrit, which overwhelmingly voted against it, while the results of Mosul and Thi Qar had been tampered with.¹²

Implications and repercussions of the occupation of Mosul in June 2014

Before the United States withdrew from Iraq in 2011, it signed a security agreement in 2008 with Iraq entitled the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). According to this agreement and its related protocols, the American forces were given the freedom, without the consent of Iraq, to take action to fight terrorism in and around Iraq (Jawad 2008). However, this did not prevent Washington from doing nothing to prevent the fighters of Da'ish from occupying Mosul and extending their presence to other areas in Tikrit, parts of Anbar and Diyala in June 2014. Yet, the United States was fast in taking effective military action against these brutal fighters when they approached the borders of Erbil, the capital of the Kurdish region. The intense bombardment by the US Air Force, and some other European countries, managed to drive away these fighters. It seems that the United States hesitated to take on the advancing Da'ish forces for two reasons. Firstly, they said that the Iraqi government had not asked for their assistance; and secondly, they were looking for an excuse to blame the then prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, and his failed foreign policy for what had happened. He refused to listen to US advice to change his sectarian policy that led to the alienation of vast segments of the Iraqi people, especially the Sunnis. What was not said was that the United States was not really concerned about what happened in Iraq. In fact, the United States, Europe, Turkey and other Gulf States supported Da'ish when it was fighting the Syrian regime which they wanted to remove. They were also happy to see Da'ish advance towards Iran's borders. However, their attitude

changed when Da'ish decided to invade the Iraqi Kurdish region and later brutally beheaded American and European citizens. Only then did the United States lead a coalition to fight Da'ish, but only from the air.

The Mosul setback revealed gross deficiencies which the Iraqi successive governments tried to cover up, or claimed they did not exist. The first deficiency was the fragility and meagreness of the so-called new Iraqi army constructed by Bremer. The low-level investigation that took place in Baghdad months after the disaster revealed that the number of troops who were supposed to defend Mosul was grossly and fictitiously enlarged. Most of the recruitments never actually took place; they were merely names on paper, the salaries of whom were going into the pockets of their commanders.¹³ Secondly, the government of Maliki was not affected by this disaster since it held none of the military leaders or commanders accountable for what happened. This attitude still prevails after more than a year under the new government of Haidar al-Abadi. Some Sunni leaders also believed that Maliki was clearly indifferent to the loss of the Sunni-dominated areas which he had always repressed because they opposed his sectarian policies. Thirdly, the KRG was also apathetic towards this military disaster and simply regarded it as part of the Shiite–Sunni struggle in Iraq. It could also be said that the KRG was, in reality, satisfied about the defeat of the Iraqi army, and regarded it as a golden opportunity to extend its sphere of power to the so-called disputed areas, especially Kirkuk. The KRG only realized the error of its thinking after Da'ish forces reached the walls of Erbil and put the whole Iraqi Kurdish region under real threat. Yet, even under these dangerous circumstances, the KRG tried to exploit the events in order to obtain, and sometimes actually received, direct military assistance and arms from the United States and European countries.

The sectarian policies and their aftermath

As already described above, the sectarian language and policy were very clear in the speeches and behaviour of the new politicians, as well as in how the governments were formed. This policy was also evident in dealing with the overwhelming Sunni-dominated areas of Mosul, Anbar and Tikrit. The usually mixed areas in Baghdad and Diyala were not exempt from this. Sectarian militias from all sides waged armed raids to cleanse the mixed areas on a sectarian and ethnic basis, without any response from government institutions. The sectarian and ethnic scheme adopted by the occupying administration succeeded in sowing discord amongst the Iraqis. The parties and people accompanying the occupation adhered to this scheme simply because they knew that they had neither any real support inside Iraq nor qualification and that it was only through relying on religion, sectarianism and factionalism could they remain in power. Thus, the newcomers concentrated on performing sectarian rites in the Shiite and Sunni areas, and at fanatic national events in Iraqi Kurdistan. The portraits of religious leaders, even Iranians, were extensively used during elections and religious events. The Sunni representatives were keen only on getting the ministries and positions that would bring them billions of dollars. When the people finally became aware of this fact it was too late, as the corrupt politicians and parties had managed to accumulate huge wealth which they can use to buy support.

Since 2003, the successive Iraqi governments of Alawi, Jaafari and Maliki did not look at the protests as demands to correct wrong policies; rather they looked at them as attempts to bring down the government with all its privileges. Here again, in this respect, sectarian rhetoric was used. Maliki, for example, considered the opposition to his rule and corruption as 'a Sunni revolt' against 'the Shiite's rule', or a war between the army of Yazid against the army of Imam Hussain which he claimed to represent.¹⁴ From his point of view, he had the right to fight any opposition, especially if it came from the Sunni component. It was not strange, then, that he ordered his forces to use excessive means to subdue the population of Mosul, Tikrit and Anbar when they were merely using peaceful means to protest. Indicatively, he was reported to have said to the then president of the

republic, Jalal Talbani: 'Why don't you [the Kurds] take Mosul and rid us of its annoyance?' (al-Mada 2014).

As a response to the policies of alienation and marginalization, the Sunni groups and tribes felt that the Shiite-dominated coalitions were ingrates who ignored their victory in defeating al-Qaeda in 2006–07. Their reaction, in turn, was also sectarian. They thought that the only way to end the Iranian supported Shiite domination and Maliki's government was through cooperating with regional Sunni governments and organizations.

Even the supposedly secularist Baath leadership did not object to this way of thinking, and went as far as cooperating with the fanatic Da'ish fighters. They only realized their mistake after that organization physically annihilated their comrades and a large numbers of Sunni inhabitants in the areas they occupied.

Despite all these tragedies and divisions, the coalitions taking part in the political process showed no sign of remorse or attempt to rebuild the national unity of the country. On the contrary, even the tragedy of Mosul was exploited to increase sectarian and ethnic divisions. Immediately after the fall of Mosul and Tikrit, the Iraqi government, in response to a call from al-Najaf Marja'iah, formed a new militia force called al-Hashid al-Shaabi, popular mobilization. This force contained only Shiites and was also fully backed and actually dominated by Iran. Although this force managed to liberate areas in Diyala and Tikrit, its brutal sectarian behaviour towards the Sunni inhabitants of these areas created ever further divisions. Instead of calling for the establishment of a real national army, the representatives of the Sunni population retorted by demanding the establishment of their own armed forces. Taking advantage of this situation the KRG practically annexed areas to their region, and escalated its disputes with the central government over financial issues. The lines of division were becoming ever more deep and entrenched.

In the midst of this depressing scene a glimmer of hope appeared in October 2015 in the form of huge popular demonstrations in most cities, including Baghdad, against the continued corruption. What characterized these demonstrations were as follows:

- . They erupted in the southern Shiite-dominated provinces, the provinces from where the government parties claimed their legitimacy based on votes.

- . For the first time since 2003 the demonstrations got the full support of al-Najaf Marja'iah, support that could only be regarded as the belated expression of a guilty conscious felt by the Marja'iah for either having supported or kept silent about the corrupt governments in Baghdad.¹⁵

- . The demonstrations maintained their peaceful character and orderliness and continued despite the brutal repression used by the authorities in some provinces.¹⁶

Similar demonstrations were also staged in Iraqi Kurdistan, and similar brutal means were used against them. Unfortunately, no similar demonstrations were held in the Sunnidominated areas. It may be that the latter did not dare to take such steps for fear of the extensive existence of the popular mobilization forces in their areas.

The future of the united, national and democratic project in Iraq

It could be fairly stated that the unifying, national and democratic project in Iraq received a major blow as a result of the occupation and the deplorable sectarian and quota system that ensued. The foreign intervention, the policies of those who came with the occupation, and the sheer scale of corruption also played a major role.

As a result of 35 years of Baath Party domination, eight years of war with Iran and the 12 years of inhumane sanctions following the invasion of Kuwait, people had become indifferent to what was happening. Not only indifference and despair were clear in the attitude of people but also a fair number believed that the American occupation would not

only rid them of Baath rule but also would also establish democracy and prosperity. Regrettably some of the educated elite were also thinking along the same lines.¹⁷ The other regrettable phenomenon was that large segments of the Iraqi society accepted the sectarian, ethnic and factional policies and practised them. The secularist attitudes that had always characterized the society, especially in big cities, have now disappeared in the face of the invading militant religious, sectarian and narrow ethnical ideas. This may be explained by the fact that society had been influenced by the 'religious campaign' initiated by the late president in the 1990s, and the impact that the dire days endured by Iraqis prior to the occupation had on the people. Normally, the Iraqis loathed speaking about sectarian affiliations and their negative aspects. The Iraqi residential neighbourhoods were all mixed, and intermarriages, even between different religions, were common. To ask about the sect, religion or ethnic background of any citizen was an insult not only to the person asked but also to the one who posed such a question. This situation was turned upside down after 2003; professing sectarian, religious and ethnic affiliations became more than a common daily practice. What was striking was that those who spread and circulated these tendencies were people who had lived for more than 25 years in secular and democratic Western countries. Even more striking was that secular parties like the Iraqi Communist Party and the National Democratic Party accepted these tendencies and worked within them.

The other problem was the absence or weakness of any general national organization. The policies of the Baath Party, which were built on no tolerance for any difference of opinion, kept Iraq void of any national movement that could effectively oppose the occupation. What were available were only some nationalist figures who tried to establish national fronts, but lacked the means to be effective, as compared with the means made available by Iran, the United States and the Gulf countries to their sectarian adversaries. The best example here could be the National Iraqi Foundation Conference (NIFC), established in May 2004 in Baghdad. It included Arab nationalists, Islamic figures, independents, former communists, Baathists and national democrats, Arabs, Kurds, Turkomans, Christians, and Sabians. Despite its popularity, it failed to maintain its activities, especially after it refused to approve the constitution or take part in the ensuing elections. It even failed to maintain the publication of its newspaper or any other future activities due to the difficulties put in its way by the American administration and the sectarian parties.¹⁸ In the end it was frozen and its leaders remained national names who refused to cooperate with the occupation and without any effective role on the ground. As for democracy, it could be fairly said that the occupation managed to implement a crippled version of it. Corruption and the stealing of public money were the main features of the new system established after 2003. A previous vice premier, Baha al-Araji, admitted that between 2003 and 2014 around US\$1 trillion were squandered on fake projects and grossly inflated arms contracts.¹⁹ As the bulk of these figures went into the pockets of politicians and the budgets of the ruling political parties and coalitions, it is difficult to see how any elections could be fair and democratic, since any upcoming elections would bring back the same grim and corrupt faces.

The arrival of Haidar al-Ibadi to power as prime minister, following the elections of 2014, was an indication of an Iraqi and American desire to remove Maliki who had ruled unsuccessfully for two terms since 2006. Despite the unprecedented internal, regional and international support Ibadi received,²⁰ he failed, more than one year after his election, to take daring measures. It is true that his discourse was different from Maliki's, but he remained inactive because he still belongs to the same al-Dawa party as his predecessor, and to the same Shiite coalition. Both sides fear any real reform as they will surely affect a significant number of their members. Also, he himself has been part of all the governments that have ruled Iraq since 2003 and has never been known for

opposing any of the measures taken previously. The other problem is that he still thinks that national reconciliation can be achieved through organizing all-national conferences or declarations. He has not integrated the idea that reconciliation can easily be achieved through real, speedy, effective and daring reform measures that would end sectarian policies, marginalization and corruption.

The question today is whether there is a way to make amends for all these mistakes and to heal the terrible divides afflicting present-day Iraqi society. The answer may lie in the anti-corruption demonstrations overwhelming Baghdad and the other southern cities. These demonstrations started as a protest against corruption; but soon the demonstrators increased their demands to include more general ones including rejection of the sectarian policies and quota system, defending the rights of the displaced to return to their home towns, and releasing the unjustly detained. More important perhaps is that the society is now showing itself to be transcending parochial sectarian thinking. It is true that these demonstrations have not yet achieved anything constructive, but if this movement continues it will surely enforce changes in the politics of the country. It was hoped that Prime Minister Ibbadi would take strength from them and make daring and quick reforms. But, unfortunately, all his promises have proved to be void. Some say that as a weak person he does not have the courage to face his Shiite coalition. Others believe that there are suspicions of corruption hovering over him. In any case, it is clear that the more he dithers the more his increasing opposing factions will manage to regain their positions and defy him. This was clear in the decision of the parliament on 2 November 2015 that obliged Ibbadi to seek the approval of parliament for any reform measure he wishes to undertake.

Ibbadi is not the only one to stand accused; parliament too should take a bigger share of the blame. Since it was established in 2006, parliament has proved to be a paradigm of corruption, inefficiency, and dedication to sectarian and factional affiliations. Moreover, a fair number of its members gained their seats through the quota system.²¹ The constitution bestowed all the powers on parliament to observe and hold corrupt officials accountable. But its conduct, throughout all these years, has shown that it never held anyone accountable and never referred any corrupt or failing official to the courts. On the contrary, its conduct has shown that it contained a large number of corrupt deputies who had stolen public money, as well as covering up for the ones who were accused of it. Finally, all the probes it made were based on favouritism and conducted on a sectarian and ethnic basis.

Searching for possible solutions

In searching for a solution to the multiple crises, two viewpoints transpire. The first takes the position that the problem has become so complicated that any talk of solving it internally has been rendered almost impossible. Those who take this position base their beliefs on two arguments:

- . The deep divisions between all the components of Iraqi society and vested interests.
- . The enormous degree of foreign interference and influence.

The second viewpoint stresses that any solution should come from inside Iraq and by the Iraqis alone, without any external or foreign intervention.

It is likely that the first party that thought of solving the Iraqi problem through external involvement was the United States and Britain. Some believed that the two countries, when planning to invade Iraq, had carried out their plan efficiently, but that they did not have a clear idea about what to do next. Others believed that what happened in Iraq had taken place according to a well-studied US plan. What the US administration was not expecting was the intense resistance with which the invading

forces were faced. The significant thing is that after finding themselves bogged down in the Iraqi quagmire and when all the information the US administration had had about the invading forces being met by Iraqis holding flowers proved wrong,²² they had to begin to think of finding a face-saving way out. After claiming Iraq as an occupied country in 2003, the United States suddenly declared in 2004 that it would hand over sovereignty of the country to the Iraqis through the UN. Then UN Secretary General Kofi Anan responded positively and dispatched the veteran Algerian diplomat, Lakdhar Brahimi, to find a way out of the impasse. After many meetings Brahimi had with different prominent Iraqi politicians and personalities, he reached the following conclusions:

- . That the then GC appointed by Bremer had no popularity whatsoever, and was unanimously refused to form a transitional government, as the council was demanding.
- . That Iraqi public opinion held similar views about most of the personalities, parties and organizations that came with the occupation.
- . That Iraq needed a government of efficient technocrats that should not include any member of the GC or representatives of the parties that came with the occupation.
- . That the members of the transitional government should not be allowed after their service to nominate themselves for the forthcoming elections.
- . That the political parties should take advantage of the transitional period to prepare their programmes for the forthcoming elections.
- . He thought that the Iraqis had the merit and ability to govern themselves. It was not surprising that the parties cooperating with the occupation and the GC strongly attacked Brahimi's ideas in order to foil his mission. He was accused by them as being a stooge of Saddam Hussain and of being hostile to the Shiites.²³

In the end, after claiming that it accepted his suggestions, it was the United States itself that frustrated Brahimi's mission. When the time came to nominating the transitional prime minister, the United States had a hand in the nomination of Iyad Allawi as prime minister, as well as with nominations for other important ministries. With a few exceptions, only Brahimi's nominations for ineffective ministries were accepted. In the end nothing was achieved from Brahimi's scheme. Regrettably, Brahimi not only remained silent about the American interventions and selections but also gave them his blessing in the report he submitted to UN in June 2004.²⁴

It should be noted that the views presented by Brahimi were relayed to him by the nationalist Iraqis he met in Baghdad and abroad, but he failed to uphold them. This prompted some Iraqi nationalist personalities to submit these ideas again and in more detail (Haseeb 2006). Dr Khair el-Din Haseeb was the first to put forward a plan of 21 points to end the occupation in 2005 (Haseeb 2006). His initiative came after the failure to convene the different national Iraqi movements and personalities in conciliatory meetings. The main points of Haseeb's plan were as follows:

- . The unequivocal and complete withdrawal of the United States according to a short timetable.
- . The declaration of a ceasefire by the Iraqi resistance.
- . An agreement should be reached under the auspices of, and with guarantees from, the UN Security Council, and in consultation with the Iraqi resistance and other national forces that have not collaborated with the occupation, on selecting a prime minister for Iraq for a transitional period of no more than two years. The chosen prime minister should have the authority to select a cabinet from neutral candidates and technocrats, in a non-binding consultation with the UN representative in Iraq. The transitional prime minister and the ministers will refrain from nominating themselves in any elections hereafter. The cabinet will be endowed, during the transitional period, with all the legislative, executive and financial powers necessary to carry out their duties.

. The UN Security Council should be committed to preserving Iraq's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. The initiative also covered reconstructing a new national army on a professional and patriotic basis, the transitional government's right to invite a limited number of Arab forces from the countries that had not encouraged or participated in the occupation of Iraq, to perform peacekeeping missions in Iraq; abrogating the constitution adopted by a rigged referendum and preparing, within one year, a law on elections and a law on political parties.

. The transitional government should hold general elections within the second year of the transitional period, to elect two houses of parliament, one for the deputies and the other for senates, taking its guidelines from the provisional constitution drafted by the Beirut Symposium of July 2005, and in consultation with a large number of Iraqis inside and outside the country. The initiative also held the United States and Britain responsible for what happened to Iraq and obliged them to pay compensation in the form of grants for the damage they inflicted on Iraq and its population.

To reiterate these views a more detailed programme, under the auspices of the Centre for Arab Unity Studies, was drawn up by Iraqi specialists – each one in his own field of expertise including economics, oil, constitutional law, elections, reconstruction of the army and national unity. Apart from the then obvious hostile reaction of the United States and other collaborating Iraqis to the plan, there were two reasons why this initiative did not get the attention it deserved. Primarily, it came very early, and at a time when there was a regional and international feeling that the United States would succeed in finding a suitable solution in Iraq.²⁵ The leaders of the resistance, for their part, felt that their successes on the ground would achieve better results.

Those who upheld the latter view, believing that the solution should come from inside and by the Iraqis themselves, did not deny a role for the UN. In this respect one could mention two recent initiatives. The first was presented by the Association of Muslim Scholars in Iraq (AMSI) called 'The Project for a Comprehensive Iraq: The Suitable Solution to Rescue Iraq and the Region'. This initiative was put forward in Amman on 15 August 2015.²⁶ It was followed by a second one put forward by the Baath Party at a meeting in Doha in September 2015. This meeting, convened under the auspices of the UN secretary general and the government of Qatar, with binding guarantees from Arab and international sides, claimed to have included all the Iraqi groups.²⁷ While the AMSI claimed that it had got the approval of the Baath leadership of their initiative, Baathist representatives did not attend the Amman meeting and denied their approval of it. In turn, the AMSI leaders did not attend the Doha gathering, of which they disapproved. In analyzing the two initiatives it could be concluded that although the one proposed by AMSI did transcend sectarian rhetoric, it was criticized on two accounts. Firstly, the initiative came from an all-Sunni religious body when most Iraqis, and after 13 years of religious rule, were not enthusiastic about such an example. The Iraqis were not prepared to see a major or central role for any religious body in ruling Iraq. The majority of the Iraqis wanted to see an initiative coming from a national, patriotic and secular coalition. The second aspect criticized was that the initiative only concentrated on the harmful Iranian interference in Iraqi affairs and never mentioned other harmful regional interference, which also nourished and encouraged sectarian division.²⁸ Finally, AMSI was called upon to revive the IFNC, which was more collective, and of which it was a part and to present its initiative under the name of the IFNC. However, in fairness, this initiative stressed its adherence to diversity and pluralism, it rejected political revenge, and it stressed that the tragedy of Iraq was the tragedy of a country and its people. It also said that it was inspired by the right to resistance, and to holding the demonstrations, popular uprisings and sit-ins that are taking place in Iraq. It also called for a consultative meeting for all the Iraqi groups opposing the present political project to participate in.

Finally, it called on the international community to seize this opportunity to find comprehensive and realistic solutions to end the treacherous crises of Iraq (al-Hayat September 6, 2015). But, once again, this initiative did not succeed in getting the needed support.

The initiative of the Baath Party, in fact, depended on the desire of the Qatari government to convene an all-Sunni conference. Unfortunately, the party complied with this call only to have an erroneous start right from the outset. Instead of calling for an all-Iraqi meeting, the Baath representative declared that the party was taking part in the Sunni Components Conference. This was confirmed by two other groups that belonged to the party, the Islamic Army and the Military Council when both declared that they would not take part in the conference because, according to their words, it 'disperses Sunni unity'. This discourse should have been rejected by a party that regarded itself as secular. It is true that the policies of the successive Iraqi governments were sectarian par excellence, but this should not be confronted in a similar manner and language. Although the party representatives declared that they had adopted large parts of the AMSI initiative, and that the AMSI agreed with it, AMSI rejected these claims and refused to attend the conference.²⁹ A close look at the Baath initiative reveals great similarity with that of Haseeb and the plan drawn by the Iraqi experts in 2005.

Nonetheless, what happened in Doha was puzzling. It seems that the Doha efforts to convene the Iraqi Sunni components resulted in two separate meetings being held. Thus, Doha's alleged intention to convene leaders of the Baath Party and some members of the present Iraqi government and parliamentarians, as well as all Sunnis, did not materialize. In the end, two separate meetings, both under the auspices of the Qatari foreign ministry, were held. The head of the Iraqi parliament who went to Doha did not attend any of the meetings due to sharp criticism from Baghdad. The Baathists also refused to attend the meeting at which some Sunni Iraqi parliamentarians were present. The Qatari foreign minister continually mediated between the two conferences without any success at convening them in one meeting. However, the only positive aspect that came out of the meeting was that it managed to bring Baath Party representatives to meet with the ambassadors of the Gulf States (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)), as well as the UN representative for Iraq and his deputy, which some scholars saw as amounting to a tacit US approval (Lund 2015).

This was the first time that these countries accepted the idea of sitting together with representatives of the Baath Party. An ultimate evaluation of the Qatari-supported initiative would show that, except from the fact that it had come from an external element, it still only concentrated on one component of the Iraqi society: the Sunnis.

As far as the Iraqi government was concerned, Ibadi deplored the convening of the conference and described it as 'a breach of Iraqi sovereignty' (Lund 2015), although Qatar claimed that it had the approval of the Iraqi government. He also prevented parliamentarians and other members of his government from travelling to Qatar. Supporters of former Prime Minister Maliki gathered more than 100 signatures demanding the removal of the head of parliament, accusing him of attending the 'divisive Doha meeting'. Ironically, to avoid that prospect, the head of parliament went back to Baghdad via Tehran!

All these events confirm the deep divisions within Iraqi society and strengthen the view that under Iraq's current circumstances, where one-third of the country is occupied by Da'ish, and enduring daily explosions, killings, corruption, lack of services and a huge drop in oil prices, the Iraqi people will not be able to solve their problems alone.

In the final analysis, and from the personal point of view of this article's author, the main reason for the failure of these initiatives coming from parties with undoubted national loyalty was the desire of each of them to be the only party playing the leading role. Haseeb's initiative, for example, was disregarded mainly because the Baath Party

felt that he was trying to benefit from popular support their party enjoyed inside Iraq, while in fact their party disintegrated and collapsed after the invasion in 2003. Others rejected it for pure sectarian reasons. The initiative of AMSI was aborted by other groups from the same Sunni component, believing that they did not have enough weight within it. They also claimed that AMSI, following the death of its leader, Sheikh Harith al-Dhari, had lost most of its credibility. Instead of agreeing on a united course, as they were all aiming for the same objective and shared the same views about the problems facing Iraq, they differed and resorted to a sectarian discourse. Instead of gathering forces they sought the assistance of foreign countries and parties that encouraged sectarian tendencies. The other major deficiency in all these initiatives was that they did not take into consideration the developments that had taken place in Iraq itself between 2003 and 2015; developments that included the occupation of Mosul and Anbar, the formation of the popular mobilization forces, the dispersal of the army and the huge foreign influence in Iraq today. All these changes, in addition to others, had created a new atmosphere that had been overlooked by the different initiatives. Also, all the parties that presented these initiatives did not have the internal support that could face the overwhelming Iranian influence, the strong US presence and the role of the popular mobilization forces. All these elements can be expected to fight against any attempt to curtail or put an end to their influence.

Under such complicated circumstances, some scholars have evoked two other ways to bring about a complete major change: military coups or sweeping popular revolutions. Both possibilities are hard to envisage due to the way in which the new army has been established and the lack of any popular movement that could lead a widely supported revolution. Even if one of the army commanders risked a coup d'état, it would still have to face two obstacles:

- . The reaction of the many militias that have grown stronger than the army itself.
- . The American reaction which would accuse such a move as being an illegal act against a democratically elected government.³⁰

Some scholars, however, still believe that democratic measures can still improve matters. But rarely have democratic methods succeeded in making improvements. Democratic procedures can succeed if the institutions of the state actually exist and could then be reformed. In such a case a powerful and genuine reformist might succeed, as otherwise the anti-reform elements would be stronger and would defeat any reformer's attempts at implementing change. This is the case for Iraq.

Some sources recently spoke of a solution to the Iraqi impasse through another direct US intervention, which could come about not from any love for the Iraqis but because of the four-sided alliance which included Russia, Iran, Syria and Iraq, and of which the United States never approved.³¹ Indications of this were in a recent leak by the American media that spoke of the United States' intention to replace Ibadi with another American citizen of Iraqi origin.³² But how prepared will the US administration be in defending such a solution, or how able would the newcomer be to enact major change, which would certainly be opposed by the many powerful militias as well as Iran? Such a move would need forces on the ground to support it. How ready would the United States be remains questionable? Finally, it should be stated that any solution to the Iraqi problem would have to be closely connected to solving the problems in the region, and especially in Syria. In other words, the outcome of the Syrian crisis will have a direct effect on Iraq. To be more frank, if the schemes to force a military change in Syria succeed, Iraq will undoubtedly follow the same destiny. If the planned schemes to divide Syria fail, then there would be great hope that Iraq will escape division and disintegration.

Notes

1. The plan also spoke about dividing up other countries such as Syria and Lebanon. Yinon wrote that Iraq's dissolution was even more important for Israel than that of Syria, and that Iraq was stronger than Syria. He wrote that in the short run it was Iraqi power that constituted the greatest threat to Israel. See <http://cosmos.ucc.ie/cs1064/jabowen/IPSC/articles/article0005345.html/>.
2. This is what was mentioned in the Iraqi constitution of 2005, which did not mention that Iraq was an Arab state, but a member of the Arab League.
3. For fuller details, see <http://www.middle-east-online.com/?id=189193./>
4. Both Jalabi and Shawkat are members of the same party.
5. Other Iraqi Arab politicians also established good relations with Israel before and after the invasion. See the reports in BBC News (20 September 2006) and *albaghdadia* (October 2015).
6. Galbraith (2006) describes his role as an adviser to the Kurdish parties.
7. Although the Iraqi constitution followed the US example in putting in a preamble, there were two major differences between the two. The US rendition only contains 51 words and stressed unity, freedom and prosperity, while the Iraqi rendition contains no mention of freedom and unity.
8. This is very telling. The Kurdish parties always insisted that Iraq was composed of two parts, Mesopotamia for the Arabs and southern Kurdistan, which was attached to the state of Iraq following the First World War.
9. Bremer himself interfered in preventing the implementation of a law on personal status, which had been approved by the GC in response to strong criticism from women's organizations and other civil society groups.
10. Article 53-A of the TAL regarded the Kurdish region as the one that existed prior to 2003, which included Erbil, Sulaimaniya and Dehouk, as a region that should not be tampered with. It also included other areas from the provinces of Mosul, Tikrit and Diyala. This article was reiterated by the permanent constitution and exempted from cancellation.
11. Larry Diamond wrote: 'On October 2005, the Iraqis voted on a permanent constitution they had not seen, read, studied, debated, or drafted' (Diamond 2005). He was one of those who participated in the drafting of the constitution as an adviser.
12. In Mosul the initial results showed a clear refusal of the constitution. The authorities stopped the counting and dispatched the voting boxes to Baghdad. Ten days later it was announced that the negative votes did not constitute the needed two-thirds.
13. The term used now in Iraq to refer to these recruits or soldiers is 'ghost soldiers'.
14. This comparison was also aimed at reviving sectarian divisions based on incidents that had happened more than a millennium before, and were the main reasons for dividing the Muslim world.
15. Most of the Shiite politicians claimed that they had the full backing of the Marja'iah.
16. Some Shiite politicians accused the demonstrations as having been instigated by foreign powers, and some even attacked the Marja'iah for the moral support it extended to the demands of the demonstrators.
17. More regrettable is that some similar Arab elites are still thinking this way after the Iraqi disaster.
18. The NIFC was presided over by the late General Subhi Abdul Hamid, with Sheikh Jawad al-Khalisi as its secretary general, Dr Wamidh Nadhmi as his deputy and Salman Abdullah as treasurer. It also included the AMSI, the Sadrists, a splinter group of the Baath party and many independent personalities. The writer was the spokesperson for this group. Ironically, some members of it were treated in the same manner under the old regime because of their persistent calls for democratic change.
19. Araji said that this amount consisted of US\$800 billion in oil revenues and US\$200 billion in foreign assistance. Other sources put the figures between US\$700 billion and US\$350 billion. Reports in Arabic are available on the Albayan and Aljazeera websites.

20. As opposed to his predecessor, Ibadi was strongly supported by a large number of Iraqis, al-Marja'iah, Turkey, the Gulf States, the United States and European countries.
21. A number of deputies gained only tens of votes but were nominated to the parliament by their winning lists.
22. For this Senate report, see http://fas.org/irp/congress/2006_rpt/srpt109-330.pdf/.
23. For this report in Arabic, see <http://www.al-jazirah.com/2004/20040406/du9.htm/>.
24. For this account, see <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/arabic/texttrans/2004/06/20040608152432aywalhsib-le0.2970392.html#axzz3nuXmZH8B/>.
25. This view was expressed by one of the staunch supporters of the occupation when he said that it was a well-known fact that the United States makes mistakes at the beginning but that after a short while it resorted to using its brains and reviewed its policies and found the best solutions in the end.
26. Full details are available in Arabic from the Aljazeera website.
27. This was reported by Al-Hayat newspaper, London, on September 6, 2015.
28. The reason for this was because Qatar was also supporting the initiative.
29. It later appeared that a breakaway faction from the association attended the conference
30. Note that the US experiment in South Korea was quite the opposite as it allowed military coups and supported the efforts to building a strong industrial revolution and supporting genuine democracy, something it did not apply in the case of Iraq.
31. It was evident that Iraq's participation in this coalition was in accordance with an Iranian decision.
32. For detailed information on this in Arabic, see www.iraqkhair.com/.

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