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Conflict Research Programme

Iraq Synthesis Paper

Understanding the Drivers of Conflict in Iraq

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## Executive Summary

### Introduction to the Conflict Research Programme

The Conflict Research Programme (CRP) is a three-year programme funded by the UK Department of International Development (DFID) designed to address the drivers and dynamics of violent conflict in the Middle East and Africa, and to inform the measures being used to tackle armed conflict and its impacts.

The overall goal of the CRP is to provide an evidence-based strategic reorientation of international engagement in places apparently afflicted by the world's most intractable violent conflicts. Its premise is that in these places, the ability of public authorities to provide even the most basic level of governance is subject to the functioning of the 'real politics' of gaining, managing and holding power, which we argue functions as a 'political marketplace'. This approach helps explain the frustrations of state-building and institutionally-focused engagement; it can also inform the design of improved interventions, which reduce the risk and impact of conflict and violence in developing countries, alleviating poverty and insecurity.

The locations for research are Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Somalia, South Sudan, Iraq and the wider Middle East. Our central hypothesis is that governance in these difficult places is dominated by the logic of a political marketplace. These political markets are turbulent, violent and integrated into regional and global networks of power and money. We also hypothesise that moral populism (most visible in identity politics, persecuting ideologies and violent extremism) is a counterpart to the marketisation of politics, and the two flourish in conditions of persistent uncertainty, conflict and trauma. Current policy frameworks and tools can neither capture the everyday realities of politics and governance, nor adjust to the dynamics of contested power relations. External interventions risk being enmeshed in logics of power and may end up inadvertently supporting violence and authoritarianism. At the same time, in all war-torn spaces, there are relatively peaceful zones: what we term 'pockets of civiness'. These might be territorial (local ceasefires, or inclusive local authorities), social (civil society groups helping the vulnerable or countering sectarian narratives, or customary courts solving disputes fairly) or external (interventions that regulate flows of political finance).

The CRP will generate evidence-based research on the dynamics of conflict, contestation, 'civiness' and public authority, enabling better interventions to manage

and resolve armed conflict, reduce violence, and create conditions for more accountable and transparent governance. A core component of the CRP is to contribute to a better understanding of 'what works' in addressing violent conflict across our research sites. We will develop comparative understanding of how different interventions affect violent conflict and the risk of renewed conflict across our research sites. We will also examine the contextual factors that affect the effectiveness of these interventions. Intervention areas selected for comparative research are: security interventions; civil society and community mediation interventions; resource interventions; and interventions designed to strengthen authority and legitimacy, including at the sub-national level. We envisage emerging findings from our political economy analysis of conflict drivers to shape our comparative analysis of specific interventions.

We have a unique and robust infrastructure of local researchers and civil society networks across all our sites that will facilitate both fieldwork research and remote research. The CRP team is already closely engaged with key political processes – and regional actors – in the countries concerned, designed to promote peace, humanitarian action, human rights and democracy. This engagement is a key part of our method and will ensure that evidence-based research is effectively communicated to institutions engaged in trying to reduce the risk and impact of violent conflict in our research sites. Our emphasis is upon a mix of research methods and mechanisms for engaging in policy and practice.

### CRP Research on Iraq

It has now been over a year since the liberation of Mosul by Iraqi government forces in July 2017. This victory marks a new stage in the violent conflict that has destabilised Iraq since regime change in 2003. In some ways, this breakthrough can be compared firstly to the initial aftermath of the invasion itself from April 2003 until the insurgency transformed itself into a civil war in 2005, and secondly to the period following the US-led surge which started in February 2007 and lasted until the reconstitution of Da'esh<sup>1</sup> and the fall of Mosul in 2014. As with the invasion and the surge, the organisational capacity of violent opposition to the post-2003 political order was shattered by the deployment of superior military force. The aftermath of this successful military campaign clearly represents a window of opportunity where a sudden reduction in politically

<sup>1</sup> Da'esh is an Arabic acronym referring to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), now officially known as the Islamic State (IS). These terms are used interchangeably in the paper.

motivated violence offers the Government of Iraq (GoI) and its allies the opportunity to deal with long-term underlying drivers of instability that have repeatedly given rise to organised violence since 2003.

However, as the examples of 2003 and 2007, along with the rapid reconstitution of Da'esh after 2017 indicate, if these underlying drivers are not properly identified and mediated through accurately targeted policy interventions, then a return to the levels of organised violence that have dominated Iraq for the majority of the last fifteen years is likely. This paper is an attempt to identify those underlying drivers of conflict using the CRP's four key analytical concepts – moral populism, the political marketplace, public authority and 'civicness'.

The CRP's Iraq component is based at the LSE Middle East Centre. Professor Toby Dodge leads on the research in partnership with Dr Zeynep Kaya and Dr Jessica Watkins. The programme is managed by Sandra Sfeir.

The CRP's Iraqi partners are the Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS), American University of Iraq, Sulaimani and Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies, a think tank based in Baghdad. IRIS and its Director, Christine M. van den Toorn, will lead research on the Kurdistan Regional Government, displacement and the disputed territories. Al-Bayan Center, led by Managing Director, Sajad Jiyad and Director of Studies, Ali al-Mawlawi, will research central government politics, administration and finances, the politics of resource distribution and intra-Shi'a relations.

The rise of destructive sectarian narratives in Iraq since 2003 will be examined through the category of moral populism. This refers to the social and political power produced by invoking exclusivist and morally-imbued identities and values, such as those characteristic of militant Islamist, sectarian and ethno-nationalist movements. In post-2003 Iraq, moral populism has taken the form of both radical Islamism and sectarian political mobilisation, with politicians seeking to divide the polity through the mobilisation of exclusivist Sunni, Shi'a and Kurdish identities.

In the aftermath of the first national election of 2005, a government of national unity was formed through the creation of an elite pact that brought this sectarian political logic into government formation. The *muhāsasa ta'ifīa* – or sectarian apportionment system – deliberately used moral populism to disguise the evolution of a nationwide patronage system (the political marketplace) and to legitimise the use of violence during the civil war.

The rapid reconstitution of Da'esh shows the negative consequences that the *muhāsasa ta'ifīa* system had on the Sunni section of Iraq's polity. In the aftermath of the liberation of Mosul and the 2018 elections, political organisations seeking to represent the Sunni populace remain fractured and are increasingly dominated by competing regional states. Given that the vast majority of Iraq's internally displaced people are Sunni, the disorganised state of those seeking to mobilise and deliver them to the ballot box is yet another destabilising factor.

Between the fall of Mosul to Da'esh in 2014, its liberation in 2017 and the national elections of 2018, there have been trends that have both bolstered but also undermined moral populism. A trend counter to moral populism is political mobilisation, which came to the fore in the summer of 2015 with the spontaneous protests against power shortages, endemic corruption and the *muhāsasa ta'ifīa*, starting in Basra and then spreading through to Baghdad. The influence of the 2015 protest movement meant that the issue of corruption dominated the 2018 elections campaign. Muqtada al-Sadr allied with the Iraqi Communist Party to form the Saairun Coalition. This certainly placed the issue of corruption at the heart of the elections and played a major role in Sadr's alliance winning the largest number of seats, at 54. However, it looks unlikely that Sadr can transform this election victory into a meaningful and sustainable programme to reform the state and reduce corruption.

The emergence of the Hashd al-Sha'abi (or Popular Mobilization Units, PMU), a plethora of militias primarily mobilised through Shi'a identity politics, has seen the Iraqi state struggle to gain control over purveyors of violence. In 2018, the political coalition representing the majority of groups involved in the Hashd al-Sha'abi, the Fateh Alliance won the second largest number of votes (47 seats), further hindering the state's ability to control them.

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), by pushing forward with the independence referendum in September 2017, then-President Masoud Barzani and the KDP sought to exacerbate Kurdish moral populism to shore up their legitimacy. However, the move by the Iraqi army into the disputed territories claimed by both the GoI and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in October 2017, indicated the political vulnerability of Barzani and his family's domination over the KRG.

The national elections of May 2018 certainly saw a move away from identity-based politics to campaigning focused on economic and reform issues. The majority of political coalitions eschewed overtly sectarian rhetoric, instead

developing manifestos focused on how to economically reform the Iraqi state and deliver much needed government services to all. However, the low turnout, at 44.52 percent, indicated the alienation of the population from the political process and the state. In addition, winning coalitions moved into complex negotiations to form another government of national unity. This means that the *muhāsasa ta'ifīa* remains the dominant logic shaping elite politics in Baghdad.

The reasons behind the high levels of politically sanctioned corruption that have undermined Iraqi state institutions and government legitimacy lie in the dominant role the political marketplace plays in Iraqi politics. The political marketplace refers to the transactional politics through which loyalties and services are exchanged for material reward, often extracted from state resources. The Iraqi oil-funded political marketplace is intimately linked to the use of ethno-sectarian moral populism and sectarian apportionment promoted by the country's ruling elite. Within the *muhāsasa ta'ifīa* system, dominant parties use Gol payrolls to reward political loyalty with public sector employment, government contracts to enrich allied businessmen and personal theft from ministerial budgets. The result has been a state payroll that has swelled from between 850,000 and 1.2 million employees in 2003 to a peak of 3 million in 2015.

The challenges to government authority at a national level will be examined through the analytical lens of public authority. Public authority is understood by the CRP as the structures and people who exercise governance functions, with a degree of consent, at any level above the family. In Iraq, the removal of the Ba'athist regime in 2003 led to the institutional collapse of the state. Sub-state organisations such as the Mahdi Army and Da'esh and, after 2014, the Hashd al-Sha'abi, partially filled the gap left by the state. The influence of the *muhāsasa ta'ifīa* and the political marketplace has meant that public authority at state level is incredibly weak. The CRP will investigate whether the decentralisation of public authority to the provincial level is a more effective way of filling the vacuum caused by war and corruption.

In the KRG, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)'s monopolisation of political power and resources has meant that informal systems of governance prevail and have largely impeded the development of coherent government institutions and the rule of law. The CRP will examine if the domination of public authority in the KRG by the political marketplace can be challenged in the aftermath of the referendum and resurgence of Gol authority in the disputed territories.

Political mobilisation will be studied through the notion of 'civicness'. The violent character of moral populism post-2003 has stifled the development of nationwide civic organisations. While civil society organisations have become active, they operate within the constraints imposed by the political elite. Beyond party politics, cross-communal political mobilisation has been patchy and tends to focus on protests against government sectarianism and corruption and its appalling record of service delivery. In 2015, protests against the *muhāsasa ta'ifīa* system originating in Basra spread through the south and to Baghdad, attracting hundreds of thousands of protestors. Attempts by the Prime Minister to address demonstrators' demands were largely unsuccessful and the demonstrators' lack of organisational capacity left them vulnerable to co-optation by the Sadrist trend which led the reform movement in the 2018 elections.

Public authority in Iraq is highly gendered and based upon embedded forms of patriarchy present in the running of public institutions, the management of war, the distribution of resources and the interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence. Iraqi public authorities reproduce and institutionalise the gendered dimensions of moral populism in the shape of religious sectarianism, which in turn reinforces their authority. The positive causal relationship between women's engagement in conflict prevention and lasting peace also makes it important to adopt a gender analysis.

With the aim to further deepen the analysis on the drivers of conflict in Iraq, the CRP-Iraq research agenda focuses on two additional issues: internal displacement and the disputed territories. These issues are both causes and outcomes of conflict; they create further political, economic and social tension and have become even more significant in post-liberation Mosul.

Internal displacement has been central to operations of state power in Iraq for the past 30 years. In the post-2003 era, displacement has accelerated under an increasingly fractured political landscape defined by sectarian politics. Heightened internal displacement between 2005 and 2008 was a result of conflict and an absence of state-centralised public authority that could protect citizens. Armed groups relied upon sectarian violence to secure pockets of territory, driving members of other sectarian groups out of their homes to do so. The most recent wave of displacement since 2014 has exacerbated an already protracted crisis. As of March 2018, more than 2.3 million Iraqis lived in a state of internal displacement. Displacement has weakened community and tribal power structures in some areas, while entrenching their authority in others.

The increasingly corrupt political marketplace has only grown stronger with the rise of the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), as political actors have distributed aid to IDPs on the basis of their political affiliations. IDPs in Iraq have generally suffered from a lack of legal protection, limited access to services and restrictions on freedom of movement.

Alongside the IDP crisis, the status of the territories disputed by the Gol and the KRG, with large untapped oil reserves, has been one of the most intractable issues in Iraq since 2003. For the KRG, controlling the oil reserves is essential for providing economic self-sufficiency and supporting independence. However, the reassertion of Gol control over the majority of these territories in October 2017 was an economic and strategic blow to the KRG. In the aftermath of this military operation, it is expected that both sides will continue to use a combination of coercion, corruption and patronage to fight for local allegiances, using ethno-political narratives to rally Arab, Kurd and other minorities under exclusivist banners, portraying the disputed territories as vital to their integrity. The national-level Gol–KRG dispute over these territories has undermined, but not completely overshadowed, underlying grassroots initiatives that foster intercommunal stability and ‘civicness’.

The defeat of Da’esh and the retaking of Kirkuk created a window of opportunity for Baghdad. Before the elections of May 2018, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi publicly committed himself to post-sectarian politics and hoped the retaking of both Mosul and the disputed territories would bolster his popular standing. However, his inability to implement a reform agenda while in office directly contributed to his disappointing performance in the elections. This, along with the low turnout, indicates that public opinion is focused on the need to reform the Iraqi state and its relationship with society and the economy, and that people will punish those politicians who fail to deliver change.

## Introduction

The academic, journalistic and ‘grey’ literature focusing on the post-2003 period in Iraq is dominated by four major themes or analytical concerns: the cause and effect of the US intervention; the rise of sectarianism as a driver of political mobilisation; the groups involved in politically motivated violence; and the challenges of economically and politically reforming the Iraqi state. Existing work on sectarian mobilisation mirrors one of the key themes of the CRP’s own approach to Iraq, moral populism, and our research will critically interact with it. The CRP’s work will also utilise

existing work on violent groups but will expand this through on the ground research. This will include research on the Peshmerga, the reform of the Iraqi army following its collapse in 2014, Ministry of Interior forces after the fight against Da’esh and the Iraqi Counter Terrorism Service.

A central CRP–Iraq research project will examine the evolution and future role of the Hashd al-Sha’abi. Our own work will interact with existing literature as it relates to two of the CRP’s central themes, public authority and moral populism. Finally, the CRP–Iraq will examine attempts to reform the state, both economically and politically. This will include studying the impact of International Monetary Fund and World Bank reform packages but also Haider al-Abadi’s own attempts, between 2014 and 2018, to tackle corruption, reduce the government payroll, and undermine the logic of the *muhāsasa ta’ifia* system by appointing ‘technocrats’ to government positions.

Against this background, this paper is divided into seven major sections that will assess the secondary literature that underpins the research projects that the CRP–Iraq will carry out over the next three years. First, it will explain the applicability of each of the CRP’s four major themes to Iraq, and how they will shape our research. It will do this by judging how existing research interacts with these themes. It will also appraise how those themes can be used to explain the past, current and future drivers of conflict. The paper will then offer a gender perspective on violent conflict, moral populism and public authority in Iraq.

In addition, each research site within the overall CRP–Iraq project has a limited number of context-specific drivers or outcomes of conflict. With this in mind, the paper will examine two other drivers of conflict, the estimated 2.3 million IDPs, those driven from their homes since 2003 by violence who have yet to return; and the role of the disputed territories after the Gol’s retaking of Kirkuk in October 2017. Since 2003, there has been a struggle between the KRG and Gol for control of these areas and the population within them. The CRP will examine how the retaking of Kirkuk has changed the political dynamics across the whole of the disputed territories and whether the Gol can control these territories, let alone expand its authority into the entire area.

## Moral Populism in Iraq

For the CRP, moral populism refers to the ability to both mobilise and divide populations by deploying exclusivist religious and ethnic rhetoric. This power can be deployed by national politicians, militia leaders or local social

and political figures seeking influence. From the US-led invasion of March 2003 to at least the elections of 2018, Iraqi politics have been dominated by an overtly religious and ethnic sectarian moral populism. In the immediate aftermath of the invasion, the country was swept up in an insurgency against foreign occupation justified by territorial nationalism. However, a militant form of Sunni Islamist moral populism quickly infused the conflict. The fight then degenerated into a civil war understood by participants and observers in terms of violent sectarianism, with the assertion of exclusivist ethnic and religious identities, Shi'a, Sunni and Kurd. In the aftermath of that civil war, especially in the run up to the 2010 elections, the large political blocs seeking to deploy moral populism fractured, with smaller coalitions and parties competing amongst themselves for the votes of the communities they sought to represent. Finally, in June 2014, Iraq's second largest city, Mosul, fell to the rejuvenated forces of the Islamic State who claimed to be recreating a transnational Sunni caliphate, seeking to unite all Sunni Muslims under their austere, violent and deeply sectarian interpretation of Islam. This, once again, saw an upsurge in the deployment of moral populism.

The 2018 elections saw the continuation of a process which fractured the ethno-sectarian political bloc. The election campaign was largely fought around issue-based not identity-based politics. The main exception to this was the Shi'a-centric campaign run by Nouri al-Maliki's State of Law Coalition (I'tilaf Dawlat al-Qanun) and the Sunni-centric campaign run by Osama al-Nujaifi's Iraqi Decision Alliance (Tahalof al-Qarar al-Iraqi).<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the other leading electoral coalitions fiercely debated their rival plans for reforming the economy, delivering jobs and services, and tackling corruption. In addition, incumbent Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and one of his main rivals, Hadi al-Ameri, actively campaigned across the country, well beyond their traditional Shi'a constituencies.

The CRP's use of moral populism, in combination with the political marketplace and the notions of variable public authority, allows it to escape a static or transhistorical understanding of sectarianism as a force that has always mobilised Iraqis. Instead, the deployment of moral populism as an analytical unit certainly recognises the emotive and political power of exclusivist appeals to ethnicity and religion. However, it explains this appeal in Iraq in terms of a collapse of national public authority. The withdrawal of institutional state power from society created a space

for moral populism to be used by ethnic and sectarian entrepreneurs to mobilise society and for the purveyors of non-state violence to justify their role.

The political system put in place after regime change was based on an elite pact justified in terms of sectarian apportionment or, in Arabic, *muhāsasa ta'iffia*. This system deliberately used moral populism to disguise the workings of the political marketplace and divide Iraq's post-2003 polity, making ethnic and religious identity the basis not only for voting but also for access to state resources, proffering employment and obtaining government services. As a result, ethnic and religious moral populism dominated political mobilisation, justified the role of Iraq's new governing elite, and finally legitimised the use of violence in Iraq's civil war.

It is the *muhāsasa ta'iffia* system and the governments of national unity it led to after every post-2003 election, that merged moral populism with the political marketplace. Leaders of the ethno-sectarian parties divided government ministries amongst themselves, utilising the resources the ministries brought, in terms of civil service payrolls and ministerial budgets, as patronage to solidify their own political base. As with previous elections, the winning coalitions in the 2018 elections have moved into complex negotiations that will eventually lead to another government of national unity.

### Moral Populism and Shi'a Political Identity

From 2003 until at least 2010, three main political parties, the Sadrist Movement, the Islamic Da'wa Party and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), sought to deploy moral populism to rally the Shi'a vote in parliamentary elections and thus gain access to the political marketplace operating under the cover of the *muhāsasa ta'iffia* system. However, from 2010 onwards, there was a fracturing of the Shi'a political field in Iraq with a proliferation of parties competing for the loyalty of the Shi'a population.

This fragmentation reached a peak after the fall of Mosul and the creation of the Hashd al-Sha'abi. The legitimacy and resources accrued by groups within the Hashd al-Sha'abi encouraged a number of more radical, Iranian-aligned militias to secure their role in Iraqi politics through military and then political mobilisation on the national stage. For the 2018 elections, twenty pro-Iranian Hashd groups formed the Fateh Alliance (Tahalof al-Fateh) under the leadership of Badr commander Hadi al-Ameri. They competed for the Shi'a section of the electorate against four other electoral coalitions; Haider al-Abadi's Victory Alliance (I'tilaf al-Nasr), Nouri al-Maliki's State of Law

<sup>2</sup> 'Iraq Votes 2018: Election Mobilisation Strategies', *Institute of Regional and International Studies* (2018). Available at: [http://auis.edu.krd/iris/sites/default/files/IraqVotes2018\\_MobilizationStrategies1.pdf](http://auis.edu.krd/iris/sites/default/files/IraqVotes2018_MobilizationStrategies1.pdf).

Coalition, Muqtada al-Sadr's Saairun Coalition and Ammar al-Hakim's National Wisdom Movement (Tayar al-Hikma al-Watani).<sup>3</sup>

In September 2004, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani drove forward the formation of the United Iraqi Alliance, an exclusivist Shi'a electoral coalition, and gave it his blessing during the first national elections since regime change.<sup>4</sup> Following that decision, the majority of political parties sought to solidify and maximise votes from their potential constituencies by forming large electoral coalitions. However, as the civil war evolved, Sistani expressly forbade retaliation against the rising tide of sectarian violence, acting as a major break on organised sectarian retribution. It is Sistani's refusal, after the elections of 2005, to overtly engage in Iraqi politics that partly explains the fracturing of the political coalitions that have sought to use moral populism to mobilise Iraq's Shi'a.

Muqtada al-Sadr, from 2003 until 2007, became the main promoter of Shi'a moral populism. His militia, the Mahdi Army (Jaysh al-Mahdi), a radical, violent and non-hierarchical organisation, was one of the major protagonists in the civil war. From mid-2006 onwards, Mahdi Army death squads used Sadr city and east Baghdad as a platform from which to attempt to drive Baghdad's Sunni population out of the city altogether.

However, the shifting causes of moral populism in Iraq are reflected by Sadr's ideational and organisational transformation since 2007. In the face of clashes between the Mahdi Army and the Badr Brigades, another Shi'a militia, Sadr drastically reformed his militia, purging and shrinking its size to gain greater control. Then, following the popular protests of 2015, Sadr gave his wholesale backing to the movement, aligning with the Iraqi Communist Party and even deploying what was left of his militia to defend it. The national elections of 2018 mark the peak of Sadr's turn away from moral populism towards issue-based politics. Sadr demobilised his old party and formed a new one, formally aligning it with the Iraqi Communist Party to create the Saairun Coalition. During the election, the resulting coalition overtly campaigned against the *muhassasa ta'ifia* system, calling for the creation of a technocratic government to reform Iraqi politics and fight party-driven political corruption. However, in the aftermath of the vote, Sadr quickly moved into negotiations to reconstitute the *muhassasa ta'ifia* system he campaigned so vociferously

against. This cannot but alienate his supporters and delegitimise him as an agent of much needed political reform.

Another major political party seeking to mobilise the Shi'a vote through moral populism was the ISCI. However, the ISCI were the main victims of the fragmentation of the Shi'a political field. In the aftermath of the 2010 national elections, their armed wing, the Badr Brigades, formally split from the party because the ISCI's leader, Ammar al-Hakim, refused to back a second term for Nouri al-Maliki. Then, in July 2017, Hakim himself finally left the party's old guard to form a new organisation, the National Wisdom Movement. This was in recognition that ISCI's previous alignment with Iran and use of overt sectarian rhetoric would now be a hindrance to Hakim's aim of targeting the youth vote in the 2018 elections. This strategy resulted in the Wisdom Movement winning 19 seats.

The final party seeking to mobilise the Shi'a vote is the Islamic Da'wa Party. This party has supplied three of Iraq's four post-2003 prime ministers, Ibrahim al-Jafaari, Nouri al-Maliki and Haider al-Abadi. Like its two political rivals, Da'wa's relationship to Shi'a moral populism has fluctuated. The promotion of an exclusivist moral populism reached its peak under Nouri al-Maliki's two terms (2006–14). Maliki centralised power in the prime minister's office as he attempted to outflank a highly factionalised cabinet. He also came to dominate a previously highly plural political marketplace. However, he was unable to rebuild the state's institutional capacity to deliver services to the population. Against this background, when faced with a weak and highly corrupt state and hence an alienated population, he mobilised the backing of Shi'a voters by utilising overtly sectarian language, demonising the Sunni sections of Iraqi society, first as Ba'athists and then as jihadi terrorists.

This destructive moral populism reached a peak when Maliki used accusations of terrorism to drive Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi and Minister of Finance, Rafi al-Issawi, out of government and then into exile. The persecution of Issawi in December 2012 triggered mass demonstrations across the Sunni-majority areas of the northwest and further increased a general sense of alienation that allowed Da'esh to expand so rapidly.

Maliki was removed as Prime Minister in 2014, despite gaining the largest personal vote in those elections. He was replaced by another member of Da'wa's national politburo, Haider al-Abadi. From his prime ministerial acceptance speech in September 2014, Abadi made it clear that he recognised the damage Maliki's sectarian rhetoric had done and highlighted his aim to sweep away the *muhassasa ta'ifia*

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ali Allawi, *The Occupation of Iraq: Winning the War, Losing the Peace* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 341, 343, 390.

system through ‘a comprehensive revolution, based on new administrative foundations’.

In the 2018 elections, the Da‘wa Party, divided between Maliki and Abadi, could not agree on a united electoral slate, which led to them running two separate electoral coalitions. Although overall electoral campaigning focused on policy issues, particularly how to reduce corruption and reform the economy, Maliki’s State of Law Coalition continued to deploy moral populism in an attempt to garner votes amongst the Shi‘a population. Maliki himself and other candidates built their campaign around the notion of ‘Shi‘a oppression and marginalisation (*muthloomiya*)’. They repeatedly highlighted the danger posed by specifically Sunni insurgent groups linked to the Ba‘ath Party.<sup>5</sup>

The final and most recent vehicle for Shi‘a moral populism has been the formation of the Hashd al-Sha‘abi. In the aftermath of the fall of Mosul, in June 2014, as Islamic State forces were rapidly moving southwards towards Baghdad, Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani issued a religiously binding edict or *fatwa*, calling on all able-bodied men to defend ‘their country, their people and their holy places’. Tens of thousands of young Shi‘a men joined the force that was created to fight against Da‘esh. Radically sectarian and violent Shi‘a militia groups like Asa‘ib Ahl al-Haq, Kata‘ib Hezbollah and the Badr Brigades, took centre stage, arming and deploying these new recruits and, in the process, rapidly expanding in size, power and influence. It was their electoral vehicle, the Fateh Alliance, which won 48 seats, the second largest, under the leadership of Hadi al-Ameri.

The fracturing of the electoral coalition that sought to maximise the Shi‘a vote on the basis of moral populism in the 2010 electoral campaign, the selection of Haider al-Abadi as Prime Minister in September 2014 and the recapture of Mosul from Da‘esh in July 2017 all combined to create a window of opportunity for those seeking to mobilise the Shi‘a vote.

One of CRP–Iraq’s research projects will examine the future role of the Hashd al-Sha‘abi, studying government attempts to gain control over their budget, integrate them into the wider chain of command, and then reduce their size by widespread demobilisation.

Overall, the fracturing of the ‘Shi‘a house’, the large electoral bloc personified by the United Iraqi Alliance, lends Iraqi politics a much more fluid nature. The plausible decline in mor-

al populism allows greater space for the encouragement of issue-based politics. It also allows for the formation of post-election policy implementation coalitions within government, which could push for the meaningful reform of the *muhāsasa ta‘ifia* system, moving the Iraqi political field away from identity-based politics towards service delivery.

## Sunni Moral Populism

Lacking the centralised religious hierarchy of Shi‘a Islam or the dominant political parties of Kurdish politics, the use of a specific Sunni moral populism is more difficult to assess. It can be argued that a specifically Sunni moral populism was late to arise in Iraq.

In the immediate aftermath of regime change, the dominant rhetoric and symbolism used by those seeking to mobilise Sunni Iraqis tended to focus not on them as Sunnis but instead as Iraqi nationalists or patriots resisting a foreign invader. It was not until the midst of the civil war and the rise of an overtly transnational radical jihadi Salafism that political entrepreneurs specifically addressed those they wanted to mobilise as Iraqi Sunnis, setting them against Shi‘a and Kurds.<sup>6</sup>

The alienation and anger felt amongst Iraq’s Sunnis coalesced for a time around a loose coalition of mosques, the Association of Muslim Scholars (Hay‘at al-Ulama al-Muslimin, AMS).<sup>7</sup> Beyond the more guarded moral populism of the AMS stood radical jihadist Salafism. The violent opposition to the US occupation and the new order it established started to cohere into more compact fighting groups in 2005. What united these groups was an increasing commitment to jihadist Salafism and an aggressive sectarian moral populism.<sup>8</sup> Taking the lead in this amalgamation was Jordanian jihadist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who by 2004 had allied his own group in Iraq with al-Qaeda. However, this alliance was continuously put under strain, primarily because of Zarqawi’s extreme anti-Shi‘a sectarianism.<sup>9</sup> After Zarqawi’s death in 2006, the organisation further expanded and

<sup>6</sup> R Meijer, ‘Sunni Factions and the “Political Process”’, in David M. Malone, Markus E. Bouillon and Ben Rowswell (eds), *Iraq: Preventing a New Generation of Conflict* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007), pp. 89–108.

<sup>7</sup> Nir Rosen, *Aftermath: Following the Bloodshed of America’s Wars in the Muslim World* (New York: Nation Books, 2010), p.38.

<sup>8</sup> ‘In their own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency’, *International Crisis Group Middle East Report* 50, 15 February 2006. Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/their-own-words-reading-iraqi-insurgency>.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Phillips, ‘How Al Qaeda Lost Iraq’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 63/1 (2009), pp. 64–84.

<sup>5</sup> Renad Mansour and Christine van den Toorn, ‘The 2018 Iraqi Federal Elections: A Population in Transition?’, *Institute of Regional and International Studies and LSE Middle East Centre Report* (2018), p. 17.

transformed into Da'esh, a radical Sunni jihadi organisation designed to capitalise on an increasingly sectarian conflict and bearing the hallmarks of that war's brutality.<sup>10</sup>

From 2003 onwards, the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) was given the role of representing the Sunni population within the *muhāsasa ta'ifīa* system, the Iraqi Governing Council and every government of national unity since. To do this, the IIP set up Tawafuq, a broader electoral coalition. However, as violence temporarily declined after 2007 and with it the assertion of aggressive sectarian politics, the IIP suffered from a split similar to those parties deploying moral populism to rally the Shi'a vote. This dynamic came to a head in 2008, when a number of prominent personalities left the coalition.

In the run up to the 2010 national elections, Ayad Allawi, leader of Iraqi National List (Wifaq), set out to capitalise on the decline in sectarian politics, which allowed him the freedom to build a much broader organisation to fight the national elections. Its attainment of 91 seats, compared to 89 for the Prime Minister's State of Law Coalition and 70 for the Iraqi National Alliance, is to date the strongest electoral showing for a party not deploying moral populism in their election campaign. However, the 2014 elections saw Allawi's previous alliance, Iraqīyya, fracture. This signaled a return to Sunni moral populism.

In the 2018 elections those electoral coalitions seeking to capture a specifically Sunni vote suffered most from the fracturing of ethno-sectarian voting bloc. Osama al-Nujaiif's Iraqi Decision Alliance (Tahaluf al-Qarar al-Iraqi) set out to mobilise the electorate using an exclusive Sunni-centric moral populism. However, with the major national blocs also campaigning in Sunni majority areas, Nujaiif's strategy failed and he only managed to get 14 seats, a reduction of 9 from 2014.<sup>11</sup>

One of the CRP's central research projects will examine the future trends in Sunni political mobilisation, the role of internally displaced populations and the possible political role of recently returned former IDPs. This research will focus on political trends within Iraq's Sunni population but also allow policy interventions to target resources that will help bolster meaningful political representation, creating channels for democratic mobilisation at both provincial and national levels.

<sup>10</sup> Cole Bunzel, 'From Paper State to Caliphate, the Ideology of the Islamic State', *Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World*, March 2015. Available at: <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/03/ideology-of-islamic-state-bunzel/the-ideology-of-the-islamic-state.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> 'Iraq Votes 2018'.

## Moral Populism in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Kurdish nationalism in Iraq emerged in response to the excesses of Arab nationalism towards Kurds. Iraq's defeat in the Gulf War of 1991 brought Kurdish aspirations of an independent homeland closer by establishing the KRG, a semi-autonomous government later recognised by Iraq's 2005 Constitution.

The Kurdish nationalist project and an associated moral populism entered a new era after 2003. Transnational networks connected the Kurdish diaspora with Iraqi Kurds and prompted greater ideological diversity. At the same time, opposition to the KRG and its traditional party establishment emerged, especially amongst the young generation.<sup>12</sup> The Gorran Movement (Movement for Change) fragmented the two-party structure of the KRG, challenged endemic corruption and nepotism, and undermined the KRG's nationalist narrative that hinged upon Kurdish independence and self-determination.<sup>13</sup>

The Gorran Movement also amplified the voices of two Kurdish Islamist parties, capitalising on their disillusionment with the ruling KDP and PUK establishment.<sup>14</sup> However, while these Islamist parties demonstrate the existence of Islamist moral populism in the KRI, political Islam and sectarian identity politics are nowhere near as influential here as they are in central and southern Iraq.<sup>15</sup> Equally, while it is true that Da'esh has managed to recruit hundreds of Kurds since 2014, some of whom launched attacks in Erbil, Kirkuk and internationally,<sup>16</sup> research suggests that Da'esh recruitment strategies exploited popular grievances with rampant corruption, economic disenfranchisement,

<sup>12</sup> Denise Natali, 'Are the Kurds Still Kingmakers in Iraq?', *Carnegie Endowment*, 26 May 2010. Available at: <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=40856l>; Denise Natali, *Kurdish Quasi-State: Development and Dependency in Post-Gulf War Iraq* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Akiko Yoshioka, 'The Shifting Balance of Power in Iraqi Kurdistan: The Struggle for Democracy with Uninstitutionalized Governance', *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 9/1 (March 2015), pp. 21–35.

<sup>14</sup> Kawa Hassan, 'Kurdistan's Politicized Society Confronts a Sultanistic System', *Carnegie Middle East Centre* (2015). Available at: [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CMEC\\_54\\_Hassan\\_11.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CMEC_54_Hassan_11.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Michiel Leezenberg, 'Iraqi Kurdistan: Contours of a Post-Civil War Society', *Third World Quarterly* 26/4 (2015), pp. 631–47; Michiel Leezenberg, 'Politics, Economy, and Ideology in Iraqi Kurdistan since 2003: Enduring Trends and Novel Challenges', *Arab Studies Journal* 23/1 (2015), p. 154.

<sup>16</sup> 'Youth between Two Options: Migration and Joining Extremist Group', *Global Shapers Community*, 4 October 2015. Available at: <https://www.globalshapers.org/news/youth-between-two-options-migration-and-joining-extremist-groups>.

financial instability and poor education in the region.<sup>17</sup>

Nationalist sentiment has also been exploited in the recruitment strategies of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a radical pan-Kurdish movement open to both men and women that has engaged in combat against Da'esh. The PKK's success on the battlefield, combined with the increasing popular rejection of corruption and nepotism of the two leading Kurdish parties, has increased its popularity and support. From the perspective of many Iraqi Kurds, the KDP and PUK deployed Kurdish moral populism for their own political and commercial leverage, thus compromising nationalism, while the PKK 'preserved its nationalist profile' and hence its legitimacy.<sup>18</sup>

Kurdish moral populism and nationalism have shifted over the past decade as a result of the failure of the Kurdish ruling elite to secure economic and political stability and prosperity for the Kurdish people. Many Kurds now place the importance of obtaining a job or education above achieving independence. This sentiment was amplified over 2017–18, with KRG territorial losses and a decline in the economic and political rights and privileges Kurds had gained from Baghdad.

The KRG's most significant attempt at amplifying its moral populism came on 25 September 2017, when it held a referendum on Kurdish independence against the wishes of Baghdad and its neighbours, with 93 percent voting in favour. Masoud Barzani and the KDP sought to use the referendum to exacerbate Kurdish moral populism and shore up their legitimacy, but the significant territorial, economic and political losses that followed the vote undermined this attempt, and highlighted the fact that nationalist sentiment was more a reflection of the crises in and around Iraq rather than steady progress towards a Kurdish state.

The retaking of Kirkuk by federal forces in October 2017 further alienated voters from the establishment leadership, particularly the PUK, whom many viewed as having betrayed the Kurdish cause by negotiating a deal with Baghdad to withdraw from the city. The ongoing protests that flared into mass movements in December 2017 and March 2018, the harnessing of anti-corruption and anti-establishment narratives by newly-formed political parties, and the boycotting of the Kurdish independence referendum and

Iraqi federal elections, similarly reflected growing disillusionment. Despite the continued use of moral populism by both establishment and opposition parties, the general shift away from oft-used nationalist narratives reflects the disenfranchisement Kurds felt towards their leadership.

The protest movement in particular reflected the grievances of civil servants, teachers and the general public towards officials whose attempts at stoking nationalist fervour, they believed, could no longer justify their stay in power. Although grievances had been ongoing since the consolidation and expansion of power by the PUK–KDP duopoly, they flared into protests and violence, most recently in the aftermath of the Kurdish independence referendum in 2017 and lead-up to the Iraqi federal elections in May 2018.

The strength of the protest movement prompted the emergence of the Coalition for Democracy and Justice (CDJ), whose leader, former Kurdish Prime Minister Barham Salih split from the PUK in September 2017, and the New Generation Movement, led by Shaswar Abdulwahid, owner of Nalia Media Corporation. Both parties joined the ranks of existing opposition parties. While personal attacks and anti-Baghdad rhetoric reigned supreme in the campaigns of the PUK and KDP, these new parties shifted their priorities away from ethno-centric Kurdish nationalist narratives towards ones that focused on ending corruption, restoring good governance, and securing salaries for civil servants. They subsequently joined forces in the aftermath of the election to protest electoral fraud and demand a vote recount.

Changes in the way moral populism is communicated also reflect general attitudes towards the Kurdish referendum and the 2018 elections, where boycotts and abstentions were common.<sup>19</sup> Public and private protests about the timing of the referendum also indicated that Kurdish nationalist sentiment could not be rallied on the basis of ethno-centric narratives and historical territorial claims alone. Nevertheless, turnout was high and 93 percent voted in favour of independence. The referendum indicated that, in the final hours before the vote, these narratives were still strong enough to sway the general public to vote, despite the clear instrumental motives of the ruling party.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Denise Natali, 'Islamic State Infiltrates Iraqi Kurdistan', *Al-Monitor*, 4 June 2015. Available at: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/06/is-infiltration-iraqi-kurdistan.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Jon Gorvett, 'PKK Popularity Grows in Iraq's Autonomous Kurdistan Region', *The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 26/5 (2007), pp. 30–31.

<sup>19</sup> Christine van den Toorn, 'Internal Divides behind the Kurdistan Referendum', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 11 October 2017. Available at: <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/73359>.

<sup>20</sup> 'Primary Results', *The Independent High Elections and Referendum Commission*, 27 September 2017. Available at: [http://www.khec.krd/pdf/173082892017\\_english%202.pdf](http://www.khec.krd/pdf/173082892017_english%202.pdf).

The 2018 federal elections were even clearer indicators of this shift in both campaign narratives and efforts to boycott and abstain. In all provinces with significant Kurdish populations (with the exception of Ninewa), turnout was significantly lower (close to 40 percent) than in both the 2010 and 2014 elections (at around 70 percent).<sup>21</sup> However, as with the referendum, establishment parties demonstrated their continued hold on power, as the low turnout benefitted the KDP and PUK, who gained 25 and 18 seats respectively. Gorran came in a distant third, winning only 5 seats, 4 fewer than in the previous election; while New Generation received 4; and the CDJ, 2.

Across the KRI, the apparently monolithic ethno-sectarian blocs which dominated Iraqi politics from regime change until 2010 have all but disappeared. Moral populism remains a key political strategy but those organisations deploying it have become more numerous and have to refer to other issues like corruption and the lack of government services. Politics are hence more fluid, but moral populism still remains the lowest common denominator that politicians who have failed to deliver meaningful change to their constituents deploy to gain votes.

CRP research on moral populism in Iraq will allow a wider understanding of the countervailing forces within the KRG after the referendum and the loss of Kirkuk. Today, the senior leadership of the KDP and PUK are in disarray, unable to shape meaningful policies that will allow them to respond to the financial crisis they face or move towards sustainable diplomatic relations with Baghdad. This research will give a much better understanding of political dynamics within the KRG, how these are influencing – or not – Kurdish political elites and what this means for long term stability.

## The Political Marketplace

### The Political Marketplace and the Gol

The political marketplace refers to transactional politics that facilitate the purchase of political loyalties in exchange for material reward, often extracted from state resources. This is an updated form of patrimonial politics, which competes with and undermines processes of state-building and institutional development. In Iraq, the functioning of the political marketplace is intimately linked to and legitimised by the use of ethno-sectarian moral populism to justify both the position of the ruling elite and their division of the spoils of government amongst themselves and their

followers. The post-2003 political settlement which has shaped the process of government formation following all five of Iraq's national elections is best understood as a rough and ready variant of consociationalism, an exclusive elite pact justified in terms of sectarian apportionment, or *muhāsasa ta'ifia*.

The political settlement created by the US after the invasion was an exclusive elite pact that placed the workings of the political marketplace at the centre of the state. This elite pact was then institutionalised by the 2005 Constitution, and legitimised by the terms under which post-election governments have been formed since. It also deliberately marginalised the political role and hence the resources available to representatives of one section of Iraq's population, the Sunnis. The dual outcomes of the *muhāsasa ta'ifia* system have been debilitating corruption and constant resentment from all those excluded from access to the spoils of office.

Within the *muhāsasa ta'ifia* system, the political marketplace functions in three ways. First, the dominant parties use government payrolls to reward political loyalty. Second, they use government contracts to enrich business people close to their leaderships. Third, money is simply stolen from the ministerial budgets for both personal gain and party use.

After each national election, the *muhāsasa ta'ifia* system sees ministries and their resources awarded to ethno-sectarian parties as a reward for taking part in governments of national unity. Each party then exploits the resources of the ministry they have been awarded for political, but also very often personal, gain. Parties issue a *tazkiya*, or letter of recommendation, to their followers that allows them to get jobs in the ministries they control.<sup>22</sup> As a result, ministerial payrolls are expanded to employ party members as well as those connected to party bosses. This has led to a state payroll that has swelled from between 850,000 and 1.2 million employees in 2003 to a peak of 3 million in 2015. The public sector wages bill between 2005 and 2010 amounted to 31 percent of the total expenditure of government, or 18 percent of GDP.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Eric Herring and Glen Rangwala, *Iraq in Fragments: The Occupation and its Legacy* (London: Hurst & Company, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> Ali Al-Mawlawi, 'Analysing Growth Trends in Public Sector Employment in Iraq', *LSE Middle East Centre Blog*, 31 July 2018. Available at: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2018/07/31/analysing-growth-trends-in-public-sector-employment-in-iraq/>; Ali Mamouri, 'How to overcome Iraq's economic crisis', *Al-Monitor*, 9 February 2016. Available at: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/02/iraq-economic-crisis-solutions-promote-small-businesses.html>; Tim Arango,

<sup>21</sup> Mansour and Van den Toorn, 'The 2018 Iraqi Federal Elections'.

Major corruption scandals have dominated the Ministries of Defence, Oil, Electricity and Trade. Iraq's widespread political corruption is supposedly fought by two major institutions specifically designed to reduce fraud within government. However, a leaked US Embassy report concluded in 2007 that 'Iraq is not capable of even rudimentary enforcement of anti-corruption laws'. There is little reason to suggest there has been any significant change in the situation since.

Our research project on the political market place and the GoI will examine the drivers of payroll expansion in two specific ministries, the composition of that payroll and how it can successfully be reduced. This will give unprecedented insight into the corruption that has undermined the coherence and legitimacy of the Iraqi state since 2003. This information will help the shaping and targeting of anti-corruption policies.

### The Political Marketplace in the KRI

Since 2003, the KRG has operated as a rentier state through its reliance on oil revenue, extensive corruption, a huge public sector and a weak tax structure.<sup>24</sup> By prioritising fast-track hydrocarbon development and using the 'oil card' as leverage against Baghdad, the KRG bypassed necessary institution building that could have shielded it from the ill effects of rentierism.<sup>25</sup> The major Kurdish political parties have pursued loyalty and legitimacy through the

distribution of government resources<sup>26</sup> and have redistributed wealth through the public sector payroll, giving the KDP and PUK extensive control over the public sector.<sup>27</sup>

The KRG's law enforcement and security institutions are also built upon patronage networks. The KDP and the PUK maintain their own Peshmerga units and provide them with incentives, including free housing, land, lucrative monthly salaries and generous pensions, thus enforcing the division of security actors across party lines.<sup>28</sup> This personalised and clientelistic approach to power is one main reason behind the lack of progress in integrating and depoliticising the region's different security forces.<sup>29</sup>

The oil sector provides the primary source of funding for the political marketplace. That it can do so speaks to the lack of transparency within the sector, brought about by non-existent or ineffective institutions and a paucity of compulsory public disclosure. The opacity in the management of oil resources has not only fueled internal distrust of government, but also impeded the resolution of disputes with the central government. Even when the government itself tried to address the problem of corruption, it deliberately omitted the Ministry of Natural Resources from its reforms.<sup>30</sup> Overall, a lack of transparency and accountability has consistently been a barrier to democratic development in the KRI.<sup>31</sup>

'Battered by War, Iraq Now Faces Calamity from Dropping Oil Prices', *New York Times*, 31 January 2016. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/01/world/middleeast/battered-by-war-iraq-now-faces-calamity-from-dropping-oil-prices.html>; Martin Chulov, 'Post-War Iraq: "Everyone is Corrupt, from Top to Bottom, including me"', *The Guardian*, 19 February 2016. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/19/post-war-iraq-corruption-oil-prices-revenues>; Loveday Morris, 'Iraq is broke. Add that to its list of worries', *The Washington Post*, 5 March 2016. Available at: [http://wapo.st/1X-0knsq?tid=ss\\_tw&utm\\_term=.2e636ef9b08a](http://wapo.st/1X-0knsq?tid=ss_tw&utm_term=.2e636ef9b08a).

<sup>24</sup> Mark DeWeaver, 'Kurdistan's Great Recession: From Boom to Bust in the Rentier Economy', *Institute of Regional and International Studies Report* (2015). Available at: [http://auis.edu.krd/iris/sites/default/files/Kurdistan%27s%20Great%20Recession\\_1.pdf](http://auis.edu.krd/iris/sites/default/files/Kurdistan%27s%20Great%20Recession_1.pdf); Mark DeWeaver, 'Making Ends Meet: Economic Reforms in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq', *Institute of Regional and International Studies* (2015). Available at: [www.auis.edu.krd/iris/sites/default/files/IIR\\_Making%20Ends%20Meet\\_DeWeaver%202017.pdf](http://www.auis.edu.krd/iris/sites/default/files/IIR_Making%20Ends%20Meet_DeWeaver%202017.pdf); Michael Gunter, 'Iraqi Kurdistan's two Contrasting Economic Images', *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 6 (2012), pp. 89–95; Erlend Paasche, 'Iraqi Kurdistan: Partner Under Pressure', *Peace Research Institute Oslo Policy Brief* 4 (2014). Available at: <https://www.prio.org/Publications/Publication/?x=7589>.

<sup>25</sup> Natali, *Kurdish Quasi-State*.

<sup>26</sup> Bilal Wahab, 'Oil Federalism in Iraq: Resource Curse, Patronage Networks and Stability. Case Studies of Baghdad, Kurdistan and the Advent of ISIS', *George Mason University PhD Thesis* (2015). Available at: <http://mars.gmu.edu/handle/1920/9682>; Kawa Jabary and Anil Hira, 'The Kurdish Mirage: A Success Story in Doubt', *Middle East Policy* 20/2 (2013), pp. 99–112; Yoshioka, 'The Shifting Balance of Power in Iraqi Kurdistan'.

<sup>27</sup> Mario Fumerton and Wladimir van Wilgenburg, 'Kurdistan's Political Armies: The Challenge of Unifying the Peshmerga Forces', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 16 December 2015. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2015/12/16/kurdistan-s-political-armies-challenge-of-unifying-peshmerga-forces-pub-61917>.

<sup>28</sup> Mohammed M. A. Ahmed, *Iraqi Kurds and nation-building* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012); Bilal Wahab, 'Trouble Brewing in Iraqi Kurdistan', *Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 30 September 2016. Available at: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/trouble-brewing-in-iraqi-kurdistan>.

<sup>29</sup> Fumerton and Wladimir van Wilgenburg, 'Kurdistan's Political Armies'.

<sup>30</sup> Muslih Irwani, *Clientelism and Implementing Social Security Programmes in Post-Conflict Iraqi Kurdistan Region* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015).

<sup>31</sup> Shwan Zulal, 'Reforming Iraqi Kurdistan's Oil Revenue', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 21 December 2010. Available at: <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/46306>.

The Kurdish independence referendum and subsequent takeover of the disputed territories marked a turning point in Kurdish territorial control and administrative and economic authority over the oil-rich territories. The reassertion of federal power over checkpoints, borders and airports further reduced the extent to which the KRG could maintain its patronage networks in security apparatuses, the public sector and private business. This expansion of federal authority, paired with the March 2018 reduction in the federal budget for the KRG from 17 to 12.6 percent, significantly weakened the KRG's ability to sustain its economy and social services, forcing a contraction of the KRG payroll.<sup>32</sup>

In particular, the retake of the Kirkuk oil fields, over which Kurdish forces asserted control in the fight against Da'esh in 2014, constituted the most significant blow to the KRG economy. The Kirkuk oil fields provided about 70 percent of the KRG's daily output of oil, and they – along with the other fields retaken by federal forces in October 2017 – provided about \$8 billion of annual revenue for the KRG.<sup>33</sup>

The Ministry of Natural Resources, widely considered to be one of the least transparent government institutions in the KRG, ostensibly tried to respond to criticisms from both Baghdad and foreign governments. In January 2018, it announced that Deloitte's audit of KRG oil and gas sectors, which it asserted was 'a transparent process and in accordance with the World Bank guidelines'<sup>34</sup> found 'no misstatements in KRG oil sales'.<sup>35</sup> However, this report was immediately met with skepticism given its lack of detail and poor fulfilment of promised data.<sup>36</sup>

The reduction of the KRG's portion of the federal budget may, however, force more genuine efforts to reform and reduce the size of the public sector, especially if politicians

<sup>32</sup> 'Iraq adopts 2018 budget, slashing allocations for Kurds', *Middle East Eye*, 3 March 2018. Available at: <https://www.middleeast-eye.net/news/iraq-adopts-2018-budget-slashing-allocations-kurds-1116415756>.

<sup>33</sup> David Zucchino, 'Iraqi Forces Retake All Oil Fields in Disputed Areas as Kurds Retreat', *New York Times*, 17 October 2017. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/17/world/middleeast/iraq-kurds-kirkuk.html>.

<sup>34</sup> 'Deloitte Report on Oil and Gas in the Kurdistan Region', *Kurdistan Regional Government*, 16 January 2018. Available at: <http://cabinet.gov.krd/a/d.aspx?a=56305&l=12&s=040000>.

<sup>35</sup> 'Deloitte found no 'misstatements' in KRG oil sales in first audit report', *RUDAW*, 16 January 2018. Available at: <http://www.rudaw.net/english/business/16012018>.

<sup>36</sup> Patrick Osgood, 'Selective Transparency: Things You Can't See about KRG Oil', *LSE Middle East Centre Blog*, 25 April 2018. Available at: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2018/04/25/selective-transparency-things-you-cant-see-about-krq-oil/>.

want to address the grievances of an increasingly disenfranchised public. The fact that the KRG must now be accountable to the government in Baghdad may incentivise it to address corruption more quickly than if it were able to rely entirely on the benefits of rentierism.

The research project focused on the political marketplace in the KRG will examine the scope and extent of patronage networks and the role they play in undermining government institutional coherence. It is hoped the findings will provide insights into the political economy of the KRG and help shape policy interventions aimed at encouraging reform.

## Public Authority

### Public Authority in Iraq

For the CRP, public authority refers to the structures and people who exercise governance functions, with a degree of consent, at any level above the family. Public authorities are the units of governance as they actually exist in any particular situation. In Iraq, centralised public authority, the civil and military institutions of the state, have been transformed three times. Under Ba'athist rule during the 1970s, the significant increase in oil revenues allowed the regime to greatly expand its institutional presence within society. However, following the 1990 invasion of Kuwait, thirteen years of the harshest international sanctions ever imposed on Iraq led to a retrenchment of state institutions. The violent aftermath of the 2003 invasion led to another dramatic decline in institutional capacity to the point where Iraq could be described as a failed state. Between 2007 and 2014, buoyed up by strong oil prices, state institutions slowly re-established themselves within Iraqi society. However, Da'esh's campaign against the Iraqi state, culminating in the fall of Mosul in 2014, dealt another major blow to centralised public authority.

After 2003, as centralised public authority declined, sub-state organisations partially filled the gap left by the state. Many of these were either religious institutions, most prominently the institutions of the Shi'a religious hierarchy, or used a religiously-based moral populism to justify their governance function within society. Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army is a prime example of this, as was the governance role that Da'esh took on in the territory it controlled. A central part of this struggle between the societal role of state institutions and their non-state competitors will be the future role of the numerous groups that make up the Hashd al-Sha'abi, especially in the south of the country.

Attempts at federal decentralisation, heralded by the passing of Law 21 by the Iraqi Parliament in 2008 and backed by the international community, are designed to push provincial government institutions into the space vacated by weak national governance. However, it is clear this policy initiative has been contested at a national level with ministers, ministries and director generals all attempting to hinder the delegation of power to the provincial level. The concept also remains unpopular with the Iraqi population.

CRP–Iraq’s research project on GoI public authority will examine the motivations behind attempts to block decentralisation and the success of initiatives to build capacity at the provincial level. This research project will allow for an assessment of this policy initiative’s success and help shape similarly targeted interventions in the future.

### The Iraqi Armed Forces and the Fall of Mosul

The US military, after initially disbanding the Iraqi armed forces in 2003, changed its mind in 2004. By 2011, \$24.49 billion had been spent in an attempt to rebuild it.<sup>37</sup> When the US withdrew from Iraq in December 2011 there were 940,000 people working for the security forces. The quality of rank and file soldiers and the weaknesses in the command and control of the armed forces raised doubts about the military’s ability to function after the US drawdown. Another serious problem was the politicisation of the officer corps after 2003.

The majority of the Iraqi forces, carefully constructed over seven years, collapsed in the face of Da’esh’s 2014 campaign.<sup>38</sup> The Iraqi Minister of Defence from 2014 to 2016, Khaled al-Obaidi, estimated that 60–70 percent of the Iraqi armed forces left government employment after June 2014.<sup>39</sup> Against this background, the vast majority of the Iraqi army involved in the fight against Da’esh had to be rebuilt almost from scratch.

<sup>37</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, ‘Iraqi Force Development in 2007’, *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (2007), p. 8. Available at: [http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/070823\\_iraqi\\_force\\_development.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/070823_iraqi_force_development.pdf); ‘Quarterly Report and Semiannual Report to the United States Congress’, *Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction* (July 2011), p.70. Available at: [http://www.sigir.mil/files/quarterlyreports/July2011/Report\\_-\\_July\\_2011.pdf](http://www.sigir.mil/files/quarterlyreports/July2011/Report_-_July_2011.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> Mitchell Prothero, ‘Iraqi Army Remains on Defensive as Extent of June Debacle Becomes Clearer’, *McClatchy News*, 14 July 2014. Available at: <https://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article24770476.html>.

<sup>39</sup> PressTV, *Full Interview with Khaled al-Obaidi* (Iraq’s Defense Minister), YouTube, 5 August 2016. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3d>.

In the face of such a complete collapse of the Iraqi army, then-Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi, deployed a two-pronged strategy to reform and rebuild it. First, he set about purging its senior ranks of corrupt or politically tainted officers. Secondly, Abadi sought to tackle head-on the corruption that had become endemic throughout the country’s security forces. He did this by authorising an audit of the army’s payroll to identify ‘ghost soldiers’, individuals who are paid by the Ministry of Defence but do not actually show up for work, splitting their wages with senior military officers who authorise the deception. This payroll audit uncovered 50,000 individual cases of such fraud.<sup>40</sup>

Today, the Ministries of Interior and Defence combined are estimated to employ 875,253 people, with the work force of the Ministry of Interior falling by 12 percent since 2015 and Defence by 20 percent. This has been accompanied, between 2017–18, by a reduction in spending of 6.5 percent in Interior and 15 percent in Defence.<sup>41</sup>

As the liberation of Mosul indicates, rebuilding Iraq’s armed forces, along with the addition of the Hashd al-Sha’abi forces and coalition airpower, created a formidable fighting force. However, the Iraqi government now faces the daunting task of integrating the Hashd al-Sha’abi into the mainstream fighting force and moving the whole of the state’s armed forces to a peacetime setting.

In addition to examining how the government is attempting to reduce the size of the Hashd al-Sha’abi and integrate it into the mainstream military forces, another research project will examine the post-Mosul relationship between the Counter Terrorism Service, the regular army and the forces controlled by the Ministry of Interior, assessing plans to bring greater coherence to overall command and control.

### Public Authority in the KRI

In the KRI, public authority is still defined by party, tribe and family networks. Public institutions, including ministries and the parliament, operate as fiefdoms divided between the KDP (and the Barzani family) and the PUK (and the Talabani family). Informal systems rather than formal rules and legal institutions shape governance and the ways in which power holders and social groups perceive their

<sup>40</sup> Alexander Smith, ‘Not Fighting ISIS: How Iraq’s 50,000 ‘Ghost Soldiers’ Run Their Scam’, *NBC News*, 28 December 2014. Available at: <http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/not-fighting-isis-how-iraqs-50-000-ghost-soldiers-run-n267261>.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Mawlawi, ‘Analysing Growth Trends in Public Sector Employment in Iraq’.

interests.<sup>42</sup> In such a context, the rivalry between the KDP and PUK renders the government a vehicle for patronage rather than a pursuer of collective and public interests.<sup>43</sup>

The reassertion of federal authority over the KRG following the referendum in September 2017 has led some to challenge the authority of political elites in the region due to their failure to maintain Kurdish autonomy, power, rights and territories.<sup>44</sup> For example, in response to the losses suffered by the KRG in the wake of the referendum, Masoud Barzani, who had unilaterally and unlawfully extended his presidential term twice (in 2013 and 2015) stepped down.<sup>45</sup> Protests, low election turnout and the proliferation of new opposition parties also point to the emergence of new types of political authority.

However, the behaviour of the traditional ruling elites during the protests in December 2017 and March 2018 shows that they are willing to use violence and fraud to maintain their authority. The 2017 independence referendum also exposed deep divisions within the KRG political elite. It amplified an existing pattern whereby political and personal interests drive decision-making at the expense of pluralism and the rule of law.<sup>46</sup> While still 'in the making', there is a shift among certain segments about the perception of

public authority. While the KDP and PUK maintain their authority through the same traditional means of tribe and family, their constituencies have shrunk over the past decade. Parties like Gorran, CDJ and New Generation seek authority through focusing on jobs, private sector growth and good governance.<sup>47</sup>

The KRG's relationship with the GoI is characterised by deep mistrust and a maximalist, zero-sum approach.<sup>48</sup> The main drivers of conflict associated with this relationship are the disputed territories, revenue sharing, control of resources and the integration of the Peshmerga.<sup>49</sup> The battle over oil and resources underscores that despite resource wealth, inadequate governance and institutional frameworks in both the KRG and GoI have failed to deliver economic benefits to the Iraqi people.<sup>50</sup>

The absence of an agreed legal framework for the petroleum sector can, in part, be blamed upon the KRG's leadership within the federal government who have rejected negotiations over all the three revisions of the federal Oil and Gas Law.<sup>51</sup>

The 2017 independence referendum reversed 15 years of steady incline in Kurdish autonomy by resetting GoI–KRG relations and catalysing federal reassertion of authority.

## Civiness

### 'Civiness' in Iraq

Iraq suffered 35 years of one of the most repressive and violent dictatorships in the Middle East that went out of its way to atomise society and tie individuals directly to

<sup>42</sup> Anne Hagood, 'The Peshmergas and the Future of the State', *NORIA Research*, 21 January 2015. Available at: <https://www.noria-research.com/the-peshmergas-and-the-future-of-the-state/>.

<sup>43</sup> Jabary and Hira, 'The Kurdish Mirage'.

<sup>44</sup> Elise Knutsen, 'What's at Stake in Kurdistan's Post-Referendum Future?', *New America*, 28 September 2017. Available at: <https://www.newamerica.org/weekly/edition-178/whats-stake-kurdistan-post-referendum-future/>; Loveday Morris, 'How the Kurdish independence referendum backfired spectacularly', *The Washington Post*, 20 October 2017. Available at: [http://wapo.st/2ippR7m?tid=ss\\_tw&utm\\_term=.d2794054216e](http://wapo.st/2ippR7m?tid=ss_tw&utm_term=.d2794054216e); Christine van den Toorn, 'Internal Divides behind the Kurdistan Referendum', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 11 October 2017. Available at: <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/73359>.

<sup>45</sup> Isabel Coles and Ali Nabhan, 'Iraqi Kurdish President Steps Down After Independence Push Backfires', *Wall Street Journal*, 29 October 2017. Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/iraqi-kurd-leader-to-step-down-as-president-following-independence-vote-1509279415>; Jane Arraf, 'Iraqi Army: Almost One-quarter Lacks Minimum Qualifications', *The Christian Science Monitor*, 22 May 2009. Available at: <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2009/0522/p06s07-wome.html>; Jane Arraf, 'In Disputed Iraqi Territory, Rebuilding A City Means Doing It Yourself', *NPR*, 11 January 2017. Available at: <http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/01/11/509265909/in-disputed-iraqi-territory-rebuilding-a-city-means-doing-it-yourself>.

<sup>46</sup> Christine van den Toorn and Raad Alkadiri, 'Kurdistan's Missed Chance for Reform', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 15 September 2015. Available at: <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/61286>.

<sup>47</sup> Mansour and Van den Toorn, 'The 2018 Iraqi Federal Elections'; Van den Toorn, 'Kurdistan Politics at a Crossroads'; 'Iraq Votes 2018'.

<sup>48</sup> Saad Naji Jawad, 'The Kurdish Question in Iraq: Historical Background and Future Settlement', *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 1/ 1 (2008), pp. 25–41.

<sup>49</sup> 'Iraq and the Kurds: Trouble along the Trigger Line', *International Crisis Group Middle East Report* 88, 8 July 2009, p. 8. Available at: <http://www.aina.org/reports/iatktatl.pdf>; 'Iraq's New Battlefield: The Struggle Over Ninewa', *International Crisis Group Middle East Report* 90, 28 September 2009, p. 8. Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/iraq-s-new-battlefront-struggle-over-ninewa>; Seane Kane, 'Iraq's Disputed Territories: A View of the Political Horizon and Implications for US Policy', *US Institute of Peace Peaceworks* 69 (2011); Peter Bartu, 'Wrestling with the Integrity of a Nation: The Disputed Internal Boundaries in Iraq', *International Affairs* 86 (November 2010), pp. 1329–43.

<sup>50</sup> Peter D Cameron, 'Contracts and Constitutions: The Kurdish Factor in the Development of Oil in Iraq', *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies*, 5/1 (2011), pp. 81–99.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

the state.<sup>52</sup> After regime change, Iraq's polity was then transformed by an increasingly violent moral populism that deliberately divided the population amongst mutually exclusive ethno-sectarian groups. The country later descended into a civil war in 2004 that lasted until 2008. Finally, during his premiership, Nouri al-Maliki used the state's security services to pursue an increasingly authoritarian agenda aimed at coercively silencing his critics. In spite of this legacy of violence, moral populism and authoritarianism, Iraq remains an imperfect democracy with a vibrant civil society and a number of press outlets. However, 'civicness' operates within the constraints imposed by the political parties who, since 2003, obtained dominance. These parties deploy an aggressive moral populism designed to fracture civic mobilisation. Where this fails, they frequently use violent intimidation, delivered by both the state and party militias to curtail popular protest against them.

In the aftermath of regime change in 2003, Iraq's media and civil society rapidly expanded into the space vacated by the former regime. In 2010, the Iraqi government attempted to regulate civil society groups through legislation. The drafting of the law and its passing through Parliament was accompanied by high levels of public scrutiny but was seen as a victory for the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved. However, civil society groups still complain about the length and bureaucratic process involved in registering with the government. In 2015, this process was further complicated by new requirements for NGOs to be first cleared by the de-Ba'athification Commission. Despite these hurdles, by 2015, 2,600 NGOs had fulfilled the requirements to register.<sup>53</sup> However, the vast majority of these were arms of the dominant political parties set up to crowd out independent NGOs or exploit funding opportunities.

Beyond a party and electoral system that has been dominated by ethno-sectarian moral populism, cross-communal political mobilisation has tended to focus on the government's appalling record of service delivery and its relationship to the political marketplace and the *muhāsasa ta'ifia* system.

Before 2015, demonstrations focused on corruption and poor service delivery tended to be sporadic and largely reactive, targeted at the government's inability to deliver electricity during the very hot summer months.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Isam Al-Khafaji, 'The Myth of Iraqi Exceptionalism', *Middle East Policy* 7/4 (2000), pp. 62–86.

<sup>53</sup> 'Freedom in the World 2016: Iraq', *Freedom House*. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/iraq>.

<sup>54</sup> Michael Schmidt and Duraid Adnan, 'Protests Spread to more Iraqi Cities', *New York Times*, 17 February 2011. Available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/18/world/middleeast/18iraq.html>.

However, the mass demonstrations of 2015 focused on calls for a 'civic state'.<sup>55</sup>

These demands were also of political significance because the vast majority of demonstrators in Baghdad and across the south were Shi'a. Unlike previous summers, however, two important religious and political figures, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and Muqtada al-Sadr, gave their wholehearted support to the protest movements.<sup>56</sup> When faced with mass protests backed by both Sistani and Sadr, Abadi had little choice but to try and meet their demands, launching an ambitious 44-point reform plan designed to end the sectarian *muhāsasa* system, tackle corruption, reduce the size of government and reform the cabinet. However, as protestors demobilised and summer temperatures abated, Abadi's reform plans remained unimplemented and Iraq saw a return to politics as usual.

The popular protests show the potential for cross-communal civic mobilisation in Iraq. This might potentially serve as another avenue for women to participate in social, economic and political life, as sectarian mobilisation is highly patriarchal and leaves little room for women's ability to influence political processes. However, these protests were ultimately unsuccessful for two reasons. Firstly, the demonstrators did not have the organisational capacity to sustain the movement on their own, which left them vulnerable to co-optation. Secondly, both the overt coercive forces of the state and the militias of the dominant political parties used violence in an attempt to demobilise the movement. Again, it was Sadr's forces who stepped forward to offer protection.

If the protest movement is to grow into a sustainable political movement for change, then it will have to develop its own organisational capacity that separates it from the problematic association with Sadr. Isam al-Khafaji, veteran analyst of Iraqi politics, makes the point that the political movement that came out of the 2015 protest movement, the Takaddum Coalition, could have been the platform from which to launch an alternative programme to challenge the *muhāsasa* system during the elections of 2018.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> [nytimes.com/2011/02/18/world/middleeast/18iraq.html](http://nytimes.com/2011/02/18/world/middleeast/18iraq.html).

<sup>56</sup> Faleh Abdul Jabar, 'The Iraqi Protest Movement: From Identity Politics to Issue Politics', *LSE Middle East Centre Paper Series* 25 (2018). Available at: [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/88294/1/Faleh\\_Iraqi%20Protest%20Movement\\_Published\\_English.pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/88294/1/Faleh_Iraqi%20Protest%20Movement_Published_English.pdf).

<sup>57</sup> Adnan Abu Zeed, 'How religious movements gained the upper hand in Iraqi protests', *Al-Monitor*, 8 April 2016. Available at: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/04/iraq-secular-protests-muqtada-al-sadr-reform-sit-ins.html>.

<sup>58</sup> Isam Al-Khafaji, 'Iraq 2018 Elections: Between Sectarianism and

However, the organisational and ideological core of Takadum, the Iraqi Communist Party, was co-opted into Sadr's Saairun Coalition, thus removing its ability to channel societal anger into a focused political movement with a coherent reform agenda.

### Civic Mobilisation in the KRI

Since 2003, as the KRG has gradually consolidated its central authority, the civil society organisations (CSOs) that have been able to operate successfully have usually been affiliated to either the KDP or the PUK.<sup>58</sup> This has limited the effectiveness of CSOs, and explains, in part, why the KRG is still struggling with basic issues of human rights, freedom of speech, minority rights, fiscal transparency and corruption.<sup>59</sup> Kurdish political parties have drawn on nationalist moral populism to dominate civil society.<sup>60</sup> However, this influence does not equate to absolute control over civil society.<sup>61</sup>

Independent media flourished after 2003. This helped produce a more pluralistic national narrative, challenged the Kurdish political elites for control over historic memory, and gave civic and political opposition groups new platforms to publicise their ideas and grievances to a much larger audience.<sup>62</sup> However, many independent outlets closed in subsequent years as the Kurdish parties consolidated their authority and control. The political elite have also created a 'shadow media'<sup>63</sup> that purports to be independent but is

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the Nation', *Arab Reform Initiative Policy Alternatives*. Available at: <https://www.arab-reform.net/en/node/1328>.

<sup>58</sup> 'Iraq's Civil Society Assessment', *USAid Iraq* (February 2012). Available at: [http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/pnadz188.pdf](http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pnadz188.pdf).

<sup>59</sup> 'Iraq's Civil Society in Perspective', *NGO Coordination Committee for Iraq* (April 2011). Available at: [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Full\\_Report\\_476.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Full_Report_476.pdf).

<sup>60</sup> Nadje Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt, 'Between nationalism and women's rights: the Kurdish women's movement in Iraq', *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 4 (2011), pp. 339–55; Nadje Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt, 'Conspiracy of Near Silence: Violence against Iraqi Women', *Middle East Report* (2011), pp. 34–48.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas von der Osten-Sacken, 'Working Paper: Iraqi-Kurdistan; a Model for Iraq?', *Aspen Conference: Greater Middle East* (March 2006). Available at: <http://www.niqash.org/en/articles/politics/3166/>.

<sup>62</sup> Nicole F. Watts, 'Democracy and Self-Determination in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq', in David Romano and Mehmet Gurses (eds), *Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 141–68.

<sup>63</sup> 'Politics, Money and War – Independent Media in Iraqi Kurdistan', *Doha Center for Freedom*, 28 January 2015. Available at: <http://www.dc4mf.org/en/news/politics-money-and-war-independent-media-in-iraqi-kurdistan/>.

actually affiliated to political parties.<sup>64</sup> This accounts for approximately 57 percent of the media landscape in the KRI.<sup>65</sup>

In recent years, the KRG has experienced a series of popular protests, particularly in and around the city of Sulaimani. Anti-government demonstrations took place in 2011 to challenge the KDP–PUK traditional power structures and the entrenched patronage systems.<sup>66</sup> In 2014, the KRG delayed salary payments to civil servants, sparking large protests especially by teachers' unions.<sup>67</sup>

There have been several rounds of post-referendum protests that exhibit both similarities to and differences from the protests of 2011. They are similar in that people continue to protest for salary payment, jobs and economic opportunity. However, they are now increasingly directed against political parties and elites, more aggressive and chaotic, and most significantly, take place in Erbil and Dohuk, which has not occurred since 2003. In addition, the high level of violent repression against the protestors by PUK and KDP security forces was not seen in previous protests. The increased intensity of the protests stems from Kurdish anger and frustration toward the failures of the ruling elites during and after the referendum.<sup>68</sup>

### Gender in Iraq

The insecurity, conflict and economic deprivation that followed the invasion of 2003 have significantly affected women, their rights and the overall status of gender equality in Iraq. The impact of the intervention and its aftermath has been mostly negative for Iraqi women; they have become more exposed to violence and their socio-economic rights have deteriorated. These outcomes have been exasperated by irresponsible and short-term policies.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Afshin Ismaeli, 'The Role of The Media in Developing Democracy in Kurdistan: A study of Rudaw Journalists Perspectives, Notions and Attitudes', *Masters Dissertation, University of Oslo* (2015); Kamal Chomani, 'Independent media fades in Iraqi Kurdistan', *Al-Monitor*, 2 August 2014. Available at: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/07/iraqi-kurdistan-free-independent-media-kr-g-rudaw.ht>.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Watts, 'Democracy and Self-Determination in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq'.

<sup>67</sup> Isabel Coles and Stephen Kalin, 'In Fight against Islamic State, Kurds Expand their Territory', *Reuters*, 10 October 2016. Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/mideast-crisis-kurds-land>.

<sup>68</sup> Van den Toorn, 'Kurdistan Politics at a Crossroads'.

<sup>69</sup> Nadje Al-Ali, 'Sexual Violence in Iraq: Challenges for Transnational Feminist Politics', *European Journal of Women's Studies* 25/1 (2016), pp. 10–27.

There is no denying that Iraq has always been a difficult context for women to push for improving their status. However, Iraqi women's rights activism has a long history and the current struggle for women's rights has built on this tradition,<sup>70</sup> becoming increasingly connected with transnational women's rights activism.<sup>71</sup> Conflict, war, political transition, economic sanctions and increasing social conservatism have posed significant obstacles for women.<sup>72</sup> For instance, economic decline during the sanctions period (1990–2003) restricted women's ability to participate in education and the labour force, reinforced conservative gender roles, impacted family relations, and led to increased violence.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, the decades preceding the 2003 invasion had already led to the erosion of women's socio-economic rights.<sup>74</sup> The 2003 invasion and what followed served to worsen women's already poor situation.

Introduced in 2005, the gender quota system in elections and in parliament promised change but remained symbolic, with women's rights still largely overlooked. The lack of a coherent policy to meaningfully include women in the political processes and the use of women as bargaining chips in political negotiations with religious parties had far-reaching and detrimental effects. The US gave in to the more conservative demands of the new political elite in the bargaining surrounding the reform process.<sup>75</sup> Women's presence in parliament did not change general perceptions about women's positions in politics and did not lead to greater democratisation. The policy of democracy promotion marginalised and excluded women's movements that challenged male dominance in society or opposed the invasion.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Noga Efrati, *Women in Iraq: Past Meets Present* (Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>71</sup> Yaniv Voller, 'Countering Violence against Women in Iraqi Kurdistan: State-Building and Transnational Advocacy', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46/2 (2014), pp. 351–72.

<sup>72</sup> Nadje Al-Ali, 'Reconstructing Gender: Iraqi women between dictatorship, war, sanctions and occupation', *Third World Quarterly* 26 (2005), pp. 739–58.

<sup>73</sup> Yasmin Husein Al-Jawaheri, *Women in Iraq: The Gender Impact of International Sanctions* (London: IB Tauris, 2008); Jacqueline Ismael and Shereen Ismael, 'Living through War, Sanctions and Occupation: The Voices of Iraqi Women', *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 2/3 (2009), pp. 409–24.

<sup>74</sup> Dalia M. A. Gomaa, 'Re-membering Iraqis in Nuha al-Radi's Baghdad Diaries: A Woman's Chronicle of War and Exile', *Feminist Formations* 29/1 (2017), pp. 53–70.

<sup>75</sup> Nadje Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt, *What kind of liberation? Women and the occupation of Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

<sup>76</sup> Efrati, *Women in Iraq*; Efrati, 'Women, Representation and Democracy in Post-Saddam Iraq, 2003–10'.

Moreover, the inability of public authorities to provide security has confined women to their homes and increased their vulnerability to threats of sexual violence and abduction.<sup>77</sup> The sectarian justification for the civil war that followed the invasion encouraged lawlessness and the emergence of other forms of gender control. Rising hyper-masculinity due to conflict led to an increase in domestic violence against women as well as the use of violence by public authorities. For instance, vigilantes employed by Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army imposed strict rules, forced women to wear full-length veils, forbade music, make-up or being too vocal in public, and enforced gender segregation.<sup>78</sup>

Conflict and instability also exacerbated the underlying structural factors in economic, social, family and political spheres that foster patriarchy and hinder equality. Indeed, there is continuity between pre- and post-2003 violence against women and violence in general. The socio-political environment under the Ba'ath was deeply imbued with violence. Today's sexual violence against women and men, including the violence perpetrated by Da'esh, emulates practices that have been endemic in Iraq for decades.<sup>79</sup> Significant correlations can be identified between 'honour' killings, state ideologies and notions of masculinity. However, the transformation of Iraq from a largely secular dictatorship to a sectarian state placed new limits on women's presence in the public sphere and increased control over women's bodies in public. Changes in the legal rules governing family and personal status has further violated the principles of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and has negatively affected women and their status.<sup>80</sup>

Domestic and conflict-related violence is a key issue faced by women in Iraq.<sup>81</sup> The violation of women's human rights and legal discrimination against women and the LGBTQ

<sup>77</sup> Catherine Powell, 'The Status of Women and Girls in Iraq and Afghanistan', Council on Foreign Relations, 3 July 2014. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/blog-post/status-women-and-girls-iraq-and-afghanistan-0>; Haifa Zangana, 'Walling in Iraq: The Impact on Baghdadi Women', *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 4/1 (August 2010), pp. 41–58.

<sup>78</sup> Huda Ahmed, 'Women in the Shadows of Democracy', *Middle East Report* 36 (2006), p. 24.

<sup>79</sup> Ariel I. Ahram, 'Sexual Violence and the Making of ISIS', *Survival* 57 (2015), pp. 57–78.

<sup>80</sup> Riyadh K. Lafta, Atheer J. Al-Saffar, Sahar A. Eissa and Maha A. Al-Nuaimi, 'Gender-based Violence: A Study of Iraqi Women', *International Social Science Journal* 59/192 (2009), pp. 309–16.

<sup>81</sup> 'Iraq: MENA Gender Equality Profile – Status of Girls and Women', *UNICEF Report* (2011). Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/gender/files/Iraq-Gender-Equality-Profile-2011.pdf>.

community have clearly increased since 2003.<sup>82</sup> Protection against torture, sexual attacks and ill treatment are not effective.<sup>83</sup> The deteriorating situation of women and limitations placed on gender equality in the design of the Constitution and drafting of laws after 2005 have increased violence against women and gendered vulnerabilities.<sup>84</sup>

Another issue that significantly affects women in Iraq is displacement.<sup>85</sup> Displacement impacts women more severely than men due to their social status, discrimination and marginalisation.<sup>86</sup> Displaced women experience higher levels of domestic and other forms of violence than women who are not displaced. They are also more vulnerable to trafficking and prostitution.<sup>87</sup> Displacement in Iraq also increased communal and family-level restrictions placed on women to ensure security and to avoid the stigma associated with certain incidents or behaviours. These limit displaced women's visibility and presence in public spaces, their access to services, support and information, and confine them to domestic spaces in their new location.

The KRI has made greater strides towards gender equality than the federal GoI, with CEDAW principles and the Women, Peace and Security agenda internalised to a greater

extent in regional laws and regulations. Women's rights activism and some policymakers' willingness to realise change have played an important role in this. However, discriminatory rules and practices still exist, violence against women and 'honour' killings continue, and legal changes are not fully implemented or monitored by the KRG.<sup>88</sup> The state of the literature on women in Iraq reflects a heavier focus on the KRI. This is mainly due to the inaccessibility of other parts of Iraq and security risks involved in carrying out research. The specific focus on the KRI is also driven by the differences in political, economic and societal processes between the two contexts.

### Gender, Public Authority, Moral Populism and the Political Marketplace

Public authority in Iraq is highly gendered. It is based upon a patriarchal form of masculinity embedded in all aspects of society from the way in which public institutions are structured to the management of war, distribution of resources and interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence, and men and women's roles in public and private life. The level of patriarchal influence in politics, society and the economy have varied throughout Iraq's history. Dominant modes of masculine state and non-state authority connect sexual control and men's control over the bodies and behaviours of women and girls with ethno-sectarian hierarchy, this being an important source of violence, including sexual violence, and control. Sexual violence carried out under the pretext of security in prisons is an example of this. During the US occupation and civil war, most women held in prisons and Ministry of Defence facilities were Sunni and some experienced sexual assaults including rape.<sup>89</sup>

Moral populism has defined women's roles and positions in public and private life in Iraq. Moral populism has clear gendered dimensions with conservative interpretations of Islamic tradition framing gender attitudes and practices. Public authorities reproduce and institutionalise the gendered dimensions of religious sectarianism and these dimensions in turn reinforce their authority. Although conservative attitudes are increasing in certain segments of Kurdish society, the KRG has adopted a form of moral populism that draws upon contemporary global norms on gender equality to strengthen its international standing and to ensure continuing external financial and political support.

<sup>82</sup> 'They Want Us Exterminated: Murder, Torture, Sexual Orientation and Gender in Iraq', *Human Rights Watch*, 17 August 2009. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/08/17/they-want-us-exterminated/murder-torture-sexual-orientation-and-gender-iraq>.

<sup>83</sup> 'Working Together to Address Violence Against Women and Girls in Iraqi Kurdistan', *International Rescue Committee Report* (2012); 'Trapped by Violence: Women in Iraq', *Amnesty International Report*, 20 April 2009. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2009/04/atrapadas-violencia-mujeres-irak-20090420/>.

<sup>84</sup> American Bar Association, 'The Status of Women in Iraq: Update to the Assessment of Iraq's International Legal Standards', *Iraq Legal Development Project* (2007). Available at: [https://www.americanbar.org/advocacy/rule\\_of\\_law/where\\_we\\_work/middle\\_east/iraq/news/news-iraq-womens-assessment-update.html](https://www.americanbar.org/advocacy/rule_of_law/where_we_work/middle_east/iraq/news/news-iraq-womens-assessment-update.html); Carolyn A. Dubay, 'Beyond Critical Mass: A Comparative Perspective on Judicial Design and Gender Equality in Iraq and Afghanistan', *Florida Journal of International Law* 24/1 (2012), p. 163.

<sup>85</sup> 'Women in Iraq Factsheet – Displaced Women and Women in Conflict', *United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq Report* (2015). Available at: <http://www.uniraq.com/index.php?lang=en>.

<sup>86</sup> Zeynep N. Kaya and Kyra Luchtenberg, 'Displacement and Women's Economic Empowerment: Voices of Displaced Women in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq', *Women for Women International* (April 2018). Available at: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/87686/>.

<sup>87</sup> "'We Just Keep Silent' Gender-Based Violence amongst Syrian Refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq', *UNAMI and UN Women* (April 2014). Available at: [http://www.uniraq.com/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=1913:we-just-keep-silent-gender-based-violence-amongst-syrian-refugees-in-the-kurdistan-region-of-iraq&Itemid=626&lang=en](http://www.uniraq.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=1913:we-just-keep-silent-gender-based-violence-amongst-syrian-refugees-in-the-kurdistan-region-of-iraq&Itemid=626&lang=en).

<sup>88</sup> 'Mino Alinia, *Honor and Violence against Women in Iraqi Kurdistan* (New York: Palgrave, 2013); Zeynep N. Kaya, 'Gender and Statehood in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq', *LSE Middle East Centre Paper Series* 18 (2017).

<sup>89</sup> Ariel I Ahram, 'Sexual Violence and the Making of ISIS', *Survival* 57 (2015), pp. 57–78, at pp. 63–64.

Gender norms also contribute to the emergence and perpetuation of the political marketplace. Economies of war and conflict are increasingly informal. According to Peterson, the following economic activities can be observed in Iraq: coping economies based on the survival needs of individuals and families; combat economies related to military objectives and facilitating insurgent activities; and criminal economies as a result of the breakdown of regulatory mechanisms and profit seeking behaviour.<sup>90</sup> Structured gendered hierarchies and patriarchal rules push women into the role of keeping households. Simultaneously, female-led households increased due to militarisation, conflict-related injuries and deaths.

Two CRP research projects focus on gender in Iraq. The first will examine how masculinity and gender norms are contested and manipulated, and how they shape the conflict economy in Iraq. The second will study the role increasing social and political conservatism play in the deterioration of women's status in Iraq.

However, there is a danger that studies looking at these issues assume causal links between moral populism and the suppression of women, neglecting the analysis of political, economic, social, class-related and geographic factors and their interaction. To avoid this, CRP research will adopt an intersectional approach to better understand complex causality.

## Internally Displaced People

Authoritarian rule, violent persecution and war have led millions of Iraqis to flee their homes over the past decades. From Ba'athist-era Arabisation policies to military and sectarian induced displacement after 2003, the country has witnessed multiple waves of protracted displacement as well as migration.<sup>91</sup> The latest wave of displacement was caused by violence related to Da'esh, the cumulative effect of which was to create in excess of 5 million IDPs.

<sup>90</sup> Spike Peterson, 'Gendering Informal Economies in Iraq', in Nicola Pratt and Nadjie Al-Ali (eds), *Women and War in the Middle East: Transnational Perspectives* (London: Zed Books, 2009), p. 35.

<sup>91</sup> Ibrahim Sirkeci, 'Conflict, the Environment of Human Insecurity and Migration in Iraq in the Aftermath of 2003' in Helga Rittersberger-Tilic (ed.), *Rethinking Global Migration: Practices, Policies and Discourses in the European Neighbourhood* (Ankara: KORA – Center for Black Sea and Central Asia and Middle East Technical University), pp. 161–75; Björn Rother, Gaëlle Pierre, et al., 'The Economic Impact of Conflicts and the Refugee Crisis in the Middle East and North Africa', *International Monetary Fund* (September 2016). Available at: <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/sdn/2016/sdn1608.pdf>.

Despite the end of military operations against Da'esh in December 2017, many IDPs remain unwilling to return home due to security fears, damaged property, lack of employment and poor service provision.<sup>92</sup> As of 31 December 2017, according to the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix, there are 2.6 million IDPs still displaced, while 3.2 million IDPs have returned, albeit often to terrible conditions. With destroyed local governance structures, property conflict and the absence of any national plan to coordinate the processes of reconstruction and reintegration, IDP return has fueled conflictual majority–minority dynamics.<sup>93</sup>

The slow rate of return of Sunni Arab IDPs to historically mixed areas is partly the result of the ongoing presence of the Shi'a-dominated Hashd al-Sha'abi, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, and Badr Brigades. Sunni Arab and Kurdish communities have reported abuses and forced evictions by these groups since 2014. Militias, as well as Shi'a tribal authorities, have resisted or demanded payments for the return of Sunni IDPs. These intercommunal conflicts cannot be viewed in isolation from other conditions preventing return.

## IDPs and Moral Populism

Internal displacement is a key driver of conflict in Iraq. Conflicting relations between host and IDP communities have exacerbated ethno-nationalist narratives, and political leaders have blatantly framed displacement within ethno-sectarian discourses. At the same time, internal displacement has resulted in increased sectarian homogeneity, since there is often protective benefit associated with living in a homogenous community. However, the increasing geographic segregation of Iraq's communities has cultivated sectarianism, especially among the young.<sup>94</sup>

Distrust of Sunni Arabs is both a driver and consequence of post-2014 displacement. The fight against Da'esh exacerbated historical sectarian fears as well as internal divides between and within Sunni and Shi'a communities. The trauma of recent years and the hatred felt towards Da'esh often manifests itself in hostility towards those families who are believed to be affiliated to the group. Sunni Arabs

<sup>92</sup> 'IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)', *International Organization for Migration* (2017). Available at: <http://iraqdtm.iom.int/>.

<sup>93</sup> Omar Abdel-Razek and Miriam Puttick, 'Majorities and minorities in post-ISIS Iraq', *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 9 (2016), pp. 565–76.

<sup>94</sup> 'Fight or Flight: The Desperate Plight of Iraq's Generation 2000', *International Crisis Group Middle East Report* 169, 8 August 2016, p. 11. Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/fight-or-flight-desperate-plight-iraq-s-generation-2000>.

lament that they are excluded while displaced and after returning due to their assumed collective guilt. In some areas, they have alleged that Shi'a militias used the presence of Da'esh as a pretext for forcing out the Sunni population.

Movement restrictions imposed on Sunni Arabs have cemented the division of Iraq, effectively locking Sunnis into the country's least safe areas and denying some families a solution to protracted displacement. Restrictions on movement partly explain disparities in the population of IDPs across receiving provinces. 348,552 IDPs of Ninewa origin currently reside in Dohuk, while less than a quarter of that number, reside in the larger and better-serviced province of Erbil.<sup>95</sup> While both provinces border Ninewa, the checkpoints at the entrances to the capital Erbil are known to be among the most stringent towards Sunni Arabs.

Kirkuk has become a particularly important flashpoint for a sectarian politicisation of the IDP crisis. Since 2015, Kurdish politicians have rejected moves by the federal Ministry of Interior to grant IDPs residing in Kirkuk residence, describing it as a new wave of the Saddam-era policy of Arabisation. In October 2016 and May 2017, reports indicated that Kurdish security forces forced hundreds of Arab and Turkmen IDP families to leave Kirkuk and return to their areas of origin. In the wake of the October 2017 takeover of Kirkuk by federal government forces, talk of Arabisation has only increased as Kurdish forces no longer hold influence over the city's demographic makeup.

### IDPs and the Political Marketplace

Since 2003, all actors with a political stake in Iraq, from state and non-state armed groups to the US-led Multinational Force, have engaged in the distribution of assistance on the basis of political gain rather than need.<sup>96</sup> Iraqi political elites have used internal displacement as a tool to secure funds for their patronage networks. Charitable entities connected to political party figures or community leaders have proliferated; these entities receive large amounts of international aid under the pretence of responding to the needs of IDPs or conducting other civil society activity, but in fact redirect money to their patronage networks, including to families of militia volunteers.<sup>97</sup>

There has also been an upsurge in displacement-related corruption. The requirement for the support of a local spon-

sor for IDP entry into safe areas has enabled extractive corruption schemes and civil servants have imposed arbitrary fees for IDP registration and documentation renewal.<sup>98</sup> For returnees to Ninewa and other areas formerly under Da'esh control, much of the cynicism about the prospect of reconstruction is rooted in a widespread distrust of corrupt government schemes drawing profit from infrastructure and building projects.

### IDPs and Public Authority

Displacement in Iraq is associated with a breakdown in trust between citizens and their government. IDPs cannot rely on state institutions for even their most basic needs. The ability of IDPs to participate in political processes, or to secure access to property and documentation, is also constrained.<sup>99</sup> The inability of the Iraqi state to protect IDPs – as well as non-displaced citizens – has forced them to rely on non-state armed groups affiliated with their ethno-sectarian group.<sup>100</sup> This is a risk because in the past rival militias have been the ones to enforce segregation and the creation of ethnic boundaries.<sup>101</sup> Despite these problems, there remains a significant lack of coordination between Baghdad and Erbil on the question of IDP response<sup>102</sup> reflecting the profound division between the two capitals.

IDPs suffer from an ambiguous legal status in host provinces. IDPs without civil documentation have struggled to move across checkpoints and access state food rations, health care and other public services. They are often told to return to their province of origin to access documentation, which is impossible for most. The UNHCR and other groups have worked to ease this process, but 49 percent of IDPs reported problems with accessing civil identification.

<sup>98</sup> Ahmed Hassin and Mays Al-Juboori, 'Humanitarian Challenges in Iraq's Displacement Crisis', *Minority Rights Group International*, December 2016. Available at: <http://minorityrights.org/2016/12/22/iraqs-displacement-crisis-unsustainable-return-home-distant-prospect-new-report-humanitarian-challenges-facing-idps/>.

<sup>99</sup> Jamille Bigio and Jen Scott, 'Internal Displacement in Iraq: The Process of Working toward Durable Solutions', *Brookings Institution—University of Bern Project on Internal Displacement*, June 2009.

<sup>100</sup> Ashraf al-Khalidi and Victor Tanner, 'Sectarian Violence: Radical Groups Drive Internal Displacement in Iraq', *Brookings Institution—University of Bern Project on Internal Displacement* (2006). Available at: [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/1018iraq\\_al-khalidi.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/1018iraq_al-khalidi.pdf).

<sup>101</sup> Philip Marfleet, 'Displacement and the State – The Case of Iraq', in Khalid Koser and Susan Martin (eds), *The Migration—Displacement Nexus: Patterns, Processes, and Policies* (2011), p. 96.

<sup>102</sup> Cameron Thibos, '35 Years of Forced Displacement in Iraq: Contextualising the ISIS Threat, Unpacking the Movements', *Migration Policy Centre Policy Briefs* 4 (2014).

<sup>95</sup> 'IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM)', *International Organization for Migration* (2018). Available at: <http://iraqdtm.iom.int/>.

<sup>96</sup> Dina Abou Samra, 'Military-Induced Displacement', *Forced Migration Review Iraq Special Issue* 37 (June 2007).

<sup>97</sup> 'Fight or Flight'.

The forced displacement of IDPs has become a strategy used by both governments to renegotiate power dynamics, especially in the disputed territories.<sup>103</sup> For example, since 2015, security actors in both central Iraq and the KRG have confined thousands of Arab IDPs fleeing Da'esh territory to 'security zones', where they are prevented from moving elsewhere or returning to their homes. Across the disputed territories, this mechanism led to demographic change when Kurdish security forces allowed Kurdish IDPs to return but denied Arab IDPs the required security clearance. There are also reports that after Kurdish families returned to the disputed territories, they were permitted to move into homes of Arabs who fled.<sup>104</sup>

Displacement has also contributed to the weakening of community and tribal links.<sup>105</sup> From an economic perspective, the erosion of kinship networks, particularly in communities where network-based coping mechanisms served as insurance policies, has significantly diminished individual resilience.<sup>106</sup>

### IDPs and 'Civicness'

While IDPs have traditionally been vulnerable within host communities and political participation has been a challenge, there have been instances of either IDP protest or the use of the IDP cause in protests.<sup>107</sup> There are localised women's organisations at community level, both religious and secular in character; but these small initiatives generally remain short-term, localised and untapped.

## Iraq's Disputed Territories

The dispute over territory between the Gol and the KRG is one of the most intractable issues in Iraq.<sup>108</sup> The disputed territories are a 480-kilometre swathe of land stretching from the Iranian border to the Syrian border with Kirkuk at the centre, containing a diverse mix of Arabs, Kurds and ethno-religious minorities. The dispute involves competing political, economic and communal dynamics, including, crucially, the position of Kurds and their long-term aspirations to self-determination.

### The Disputed Territories and Moral Populism

Behind the ostensibly technical question of who rightfully governs the disputed territories lurks more fundamental concerns of identity and nationhood.<sup>109</sup> Moral populism is expressed through ethno-political narratives, rallying Arabs, Kurds and other minorities under exclusivist banners.<sup>110</sup> The dispute over Kirkuk, for example, is framed as a matter of Kurdish ethno-nationalism, as political elites describe it as the 'Kurds' Jerusalem'.<sup>111</sup> In addition, the 2009 Kurdish Constitution provocatively asserts 'the Kurds' aspirations to take full control of areas they consider to be part of a Kurdish national homeland, including Kirkuk'.<sup>112</sup>

Similarly, Gol elites have used nationalist discourses to support their approach, presenting Gol control of the disputed territories as necessary for the integrity and survival of the Iraqi nation. The sentiment is so strong that it has unified Sunni and Shi'a Arab parties on this issue since 2003. At the local level, Arab populations fear that their own interests will be undermined by a shift in power from the Gol to the KRG.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>103</sup> 'Humanitarian Implications of Violence in Northern and Central Iraq', *ACAPS Briefing Note*, September 2014. Available at: <https://www.acaps.org/special-report/humanitarian-implications-violence-northern-and-central-iraq>.

<sup>104</sup> 'Iraqi Kurdistan: Ruling Party Forces Fire on Protesters', *Human Rights Watch* (2015). Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/10/21/iraqi-kurdistan-ruling-party-forces-fire-protesters>.

<sup>105</sup> Nasir Ahmed Al Samaraie, 'Humanitarian Implications of the Wars in Iraq', *International Review of the Red Cross* 89/868, pp. 929–42.

<sup>106</sup> Ali A K Ali, 'Displacement in a fragile Iraq', *Forced Migration Review* 58 (2013).

<sup>107</sup> Al-Khalidi and Tanner, 'Sectarian Violence'.

<sup>108</sup> 'Iraq and the Kurds'; 'Iraq's New Battlefield'; Kane, 'Iraq's Disputed Territories'; Bartu, 'Wrestling with the Integrity of a Nation'; Daniel Coats, 'Worldwide Threat Assessment of the US Intelligence Community', *Senate Select Committee on Intelligence*, 11 May 2017. Available at: <https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/os-coats-051117.pdf>.

<sup>109</sup> Bartu, 'Wrestling with the Integrity of a Nation'.

<sup>110</sup> Arbella Bet-Shlimon, 'Group Identities, Oil, and the Local Political Domain in Kirkuk: A Historical Perspective', *Journal of Urban History* 38 (2012), pp. 914–31.

<sup>111</sup> Aram Rifaat, 'Kirkuk: The Central Issue of Kurdish Politics and Iraq's Knotty Problem', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 28/2 (2008), pp. 251–66.

<sup>112</sup> Michael J. Kelly, 'The Kurdish Regional Constitutional within the Framework of the Iraqi Federal Constitution: A Struggle for Sovereignty, Oil, Ethnic Identity, and the Prospects for a Reverse Supremacy Clause', *Penn State Law Review* 114/3 (2010), pp. 707–808.

<sup>113</sup> Liam Anderson and Gareth Stansfield, *Crisis in Kirkuk: The ethnopolitics of conflict and compromise* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

The use of ethno-nationalist discourse in this context is problematic because it constrains the ability of Kurdish and Arab elites to compromise and negotiate, and it justifies the implementation of exclusivist policies in mixed areas.<sup>114</sup> The conflict over the disputed territories is thus legitimised through moral populism. The KRG's maximalist approach is also sustained by articulating a 'compensatory' discourse: the return of the disputed territories is presented as justice for every historic wrong done to them by the Iraqi state. Kurdish leaders argue that decades of Arabisation and forced migration made them a minority in their historic homeland; hence they have a right to reverse these crimes and repopulate the areas with Kurds.<sup>115</sup>

In recent years, shifts in Iraqi and Kurdish moral populisms – a rejection of Shi'a sectarianism and Kurdish nationalism among some segments of the population – stemming from the failure on both sides to govern and achieve stability and prosperity for their people, may ebb the competing moral populist claims, ethnicity and sect-based nationalisms, and hence inflame the conflict in the disputed territories.

### The Disputed Territories and the Political Marketplace

Competition over Iraq's disputed territories has been characterised by coercion, corruption and patronage at the national, regional, and local levels. A particularly intense use of those practices can be observed locally, where rivals seek to win the hearts and votes of local populations through government jobs, handouts from parties and gifts of land and houses.<sup>116</sup> While the Gol and Kurdish political parties have been reluctant to invest in infrastructure, they have not hesitated to line the pockets of local notables with money for votes and loyalty.

At the national level, while claims to the disputed territories are usually rooted in moral populism, much of the literature argues that the real source of conflict is underground,

<sup>114</sup> Mahir Aziz, *The Kurds of Iraq: Ethnonationalism and National Identity in Iraqi Kurdistan* (New York: IB Tauris, 2011).

<sup>115</sup> Silke Jungbluth, 'The Future of Iraqi Kurdistan: The "Islamic State" as a Catalyst for Independence?', *Åland Islands Peace Institute*, August 2015. Available at: [http://www.peace.ax/images/Silke\\_Jungbluth\\_Working\\_Paper\\_Kurdistan\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.peace.ax/images/Silke_Jungbluth_Working_Paper_Kurdistan_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>116</sup> 'Banished and Dispossessed: Forced Displacement and Deliberate Destruction in Northern Iraq', *Amnesty International Report*, 20 January 2016. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde14/3229/2016/en/>; 'Where Are We Supposed to Go? Destruction and Forced Displacement in Kirkuk', *Amnesty International Report*, 7 November 2016. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde14/5094/2016/en/>.

since the disputed territories host some of Iraq's richest oil and gas reserves. The KRG's oil exploration blocs are all centred around the disputed territories, namely in Ninewa, Kirkuk and Salah al-Din.<sup>117</sup> These resources are essential to the Kurdish nationalist project, since they represent the only avenue for economic self-sufficiency in the short- to medium-term.

The contraction of public payroll in Erbil and Baghdad, federal reassertion over oil fields in Kirkuk and other disputed territories, and changes in moral populism and public authority may limit each capital's ability to maintain and expand their claims via coercion, patronage and oil revenue in the future.

### The Disputed Territories and Public Authority

Constitutional authority to resolve the disputed territories issue does exist; however, the language is vague and political actors have never developed workable mechanisms or institutions to implement this authority.<sup>118</sup> Multiple attempts to resolve the issue have been made over the years but have not been successful, undermined by intransigence on the part of both governments.<sup>119</sup> This has created a vacuum in terms of security and governance because neither government takes responsibility for territories that are not fully loyal to them or under their control.

In terms of local administration, the Gol has *de jure* authority over the disputed territories. The approach of the central government since the 1930s has been to try and Arabise these areas by expelling Kurds and other minorities and repopulating them with Arabs from southern Iraq. In 2003, the tables turned as Peshmerga forces seized large swathes of the disputed territories, often with the support of US Special Forces, and managed to partially reverse Arabisation.<sup>120</sup> A weak and distracted government

<sup>117</sup> 'Iraq Oil and Gas Outlook', *Hannam and Partners* (2015). Available at: <http://www.hannamandpartners.com/uploads/2015/10/Iraq.pdf>.

<sup>118</sup> Saad Naji Jawad, 'The Iraqi Constitution: Structural Flaws and Political Implications', *LSE Middle East Centre Paper Series* 1 (2013); Arthur Quesnay, 'The Iraqi Crisis: A Return on Social Trajectories', *NORIA*, 25 February 2015. Available at: <http://www.noria-research.com/the-iraqi-crisis-a-return-on-social-trajectories>; Arthur Quesnay, 'Communitisation of Iraqi society after 2003: Impacts on the Political and Institutional System?', *Institute for Research and Debate on Governance*, 25 February 2015. Available at: <http://www.institut-gouvernance.org/en/etude/fiche-etude-13.html>.

<sup>119</sup> Kane, 'Iraq's Disputed Territories'.

<sup>120</sup> 'Claims in Conflict: Reversing Ethnic Cleansing in Northern Iraq', *Human Rights Watch* (2004). Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2004/08/02/claims-conflict/reversing-ethnic-cleansing-north-ern-iraq>.

in Baghdad allowed the KRG to gradually expand its control over the territories and populations in dispute.<sup>121</sup> This was exacerbated in 2014 when, overwhelmed by the violence of Da'esh, Iraqi security forces conceded even more territory to Kurdish security forces. Subsequently, the KRG used its military presence to forcibly remove Arab citizens, in an effort to manipulate demographics in their favour.<sup>122</sup> Ultimately, what this means is that reversing Arabisation and then Kurdification policies in the disputed territories cannot happen without forced displacement.<sup>123</sup>

The crisis caused by Da'esh and the failure of both governments to protect vulnerable communities triggered a proliferation of armed groups across the disputed territories. Both the central government and the KRG have created, funded and armed local proxy militias, or made them official battalions in the Peshmerga and Iraqi security forces.

Following the Kurdish independence referendum, on 16 October 2017, the GoI launched an operation to restore Iraqi sovereignty over the disputed territories. The retreat of Kurdish security forces transformed the political geography of northern Iraq, much to the disadvantage of the Kurds, and reversed the control patterns in place since 2003.

The reassertion of federal authority in disputed territories has temporarily put an end to dueling administrations, but will require a settlement with the Kurds regarding service delivery and equitable treatment of Kurdish and pro-KRG populations so as to prevent a slip backwards into the previous status quo.

### The Disputed Territories and 'Civiness'

Local populations in the disputed territories live side by side despite being from different communal groups with competing patrons. Cases of intermarriage and intercommunity economic dependence are not uncommon.<sup>124</sup> Community leaders have also at times developed and implemented mechanisms to constructively address or resolve disputes locally. However, these mechanisms and deals are

temporary and fragile and cannot last without buy-in at the national level.<sup>125</sup> Unfortunately, the wider GoI–KRG national dispute has consistently hindered localised efforts. Local communities are pushed and pulled, polarised by the GoI, the KRG and other national and security actors (both state and non-state).<sup>126</sup> Competing patronage has fostered and aggravated political divisions by creating and funding civil society organisations that favour their own rule, while blocking those that do not.

In recent years, with the Da'esh attack and its aftermath, social relations in some disputed areas have declined, as animosities and suspicions have sunk to the popular level. Nevertheless, the trauma of the past three years has also made local populations more united in their demands for autonomy over local government and security services, as well as less interested in which government – KRG or GoI – has ultimate authority over their lives.

<sup>121</sup> Natali, 'Are the Kurds Still Kingmakers in Iraq?'; Natali, *Kurdish Quasi-State*.

<sup>122</sup> 'Banished and Dispossessed'; 'Where Are We Supposed to Go?'; Joost R. Hiltermann, 'Spoils of Babylon', *The National Interest* 105 (2010), pp. 15–25.

<sup>123</sup> Nathan J. Brown, 'Iraq's Constitutional Process Plunges Ahead', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 18 July 2005. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2005/07/18/iraq-s-constitutional-process-plunges-ahead-pub-17206>.

<sup>124</sup> Christine van den Toorn and Nawaf Ashour, 'Attacks on Harvest Workers in Northern Iraq Signal New Security Crisis', *Niqash*, 29 May 2014. Available at: <http://www.niqash.org/en/articles/security/3445/>.

<sup>125</sup> Kane, 'Iraq's Disputed Territories'.

<sup>126</sup> Christine van den Toorn, 'The Wars after the War for Sinjar: How Washington Can Avert a New Civil War', *War on the Rocks*, 20 June 2016. Available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2016/06/the-wars-after-the-war-for-sinjar-how-washington-can-avert-a-new-civil-war/>; Christine van den Toorn, 'Internal Divides behind the Kurdistan Referendum', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 11 October 2017. Available at: <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/73359>.



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**Cover Image**

Demonstration in support of Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi in Tahrir Square, Baghdad, 9 August 2015.

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