

Iraq's Challenges of State/Nation-Building Process and Regional Implications

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Abstract

This paper investigates the roots of Iraq's challenges of state/nation-building process and its effects on the regional issues; it also discusses some solutions for these challenges. Understanding these challenges is vital because the developments of the last three years in this country transgress its domestic issues and hence affects the regional and global peace and security. Whereas, Iraq's traditional threats to the region emanated from military extremism, suppression of the ethnic groups, expansion of war environment and an arm race, the new threats are mostly from the internal ethnic-political rivalry over fulfilling the power vacuum, the expansion of terrorist activities and violence, conflict of interests among the involved regional and global powers and generally the challenges of state/nation-building process. In this article, the author holds the US and allies' war in Iraq has unfolded some of the existing complexities and controversies of Iraq's power and politics as well as the entire Middle East region. The outcomes of these paradoxes have weakened the status of the foreign intervening powers in the region. The author also discusses the prospect that new developments in Iraq's power structure will bring about new significant changes at the regional level and is indeed a turning point for redefining the regional security, political, cultural and economic systems. The author argues, diminishing some of the current challenges in the region, requires considering issues such as withdrawing of the traditional theory of the Balance of Power, redefining the nations' interactions based on mutual respect and confidence-building, establishing proportionate economic relations with all Iraq's neighbors and shaping a new kind of political-strategic cooperation. In addition, by introducing the characteristics of "a balanced Iraq", the author maintains that the political-security nature of the regional system requires all involved sides in Iraq's politics to cooperate for establishing security and stability in the country. Put differently, Iraq's weakness in the long-term would not be in the benefit of the region. Furthermore, the author observes that a many of Iraq's existing political-security challenges emanates from the presence of foreign occupation forces. These forces not only intensify the current political-ethnic rivalry (Shiite-Sunni) and act as a pretext for terrorist activities, but also provide the grounds for further splits and distrust amongst the governments and nations of the region.

Discussion

I. Controversies and Realities Emerging from War in Iraq and Regional Implications

Conducting the three-year long war in Iraq has disclosed some of the country's covert challenges and realities and their impact on the region's politics including:

A. Declining of the great power's status among the nations and governments of the region;

One of the most immediate effects of the Iraq war is decline of the US status and influence among the nations and governments of the region. The war ramifications such as the eruption of insecurity and instability, extension of ethnic-religious rivalry, and an uncertain outlook of prosperity and progress generally, have changed mass perceptions of US role and intentions. The general public perception and expectation toward the US role were at the start of the war often focused on changing the political-economic conditions and providing of a better daily life. From the masses standpoint, therefore, not only has the US presence changed the situations, but provided excuses for the extremist and violent movements, which lead to the current insecurity and chaos. As a result, public hatred toward the US attitude is growing sharply.

In addition, the US failure in controlling the crisis has weakened its position in the sight of regional governments. At the same time it undermined these governments' legitimacy before the public. As expressed in many occasions, the regional governments are nowadays extremely concerned of the US long-term presence in the region whereas such a policy anyway requires an amount of cooperation with the US as well; a reality that could lead to their illegitimacy. As the foremost excuse, for instance, Al-Qaeda has always based their opposition to regional regimes such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, etc., on their political, security and economic dependency on the United States. It is their sacred duty to overthrow this kind client regime in the region. Further, the US new strategy of the Great Middle East Initiative Plan which provides some grounds for democratization, interactions among NGOs and nations, etc., will weaken these pillars of state power and cause question about regime legitimacy; a policy that will obviously not be to the benefit of regional governments. Finally, the US presence intensifies conflict in the regional governments' relations. One vivid manifestation of this is the positions taken by Arab leaders like King Abdollah of Jordan on the emergence of the "Shiite Crescent" or that of Hosni Mubarak who recently expressed

concerns that "the Shiites of the region are more sympathetic to Iran than their countries." Indisputably, expressing such issues is the result of the existing misperceptions and fears towards Iran's role and natural influence in Iraq and further the outlook of witnessing the Shiite factions placing at the top of Iraq's politics and its implications to the entire region.

B. Paradoxes of simultaneous democratization and securitization;

Conducting the Iraq war has disclosed the divergence between fostering democracy and establishing security in the country and the region. As of the reason, the US democratization rhetoric has not been welcomed by the nations and governments of the region is its simultaneous contradiction with establishing security. As the result of foreign powers' self-interested role such as creating artificial national boundaries, supporting of client governments, shaping coups, etc., the two processes of democratization and securitization are deviated in the region. Put differently, they can not be put in one context at once: Democratization and an increase of nations' role will result in growing political expectations and ironically at last in insecurity. Insecurity is itself a major obstacle to fostering democratization. Iraq's political developments are a vivid example. The prime principle of democratization is majority rule, which in Iraq means the rule of Shiite factions who are the dominant majority (60%). But for the sake of security and stability, the US policy is currently focused on establishing a "Political Consensus", rather than the majority rule as a consequence of general elections.

For the Iraqis or other regional nations, it is hard today to believe that the US entered Iraq for the sake of democratization or other solely humanitarian purposes. For many years, the US acted to preserve regional stability at the cost of democratization. Indeed, no genuine change has yet been achieved. It is still a self-interested strategy: Endorsing democratization for establishing security and thereby safeguarding the world peace or better to say US security. What is security for great powers is at the same time insecurity for the regional countries. In fact, because of the historical distrust and lack of common language, it no longer makes sense for regional governments to support such policies.

C. Empowerment or weakness of central government's power and political-ethnic rivalry;

Indisputably, Iraq's current power vacuum has intensified political expectations within the ethnic-religious factions. For a long time, the presence of a dominant Sunni majority was the foundation of Iraq's power and politics. For the first time, other factions like the Shias and Kurds due to their substantial characteristics and potentials such as separate territories and

large population, etc., are seeking for their adequate share in the power division. In this respect, the controversy between various factions for acquiring further share in the power vacuum circumstance is a major challenge of Iraq's state-building process. The profound concern in this process is that any disagreement and political impasses- the fact that is being currently demonstrated in electing Iraq's premier- will lead to providing of an excuse in hands of terrorist and violent groups. The substantial challenge is therefore here: Without a powerful central government to be able to extend its power and control in entire Iraq, which means the lessening of the political factions' strength in the long term, no appropriate security can be realized. No doubt, as of the reason made Iraq integrated for long years, was the existence of a central powerful and military government, which was able to extend its control all along the country.

D. The prominence of ideology and religion in the region's power and politics;

As the past three-year developments demonstrate, there is a deep-rooted association between religion and ideological thoughts and the region's politics. As the case of Iraq substantiated, the traditional-religious segments have the real power and influence in the Islamic societies. Therefore any attempt in order to de-ideologizing and weakening of religion by injecting the principles of western democracy within the religious masses will lead to misperceptions and a failure of understanding of regional nations' demands and expectations. Pursuing these kind policies will neither lead to creation of a common discourse among the masses, nor result in finding receptive audiences. As of vivid manifestations are the role and policies played by Iraqi religious leadership such as Grand Ayatollah Sistani and Moqtada Al Sader in bringing masses in streets thereby expressing and realizing their followers wills. Ratification of Iraq's Constitution is indeed in contradiction with the US earlier expectations and understandings of Iraq's politics while at the beginning the US policies was focused on bringing secular leadership and governments no matter Shiite or Sunni. It was because of the masses resistance and the supportive role of religious leaders that the US was step by step forced to accept the existing realities of Iraq's politics. As such, political development in Iraq is a turning point in the revival of the religion's role in another Islamic society (after Iran). This will inevitably have effects on other regional nations.

E. Power vacuum and conflict of interests among regional and global players;

Iraq's power vacuum has made the country's political scene a place of conflict between regional and global powers with its inevitable consequences for regional peace and security.

As the experience of Afghanistan showed, any power vacuum or condition of “failed state” is essentially a ground for chaos not only domestically but regionally and internationally; This was best demonstrated in the Taliban case. The power vacuum and regional rivalry among regional countries provided the grounds for shaping, organizing, training and operating of Al-Qaeda terrorism, which endangered the entire globe. Iraq’s political scene has also been the grounds for erupting tension at various domestic, regional and international levels. Domestically, the principle challenges stem from the differing Shiite, Sunni and Kurds factions standpoints over who will rule the country on the one side, and the inner-group rivalries to fulfill the power vacuum on the other. Regionally, the rivalries are notably among the regional powers and players and focused on the extension of influence and role in the new Iraq. Two kinds of such rivalries can be identified here: first; between the IR of Iran and the Arab world, which has a new ground of tension and contest between the two sides; something has already been shown by players like Saudi Arabia, Egypt or Jordan in expressing their concerns on Iran’s expansion of role in Iraq. Second, is the rivalry inside the Arab world, which emanates from the conflicting views toward dealing with the current Iraq and its leadership. For instance, the views of Syria and Saudi Arabia are different here. And finally at the international level, there is a rivalry going on between great powers like the US and UK and other European players such as Germany and France to how to conduct the war on terror on the one side and other powers like China and Russia who would not like to lose their influence in the region on the other. Besides, there is a conflicting interest in expanding role between regional power like Iran and a global power like the US; something that can be best explained as of a new ground of broadening enmity in the two sides’ relations.

II. Iraq’s Challenges of State/Nation Building Process and the Outlook of Regional Peace and Security

Although the new Iraq is no longer a military threat as the past, it still in various aspects contains the potentials to direct some new challenges towards the region. One of the most significant issues at present is institutionalizing of the Constitution and enhancing the permanent government. No doubt, political stalemate will best provide the base for violent factions and terrorist activities which are meant to show the failure and inability of any Iraqi government. As such, it is in the interest of all internal, regional and international sides to work together in order to find a way out of current political impasse. Insecurity in Iraq is not in benefit of anyone. Weakness of Iraq is not in interest of regional peace and security. Due to the complexities of Iraq’s politics and its relations with each neighboring countries, resolving

the Iraqi crisis without considering the role and interests of its neighbors is almost unfeasible. One of the main roots of extending Iraq's crisis is the ignorance of the US policy in benefiting from the role of the regional influential powers like IRI and Syria. At present, Iraq's main challenges ahead include:

- A. Challenges of establishing security and stability and efficiency of the future government;
- B. Challenges of creating balance in the power division and domestic politics;
- C. Challenges of proceeding and institutionalizing the Constitution and the principles like conducting federalism and distributing sources of wealth;
- D. Challenge of establishing political sovereignty and withdrawing of the foreign occupation forces.

Given the war's consequent effects, for the sake of the region this author believes all involved sides in Iraq's politics should consider some observations including:

A. *Making consensus*; no doubt, the majority rule is the foremost substance of any democratic move. As regards Iraq, the right of Shiite factions in establishing government must thus be accepted as a concrete reality of the Iraqi society. But, for the sake of conserving security as the prerequisite of Iraq's transformation, making consensus is imperative at the first stage. In fact, due to the Baathist regime's suppressing policies, it gets some time the culture of tolerance and bearing each other's role take root in Iraq. As appeared in the last couple of months (something best shown in electing Iraq's premier), without any political consensus among the differing political factions to how to run the country and regulate Iraq's politics and its regional and international relations, there would indeed be no successful security plan achieved as the main requirement of the state/nation-building process.

B. *Redefining the role of Shiites' factions in Iraq's politics*; for a long time, the suppressive policies of the Baathist regime and the hegemony of Sunni minority marginalized the role of Shiite factions in Iraq's politics. This conventional setting can no longer be accepted by neither the Shiites factions nor by the regional countries like Iran. With the Shiites rising extensively in the region's power structure, it is thus to the benefit of the region's politics that Iraq's power base to be redefined appropriately and according to the realities of present political developments.

C. Placing a balanced government; comprising of all political-ethnic factions leading to a moderate definition of national goals and interests. Having considered, various factions naturally express their own specific interests in regulating relations with the neighboring countries, i.e. Shiites with Iran, Sunni with the Arab world, and Kurds with others, therefore, the new Iraq will no longer propose military threats and extremist policies alike the past years. As such, all countries must work hard to help Iraq's state/nation-building process smooth and according to the realities of the region's politics. Undoubtedly, the existence of a balanced Iraq along with a moderate sustainable policy based on the region's political-cultural realities is in interest of regional and international peace and security.

D. Establishing appropriate economic and political interactions with all neighboring countries; which will make all neighboring states more involved in the Iraq's politics thereby more interactions. Traditionally Iraq's economic and political exchanges were oriented to the Arab world, Turkey in the north and the Soviet Bloc countries. In the new circumstances, orienting to the eastern areas and Iran as well due to the long borders and cultural-societal commonalities could play a major role for increasing economic and political exchanges thereby narrowing the gap with other regional nations. The more diverse exchanges with the neighboring countries, the further mutual interactions leading to keep an appropriate level of political-security relations.

E. Withdrawing from the traditional equation of the Balance of Power; under the existing circumstances, and with having Iran and Iraq as not of one another's permanent and strategic rivals for the first time, there would be no need of going through with the conventional security-political agreements as: Region's security is preserved while the two countries balance each other's power. This setting is, in essence, no longer according to the regional realities. This author holds the roots of previous animosities were first and foremost caused by the role of foreign intervening powers. In the new circumstances, no new regional security arrangements will in reality be successful with an exclusion of the two countries. One should be cautious that the new Iraq could be again a field of divide between Iran and the Arab world. Indisputably, approaching Iran and the Arab world's differing understandings of security- with Iraq, as a part- is one of the main challenges of the region's politics. As such, the new Iraq could be both a point of convergence or divergence between the two sides. Any effort to make a new sense of pursuing this inappropriate strategy by regional and global players will broaden the existing feeling of distrust and will so contradict with the region's long-term security and order.