



**Pugwash Workshop on  
*The Prospects for Iraq***

11-13 May 2007, Erbil, Iraq

**Report  
*by Saideh Lotfian***

**Introduction**

Pugwash convened an international workshop on Iraq's crisis of instability in Erbil, the northern Iraqi capital of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), from 11 to 13 May 2007, and gathered participants from Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States. The twin objectives of the meeting were a) to gain insight into the root causes of the Iraqi conflict situation; and b) to find ways to deal with the sectarian violence and other types of conflicts in order to help the de-escalation of the crisis. The Iraqis were prominently represented by a group of diplomats, academicians, members of Iraqi Council of Representatives, members of Iraqi Cabinet, members of Iraqi Minorities Council, members of the KRG's Council of Ministers, members of Mosul Governate, a representative of the influential Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, and other senior government officials. Regrettably, the invited Sunni politicians from Baghdad did not attend the workshop in Erbil. At the conclusion of the workshop Dr. Paolo Cotta Ramusino, the Secretary General of Pugwash decided to travel to Baghdad to talk with some of them.

**The Causes of the Iraq's Sectarian Violence**

The first topic of the discussions was the nature and the causes of the sectarian violence in Iraq. The participants expressed two different views:

1. Some Iraqi participants emphasized the external factors which create and inflame this kind of clashes in Iraq. They argued that the sectarian violence is a new phenomenon in Iraq, which is a multiethnic and multi-linguistic society composed of Arab, Kurdish, Assyrian, Turkman ethnic groups as well as Shiite Muslim, Sunni Muslim and Christian

religious groups. These different ethnic and religious communities of Iraq had coexisted peacefully. Of course, there were enmity and even armed conflicts among the rival Iraqi groups, and the totalitarian regimes in Baghdad had used violent means to repress the ethnic and religious minorities like the Kurds and the Shiites. After the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, Al-Qaeda operatives penetrated Iraq and used violent tactics to destabilize the country. The foreign members of this terror organization have been supported by Saddam Hussein's intelligence agents and the Baathists<sup>[1]</sup> as well as some neighboring countries who want to disrupt the process of political development in the country. A number of Iraqi participants claimed that the presence of the foreign forces is one of the reasons why the Iraqi people cannot live in peace. It was noted that there are more than 90 intelligence and security agencies operating in Iraq today, and each has its own agenda. The foreigners create and feed the violence.

2. Another group of Iraqis maintained that the continuing fighting between the religious and ethnic factions in Iraq is caused by two sets of domestic factors: a) the religious and ethnic persecution of Shiites, the Kurds and other ethnic minorities by the old regime; and b) the post-war de-Baathification and the dissolution of Iraqi army which resulted in the removal of Saddam's loyalists and Baath Party members in the Iraqi military and government establishment. An Iraqi participant classified the Baathists into three distinct groups: The first and the largest group is composed of 70% of the Baath Party members who were forced to declare themselves Baathists to be able to survive under the old regime. The second group is made of the ideological Baathists who believe in the ideology of the Baath Party. Finally, the last and the smallest group of Baathists belongs to the criminals who should be punished for assisting the former President in committing his crimes against the Iraqi people. They are accused of being involved in the large-scale killings of civilians during the 1988 Anfal campaign against the Kurds which included the use of chemical weapons against innocent Iraqis, and the oppression of the Shiites in south-central Iraq. In Iraq today, these former hard-core Baathists and supporters of the Saddam's regime are ready to do everything in their power to eradicate every one who comes in their way. They are sabotaging the Iraqi government's efforts to stabilize the country.

However, the conclusion was that the occurrence of violence in Iraq cannot be blamed only on the domestic factors. The extremist Baath sympathizers have introduced Al-Qaeda terrorists to the Iraqi theatre. The foreign agents are recruited outside Iraq and then sent to commit acts of terrorism inside the country.

### **Reconciliation and other Constructive Measures to Confront the Violence**

Since the beginning of the Iraq war in March 2003, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have died and millions of Iraqis have been displaced as a consequence of this violence. The security situation has deteriorated drastically. Every one agreed that there is a need to find a way to end the killing of innocent civilians. To remove causes of violence, the participants suggested the following measures:

1. Encourage all communities to solve their problems through dialogue not fighting. The solution should come from inside Iraq by the Iraqis.
2. Condemn all suicide bombings and other acts of violence. An Iraqi participant pointed out that a major contributing factor of instability is the ambiguous attitude of some Iraqi officials who denounce these acts in public but in reality are in favor of such atrocious deeds.[\[2\]](#) It was pointed out that the religious authorities must publicly and strongly condemn these acts of terrorism. When Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian-born Sunni militant with close links to Osama Bin Laden's al-Qaeda network was killed in a U.S. raid, some Islamists in Jordan and Egypt called him a martyr. His policy of targeting Shiites and the Shiite holy sites was part of his overall strategy of inciting sectarian violence as a means of undermining the US military presence in Iraq and Afghanistan. Strong denunciation of terrorist acts by Iraqi religious authorities can prevent the escalation of this conflict to a civil war.
3. Encourage the participation of all legitimate factions in the Iraqi government. Every single Iraqi has a right to have a say in the government and enjoy full rights. Some Iraqis think that they are marginalized and are powerless within the existing system. A participant who argued in favor of Iraqi national unity warned that the situation should not be treated as a zero-sum game. "Together, everyone achieves more. Alone, every one loses" was his slogan.

4. Start an intensified campaign by the government to inform the people of the true meaning of federalism. As one participant pointed out the average Iraqi believe that federalism divides their country, and is only beneficial for a minority. The Iraqi politicians should correct this misunderstanding. Not surprisingly, the Iraqi Kurdish participants spoke in favor of federalism and argued that every nationality in every region should be given local autonomy and regional independence. Kurds, Christians, Assyrians, Caldonians and all Muslim sects should be able to fully enjoy their ethnic and religious rights.
5. Reunite the people by a carefully-managed process of reconciliation. There has been a dangerous tendency to accuse all the Baathists or the former government officials as the supporters of the old regime. Several participants made a distinction between the segments of Saddam's regime (e.g., *Mokhaberat*, the Republican Guards) who were paid to be killers and the Baathists who were not part of this "killing machine". These people should be given a chance to apologize for their shares in the crimes committed by the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein in order to be incorporated into the Iraqi society.
6. Single out the criminal gangs who are terrorizing the population. Some warring factions in the Iraqi streets are criminals and have criminal intentions. Saddam Hussein had encouraged organized crimes. Now, the difficult task is to distinguish between the acts of violence committed by these criminal elements and the destabilizing acts committed by the insurgents or terrorist groups with political goals. To facilitate law enforcement, the weapons which are in the hands of the people should be collected. The Iraqi government should devise a plan to collect these weapons. For example, the Baghdad government can announce its plan to purchase the weapons from the people who own them.

### **The Oil Issue and the Distribution of Resources**

Next, the discussions were focused on the issue of the distribution of the oil wealth which is vital for Iraq because of its heavy dependency on its oil revenues. An Iraqi government official said that "we are in the process of having an oil-gas sharing formula to benefit all Iraqis." It was stated that the Hydrocarbon Law and the equitable distribution of the oil income were among the subjects of intensive debates in the cabinet. In addition to this law, there are two other laws drafted by the Energy Council. One of which is a draft law for the Iraqi National Oil Company (INOC) conforming to the Iraqi National Commercial Law. The fourth law about the revenue

sharing specifies that the revenues should go to the federal government and then distributed among Iraq's regional governments and oil-producing provinces equitably. Federal Ministry of Finance is used as a means to distribute the revenues. All previous contracts are being reviewed to see if they conform to the Hydrocarbon Law. There is a plan to establish a Federal Council on Oil and Gas headed by Iraq's Prime Minister with representatives from all provinces with over 100,000 bpd oil production and representatives of some federal agencies. The Iraqi official added: "it is being said that the purpose of the U.S. occupation is oil, and it follows that these laws are written to safeguard the American interest. This is not true. Iraq is an independent country and can make its own laws." Another Iraqi participant took a stance against this assertion by claiming that "this may be true but Iraq is losing some control over its oil resources because of the practice of sub-contracting." In sum, there were two arguments: a) Iraq does not need any foreign investment in its oil and gas sector, because it has capital and the know-how. Therefore, no contract with foreigners should be allowed in the Hydrocarbon Law. And b) Iraq needs foreign investment to develop its energy sector. An Iraqi participant suggested the adoption of a middle-ground formula under which the Iraq National Oil Company (INOC) should have more than 50% of the assets and capital investments in any oil contracts.

Several Iraqis warned that the problem of Kirkuk cannot be ignored. It was noted that there is a debate between the Iraqi Prime Minister and the Regional Government of Kurdistan of Iraq (RGKI) to find a solution for Kirkuk and other oil-related problems. Most participants supported the Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution which mandates a referendum on whether the oil-rich Kirkuk province should become part of Iraqi Kurdistan. Saddam's "Arabization" policy led to the displacement of tens of thousands of the non-Arab native population who were expelled from their homes in Kirkuk and other areas to make room for loyal Arabs. This policy had caused conflict among the Arab and the non-Arabs inhabitants of this region.

### **The Status of the Foreign Forces in Iraq**

Another major topic in this workshop was the need for reaching an agreement on the status of the foreign forces in Iraq. A number of questions were raised here: What is the best exit strategy, a quick withdrawal, or a step-by-step withdrawal corresponding to the expansion of Iraqi national

military institutions? Could the Iraqi national army be the sole party responsible for the Iraqi security? What are the dangers of the immediate withdrawal of all foreign forces?

The Iraqi argued that they should look for a timetable for the withdrawal of foreign troops in such a way which will not lead to more instability. There were different views expressed about the function of the multinational forces (MNF). Some believe that the MNF are more engaged in protecting themselves than the Iraqi population. Another view was that the foreign forces are involved in intelligence gathering operations against the terrorist groups in the region. Some Iraqis consider the MNF as the liberators and the guardians of the Iraqi people, while others view the MNF as the invaders and the occupiers who have caused Iraqi instability. Whatever the case may be, most participants agreed that the MNF should be withdrawn from Iraq, and Iraqi national army should assume the responsibility of maintaining law and order in the country. An Iraqi politician said that Iraqis want the foreign forces to go back safely to their own countries. Although the Iraqi people express gratitude to these forces but they are determined to protect themselves without any dependence on the foreigners.

An Iranian participant argued that the Bush Administration is under pressure to withdraw its forces from Iraq and is looking for an exit strategy from the unpopular military occupation. The arrest of five Iranian diplomats in Erbil by the American forces is the evidence of the misguided policy of the U.S. This action was a violation of the sovereignty of the Iraqi government and the KRGI. Another criticism related to the notion of the 'Responsibility to Protect' because the U.S. is failing to meet its obligation to protect the Iraqi population. On the one hand, if the Americans follow their present policy, they have to confront a Vietnam-like situation in Iraq. If, on the other hand, the U.S. withdraws its forces rapidly, the probability of more Iraqi instability with repercussions for the entire region will be high. These forces will be needed to curb the sectarian violence and prevent a widespread and indiscriminate massacre of Iraqi civilians. An Iraqi official argued that there is a need for two timetables: a) One for the withdrawal of the foreign forces and b) a corresponding timetable for training and equipping a national army for Iraq to replace the foreign troops.

## **The Role of the Neighboring Countries**

The Iraqi participants called on the neighboring countries to help Iraq in the stabilization process. The role of the Arab intellectuals and Arab media is important, because the Arab intellectuals through Arab media could discuss the danger of terrorism. The masses should understand the distinction between the resistance against the occupation and the terrorism and criminality.

An Iraqi parliamentarian said that Turkey's cross-border incursions in northern Iraq to attack Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) bases on the pretext of combating these Kurdish separatist guerrillas are unacceptable to the Iraqis. He claimed that the Turkish government has been using the issue of the PKK as an excuse to intervene in Iraqi politics. The PKK is an internal problem, and cannot be solved militarily on Iraqi soil. He added that the uncertain status of Kirkuk is the second pretext of Turkish interventionist policy. Ankara fears that Kurdish control of Kirkuk would give the Iraqi Kurds the economic power to win independence in case of Iraq's disintegration. The creation of an autonomous Kurdistan is viewed as a serious security challenge for Turkey because of the aspirations of its own Kurdish minority. The Iraqi Shiite and Kurdish participants were critical of the 2006 conference in Istanbul in which the Turkish government had invited only Iraq's Sunni politicians and intellectuals along with participants from Sunni-dominated countries like Qatar, Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan, Algeria, and Morocco. Some neighboring states are afraid that a Shiite-dominated Iraq might influence their repressed Shiite or Kurdish population. Another point related to the Kurds is the fact that they enjoy the benefits of federalism, but Turkey does not want to see an empowerment of the Kurds in Iraq. A Kurdish participant ask: "Why does not Turkey talk about millions of Kurds living in Turkey or the large number of Arabs residing in Turkey? Should these minorities in Turkey join Iraq? Should Iraq intervene in Turkish internal affairs using the ploy of wanting to ensure the rights of these minority groups?" However, he was quick to draw attention to the flourishing and mutually beneficial economic and trade ties between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds in spite of these conflicts of interest.

As to the other countries with common borders with Iraq, a few Iraqis expressed their hope that their government finds a way to encourage Iran and Syria to talk with the U.S because this will solve some Iraqi security problems. It was declared that the U.S. and Iran have common interest

in Iraq. They both want to support the elected government of Iraq, and safeguard the independence and territorial integrity of Iraq. Both sides have assured the Iraqi government that they do not want Iraq to be their battleground. Another participant stated that Jordan was opposed to the invasion of Iraq for the purpose of the regime change. The Americans should have assassinated Saddam Hussein rather than invading and occupying the country. Civil society in Iraq and in the neighboring countries should establish closer ties.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, it was noted that there are groups in Iraq who feel that they are marginalized and are not given an equal share in the decision making process. The important questions for the Iraqi government are: What can be done to ensure that the discontented groups have equal shares of economic resources and political power? How should the constitution be amended to facilitate national unity? An Iraqi participant noted that the constitution was voted by 80% of the people, but most of the Sunni Muslims who are now calling for the amendments of the constitution, did not vote for it. He agreed that there is a need for consensus-building in the process of constitutional amendments. Some one suggested that the Kurds and the Shiites should give up some of their privileges in order to facilitate the search for a viable solution. At any rate, the Iraqis should respect the principles of democracy and the rule of law. The minorities should accept the majority view. Another conclusion dealt with economic injustice and economic corruption. There is a need for a mechanism for equitable distribution of oil and other national resources such as water.

It was also recommended the government in Baghdad to monitor the involvement and the interference of the neighboring countries in the internal affairs of Iraq. Open borders of Iraq have allowed terrorist groups to enter Iraqi territory with ease. Furthermore, foreign governments can transfer weapons and funds to the Al-Qaeda terrorists and other militia groups in Iraq across the porous borders. The workshop participants concluded that the neighboring countries can greatly contribute to the stability of Iraq, and emphasized that politicians and scholars from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria and the other major regional states should be invited to the future Pugwash workshops on Iraq.



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[1] The Baath Party came to power in 1963 in Iraq, and was the ruling political party under Saddam Hussein's regime.

[2] Several Iraqi participants condemned the Al-Qaeda terror organization for its role in the sectarian attacks against the Shiite pilgrims and the bombings of the Shiite holy sites in Iraq. They noted the 2003 Karbala suicide bombings, the 2004 Ashura massacre in Karbala, and the 2006 bombing of the Al-Askari Shrine in Samarra which had resulted in the loss of life and material damages to some of the most important Shiite mosques.

## List of Participants

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### Iraqi Participants

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Mr. Salar **Ali**, Deputy Minister of Culture, Iraq

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Mr. Nasser **Al-Rubaey**

Dr. Athem **Alsabti**, Professor of Physics and Astronomy at the University of London Observatory / University College London; International Relations Officer for the Iraqi Academy of Science

Prof. Hussain **Al-Shahristani**, Minister of Oil, Republic of Iraq, Baghdad [formerly: Chairman of Standing Committee, Iraqi National Academy of Sciences; Visiting Professor, University of Surrey]

Mr. Sherzad A. **Ameen (al-Najjar)**, Higher Education Advisor to Prime Minister, Kurdistan Region Government, Erbil, Iraq; Ass. Professor Political Science, College of Political Science, University of Salahaddin, Erbil, KRG, Iraq

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