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Research Paper

The Occupation Project and the Democratic National State Project

Iraq, From Security to Political Management

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Abstract:

The American assessment of the situation of Iraq is forcibly limited due to its main concern with security issues as part of an Empire global strategy, instead of viewing such matters as part and parcel of a broad political reality relating to the local arena. This sort of assessment lasted for the whole course of the occupation; but with the withdrawal of the US troops, it appears vital that the Iraqi political elite adopts an independent vision that asserts the political and juridical nature of the issues at hand and revises them from that perspective, while keeping the security question as a mere facet of the political issues requiring a comprehensive treatment.

We shall begin with an assessment of the years of US occupation in Iraq, focusing on its repercussions, explicating its outcomes, and exploring the horizons of political evolution in this country after its ridding of dictatorship and foreign occupation.

Unlike other studies that dealt with the Iraqi issue from the perspective of its regional ramifications and repercussions, we have attempted, as much as possible, not to discuss the questions of Iranian and Saudi influences, or Sunni-Shi'a regional competition, limiting the analysis to the manner in which "regime change", "state-building", and democratization were approached in US assessments of the Iraqi situation, while comparing them with the Arab conception of the same notions. We have linked all these issues to the quantitative and qualitative data of the occupation, the political and juridical structure of the troop withdrawal agreement, and the threats emanating from power vacuum and erroneous interpretations of the Iraqi situation.

Introduction

The security concern dominates most US assessments of the Iraqi situation. A quick review of the publications of American research centers and presses regarding Iraq is sufficient to convince us that security is the paramount question in the American assessment; studies and funding are dedicated to this dimension, and even educational curricula are dominated by it!¹ No wonder!

¹ For example, see the educational programs listed below, it shall be noticed that the study of "Iraq" mainly involves a focus on military and security issues. Political and economic development, on the other hand, do not appear to be a first-rate interest for the Americans. It should also be noted that the security theme has been intensely debated in terms of its relevance to Middle East studies in US universities since September 11, 2001, as part of the raging debate at the time. Accusations were made against teachers in the field, emanating from the "conservative camp" and the "friends" of George W. Bush, for neglecting priorities despite the funding they receive from the federal government, and for failing to warn of the threats of Islamic terrorism, as well as presenting the Arab-Israeli conflict to their students and readers from a "" "biased" perspective that condemns Israel alone and makes it solely responsible for the violence. We shall return to this subject in a separate study on the role of universities and think tanks and their funding resources in the political decision-making process. However, concerning Iraq in education, see, for examples:

Teaching with the News, The Lessons of Iraq : http://www.choices.edu/resources/twtn_iraq_lessons.php

Academic Module: War of Necessity, War of Choice: <http://www.cfr.org/iraq/academic-module-war-necessity-war-choice/p20633>

Teaching the Iraq War: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/teachers/iraq/index.html>

When the military troops of any country are engaged in war abroad, the security issue would understandably occupy the first place on the agenda, even if the broad objectives surpassed the mere preservation of security and stability to deeper changes touching on the political, economic, and legal structure of the country in question, as is the case with Iraq.

In reality, the withdrawal of military forces did not withhold the continuation of US involvement in “social engineering” in Iraq in the post-Saddam phase, and the US supervision of the political and economic activities in the country through the office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR), which has replaced the office of the Inspector General for the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA-IG). The SIGIR office was founded² after the abolishing of the Coalition Provisional Authority on June 28 2004 and the passing of law 108-106 by the US Congress establishing the office, which falls under the joint authority of the US State and Defense Departments, to whom it presents its reports on Iraq in addition to the Justice Department and the Congress. Therefore, Iraqi sovereignty, under these conditions, cannot be viewed outside of this general frame of dependence vis-à-vis the United States, unless the US withdrawal from Iraq also meant the halting of the SIGIR office’s function, which was not directly mentioned by Inspector General Stuart W. Bowen Jr. in his 28th quarterly report to Congress and the State and Defense Departments.

Between security-military concepts and “social engineering”

After seven years of occupation, 50,000 US troops departed Iraq in late August 2010 having reached the end of their mission. As the national security strategy of President Obama states: “in Iraq, we are transitioning to full Iraqi sovereignty and responsibility – a process that includes the removal of our troops, the strengthening of our civilian capacity, and a long-term partnership to the Iraqi government and people.”³

According to a May 27, 2010 White House press statement, “The troop drawdown does not mean disengagement but transformation of our bilateral relationship towards greater civilian cooperation and a focus on capacity building.”⁴ This is probably the explanation of Inspector

² See the functions of the SIGIR office on the following link:

<http://www.sigir.mil/about/index.html>

³ 2010 National Security Strategy, the White House:

National Security Strategy (NSS) 2010. The White House : http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/rss_viewer/national_security_strategy.pdf

⁴ “Advancing Our Interests: Actions in Support of the President’s National Security Strategy”. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, May 27, 2010: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/advancing-our-interests-actions-support-presidents-national-security-strategy>

For this reason, the 2010 report on National Security Strategy states the following: “We will continue to train, equip, and advise Iraqi Security Forces; conduct targeted counterterrorism missions; and protect ongoing civilian and military efforts in Iraq. And, consistent with our commitments to the Iraqi Government, including the U.S.-Iraq Security Agreement, we will remove all of our troops from Iraq by the end of 2011.”

General Bowen in his introduction to the aforementioned quarterly report; he linked the full withdrawal of US forces from Iraq, which is to be completed by December 31 2011 to “a series of transformations in Iraq that will have a large impact on the nature of the United States’ mission”. These transformations include the following:

- Ending the work of the former provincial reconstruction teams, and the transfer of their reconstruction responsibilities to the consulates in Erbil and Basra, and to the temporary offices in Mosul and Kirkuk.
- The transfer of the responsibility for training the Iraqi Police from the military force to the State Department
- The opening of a new Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq to manage most aspects of the continuing U.S. military assistance program.⁵

Also noteworthy was the comment by the Inspector General towards the end of his foreword to the quarterly report: “Although the last troops may withdraw from Iraq in December 2011, the Department of State will still maintain a significant reconstruction presence there for years to come, requiring sustained oversight and engagement to watch over what remains of the \$58 billion U.S. reconstruction program.”⁶

The scheduled military withdrawal is accompanied by an assessment process concerned with its effects on Iraq; it is noticeable that the focus here remained on the security issue. The examples that we could cite in this regard are numerous: The American Enterprise Institute (AEI), which is considered as a bastion for neo-conservatives, has issued successive reports on the threats awaiting Iraq after the withdrawal of the US forces. Frederick W. Kagan wrote warning against “abandoning Iraq at the end of 2011”, and affirming that “Iraqi Security Forces will not be able to defend Iraq’s sovereignty, maintain its independence from Iran, or ensure Iraq’s internal stability without American assistance.”⁷

In another paper, Kagan sustains that Iraq’s modern history is proof enough that the country is fated to sectarian conflicts and civil wars, neglecting to add that this same history is also one of foreign powers’ interventions and struggles for oil. More seriously, the author – who has great influence over conservatives – believes that “America’s business in Iraq is still unfinished”, and that US assistance “needs to be conditioned on Iraqis doing the things that the United States

⁵ Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, Quarterly Report and Semiannual Report to the United States Congress, January 30, 2011

[http://www.sigir.mil/files/quarterlyreports/January2011/Report - January 2011.pdf](http://www.sigir.mil/files/quarterlyreports/January2011/Report_-_January_2011.pdf)

⁶ Letter from the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, Ibid

⁷ Frederick W. Kagan, “Iraq Threat Assessment: The Dangers to the United States, Iraq, and Mideast Stability of Abandoning Iraq at the End of 2011.” AEI. May 2011: <http://www.aei.org/paper/100223>

needs them to do”⁸. In the same context, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP) organized a discussion forum in June 2011 on the subject of “the Iraqi Security Forces”.⁹ Similarly, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs organized a number of gatherings under the title “Iraqi Horizons”, and the prevalence of the security dimension over the three lectures (that took place between early 2011 and until the writing of these lines) was obvious.¹⁰ We also found that the same approach predominated the meeting organized by the Stimson Institute on “the future of US-Iraqi relations”.¹¹

If you searched, for instance, the website of the Heritage Foundation (doubtlessly one of the leading conservative think tanks) for “Iraq and Democracy”, you might find – as I did – a single entry dating from 2005: a lecture former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice performed at the foundation.¹² The same applies to the query “economic reform”, where a single result was returned: a roundtable discussion organized on the subject in June 2003 (two months after the occupation).¹³

However, when entering the term “Iraq war” in the search engine, you would receive a massive amount of events and reports and publications covering the period until today.¹⁴

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) treated the question of democracy in a 2004 paper on “anti-Americanism in Iraq” as an “obstacle to democracy”¹⁵, but this took place within an “international security program” with the short paper in question (nine pages) stating that the democratic system can survive only if the Iraqis were convinced to meet three challenges, “restoring security, preserving national unity, and identifying a suitable role for Islam in public life.”

In the same year, CSIS expert Anthony H. Cordesman wrote a paper entitled “One Year On: Nation-Building in Iraq”; his interests were also focused on matters such as: the battle to win the hearts and minds of the Iraqis (for the Americans, of course), and the opposition (to the

⁸ Frederick W. Kagan, "Unfinished Business: An American Strategy for Iraq Moving Forward." AEI. December 2010: <http://www.aei.org/paper/100161>

⁹ The Iraqi Security Forces: A Status Report. Featuring Michael Knights, Lachlyn Soper, Andrew Lembke, and Barak Salmoni. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC07.php?CID=582>

¹⁰ Perspectives on Iraq: http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/files/Event/FY11_Events/Iraq_Perspectives.aspx

¹¹ The Future of US-Iraq Relations, May 17, 2010: <http://www.stimson.org/events/the-future-of-us-iraq-relations-1/>

¹² Iraq and Democracy in the Middle East, Dec 13, 2005:

<http://www.heritage.org/Events/2005/12/Iraq-and-Democracy-in-the-Middle-East?query=Iraq+and+Democracy+in+the+Middle+East>

¹³ Iraq Economic Reform: Lessons Learned from Central Europe and Eurasia, Jun 11, 2003:

<http://www.heritage.org/Events/2003/06/Iraq-Economic-Reform-Lessons-Learned-from-Central-Europe-and-Eurasia?query=Iraq+Economic+Reform:+Lessons+Learned+from+Central+Europe+and+Eurasia>

¹⁴ <http://www.heritage.org/Issues/International-Conflicts/Iraq-War?query=Iraq+War>

¹⁵ Ben Rowswell and Bathsheba Crocker, "Anti-Americanism in Iraq: An Obstacle to Democracy?", Jan 16, 2004. <http://csis.org/publication/anti-americanism-iraq-obstacle-democracy>

Americans) in the Sunni triangle and among the Shi`a, the military leadership and the security issue and the concerned Ministries, the insurgency and the ethnic positions, and so forth.¹⁶

These are important questions, of course, but their presentation and treatment are intimately linked to the occupation, to the point where even what is referred to as “Nation-building” is approached from the perspective of the occupation as well. We do not believe that the matter could have been discussed in a similar way had the Iraqi case been one of a civil popular revolution, as the ones that took place in Tunisia and Egypt.¹⁷ It is noteworthy that those theorizing for democracy in Iraq¹⁸, while racing to present their arguments prior to the 2003 invasion, have failed – nowadays – to pursue the matter.

It would not be of much use to quote the papers emanating from think tanks such as Rand Corp., the Center for New American Security, the International Peace Institute, Stanford’s Center for International Security and International Cooperation and the like, because they all focus on security first from the US perspective; therefore, we would not expect them to be vested in analyzing events in Iraq from a different perspective.

The Cato Institute, for instance, despite its libertarian ideological bent and its concerns with matters of political economy, development, political philosophy, and civil and individual rights issues, did not give Iraq an amount of interest proportional to the price paid by the US since the invasion and the price that the withdrawal would eventually cost.¹⁹

Other studies in other think tanks are dominated by the same security concerns even when experts link the issue of the withdrawal to their conception of Iraq’s future; some examples may contravene the “rule”, offering analysis that is more concerned with civil society demands. Yet, despite that, such instances cannot be a substitute for an Iraqi approach that is free from the conflict of interests and the struggle for influence.

¹⁶ Anthony H. Cordesman, “One Year On: Nation Building in Iraq,” Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Working Paper, Revised April 16, 2004: http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/iraq_oneyearon.pdf

¹⁷ Cordesman did treat the matter of “the main challenges” facing Iraq after the US military withdrawal in a 2010 paper; but his main focus was the electoral results and the factions vying for power and security challenges. The analysis did not lead to a comprehensive view of the political process as part of reconstruction and development in the country. See:

Anthony H. Cordesman, “Iraq After US “Withdrawal.” Meeting the Challenges of 2010 and Beyond.” Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy. August 30, 2010 : http://csis.org/files/publication/100830_Iraq-I_Meet_Challenges.pdf

¹⁸ See, for instance, the following paper by Sidney Weintraub, “Democracy and Development”, which was penned during the year of the occupation. There were many others of course, but optimism regarding democracy in Iraq has greatly declined over the years:

Sidney Weintraub, “Democracy and Development,” November 2003. CSIS, Issues in International Political Economy :

<http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/issues200311.pdf>

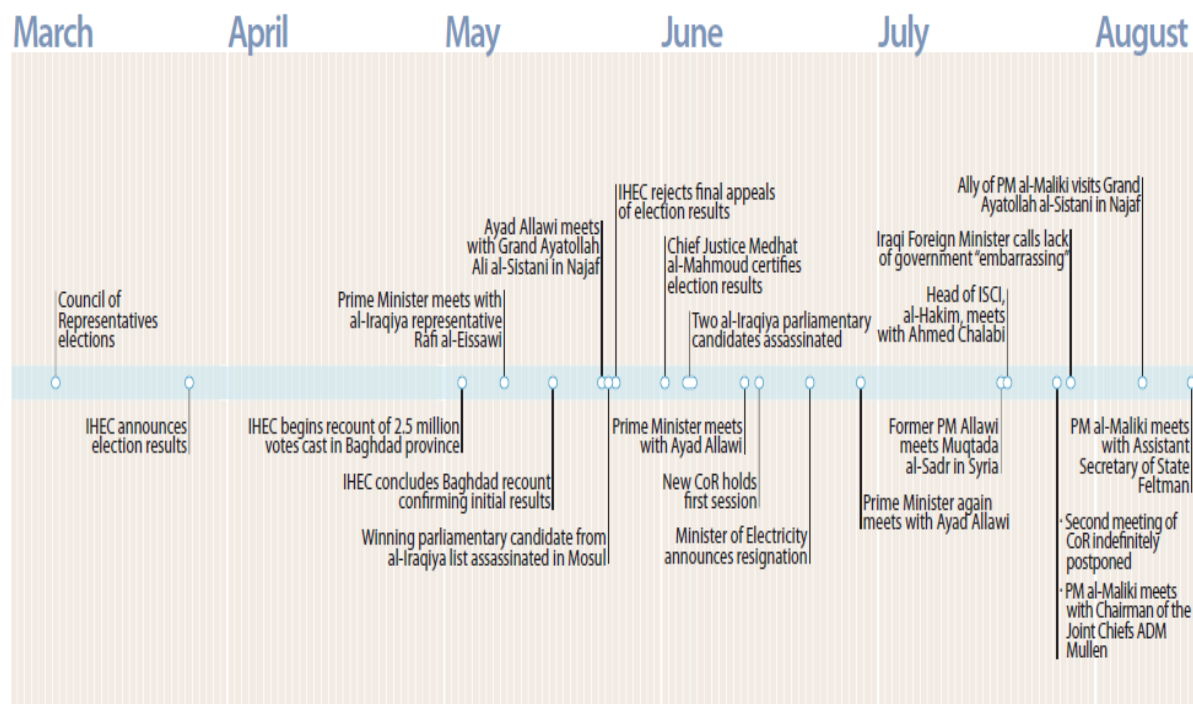
¹⁹ <http://www.cato-at-liberty.org/the-cost-of-getting-out-of-iraq/>

Developments on the Iraqi scene

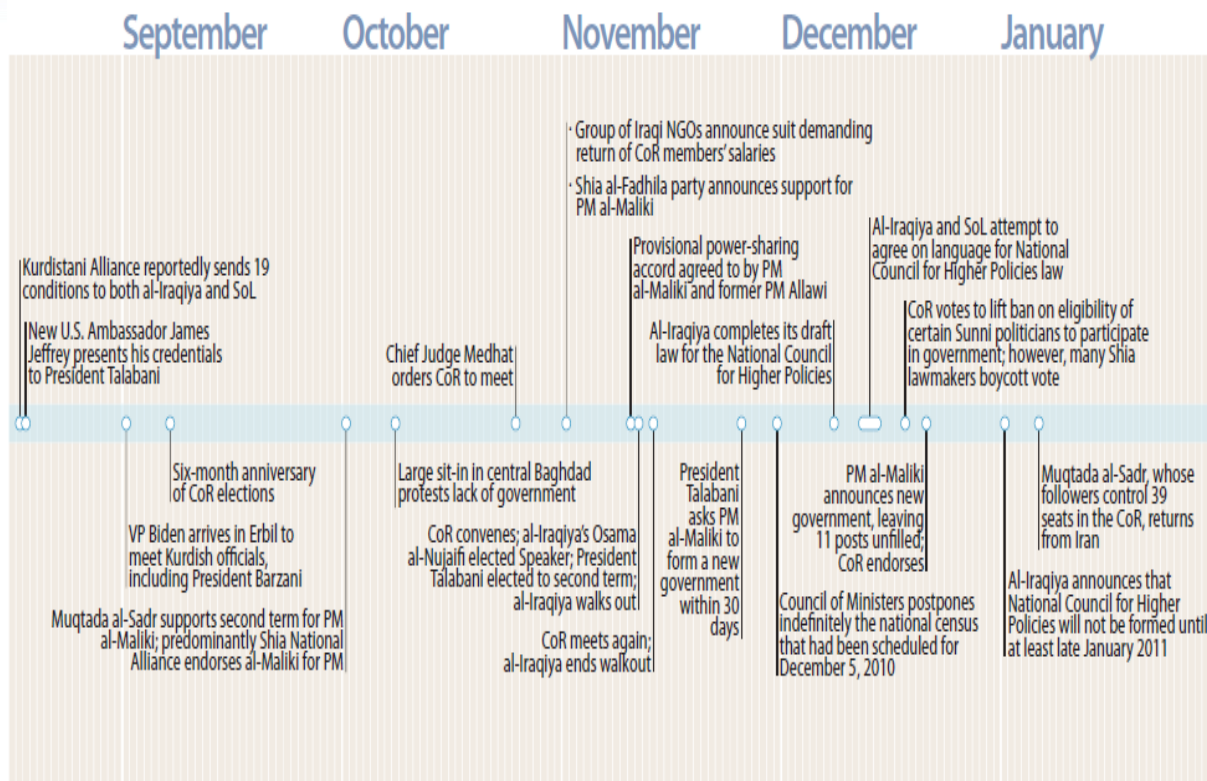
By the end of 2011, Iraq will be fully in the hands of its children, but the situation remains shaky, and the political elite unable to reach an understanding. The results of the March 2010 elections have shown the intensity of competition over power between the coalitions of the incumbent Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and that of the former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi; as a result, several months have elapsed without the formation of a new cabinet. It is true that “the worst of democracies remain better than dictatorship”, as Iraqi President Jalal al-Talabani has stated²⁰, but the country remains far from stable.

Important developments in negotiations relating to the formation of the Iraqi government from March 1st 2010 to January 15, 2011:

Figure 1.2



²⁰ Statement reported by London-based al-Hayat daily, May 29, 2010



Source: SIGIR analysis of GOI and US government documents

The new Iraqi government was finally formed after nearly nine months of negotiations, and Prime Minister al-Maliki has managed to get enough support in late November 2010 so to ask for a second mandate. Within the power-sharing deal, the “State of Law” coalition, which is affiliated to Maliki, was able to control the Ministries of the Interior and Defense, in addition to five other significant portfolios. The State of Law coalition held 17% of the cabinet posts and 27 % seats of the parliament (89 positions).

Representing the National List coalition, former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi assumed the chair of the National Council for Higher Policies²¹, in addition to his bloc garnering ten other seats in the council of ministers, including the Ministries of Finance, Electricity, Agriculture, Industry and Mining. The Iraqi List occupied 24 % of ministerial positions and 28% of the Parliament (91 seats).

²¹ The Council was created in late 2010 as an effort to appease the leader of the Iraqi List Ayad Allawi. The Council had no equivalent in previous governments and no mention in the Iraqi constitution. Accordingly, Ayad Allawi became Chairman of the National Council for Higher Policies, whose membership includes the President and his deputies, the Prime Minister, and the Ministers of Defense, Interior, Finance, Foreign Affairs, making it an authority above that of the Presidency and the government, which contradicts the constitution.

The other large coalition – the Iraqi National Coalition – that groups Shi`a parties, including the Sadrist movement and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq obtained 12 positions in the council of ministers, including the Ministries of Oil, Justice, and Transportation. This coalition controls 29% of Ministerial positions and 22% of the total Parliamentary seats (70 seats).

As for the Kurdistan Alliance, it has received seven positions in the cabinet, including the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Health; thus, the Kurdistan Alliance controls around 17% of the council of ministers and 13% of the Parliament (43 seats).

The Inspector General’s report states that the main challenge the government will have to face consists in “managing its relationship with the anti-American cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, who [...] controls 39 seats in the Council of Representatives (CoR).”²²

More than a year after the legislative elections, the generalized crisis in Iraq is not yet over and worries still prevail. Bombs still explode, suicide attacks continue to take lives, and violence remains part of the “everyday life” of Iraqis and their permanent source of fear. Armed militias and terrorist groups, of all stripes, continue to occupy the headlines in newspapers, including extremist Islamists, supporters of the former President Saddam Husain, and al-Qaida. With the beginning of the drawdown of US troops, concerns about the flaring of violence and the eventual falling of parts of Iraqi territories in the hands of insurgents began to spread. (See Table 1 below):

Table 1: Estimates of the victims of violence since the 2003 War*

	WarLogs ²⁸	Iraq ²⁷ Body Counts	Just ²⁶ Foreign Policy	Brookings’ ²⁵ Iraqi Index	The ²⁴ Economist	CRS ²³
Number of deaths	155,470	Between 101,366 and 110,719	1,455,590	114,834	More than 10,000	Between 86,661 and 94,558
Time Period	2010-2003	2010-2003	2010-2003	2011-2003	2007-2003	2008-2003

* There are several estimates with some discrepancies between them.

²² Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, Quarterly Report and Semiannual Report to the United States Congress, January 30, 2011, op. cit.

²³ <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS22537.pdf>

²⁴ http://www.economist.com/node/9764232?story_id=9764232

²⁵ <http://www.brookings.edu/saban/iraq-index.aspx>

²⁶ <http://www.justforeignpolicy.org/iraq>

²⁷ <http://www.iraqbodycount.org/>

²⁸ <http://www.iraqbodycount.org/analysis/numbers/warlogs/>

What is also noteworthy is that violence did not spare anybody. The popular classes were targeted as were government officials and judges and academics, and it took sectarian forms, victimizing Sunni and Shi`a Muslims as well as Christians.²⁹

The United Nations Commission for Refugee Affairs estimates the internally displaced in Iraq at 1.5 million individuals, “including 500,000 very vulnerable people who live in dire conditions in settlements or in public buildings.”³⁰

All of these indices seem to confirm that the security/military perspective on the Iraqi issue is the correct angle, but we shall expose below the critiques to this perspective:

Critique of the Security/Military conception of regime-change

The project termed as “regime-change”, which is frequently accompanied by “reconstruction” projects often called “nation-building”³¹ or “state-building” surpasses matters of local security to questions that touch upon the entire superstructure of society, along with the demographic composition, the political map, and anything connected to the interest groups and their the economic, political, ethnic, and religious purposes ; - a process that is also termed : “social engineering.”³²

Hence, prioritizing the security standards over social and political assessments, while possibly useful to the military institution of the intervening power, threatens to deform the objective assessment of the problems in the concerned society, especially if the ruling national elite of the country in question adopts such a perspective. .

It is not expected of this elite, , which took over after the collapse of the regime to adopt the very American standards in order to understand the Iraqi scene and its requirements; in fact, this elite must identify interests and conceptualize them in a manner prioritizing national interests over foreign ones. In other terms, viewing Iraq from the US security lens may be useful to the American military, but it is not necessarily so to the Iraqi society. This will be ever more

²⁹ In the bloodiest attack targeting Christians since 2003, insurgent gunmen stormed the Syriac Catholic church of Baghdad on October 31st 2010, killing over 50 people. The United Nations estimate that several thousand Christians have fled, from Baghdad and Nineveh provinces, to the Kurdistan Region and other parts of Northern Iraq following the church massacre.

³⁰ See UNHCR Fact Sheet, December 2010

<http://reliefweb.int/node/388041>

³¹ The United States has precedents in terms of engaging in nation-building since World War II: Germany (1945), the Marshall Plan in Western Europe (1947), Japan (1945), South Korea (1953), Colombia (1998), Palestine (1993), Somalia (1993), Haiti (1993 and 2004), Cambodia (1988 to 1995), El Salvador and Nicaragua (1980), East Timor (1999), Liberia (2003), Zimbabwe (1980), Afghanistan (2001), Former Yugoslav Republics (1996), Liberia (2003) and Iraq (2003), see: Cynthia A. Watson, Nation Building, (Santa Barbara, CA : ABC-Clio, 2004).p.7

³² See, on the subject: Francis Fukuyama, Nation Building : Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq, (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

apparent today, with the return of sovereignty and the necessity of placing strong bases for a national democratic project, which requires continuous revision, acceptance of criticism, accountability, and the readiness to reconsider and reform. This is not an exceptional situation limited to Iraq, but a general one relating to the project of the national democratic state in the Arab World, which has never been completed since it started in the first half of the 20th century. Post-independence states were unable to foment such a project, and the elites of that period were just satisfied with a rule that enabled them “to redrawing national borders in the Arab World in a new manner guaranteeing, through the creation of local and destitute bourgeoisies with no horizons, the hegemony of global capitalism and the West over the dependent peoples”³³ – as Burhan Ghalioun put it. These national entities have not enjoyed recognition before they were subjected to such a system, and “the process of their intellectual justification took place in the wake of the great renaissance of Orientalist thought and colonial ethnography, which offered each new entity its own national history, resurrected from periods predating its current and lived history, and located in the pre-Islamic era.”³⁴

It took several decades of repression, frustration, deprivation, and systematic abuse at the hands of that “comprador” class for the civil democratic revolution to take place in the Arab World in 2011, with the aim of regaining the people sovereignty. It was unfortunate for the Iraqi opposition that it needed the United States to bring down Saddam Husain’s dictatorship, while this mission should have been undertaken by the Iraqi people itself. The United States has imperial calculations that do not necessarily meet the objectives of Iraqis; and even if we assume such a juncture, the power balance would still control the relationship between the two sides.

It could be argued that the United States is not a colonial power. However, the imperialism of the age of globalization does not require the presence of troops on the ground and the appointment of a foreign military ruler, but the perpetuation of relations of dependence, the manipulation of economic needs, and the creation of security threats in the immediate surrounding – in order to convince the local ruling elite that “it needs the imperial power” for its own defense and survival.

From the beginning, there was a concern that the Iraqi state would be reshaped according to the international balance of power and not to the sovereign demands of the people; that would be a repeat of history making 2003 the starting point of a new Iraqi dependence, as has happened in previous stages of the country’s history. In reality, modern Iraq is considered a recent state, and as Arab and non-Arab historians remind us “before 1920 Iraq had never existed as a separate and independent political entity; like Syria and Lebanon, it came into being as a result of the

³³ Burhan Ghalioun, *The Elite Society*, (Beirut, Institute for Arab Development, 1986), p.36 (Arabic)

³⁴ *Ibid* p.37

postwar settlement based on the Sykes –Picot agreement of 1915 and the Anglo-French compromise reached in San Remo in April 1920.”³⁵ From this “cesarean” birth came most of the deformities afflicting the child, such as the lack of coherence and homogeneity, and the social divisions along ethnic, linguistic, sectarian and religious lines, which have the greatest effect on the political evolution of Iraq.

The phases of Iraqi dependence in the game of “the center and the periphery”

Recalling the historical experience, far away from projecting the past upon the present time thus misinterpreting both, is meant as a way to diagnose the negatives that came due to the misguided treatment of issues, and to warn – at the same time – that the same causes will produce similar results. It is noteworthy that “[T]he first Iraqi parliament was convened on July 16, 1925, ushering in the first experiment in democratic government in the country's history. By the time the 1958 coup d'état took place, the parliamentary system had been utterly discredited and democracy found impractical as a system of government.”³⁶ The truth is that Iraq's first democratic experiment was undertaken under the supervision of the British, while the current experiment is US -supervised. In both cases, there were occupation and resistance, and in both cases as well, we cannot rest assured that the democratic system will succeed on the long term if its only guarantor was a foreign power.

In 1920, Percy Cox returned to Iraq as a High Commissioner; his main task was to give meaning to the notion of “self-government” – i.e. rule through the local elite – leading to the formation of an Iraqi Cabinet headed by Abd al-Rahman al-Naqeeb al-Kilani. Great Britain chose Faysal ibn al-Husain to be crowned as King of Iraq in August 1920, and the second step was the imposition of the British-Iraqi agreement, and the organization of elections for a constitutional council. The government of Abd al-Muhsin al-Sa`dun (1925-1926) had to approve the treaty extending over 25 years, and the Parliament was to ratify it. But this treaty quickly became the central problem in Iraqi politics and a source of tension and pressure and the cause of governments' collapse, at the expense of development and the treatment of the social and economic problems of society. This is enough to prove that international treaties reached in conditions of extremely unbalanced power relations could cause security faltering and instability, even if their purpose was the reverse: building a state of security and stability that is “useful” to the imperial center.

Despite the independence of Iraq, the prevalence of the military elite over power did not provide any more security or shield from restlessness; the exact reverse took place. After King Ghazi succeeded his father in 1933, Bakr Sidqi launched the first military coup in Iraq on October 29, 1936, which heralded a series of successive coups in the Arab World, opening an age of violence that is not yet over, and postponing – indefinitely- the project of the national democratic state.

³⁵ Hisham Sharabi, *Governments and Politics of the Middle East in the Twentieth Century*, (New York: D.Van Nostrand Company, INC. 1962); p. 149.

³⁶ *Ibid* p.151

In the phase extending to 1941, Iraq witnessed five successive coups with the accompanying procession of violence, murder, and political assassination. The crisis reached its apogee in May 1941 with the movement of the four colonels and the second British occupation of Iraq. British hegemony continued until 1945 due to the Second World War. London could command and Baghdad had to obey. Nonetheless, it would be difficult not to notice that during the period extending from the formation of the state in 1921 through 1958, the entire Iraqi political scene might be summed up as “the struggle against the British”. Everything seemed to revolve around that axis, to the point where it was enough to be pro-British to gain access to power, as it was enough to be anti-British to be excluded or sacked from the halls of power.

As a result, the Iraqi state was suffering a deficiency: undermined internally and besieged from the outside; instabilities were not passing phenomena, but a state of continuous restlessness, reminiscent, in a way, of Trotsky’s notion of permanent revolution, notwithstanding the semantic signifier. Violence against the state was more or less institutionalized, which is an important feature of anti-state violence. We stress this element due to its linkage to the “center and periphery” model seemingly inevitable and still capable of reproducing itself in later historic phases if it were not cautioned against and avoided. Such dynamics undermine the national democratic edifice, and constitute the causes inciting to violence, thus creating an unsolvable Gordian knot.

In reality, during that historic phase, everything happened as if the positions of Iraqi politicians were to be founded on their stance towards Great Britain, more than towards local and competing groups and individuals; the amount of access to power afforded to a politician was dependent on his submission to the British crown. This situation was reflected on the governmental level, where instability and the inability to see programs to their end were the norm; between 1946 and 1958, for instance, 23 cabinets succeeded one another and dissolved at an average rate of one cabinet every 197 days. Even though five opposition parties were initially permitted to practice their activities publicly, this liberal experiment was short-lived, as repression quickly returned, remaining until January 10, 1948, the date of the Portsmouth Treaty, which flared a wave of anger and protests throughout the country.

In the context of the changes brought about by the advent of the Free Officers movement in Egypt, a similar trend took shape in Iraq, led by Abd al-Kareem Qasim in 1958 against the monarchy of Faysal II. It was announced that the “revolution” aims at the establishment of a civil democratic rule and a national strategy for comprehensive development. Despite the fact that the corruption of Faysal II’s regime and its submission to the British were advanced as the motivators of the coup, this movement quickly veered from its announced goals and acted as any other military dictatorship. This illustrates, as it was made clear through numerous similar

examples in the Arab World, that the proper place for the military during times of peace is the barracks; the military institution – which relies on hierarchical authority and rule from above – cannot produce a democratic thought or democratic leaders, especially in countries where democracy has never been practiced.

This statement also applies to the Ba’athist experiment since the February 8, 1963 coup, which brought Abd al-Salam Arif to power and was followed by a bloodbath; it equally applies as well to the Nasserites in Iraq and Arab nationalists everywhere and all of those who succumbed to the delusion of change and practicing politics and authority “from above” – as if the people were a lifeless corpse, or as if they were unaware of their rights that the rulers must respect. Iraq could not escape this “iron cage” of despotism except for a few brief months during the tenure of Abd al-Rahman al-Bazzaz, who had announced “the rule of law” and the return of civil political life; but this experiment was aborted with the death of Abd al-Salam Arif in a helicopter accident in April 1966. The July 17, 1968 coup later came to inaugurate an era of dictatorship, cult of personality, and wars against neighbors - all with the blessing of the Baath party - which came to an end in April 2003 with the fall of the regime under the blows of the American Military.³⁷

A trend exists in the social sciences linking wars and revolutions, with theoreticians such as Charles Tilly arguing that “external conflict and violence lead to an increase, and not a decrease, in domestic tensions, leading to destabilization”³⁸, while others claim that “a decisive causality links war and revolution.”³⁹ Still, we cannot consider the case of Iraq since the US invasion as an instance of revolution or a product of revolutionary thought, regardless of the legitimacy of the opposition’s demands in political participation and the respect of human rights.

In this paper, we are not attempting to study the connection between domestic and external conflicts, which has been the subject of several studies⁴⁰; our interest is particularly focused on the question of political “change” – i.e. regime change and the building of democratic institutions. We do so without neglecting the foreign dimension in domestic Iraqi struggles, especially when the “outside” is a major factor in these conflicts. However, we do have the conviction that **no foreign conspiracy can succeed without the participation of domestic players. At the same time, nationalists cannot participate in conspiring against their**

³⁷ In penning this historical brief, we have mainly relied on our book: *Post-Saddam Iraq*, published in French in 2005 (L’apres-Saddam en Irak, Paris, L’Harmattan). We have offered above a very condensed summary of the book’s introduction. Details pp18-25. Also see: Abd al-Wahhab Hameed Rasheed, *Contemporary Iraq*, (Arabic), (Cyprus: Al-Mada, 2002) pp81-93, 104-133.

³⁸ Abd al-Rahman Khalifa: *The Ideology of Political Conflict: a Study in the Theory of Power*, (Arabic), (Dar al-Ma`rifa al-Jami`iya, 1999), p.204

³⁹ Tilly quotes Walter Lacqueur who says that “war is the decisive element in the emergence of revolutionary positions in modern times. Most of the modern revolutions that achieved success or that failed happened in the heel of wars. For example, the Paris Commune in 1871, the Russian revolutions in 1905 and 1917, and the various revolts after the two World Wars, such as the Chinese, Korean, Algerian, Egyptian revolutions...” Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid pp208-123.

political regime with foreign powers if this regime was a stable national democracy. The reasons for regime-change are always internal, notably oppression and the feelings of injustice.

Arabs and the concepts of change

In Iraq and the Arab World in general, change sometimes took the form of a struggle between tradition and modernity, conservatives and reformists, religious and secular. Ali al-Wardi alluded to this matter when he wrote: “Many of the people of Iraq believed that modern civilization was the work of the British and their ‘infidel’ peers; and therefore it must contravene their religion and undermine it. This was a naïve view, of course, but it took over the minds of the public and some clerics who saw civilization being brought to them through the English as they occupied Iraq, so they imagined civilization and the British as one inseparable thing, and felt that religious duty mandated that both be resisted.”⁴¹

If according to Turki al-Hamad “the common and pervasive concept of change in political science is that based on the dichotomy of tradition of modernity, which is – in essence – a legacy that we inherited from 19th century Europe”⁴², this duality, then, needs to be surpassed. “Change” including a conflictual content, dividing society into irreconcilable “traditionalists” and “modernists” is not an absolute necessity.; In fact, modern Western democracies, as far as we know, tolerate differences between conservatives and progressives and several other political stripes, from the far right to the far left, without this leading to armed conflict. Actually, the very duality of tradition and modernity has been surpassed in sociology, as Turki al-Hamad rightly points, noting the model expressed by the functionalist school (Talcott Parsons), which led to the emergence of a new concept: the transitional society. Though Al-Hamad defined this concept as “containing certain elements from modernity ... and certain others from tradition”⁴³, we think it includes a potential for surpassing the conflictual dichotomy without “betraying” the Arab social structure.

⁴¹ Ali Al-Wardi, Study in the Nature of Iraqi Society (Arabic),(London, Dar al-Warraq, 2008) p.341 (in Arabic).

⁴² Turki al-Hamad, Ideological Studies in the Arab Condition, (Beirut, al-Tali'a Publishing, 1992), P.59 (In Arabic).

⁴³ Al-Hamad, Ibid p.61. In reality, al-Hamad's opinion is marred by generalization when he says “such is not a modern society nor a traditional society” because it contains elements of both. However, where do we find modern societies that do not contain traditional elements? Modernity, in our view, is not a sharp rupture with the past, but its recycling in a progressive context and in a rational and legal manner, so that the past, or tradition, do not stand as a barrier to progress. Hisham Sharabi, for instance, argues that European modernity relies on two postures: “a position towards the past, and the attempt to recreate it along the Greco-Roman model (and the Medieval model during the early 19th century), and a position towards the future, based on science and the inevitability of human progress (the philosophy of the enlightenment).” See: Hisham Sharabi, The Civilizational Critique of Arab Society at the End of the Twentieth Century, (Beirut, Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1990), p.86 (In Arabic)

It is also evident that Arabs are in need of adaptation and creativity, since the reformist Arab social and political thought of the Nahdha (Renaissance) does not contain these concepts – despite its extensive borrowing from the West. When we examine “The Encyclopedia of Modern and Contemporary Terminology of Arab and Islamic Thought” we do not find such terms among the concepts with a modernist lineage, such as: “urbanism, decline, enslavement, duties of politicians, fanaticism, despotic, justice, government, people, progress, state, nation, laws, constitution, freedom, order of the social body (in al-Bustani works), or: “civic freedom, political freedom, moral freedom, law, civil order, civil convention, architecture, election” (in Adeb Ishaq’s work); and in the writings of Khairredine al-Tunusi, we find: “causes of urbanism, consultation, deliberation, councils, opposition, participation, regulations, political rights, socialization, urbanism, management of political interests, laws of civil rights ... etc. And with Husain al-Marseefi, we find: “homeland, freedom, nation, government, education, etc...”⁴⁴

Despite that, Ibn Khaldun had coined – centuries before European social sciences adopted this terminology – the concept of *‘Umran* (civilization, society) and pointed to it as conducive to an autonomous scientific field, which nowadays may also include “nation-building”, “state-building”, and “social engineering”.⁴⁵

The most important here is not to point to Ibn Khaldun as the first pioneer of this science, which “was not approached by any of his ancestors” and that “was radically different from the sciences known in his era”⁴⁶; but to stress that many of the conceptions and notions needed in the context of building democracy and the economic and social reforms necessary for progress, are present in Arab culture and may eventually be developed. Therefore, it is not true that the reformist and democratic elites import everything from the West, their ideas included, as fundamentalists, puritans, and fanatics charge. Many of the tasks required of modernizers today were identified by Ibn Khaldun in his definition of the notion of the science of *‘Umran*, in addition to other classical texts, such as “The Lantern of Kings” by Abu Bakr al-Tartushi to whom Ibn Khaldun had referred. Al-Tartushi treated issues similar to those facing modern political and social thought, such as the benefits of good governance and “human rights”, which

⁴⁴ See, Sameeh Dughaim, The Encyclopedia of Modern and Contemporary Terminology of Arab and Islamic Thought, (Beirut, Maktabat Lubnan, 2002) (In Arabic).

⁴⁵ It is necessary to approach these concepts with caution, and to critique them and place them in their Western context. What is referred to as a nation in the United States or France is not necessarily equivalent to the term as used in the Arab World. It is not even clear how you can basically “build a nation” in Iraq or in any other part of the Arab World, while Arabs describe themselves as one nation. Would the Iraqi “nation” be a “by-product” of the Arab Nation, or is it a “by product” of the age of Empire? Our preference goes for the term “state-building”, since the existence of a state does not preclude its belonging to a larger nation. Isn’t the very American system based on a number of states that have grouped together to form the American Nation?

⁴⁶ Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri, The Thought of Ibn Khaldun: `Asabiya and the State, Sketches of a Khaldunian Theory in Islamic History, 6th ed. (Beirut, Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1994), p103 (In Arabic).

are the equivalent of his notion of the regulations that rulers have to conform to in managing their subjects' affairs.⁴⁷

As some Arab researchers have pointed out, we can bring the question of administrative and legal organization and political and social reformation (or what is termed in Western social sciences nation building and social engineering) back to the era of the *Tanzimates* in the late Ottoman period. Dr. Wajih Kawtharani studied the deep effects of these Ottoman reforms on Greater Syria, the tribal leaderships, and the urban and Bedouin life in the region.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the strongest critique that could be made to the “nation-building” model – in our opinion- is that it does not account for the historical reality of the current geo-political entities in the Arab World, which may be states, but are not necessarily nations. We find various Arab researchers affirming that Iraq, like other Arab states, “was, throughout its history, a mere province and never ... represented an independent nation in and of itself, according to the modern conception of nations and nation-states”.⁴⁹

The objective critique of Western notions of “regime change” and “nation building” – with their over-emphasis on the security perspective – is not meant to under-rate the importance of security for any society undergoing a project of change. Criticizing the American security approach is not meant to neglect the security demands of any social structure, nor does it imply that it is possible to lay sound foundations for good governance and democracy in the absence of security. In fact, what we aim for is to locate this question in its appropriate social and political contexts. Many Arab states had built powerful security apparatuses, on which the regimes were founded for nearly forty years, and then we saw them shaking and collapsing in a few days or weeks; what happened to the “security”? The United States, along with other Western powers, was the ally, supporter, “friend”, and “advisor” of these regimes before it abandoned them; for it was impossible to maintain the defense of regimes that had lost the minimum standard of wisdom and legitimacy. Before the 2003 war, Iraq itself was an example of the police state where security dominates everything to the point of abolishing public and private life; and we have witnessed the results.

⁴⁷ Ibid p.106.

⁴⁸ For instance, he wrote: “in the Tanzimates period ... Ottoman policy labored to resolve the Bedouin question in the Syrian desert through different methods: protecting the agricultural countryside with regular troops, encouraging Bedouins to settle and engage in agriculture, and creating farming communities that formed a buffer between the routes of Bedouin migration and the plains ... “

In Wajeeh Kawtharani, Authority and Society and Political Action, from the History of Ottoman Rule in Greater Syria, (Beirut, Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1988) p.117 (In Arabic).

⁴⁹ Khaldoun Hasan al-Naqeeb, Society and State in the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula, (Beirut, Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1989). p.112. (In Arabic).

There is, therefore, a different manner to deal with the social problems that confront any rule, including Western democracies. It is definitely important to stress that **the correct treatment does not deal with society “from above” armed with just a security lens, when problem-solving requires other solutions and specific reforms touching on the laws that regulate the activity of people and found the social contract .**

Seeking Stability

Many authors have rejected the notion that the Bush administration ever wanted to build democracy in Iraq, or attempt to do so. Others quoted a long tradition in US foreign policy that prefers maintaining the status quo over instability or revolution to deny any democratic character (or even an intention thereof) in the military intervention led by the Bush administration in Iraq. This relatively explains why the national security strategy was marked with more caution, because spreading democracy in the world is not the priority – or the mission – of the United States’ government, even if Obama pledged to “welcome all peaceful democratic movements”, and to “support the development of institutions within fragile democracies”⁵⁰; he even declared his support to the Arab democratic revolution that ended up removing the head of the state in Tunisia and Egypt, before spreading across the Arab World like a wildfire⁵¹.

Laurie Mylroie, who is an Iraq specialist, believes that “US bureaucracy has fought off for years the effort to place a liberal alternative in power in Iraq, preferring to bet on a post-Saddam version of the Baath establishment.”⁵² Mylroie went further, arguing that “the preference of American bureaucracies for the Baath Party and their total opposition to Liberalism is an old story. In fact, this leaning has led to an unsatisfactory conclusion to the 1991 Gulf War”⁵³ For that reason, the coup d’état option was proposed in a serious manner at one point, and there was also an attempt to push for a coup in coordination between the Central Intelligence Agency and a group of former Baathists in the Allawi-led Iraqi Wifaq movement. However, the September 11

⁵⁰ US National Security Strategy, Op Cit

⁵¹ The protest movement reached Iraq as well, after one year – to a day – of the March 7 2010 Parliamentary elections, a demonstration broke out in Baghdad “to expose the unfilled promises of the political class – according to the protestors – and to expose their regret for participating in the elections.”

<http://www.france24.com/fr/20110307-irak-an-apres-electeurs-manifestent-plein-remords-davoir-vote>

⁵² Laurie Mylroie, *Bush vs. the Beltway*, Regan Books, 2003, p. 81.

In our opinion, even if a wing of the US political elite believed that it was not necessary to hunt down all Ba`thists in Iraq, it remained doubtlessly devoid of influence, for the dominant opinion was that of the Neo-Conservative “hawks” who wanted to be rid of all Ba`thists, regardless of the political price to be paid by Iraq.

⁵³ Ibid. The war ended with a ceasefire call made by then President George Bush (Sr.) on February 28th 1991, while Saddam Husain was still in power. According to Mylroie, the CIA and the Bush administration predicted the occurrence of a coup against Saddam following his defeat, removing him from the halls of power. Bush told the British journalist David Frost: “everybody thought that Saddam Husain could not remain in power ... I have made a miscalculation.” (Ibid, p.82)

attacks have changed the entire situation, without transforming “the essential nature of the bureaucratic battle on Iraq”.

In Mylroie’s view, the United States had no plan for the post-Saddam phase, the most elementary problems were not prepared for: “drafting an interim constitution ... making legislation for the interim period, training Iraqis to assume Police functions. Practically, none of the preliminary arrangements for the post-Saddam phase in Iraq were made, not in the 1998 Iraq Liberation Act, neither in the five-year period following the passing of the Act.”⁵⁴

These allegations, in our view, are not fully valid. On the contrary, we believe that the post-war plans were made in coordination with the Iraqi opposition in exile, whose members occupied positions of authority after the fall of the dictatorship. Preparations were made on the basis of scenarios depicting the main stages that the post-Saddam governments were to go through. In a previous study entitled “Post-Saddam Iraq”, we have attempted to identify the main expressions of these visions and analyze them.”⁵⁵ It is only fair to say that these plans were not sufficient and that the potential resistance to change was not assessed correctly. There is nothing to prove that the period preceding the 2003 War was one of lack of planning; to the contrary, there were several schemes and alternatives on the table, and most of the Iraqi opposition figures in exile – regardless of their political sensibilities – have participated in that effort, whether through their meetings with US officials or through their own gatherings and conferences.

Most of these post-war plans, referred to as “reconstruction plans” were also discussed in the research centers and in the media outlets of the opposition (and some Western outlets), and we find their traces on the Internet.⁵⁶ In truth, the field of daily practice is the real test of any plan: political, economic, social, or legal. Experience decides whether a vision is fitting for the situation or not; in praxis, priority may not always go to the pre-conceived plan, but to consultation – effected on a broader level than that used with the Iraqi opposition in exile in preparation for its plan. A scheme hatched in exile, and in the conditions that we might imagine, is not necessarily representative of the Iraqi majority, even if it were adopted by a majority of the opposition representatives.

In a country that was recently liberated from dictatorship, only general and free popular elections – or popular referendums – are capable of expressing the majority opinion. It is true, however, that in the interim phase, pre-conceived plans may be fit to adopt (despite their lacunas) in the

⁵⁴ Mylroie, *Ibid.* p.98

⁵⁵ See the monograph published in Paris in French: Hichem al-Karoui, *L’après-Saddam en Irak :Les plans, les hommes et les problèmes* [Post-Saddam Iraq: the Plans and the Men and the Issues] (Paris, L’Harmattan 2005) Whether these plans were suitable or not is a separate discussion, but it remains true that such plans were readied before the war.

⁵⁶ See, for instance, the documents from that phase originating from US research centers on the following link: <http://www.iraqwatch.org/perspectives/index.html>

absence of any plan or program. In any Arab country ridding itself from despots, whatever the means, it is better for the opposition to take charge – despite the risks – rather than reverting to despotism and dictatorship.

We realize that many of these plans were designed to be temporary, but did they remain so after the regime change? Or were these “interim” solutions the prelude to long-term policies? In reality, this “long term”, especially in what relates to the constitution or the laws regulating the distribution of power and wealth, is the controversial element. Furthermore, it is not necessary that the leaders of “change” (or liberation) be the same chosen freely by the people to rule in ordinary circumstances following democratic elections. How can we forget, for example, the defeat that was dealt to Winston Churchill in the first elections following the victory of the allies in the Second World War? That was a lesson – not in “public ingratitude” as some simpletons claim – but in democracy. As Lord Moran argues in his memoirs, the British people did not want Churchill to use the aura of the victory to turn himself into a dictator. This was a valuable lesson, but all of our Arab peoples have fallen in that trap, handing power – after their liberation from colonialism – to those who would perform as obedient servants to the former colonial masters and impose the dictatorship of one-party rule and the unique leader – all of which was done through the exploitation of the aura of victory in the war of national liberation, effectively placing the people under the yoke of “domestic colonialism”. This is also, what makes the ongoing civil and democratic revolutions, the completion of the national liberation movement that remained uncompleted due to internal and foreign conspiracies.

Despite that, there is an essential difference between those leading revolutions or coups, and those who end up ruling and managing the affairs of the state. It is the same difference between the political activist and the statesman; the same difference between those activists who strike alliances with various political organizations and actors, including foreign ones, in order to change the regime and escape dictatorship on the one hand, and the politicians and technocrats who are required, following the change, to steer the ship to safety. Being a decent opposition or human rights’ activist does not make one necessarily qualified and competent to rule. After all, the political elite that took over in Iraq after cooperating with the Americans and the British to remove Saddam is still in need to prove to its people the authenticity of its patriotic claims, its incorruptibility, and its democratic spirit; because the future of the country is dependent on that. We have seen the political opponents of the current rulers raising suspicions over the government’s justification of the presence of American troops in Iraq, putting questions like: who are they exactly defending? America? The interests of multi-national corporations? The – decaying – security of Iraq? Or their personal interests? Such suspicions added fuel to the fire of the “resistance” – and this is a very indulgent and broad euphemism, for it could include all kinds of armed gangs, murderers, terrorists, and thugs with no principle or honor, who are never

absent from such instable circumstances; as they have turned Iraq into an arena of conflict and sectarian and wanton killing , we saw their likes threatening the revolution in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and so forth.

There remains a truism, however: the American presence in Iraq (the occupation) has “cursed” the United States in the eyes of the people and part of the elite. The insurgency flared on the backdrop of a complete crisis of trust towards the United States and its projects in the country, as well as the men who took the reins of power. **This crisis of trust was based on a sense of dispossession, felt by all those who have lost their businesses, employment, and source of income, and all those who have been deprived of their basic rights by the new regime** (and we are not discussing the privileged here), due to the vengeful policy adopted by the new rulers under various slogans and justifications, with in the first place “de-Ba`thification” – as if their actions expressed the will of the Iraqi people, which was not even consulted by any party regarding this matter. In reality, the initial mission of the American troops in Iraq did not consist merely in removing Saddam from power, but also in what they termed “nation building” or “state building.” In the American conception, “the global war on terror required the exertion of a great effort in nation-building”.⁵⁷ The content of this “social engineering”, however, remains in the hands of the engineer. Therefore, there is a variation in the assessment of requisites and priorities according to the case in question. This could signify “starting from scratch”, but “this was not the vision of the Bush administration for Iraq”, according to some assessments that argue that Bush administration initially intended to use the same public servants who served under the Baath regime, but changed its mind at a later phase.⁵⁸

While wisdom required that only those proven to have committed crimes against the people be presented to trial, the idea of vengeance against “former Baathists” became a motivator of state policy. Thus, the clannish and tribal mentality took hold of those supposed to be above such considerations – as it is assumed they are the enlightened democratic elite. Many observers of Iraqi affairs are aware that most of those who joined the Baath Party and who worked in the bureaucracy – including diplomats, college professors, artists, writers, and journalists – were devoid of any real authority, and could therefore not be judged as accomplices in Saddam’s crimes, and no justice could be achieved by exacting revenge upon them and depriving them of their livelihood, and no benefit could be garnered for the New Iraq from such policies. The United States, however, encouraged this leaning within the new regime in order to be rid of what it saw as “a dangerous ideology posing a problem to Israel.” It therefore favored the option of conflict over that of reconciliation. The Bush administration apparently did not consider that the firing of thousands of employees and the threat to their livelihood would be of extreme

⁵⁷ Watson, Ibid. p.6

⁵⁸ Ibid.

importance and influence over the future of the country. The destruction of Iraq was then an objective in and of itself, which the neo-conservatives pursued in conjunction with the Israeli Right-wing, and with its incitement; this was exposed since the year 2000 in a document signed by a number of US officials who played a pivotal role in pushing for war.⁵⁹

Moreover, we must add to those who were “bankrupted” and punished due to their professional occupation in the former regime (as bureaucrats, teachers, diplomats, artists, journalists, engineers, and other professionals who should have been seen as such), and who mostly belonged to the middle class, many Sunnis who feared an incoming marginalization. The Kurds, who were among Saddam’s victims, did not lose any of their ambitions; add to all those people the military, the intelligence community, and the IT and engineering specialists who joined the insurgency as soon as the “de-ba`thification law” came into effect. The law was one of the most critical decisions that damaged Iraq in a manner not even imagined by its enemies. It is noteworthy to point out that the neo-conservatives who strongly supported the American intervention in Iraq linked the process to the expected gains of the intervention.

The “new” political elite took a risk by hopping on the American tank to bring down Saddam. And whether it was for reasons related to democratic transparency or due to the pure lust for power, this elite imposed two recounts of the 2010 elections – to no avail – whereas the country was undergoing a critical period, with bombs exploding, truths exposed about the torture committed by the “new jailers” in prisons, and the stench of corruption filling the air.

This elite, which has begun to ask its American allies to depart, raises a serious question: is it really capable of dealing with the problems that will arise following full US withdrawal? Answering this question may depend on other issues raised by the occupation of Iraq, some of which will remain problematic until they are treated properly- first and foremost the question of building democracy.

Democracy in Iraq: Why and How?

The question “who wants democracy in Iraq” was urgently posed even before the fall of the regime and the occupation of Iraq, because the democratic demand represents – in itself – a great challenge to the autocratic regimes in the entire Arab region, as well as a problem for their Western allies who do not trust Arab opposition movements and what they might do once they ascend to power. The optimal solution for Western governments – after identifying and

⁵⁹ See the following report prepared by The Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies’ “Study Group on a New Israeli Strategy Toward 2000.”

<http://www.iasps.org/strat1.htm>

observing the Arab opposition movements – may be to “lead” them to the objective as much as possible through “democracy support” and “civil society” programs and various forms of cooperation and coordination, so that they remain in control of further developments in the region. In this context, security also occupies the top of the priorities, with a preference for the “transfer of power” (giving an illusion of change) over a radical popular revolution. If it were also possible for the change “agenda” to be formulated abroad, then applied by the local elite, this would be relatively reassuring for the Western governments. And if the countries in question were in need of loans, funding, or aid, that could also be supplied within specific arrangements fraught with conditions.

Despite the fact that what took place in Iraq in 2003 was far from being a “popular revolution”, the movement that began in January 2011 in Tunisia first, and then Egypt, before spreading on a wider scale, represents the soundest supportive basis to the democratic movement in Iraq, for it contains the portents of an evolution that occurred in Arab popular consciousness, which was long repressed by the despotic regimes, along with its demands of freedom and dignity. This revolutionary momentum, however, may not be allowed to boil unchecked. **In countries tied to the West with relations of dependency, all efforts will be made to contain the democratic demands within certain limits, so that the regional and international balance of power remains not affected.**

As for Iraq, we find among those who studied democracy in the country from a regional political perspective Liam Anderson and Gareth Stansfield, wondering : even if the United States succeeded in making this country democratic, who would really be enthralled with the idea of a strong, stable, democratic and prosperous Iraq? The two authors linked the question to the history of Iraq, noting that “since 1958, one of the main factors affecting internal stability was the quest of foreign actors who were prepared to intervene in order to destabilize the fragile ethnic and sectarian balance”.⁶⁰

The two researchers argue that the country was “an easy target- much easier than other states in the region”⁶¹, from the perspective of foreign powers that were active at different times, inciting the Kurds against the central government, and Iran was among those who manipulated the Shi`a in Southern Iraq with the aim of using them as a “fifth column”. The two authors listed the countries that have intervened in Iraq at one time or another, and they included: the United States, Syria, the Former Soviet Union, Jordan, Kuwait, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia. They said,

⁶⁰ Liam Anderson and Gareth Stanfield, *The Future of Iraq: Dictatorship, Democracy, or Division?* Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p.207.

⁶¹ Ibid.

“assuming that the Iraqi government is in need of the required stability to tend the roots of democracy, these interventions must stop”.⁶²

Anderson and Stansfield also noticed that few of the regional countries wish to see a strong and democratic Iraq: “for most states in the region, the ideal form of government in Iraq has been and remains that of a weak regime that is easy to contain, as was the case with Saddam – and definitely not a strong prosperous democracy that is an ally of the West. Iraq is surrounded by countries (with the possible exception of Kuwait) that have an interest in the failure of the democratic experiment. It is impossible to envisage that they will not attempt to affect the flow of events in Iraq.”⁶³

Another problem raised by the occupation of Iraq was: is it really possible to build democracies for other peoples?

The authors of the *Future of Iraq* reached the following conclusion: “the United States will not be capable of democratizing Iraq, let alone the entire Middle East, through the use of weapons,” because the eternal truth is that “democracy requires the consent of the ruled to work.”⁶⁴ The numerous suspicions regarding the American intentions in the Middle East are an additional source of frustration. Since the first day of the US arrival in Iraq, Arab media outlets – with the exception of a very small minority owned by the Iraqi opposition – stressed the “humiliation” that was the invasion of an Arab country – while it was its ruler that brought about this “humiliation” upon himself and his country. All of a sudden, the Iraqi elite returning from exile to assume power was depicted as a bunch of “collaborators with the occupation”, despite the persecution people had endured under Saddam, the intensity of which was revealed with the mass graves following the regime’s fall.

Yet, despite the fact that several Arab regimes condemned the collaboration of the Iraqi opposition with the Americans, they themselves cooperate and coordinate with the United States on all levels in all fields. In reality, Arab regimes condemned what took place in Iraq not in fear of the Shi`a coming to power as it was claimed – for this is the least of their concerns – but because it represented a precedent – what if other Arab opposition movements saw Iraq as a model to be followed in bringing down regimes? What if they also took their relations with the spheres of power in Washington to the level of coordination and planning to forcibly change their regimes? **Therefore, and based on the experience of the 2003 War against Saddam, it appeared as if a new model of political action for change had emerged in the region, revealing itself through the resort to the foreign power against the despotic ruler, who**

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

himself uses the same foreign power against his people. Is this, then, democracy? Or is it simply the race for power at any price, with all that it implies in terms of reproducing the model of dependency unendingly?

It follows that the pressures on the new Iraqi government were tremendous, at home and abroad. And the insurgency quickly flared, and armed groups appeared everywhere calling for the “struggle against the occupation”. In reality, as we know today, al-Qaida, after being expelled from Afghanistan, was in dire need of another arena to be its haven and a base for its “Jihadi” operations, and found in Iraq an ideal candidate. Furthermore, the supporters of Saddam, the officers of the Iraqi Armed Forces, the Republican Guard, and the Baath militias were not to hand the country over to the Americans without a fight; they had been prepared for that day. Adding to that, there was an international atmosphere that opposed Bush and his clumsy policies, which snubbed the United Nations when it could not receive its support for the military campaign. All these factors have placed the notion of the Iraq project as a “laboratory” or a “vanguard” for democracy in the Arab World – as some theorists argued – under intense questioning, jeopardizing the entire operation. We suddenly saw the question of “building the democracy of another people” popping to the political surface in the United States in a dramatic fashion, causing turbulence even within the conservatives’ camp, some of whom turned against Bush inquiring: “did we really need to attempt democracy building in a different country whose culture radically differs from ours?”⁶⁵

Opinion surveys in Western Europe have shown that even the traditional allies of the United States regard that war as “a war for oil”. Despite that, the Bush administration could not do much to change that perception, especially after it alienated its European allies (with the exception of Great Britain). In reality, the Iraq War did not contribute to improving the image of the Bush administration in the Middle East, where it lost popularity almost universally. This was also noticed by the former neocon Francis Fukuyama, moving away from Bush’s policy, which he roundly criticized. We shall expose only two of the points he made in commenting on the Bush policies:

The first, is the consideration that democracy is a desired objective in the Middle East in and of itself, and not because it will resolve the West’s problems with terrorism. Here, we find Fukuyama to be very close to the analysis of French scholar Olivier Roy who perceives Islamic extremism as a by-product of globalization. In fact, Fukuyama did not see democracy as a probable occurrence in the Middle East, arguing: “transitioning to democracy along the Turkish

⁶⁵ Francis Fukuyama was among the prominent critics of this policy, see: Francis Fukuyama, *After the Neocons : America at the Crossroads*, Profile Books LTD, 2006.

secular way , which is based on Western models, is not probable to take place in most of the Arab World.”⁶⁶

However, the events that led to the fall of Zin al-Abidin Ben Ali in Tunisia in January 2011 functioned as a spark that started a wildfire, with protests and demonstrations erupting in several Arab countries and the same slogans and demands being replicated: the departure of the dictators and despots and the establishing of a democratic system where sovereignty is that of the people; Iraq cannot remain outside of these events that have preoccupied the entire world – and still do.

The second critique of Fukuyama is related to a purely American problem; in truth, whether the US adopts the movement of democratic change in the region or not, that would not resolve its endemic problem: “it practically has no credibility in the region and no moral authority whatsoever.”⁶⁷

Fukuyama adds his voice to those of several authors who treated the same issue, noting that “the prevalent image of the United States is not that of the Statue of Liberty but, rather, that of the abuse of prisoners in Abu Ghreib.”⁶⁸ This explains, in his view, why activists and reformists with Western leanings attempt to keep away from American institutions that offer to support them (such as the National Endowment for Democracy) – as he writes: “a strong push for political change that emanates from Washington would, in this critical stage, have negative consequences.”⁶⁹

Assuming this statement was correct, and that the United States did not exert efforts in that direction, abstaining from pressuring , extending support, or welcoming instances of change (which is still a moot point), one may say on the one hand that it was the good fortune of the Arab World that the civil democratic revolutionary movement that is crisscrossing the region – causing these tremendous and quick transformations – is not imported or imposed from the outside. What we have seen since January 2011 in terms of the popular quest towards the Arab democratic dream does not prompt us to conclude that the United States administration or the Western governments were “behind it” or “motivating” it. On the other hand, and keeping in mind the pattern of dependent relations between Arab states and Western governments, and the latter’s insistence on not changing the character of this relationship even with the change of regimes and governments, we must be cautious in our assessments and expect efforts to “apply brakes” and hold back change, and the appearance of a virtual – or real – “ceiling” that some

⁶⁶ Fukuyama, *Ibid* pp 186-187. Such a prediction may already be outdated presently if democracy really takes hold in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and other countries of the “Arab spring.”

⁶⁷ *Ibid*.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*.

powers would place over popular demands and ambitions. There is no doubt that a deep change in the nature of regimes may take several decades. The second part of our argument also applies to Iraq.

It is clear that those criticisms directed at the Bush policy could not be all unjust or aimless. His administration was sinking every day in Iraq, while the numbers of the dead and wounded rose horrendously, and the American public opinion itself became increasingly opposed to the presence of American troops in this country. It is probable that the anti-war arguments presented by activists held an amount of truth to them, but the problematic, when seen from the ground level, involves a paradox. For the continued presence of US troops in Iraq has become rife with threats, validating the argument that the US presence is partially causing the deterioration in security. In the same time, immediate withdrawal did not appear less dangerous or more reassuring for the stability of Iraq in the foreseeable future.

In fact, when the nature of the American military presence in the country is closely studied, it reveals the extent to which the destruction of the Iraqi military establishment led to a tremendous void that had to be filled, first by the occupation, which is now abandoning it to the warring factions.

The occupation: facts and quantitative data

There were constant speculations regarding the length of US military presence in Iraq, with estimates ranging between six months and two years or more. For instance, we read in the New York Times on April 20, 2003 the following: “[T]he U.S. is planning a long-term military relationship with the emerging government of Iraq, one that would grant the Pentagon access to military bases and project American influence into the heart of the unsettled region.”⁷⁰ Quoting unnamed sources, the report mentions a base in Baghdad’s international airport, and another near Nasiriya in the South (probably Taleel), and a third in the H1 airfield in the Western desert, and a fourth in Bashur to the North.

However, on the following day, April 21, 2003, Secretary of Defense Ronald Rumsfeld claimed in a press conference that all insinuations to the United States seeking a permanent military presence in Iraq “are inaccurate and unfortunate”, adding “I have never heard the subject of a

⁷⁰ See regarding bases and facilities in Iraq:
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/iraq-intro.htm>

permanent base in Iraq discussed in any meeting that I can recall.... The likelihood of it seems to me so low that it is no surprise at all that it's never been discussed in my presence.”⁷¹

In the same conference, Rumsfeld also said, that the USA does not “plan to function as an occupier,” nor “to prescribe to any new government how our presence in their country should be arranged.”

Despite that, it was reported on March 23, 2004 that American engineers were hard at work building 14 permanent bases and long-term military camps for thousands of soldiers who would be serving in Iraq for at least two years. It was also reported that the number of US servicemen in Iraq (between 105,000 and 110,000) will remain unchanged until 2006. The plans predicted the waging of US operations from the old Iraqi Army bases in Baghdad, Mosul, al-Taji, Balad, and Kirkuk, and from areas in Nasiriya, Tikrit, al-Falluja, and the region between Erbil and Kirkuk. Moreover, the airports in Baghdad and Mosul had to be upgraded.

By May 2005 the Washington Post reported about plans for consolidating American troops in Iraq in four large air bases: Tallil in the south, Al Asad in the west, Balad in the center and either Erbil or Qayyarah in the north. The newspaper predicted that US units would be concentrated at these four fortified strategic hubs, from which they could provide logistical support and emergency combat assistance.

In January 2007, Bush announced that 21,500 soldiers will be sent to reinforce the combat force in Iraq, raising their total number to 142,000; and in late May/early June 2007, the number became 162,000 soldiers. And despite some drawdowns and reductions, especially during the New Year holidays, the number of US troops in Iraq was 146,000 by the end of 2008.

All these factors, in addition to domestic political tensions and calculation relating to his political ambitions, have prompted Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to demand that President Bush offers a clear schedule for the withdrawal of his forces from Iraq. Through this demand, al-Maliki was certainly anticipating a situation where the new political realities of the country – and electoral calculations – will require him to take a firmer stand towards the occupation.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Table 2: American Forces Active in Iraq

Year	Month	In Iraq	Combat Forces	
2003	March	0	175,000	
	April	92,000	83,000	
	May	142,000	30,000	
	June	146,250	30,000	
	July	148,750	30,000	
	August	142,500	30,000	
	September	130,000	30,000	
	October	137,500	30,000	
	November	130,000	30,000	
	December	122,500	30,000	
	2004	January	125,000	30,000
		February	108,000	30,000
March		117,500	30,000	
April		130,000	30,000	
May		140,000	30,000	
June		142,500	30,000	
July		137,500	30,000	
August		145,000	30,000	
September		130,000	30,000	
October		136,000	30,000	
November		142,500	30,000	
December		153,000	30,000	
2005	January	150,000	30,000	
	February	145,000	30,000	
	March	138,500	30,000	
	April	138,000	30,000	
	May	138,000	30,000	
	June	138,000	30,000	
	July	138,000	30,000	
	August	138,000	30,000	
	September	145,000	30,000	
	October	155,000	30,000	
	November	160,000	30,000	
	December	160,000	30,000	
2006	January	155,000	30,000	
	February	138,000	30,000	
	March	138,000	30,000	
	April	138,000	30,000	

	May	133,000	35,000
	June	127,000	35,000
	July	127,000	35,000
	August	138,000	35,000
	September	138,000	35,000
	October	138,000	35,000
	November	152,000	35,000
	December	140,000	35,000
2007	January	132,000	30,000
	February	137,000	30,000
	March	142,000	30,000
	April	150,000	30,000
	May	155,000	30,000
	June	162,000	30,000
	July	164,000	30,000
	August	166,000	30,000
	September	168,000	30,000
	October	168,000	30,000
	November	168,000	30,000
	December	160,000	30,000
2008	January	160,000	30,000
	February	155,000	30,000
	March	155,000	30,000
	April	155,000	30,000
	May	155,000	30,000
	June	155,000	30,000
	July	150,000	30,000
	August	150,000	30,000
	September	150,000	30,000
	October	150,000	30,000
	November	150,000	30,000
	December	146,000	30,000
2009	January	145,000	30,000
	February	145,000	30,000
	March	145,000	30,000
	April	140,000	30,000
	May	135,000	30,000
	June	130,000	30,000
	July	125,000	30,000
	August	120,000	30,000

	September	115,000	30,000
	October	110,000	30,000
	November	105,000	30,000
	December	100,000	30,000
2010	January	95,000	30,000
	February	98,000	30,000
	March	98,000	30,000
	April	90,000	30,000
	May	80,000	30,000
	June	70,000	30,000
	July	60,000	30,000
	August	50,000	30,000
	September	50,000	30,000
	October	50,000	30,000
	November	50,000	30,000
	December	50,000	30,000
2011	January	50,000	30,000
	February	50,000	30,000
	March	45,000	30,000
	April	40,000	30,000
	May	35,000	30,000
	June	30,000	30,000
	July	25,000	30,000
	August	20,000	30,000
	September	15,000	30,000
	October	10,000	30,000
	November	5,000	30,000
	December	0	30,000

Source: Global Security⁷²

⁷² http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq_orbat_es.htm

The withdrawal of American forces

President Barak Obama had promised to withdraw US combat forces from Iraq within 16 months of his presence in office, with an average of one brigade withdrawn per month. However, the US forces that began to depart Iraq starting from August 2010 did not only do so in execution of Obama's electoral promises, for this withdrawal was demanded by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and expected, following negotiations and agreements that were signed between the Bush administration and the Iraqi government. We are referring to treaties such as the Status of Forces Agreement and the Strategic Framework Agreement, both approved by the Iraqi Parliament in November 2008.

Despite the fact that the United Nations did not permit the invasion of Iraq in 2003, it has – however- **granted its approval to the presence of foreign forces**, through a Resolution passed in October 2003, and which has been renewed ever since. After the Iraqi government asked the United Nations not to renew the mandate after its expiry in late 2008, the rate of negotiations between the US and Iraqi sides escalated, eventually leading to the two landmark treaties that were mentioned above.

The Status of Forces Agreement, which is meant to determine “the withdrawal of American forces and the organization of their activities during their temporary presence in Iraq”, states in Article 4 (Missions) and in the first paragraph that “the government of Iraq requests the temporary assistance of the United States Forces for the purposes of supporting Iraq in its efforts to maintain security and stability in Iraq, including cooperation in the conduct of operations against al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups, outlaw groups, and remnants of the former regime.”⁷³ Thus, the mission of these troops was well defined and confirmed; and despite that, and given the current situation, the question remains: has that mission been fully performed?

Article 5 of the same agreement (Property Ownership) acknowledges that the ownership of all “buildings and non-relocatable structures” on Iraqi lands belongs to the Iraqi government, in other terms, the American military bases are Iraq's property, and “Upon their withdrawal, the United States Forces shall return to the Government of Iraq all the facilities and areas provided for the use of the combat forces of the United State.”⁷⁴

We should recall that the withdrawal of American troops from cities and villages, per the aforementioned agreement, has begun since June 30, 2009. Therefore, the American forces in

⁷³ See the original text of the agreement in English on the following link:
“Agreement Between the United States of America and the Republic of Iraq on the Withdrawal of United States Forces from Iraq and the Organization of Their Activities during Their Temporary Presence in Iraq “:

<http://www.cfr.org/iraq/security-agreement-status-forces-agreement-us-iraq/p17880>

⁷⁴ Ibid

Iraq can no longer be engaged in long-term combat, having limited their abilities to defending themselves if attacked. This also meant that “[I]n most of the country, the Iraqi Army and the police are the visible face of security, with Americans largely out of public view”⁷⁵, in line with the terms of the security agreement signed with the government of Iraq.

It is therefore apparent that there was no possibility – at least from the legal standpoint – to place Iraq under military occupation, as colonial forces usually do. Contrary to the “collective psychosis” fed by those nostalgic for Saddam’s days and Islamic radicals, we find no signed agreement between the US and Iraqi governments indicating an occupation or unconditional ownership without time limits. The bases and facilities offered to the American forces are being returned, and the same applies to “surveillance and control over Iraqi airspace [which] shall transfer to Iraqi authority immediately upon entry into force of this Agreement,” (paragraph 3, Article 9). As for the sixth article, related to the “use of agreed facilities and areas”, we find a detailed description of the conditions of the use of these structures on Iraqi soil: the Iraqi government “grants access and use of agreed facilities and areas to the United States” and permits the United States to exercise some rights and authority inside these facilities and areas. In other words, the authority remains with the Iraqis when it comes to these bases, not the Americans. As long as the matter is delineated by these legal articles, it would be difficult to read the treaty’s text as reflecting “the hegemony of a foreign power” in a plain manner. However, it should be acknowledged that – on the practical level – there is a web of power linking a small, vulnerable and unstable country to a great foreign power, making it dependent on the latter. Still, in order to resolve conflicts over authority, Article 12 of the agreement defined the jurisdiction of each side; as such, and according to the first paragraph of the article, Iraq was accorded full jurisdiction over all that takes place outside of the base and areas offered for the use of the Americans. The second paragraph of the same article granted Iraqi law primacy in cases involving US contractors and companies.

It is, however, Article 24 that states the necessary conditions for the withdrawal of American forces; the first paragraph of the article says: “All the United States Forces shall withdraw from all Iraqi territory no later than December 31, 2011.” While the second paragraph sets the June 30, 2009 as a date for withdrawal from all cities, villages, and populated areas. The fourth paragraph of Article 24 appears to be more interesting from the legal and political perspectives; for it states that: “The United States recognizes the sovereign right of the Government of Iraq to request the departure of the United States Forces from Iraq at any time. The Government of Iraq recognizes the sovereign right of the United States to withdraw the United States Forces from Iraq at any time”. This implies that these “occupation forces” have no resemblance to colonial armies that come to remain, since Baghdad could ask for the withdrawal of forces at any time, and probably obtain its demand that is based on a bilateral treaty backed by international law. Furthermore, the

⁷⁵ With the exception of some parts of Northern Iraq, see: Tim Arango, « G.I.’s Find Bullets Still Flying at Outpost in Iraq », *The New York Times*, May 14, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/15/world/middleeast/15base.html?ref=timarango>

agreement stipulates that, with the end of the mandate of the multi-national forces (UN Resolution 1790) on December 31, 2008, “Iraq is to regain its international and legal status prevailing prior to the adoption of Resolution 661 (1990) by the Security Council.” Based on that, the Iraqi government has, in principle, no obligation to accept foreign custody, let alone the American military presence on its soil. We should also remember that the unstable situation in the country prior to the signing of the agreement did not encourage the elected Iraqi government to demand a hasty withdrawal of US troops – keeping in mind that American consent to such a demand was far from assured, since they had not yet achieved some of their security arrangements and plans for the post-withdrawal phase.

The reality is that, regardless of our assessment of the effectiveness of the Iraqi political elite in managing the country, and despite the current efforts to build a credible and viable democracy, Iraq remains far from offering the face of a stable democratic country enjoying civil peace.

In order to understand the nature of the relationship established between the United States and Iraq following the fall of Saddam’s regime, and in order to better speculate on its future horizons, we have to make a comment regarding the “Strategic Framework Agreement.”⁷⁶

This second agreement, which was signed on November 27, 2008, “serves” according to President Bush as “**the foundation for a long-term bilateral relationship based on mutual goals**”. In its first section “Principles of Cooperation”, the agreement describes this relationship in four paragraphs. The key words here were the following:

- 1- “A relationship of friendship and cooperation is based on mutual respect; recognized principles and norms of international law and fulfillment of international obligations; the principle of non-interference in internal affairs; and rejection of the use of violence to settle disputes.”
- 2- “A strong Iraq capable of self-defense is essential for achieving stability in the region.”
- 3- “The temporary presence of U.S. forces in Iraq is at the request and invitation of the sovereign Government of Iraq and with full respect for the sovereignty of Iraq.”
- 4- “The United States shall not use Iraqi land, sea, and air as a launching or transit point for attacks against other countries; nor seek or request permanent bases or a permanent military presence in Iraq.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ See the text of the Agreement in English on the following link:

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/national/iraq-strategic-framework-agreement.htm>

⁷⁷ Ibid.

The importance of the last paragraph (4) is obvious; this paragraph appears as if it aims at debunking all the claims – beginning with Iranian ones – accusing the Americans of attempting to establish a permanent military presence in Iraq. As we saw, the agreement prohibits the United States from seeking to perpetuate its military presence in Iraq. For such an eventuality to take place, the two sides will have to sign a new agreement abolishing this prohibition. However, as with all similar agreements, given the conditions of the signing, the treaty bears the marks of dependency to the “center”, which led to the notion of cooperation being dominated by the security perspective, making “the achieving stability in the region” a task that is delegated to the local “ally” who could be relied upon in linking its own interests to those of the “center”.

Threats and challenges of the coming phase

We should note that both treaties received the endorsement of the majority of MPs in the Iraqi Parliament, despite the fears expressed by Kurdish and Sunni politicians regarding a potential Shi`a hegemony following the departure of American troops. Subsequently, some considered these agreements to be a “victory” achieved by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. Truly, for a considerable part of his tenure, al-Maliki showed no objection to American positions; in fact, he became capable of gaining wider influence among the Shi`a in the Spring of 2008, when the US-supported Iraqi forces commanded a number of areas in Baghdad and Basra that were previously under the control of the followers of (the anti-US) Muqtada al-Sadr. Following these events, al-Maliki informed President Bush that he supported the drafting of a timeframe for the withdrawal of US forces. Apparently, the Americans initially resisted the idea, arguing that the country was still far from stable; but they eventually accepted the notion of a negotiated agreement, which led to the signing of the two aforementioned agreements.

Therefore, we could argue that, by insisting on a timeframe for the withdrawal, al-Maliki demanded the exercise of sovereign rights and the ending of the occupation. From now on, the ruling elite in Iraq will be solely responsible for the safety of the country, as per the agreements. Most US observers, however, focus on the “security threats” related to the withdrawal, as if the occupation was not responsible for many of the violent incidents, and as if it did not engender a staunch resistance.

Prior to the August 31, 2010, date, we also saw US officers expressing their fear that insurgents loyal to the former regime would fill the vacuum left by the withdrawal of American forces. In the North, for instance, there was talk of the “Naqshabandiya Army” as one of the factors of instability. In other regions, “al-Qaida in Mesopotamia” was mentioned as the imminent threat, even though it had some of its commanders killed and “404 of its members captured since

January 2010.”⁷⁸ In March of the same year, Manaf Abd al-Raheem al-Rawi – one of the organization’s leaders – was captured; and the information he supplied allowed the Americans to set an ambush, days later, that killed the military commander of al-Qaida, Abu Hamza al-Muhajir - an Egyptian also known as Abu Ayyub al-Masri. Also killed was Dawud Muhammad Khalil al-Zawi, the Iraqi leader of “the Islamic State of Iraq”, known under the pseudonym “Abu Omar al-Baghdadi”.⁷⁹ Abu Ayyub al-Masri was succeeded by al-Nasir Li-Deen Allah Abu Sulaiman.⁸⁰

What is also feared is a bout of “settling accounts” between Sunni and Shi’a armed militias. Muqtada al-Sadr, for instance, had offered his services to Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, consisting of “fighters to help the government protect Shiite mosques. The government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al- Maliki ignored the offer.”⁸¹ How could the government rely on the leader of a political-religious-military militia that does not hide its hostility towards the main ally of the Iraqi government?

Not just security

We have attempted to argue above that the Iraqi problem is not only a security problem, unless American concepts and perspectives came to dominate the process of building the national democratic project – transforming it into a “security” project serving the dependency on the Empire. It is noteworthy that American theorists proposed “nation building” (actually meaning “state building”) as if it were a mission for the military. Yet, it is no secret that the intimate connection between the military establishment and the large industrial corporations (often referred to as “the military-industrial complex”) governed “nation building” schemes since the end of World War II. This entails that the post-war process of rebuilding and reconstruction will conform to the conditions of the companies and major banks that will offer the necessary funding and loans, whereas the majority of them (if not all) are exterior to the country, which makes local planning appear as an echo of plans devised abroad. Such is the main manifestation of dependency based on imbalanced relations. In other words, war and reconstruction have a lot to do with reckoning of loss and profit from the perspective of the American Empire.

⁷⁸ Steven Lee Myers, “Iraqi Insurgent Group Acknowledges Killing of Two Leaders”, **The New York Times**, 25 April 2010.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/26/world/middleeast/26iraq.html>

⁷⁹ Ibid

⁸⁰ This new leader is a Moroccan who carries a Syrian passport, he reportedly trained in Afghanistan and was one of Bin Ladin’s aides. He may have also executed operations in Iraq since 2006. See:

“Al-Nasir Li-Deen Allah is rough, very extreme, and has entered Iraq twice ... and favors sectarian war”, *Al-Hayat* daily newspaper, 16/5/2010 (In Arabic)

<http://www.daralhayat.com/portalarticlendam/141739>

⁸¹ Steven Lee Myers, op. cit .

From this angle, the Iraqi case seems to offer enough resources for decades to come, which the USA may exploit, especially considering the petroleum wealth; as a result, the investments are as big as the wager and the expected profits. Dr. Azmi Bishara has made two interesting comments in that regard: first, that any American citizen who is 80-year-old today cannot remember his country outside a time of war or preparing for war. In other words, the American Empire has built up its economy in the post-war years by reaping the benefits of its military interventions, or what is termed a “war economy”. The second note was that the war budget in Iraq and Afghanistan reached \$142 Billion yearly, which is added to the regular defense budget in time of peace, signifying that annual military and security spending exceeds \$650 Billion. Such a number is 25% more than the military spending in 1968, at the time of the arms’ race with the Soviet Union, with moreover the most violent war fought by the United States in its history: Vietnam.⁸² This confirms our argument that the United States’ main concern lies in special arrangements assuring the continuation of dependence relations, while the Iraqis’ concern – we assume – is in arrangements guaranteeing the sovereignty and independence within a national democratic project enabling them to progress and prosperity.

Despite that, the Americans themselves cannot deny the fact that the challenges cannot be reduced to security alone, as the Inspector General’s quarterly report indicated – in addition to the security issue – three other challenges: According to the SDR, the perceived inadequacies are:

- **Basic services:** The report asserts that the lack in basic services will be “the greatest source of potential instability in Iraq”. The report founds this conclusion on the “stability roadmap” prepared by the US State Department, which relied on data from opinion surveys. The report said that “the lack of perceived improvements in Iraq’s water, sewage, and electricity systems could lead to popular unrest—more so than political or sectarian disagreements.”⁸³ The report predicted that Iraq could fulfill its national electricity needs by 2014. “But this hope is conditioned on implementing costly improvements to Iraq’s electrical transmission and distribution network as well as operational enhancements between the Ministry of Electricity and the Ministry of Oil.”⁸⁴
- **Economic Development:** The Inspector General’s report notes the interest of international investors in the southern Iraqi oilfields, and the increase in the size and presence of international oil companies in the desert surrounding Basra. It also said however that “[S]everal obstacles stand in the way of the effective exploitation and

⁸² Azmi Bishara, **Being an Arab in our Times**, Beirut, Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2009, p98 (in Arabic).

⁸³ Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, Quarterly Report to the US Congress, January 30, 2010, op. cit.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

monetization of existent resources including poorly maintained infrastructure, pervasive public corruption, and a set of hydrocarbon laws still greatly in need of reform.”⁸⁵

- **Re-integration within the international economy:** In this regard, the report mentions an additional \$741 that were extended to Iraq by the International Monetary Fund last October, and the adoption of three Security Council resolutions lifting a chain of sanctions that were imposed on Iraq under Baathist rule. It is expected that these actions enable Iraq once again “to pursue, if it so chooses, a peaceful nuclear power program.”⁸⁶

Critiques

Observers can always speculate on the “nature” of the United States’ mission in Iraq, raising questions on whether it has really been achieved. In reality, most of those who raise these questions may not wish for this mission to be achieved, because they link it to concepts related to the perpetuation of American “supremacy” through hegemony. They endow terms such as “state building”, “nation building”, and “social engineering” with a content directly connected to the American military-industrial complex. This explains their focus on security in these faraway lands as if it were an inseparable part of American national security. This has been the demarche of many conservative and neo-conservative writers⁸⁷, as well as retired officers.⁸⁸ If the mission of reconstruction and the building of democratic society in Iraq and other countries of the region were presented as an American prerogative, what is then the role of local elites? If this task were that of the local elite, as common sense suggests, the biggest danger would be in repeating the same model of governance that had clearly shown its failure, since the beginnings of Arab action for independence from Ottoman rule, and which has accompanied all the state-building projects in the Arab World. Wajih Kawtharani described this model as follows :” thus, to the multiplicity of civic authorities in local society, and the intersection and amalgam of postures between the old Ottoman regime and the new *Tanzimates* came to be added the multiplicity of political loyalties among the emerging elites and the social groups seeking the formula of a “homeland”, a “nation”, and a “state”. This multiplicity was fed by the escalation of international conflict ...”⁸⁹ If we replace the term “Ottoman regime” by “Saddam regime”, we would find a lot of similarities between the above picture that describes the pre-WWI era and nowadays’ Iraq, where loyalties and notions of the homeland, the nation, and the state multiply in a manner threatening to re-ignite the conflict before society can reach stability. This has no direct

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid

⁸⁷ All the writings of John Bolton, Frederick Kagan, and their colleagues at the American Enterprise Institute and other think tanks that support them or are supported by them follow that trend.

⁸⁸ See, for example:

Harlan Ullman, *Unfinished Business*, (New York : Citadel Press, Kensington Publishing Corp.2002).

Gordon R. Sullivan and Michael V. Harper, *Hope Is Not a Method: what business leaders can learn from America’s army*, (Random House: 1996).

⁸⁹ Wajeeh Kawtharani, op.cit.p.214

connection to the withdrawal of American forces even if it appeared to be so. But it is definitely related to the ideology of the Iraqi elite and the heating of the struggle for power. As al-Jabiri writes, “escaping the prison of ideology and the hegemony of sectarianism begins with calling for the re-opening of the door of *Ijtihad*, and the necessity to accept difference”.⁹⁰ For this to be possible, however, the higher values and concepts that lead modern societies and help promote human rights need to be entrenched.

On the ground, events are rapidly unfolding, and threats appear to be really terrible; the possibility of the situation slipping out of control and falling into a war of militias after the American withdrawal remains present, and is inseparable from the numerous problems awaiting a solution. **We must note that the presence of American troops in Iraq would make no difference in that regard, but may be, as in 2003, an additional factor for the justification of violence;** the American forces did not solve a single one of the problems facing the government. The “security situation” is just one of these reproached deficiencies, not all of them. Dr. Dirgham al-Dabbagh recounted a number of those criticized failures, citing “the demolishing of achievements that have deep effect on building relations among the people, such as telephony, as Iraq is the only country in the world that lacks telegram and mail and telephone services, except in a minimal sense. Iraq lacks electricity, as well as security, which is the bedrock of societal life. The occupation has also destroyed education on all its levels, from primary to college institutions, and the Capital Baghdad is divided by cement walls that separate the children of the same neighborhood. Finally, Iraq suffers from sectarian power-sharing that is unrelated to any legal text, whether secular or religious, and we find in the country an anti-communitarian policy directed clearly and publicly against some minorities. Last but not least, in a country where the policy of repressing thought and opinions is rampant, and where all forms of freedoms are violated, and where crushing the other is a daily practice, what is left for reform?”⁹¹

In the same context, we find criticism relating to the revenues of oil and the manner in which they were spent. After former Minister of oil Issam Al Chalabi, quotes the inquiries of Ammar Al Hakim and the Minister of finance in Al Maliki’s first cabinet, Baker Soulagh Zubeidi, regarding these funds and the manner of their disbursement, he adds: “Is it not the right of Iraqis today to compare, away from any political consideration, what was formerly achieved with the efficiency of the era of occupation? What were the achievements made since the occupation? Is it electricity? Is it potable water? Have sewage systems been built instead of the old ones that were demolished? How many of the light and heavy petrochemical, iron, and fertilizer factories built in the past are still up and running? What of the thousands of health projects belonging to

⁹⁰ Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri, **Issues in Modern Arab Thought**, (Beirut, Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1997) p.22 (in Arabic).

⁹¹ Dirgham al-Dabbagh, “Al-Maliki’s grace period”, *Al-Murabit al-Iraqi*, June 9, 2011 (in Arabic): <http://www.almorabit.com/main/ar/almorabit-about-us-arabic/3753-2011-06-09-21-56-41.html>

both the private and mixed sectors? Have hospitals and modern schools and universities been constructed? Have roads and new railroad tracks been built? Are new ports being dredged? Is there an improvement in the ration cards' system? Have the levels of unemployment decreased? Has the number of Iraqis living under the poverty line decreased? Over the past 8 years, more money has been wasted than Iraq's budget receipts over 80 years!"⁹²

And there are documented accusations that this country has become a prey for organized looting since 2003, at the hands of those who came to "free" it from the dictatorship of Saddam. Corruption in Iraq is acknowledged even by the American Inspector General in his quarterly report. The report includes many instances and examples that leave no room for doubt in this regard.

However, the primary reproach that continues to be posed by many Iraqis is that the American intervention to change the regime has transformed Iraq into a retarded country in need of international assistance in almost every field, from health and nutrition, to agriculture, education, housing, water, and sanitation. In other words, the destruction of Iraq happened in order to "reconstruct" it in a fashion that meets the needs of the dominant world economy, and the military-industrial complex of the American empire.

Key findings

Among the foremost findings of this research which deserve full attention in the present context, the following:

- The US administration deals with all of the turbulent conditions in the Middle East from the perspective of "counter terrorism"; it mobilizes its energies and urges its allies in the region to cooperate with in this field. It does so for at least two reasons: the first is that it wants to secure its vital interests against possible attacks by uncontrolled armed groups. The second is, being geographically outside the Middle East region, its options for solving any situation out there are limited, since it cannot perform the role of the concerned governments and political actors.
- Giving primacy to security considerations over social and political ones may benefit the intervening foreign military institution, but it also becomes an entrenched bias preventing the objective assessment of society's ills. That is especially true when such a perspective is adopted by the local elite as if it stemmed from the authentic needs of the country.
- The breaching of security is not responsible for policy failure; on the contrary, policy failure leads to the breaching of security.

⁹²Issam Chalabi, "Our statistics include documented facts and figures", *Al-Murabit al-Iraqi*, April 13, 2011 (in Arabic): <http://www.almorabit.com/main/ar/2010-12-16-22-54-16/2876-2011-04-13-13-07-38.html>

- Even if we admit that the United States is not a colonialist state, the imperialism in the age of globalization does not require the presence of forces on the ground, and the appointment of a foreign military ruler. Controlling economic needs through perpetuating relations of dependence, while creating security “dangers” in the direct vicinity, is enough to convince the local elite of the need for “protection”.
- International agreements that are the product of highly unbalanced power relations could be a reason for instability and the deterioration of security, whereas its objective is the reverse.
- Sabotaging stability was not a passing phenomenon in the history of Iraq, but was somehow a permanent “coup”; i.e. violence against the state was more or less institutionalized.
- No foreign conspiracy could succeed without local participants. At the same time, no national elements would participate to a foreign conspiracy against their regime if this regime were a stable national democracy. The reasons for regime change are always internal, and mostly consist in feelings of oppression, injustice, and humiliation.
- “Change” does not necessarily have to imply a violent clash that divides society into “traditionalists” and “modernizers” with no room for dialogue between the two. The concept of “transitional society” includes tradition and modernization – permitting the overcoming of this conflictual polarization without “betraying” the Arab social structure.
- The exaggerated focus on security-military outlooks as a basis for solving complex issues did not prevent security- driven Arab regimes from collapsing.
- Plans that were devised in exile under circumstances that we can imagine, in spite of their adoption by most opposition figures, are not necessarily representative of the popular majority after the fall of the regime.
- Many of the “post-Saddam” plans prepared in exile in cooperation between Iraqi opposition figures and American officials were temporary; converting them systematically into a long-term program does not reflect common sense.
- In countries submissive to relations of dependency with the West, all efforts will be made to limit the democratic demands to a ceiling that does not create an immediate or unforeseen threat to the balance of power at either the regional or the international level.
- Starting with the 2003 war against Saddam, it appeared as if a new pattern of political action for change had emerged in the region, exhibiting itself through the use of the foreigner against the despotic ruler, who himself uses the same foreigner against his people, with all that it implies in terms of unendingly reproducing the model of dependency.
- Local planning becomes an echo of foreign planning when the post-war process of reconstruction adheres to the conditions of large external corporations and banks offering the necessary loans and funds, all of whom fall outside the control of the country in question.

-The crisis of trust between the government and a large part of Iraqi citizens has causes that may be controlled, which can be summarized as: Dispossession, felt by all those who lost their jobs and source of income.

Recommendations

It is not inevitable that conditions would sharply worsen following the full withdrawal of American troops, but this is still a probability that may occur. Since early February 2011, Iraq has witnessed a flurry of popular demonstrations and protests accusing the authorities of incompetence, which is in many ways similar to the civil democratic movement that is currently encompassing many Arab countries.

Despite all the above, it is possible to imagine a scenario where an elected, strong, and transparent government manages the deteriorating situation, which requires the focused attention and its placing at the top of the agenda. But how?

By December 2011, American troops would have departed the country. Until then, the responsibility for security issues lays primarily upon the Iraqis - with American assistance. However, the problem of Iraq as that of other Arab countries is –as already stated- not security driven except as a byproduct of policy failure. The loss of security cannot account for the failure of policy, but the failure of policy most probably lead to security failure.

In the era of Saddam, policy failure was also the reason for the successive wars, with Iran, Kuwait, coalition forces, and finally with the Bush administration. If the Iraqi political elite deals with the security situation as if it were separate from the general situation of the country with its various levels: economic, social, political, and legal, it would thus paralyze its own ability to solve these problems in a correct manner in order to bring the country to a state of self-reconciliation, which is indispensable to having peace, stability, and development.

Hence the situation requires that Iraqis – and by the way all members of the Arab elite- approach their problems in a different way. As Americans stress that the primary problem is that of security, it is important to emphasize the political nature of the issues at hand in the Arab region. There are no security solutions to the problems of: effective political participation, respect for human rights, fighting administrative and governmental corruption, and constructing the necessary facilities for a decent life (electricity, potable water, post offices, telephone lines and networks, hospitals, schools ...etc.), in addition to fairly distributing wealth, separating religion and state so to draw up the sources of sectarian sedition, implementing progressive laws

that preserve human dignity and limit the abuse of power, solving the issues of unemployment and retirement, reemploying public servants fired because of political or ideological affiliations, refraining from persecuting citizens for reasons relating to their past or current religious and ideological inclinations and so forth.

The reality is that one cannot imagine a return of normality to a country destroyed by consecutive wars and eight years of failed administration by the occupying forces, without making an effort at national reconciliation on part of the political elite that is supposed to be a model for the people. After all, who is opposing the new regime? If we exclude “Al Qaeda” and its radical allies – and this is no longer a purely Iraqi matter, with several Arab and Islamic states sharing the same affliction, which is also of concern to the international community – who remains?

Unfortunately, the answer is: Many parties and sections of society. This is a sad state of affairs in a system that wishes to be pluralistic and democratic, and whose leaders base their legitimacy on their fight against dictatorship. A democratic and reformist government must seek to unify its people through a reconciliatory initiative that satisfies its various strata, especially those who feel humiliated out of unfair treatment and marginalization since the establishment of the new regime.

The prosecution of those responsible for crime is a legitimate course of action, but treating a large part of Iraqi citizens as if they were lepers, merely because these men and women served the state under the previous regime in low and medium levels, is a behavior devoid of common sense. We have a suitable model to contemplate in the experience of South Africa and the great struggler Nelson Mandela. It is important to document testimonials and evidence against forgetfulness, so to avoid repeating the same mistakes throughout history. Yet, it is also necessary to forgive those who are not guilty of an important crime, or those who found themselves as employees within a system that superseded them, and that was the full extent of their “crime”. Recording history for memory, acknowledgement, and forgiveness, instead of seeking revenge and vengeance, is what turns the old page and extricates the country from the vicious cycle.

No government could take such a step unless it was strongly supported by its people, distanced from submission to vested and personal interests and tribal mindset. Such a government would serve the interests of the country first through implementing national reconciliation and the reallocation of civil peace above all other considerations. This is what would establish a successful policy that is effective in solving the issues at hand, after eradicating the feelings of oppression, injustice, and injury at the hands of an elite perceived as fulfilling foreign more than national demands, referring to the American recommendations and Iranian interventions.

It is important to stress that what was required to take place after the fall of Saddam was precisely the option that was excluded: reconciliation. If this was achieved, it would have probably extinguished the reasons behind the flaring of violence and the terrorists' grasp on the street. But the ruling elite submitted to the American vision that was – as we mentioned above – limited in its nature and revolving around a single axis: “combating terrorism”, for such was the overall slogan for the Bush campaign. Yet, reconciliation is not the end of the road; it is just the beginning of the path towards good governance, which does not exclude and exile for ideological, religious, or sectarian reasons.

In worst-case scenarios, as in the absence of a desire for reconciliation of this type, the “culture of revenge” may prevail. Add to it some external elements such as regional instability, and the problems that have emerged under the occupation would then continue to feed this culture of violence.

Nonetheless, an optimistic consideration of the democratic movement in the Arab world prompts us to argue that what took place in other countries such as Tunisia and Egypt could be beneficial for Iraq; just as the experience of Iraq would be beneficial for the Tunisians, Egyptians, Yemenis, Libyans, and Syrians – if they want to avoid falling into the trap of vengeance and retaliation, and, instead, seek national reconciliation as soon as the dictatorial regime is ousted.

**Note : The present study has been initially written and published in Arabic on the website of ACRPS. Any change to the exact terms in the quotations is due to the translation from Arabic.*

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