

## The Emergence and Stability of ISIS in Iraq

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**Abstract:** After US attack to Iraq, Iraq policy was completely changed. Iraq has always been governed by Sunni Arabs; however, Sunni fell to the lowest level of power and Shiites suppressed by the central government took the power, thus Sunni Arabs became isolated and showed resistance and opposition against the central government and the US. On the other hand, the central government dealt with them non-peacefully. In the meantime, terrorist groups like ISIS used this condition and brought them together.

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**Key words:** stability of ISIS; external factors; Iraq

### 1. Introduction

Having previous events in Iraq in mind, it can be claimed that it has been the best place for emergence of ISIS. How can a terrorist group like ISIS occupy the third big city of Iraq, Mosul, defended with 30-40 thousand military forces easily in a few hours, while the same group was defeated and forced to retreat in Kobani, a small Kurdish town in Aleppo Governorate, north of Syria with 60000 people and minimum military facilities, after four months of war? Why such a terrorist group claimed to be inspired by al-Qaeda, while al-Qaeda even separates itself from it and Ayman al-Zawahiri, the current leader of al-Qaeda, announced his opposition to them, a terrorist group that although beheads, kills, crucifies, burns, some Iraqi people, especially those living in Sunni areas, consider it as savior and even according to some reports, some Iraqis in Sunni areas welcome it.

Polat Talabany, the head of the Peshmerga's elite Counterterrorism Unit, told *Asharq Al-Awsat* (2014, para: 9) "Some of the local population will welcome us as we go past, and then pick up their AKs and shoot at us from behind.

It wasn't a shock but it's still quite surprising that they would do that with their wife and children next to them." ISIS has committed a lot of crimes in Iraq since October 2006, when they formed in Iraq.

They cause many discomforts in Syria by committing many terrorist attacks. In order to eradicate this group, first we should understand its appearance factors.

Regarding the above-mentioned facts, the main questions should be answered in this article is: what are the factors for emergence and stability of ISIS in Iraq? The hypothesis is that this terrorist group appeared because after the US attacked Iraq and when they evacuated Iraq, Sunnis were marginalized and the US entrusted the government to people who were not

ready enough to accept power. In other words, there was no basis for democracy in Iraq.

In contrary to those thinking ISIS appeared because foreigners wished it to appear, this article is going to show that it appeared because of some internal issues, in other words, external factors can only strengthen or weaken it.

#### 1.1. Looking at Past Transformations of Iraq to fall of Saddam

The roots of current transformation in Iraq should be searched in the past. Ethnic, cultural and religious diversity in Iraq has always been regarded as the major problem. Iraq is one of the Middle East countries that has heterogeneous population and was created by the U.K based on Sykes-Picot agreement. Members of a nation are believed to have a common history, culture and myths. Main reasons connecting a nation derive from strong sense of belonging to history, religion, culture and language. National Unity has always been difficult to be made in Iraq. Since Iraqis have never had common history, cultural values and peaceful life, they have not had any empathy, thus there are many divergence and instability factors. As a result, regarding characteristics of a nation, it can be stated that there is no Iraqi people yet. In other words, Iraq inability to create an Iraqi national identity has been regarded as one of the major reasons of resorting to adopting the policy of repression.

When Iraq was created in 1920 by England from the Ottoman Empire, 3 states (Wilayet) creating and forming it, i.e. Mosul, Baghdad and Basra had not had any experience of political, economic and social living in one political framework. Besides, due to having different culture and orientations, the mentioned states were governed separately. The three states in Iraq were so much different and separated from each other that after fall of the Ottoman Empire, Najaf declared

independence and prepared and provided a separate constitution for itself. Furthermore, civil strife soared in the province Mosul (shafeeq N. Ghabra, 2001)

Iraq is considered as a small Middle East, there is ethnic, racial, cultural and religious diversity in it. Therefore, ethnic, cultural and religious dissimilarity has made it hard for them to live together and caused political leaders not to have necessary political legitimacy to govern. As a result, the political leaders apply force and violence to get necessary legitimacy. In terms of religious issues, it can be stated that Iraqi government has composed of Shiite, Sunni, Christen, Yazidi, Shabak and Sabian. In terms of ethnicity, Iraq is composed of Arabs, Kurds and Turkmens. During Iraq independence, its population was composed of 21% Sunni Arabs, 14% Sunni Kurds (Mostly Sunni), 53% Shiite Arabs, 5% non-Muslim Arabs, mostly composed of Jews of Baghdad and 6% of other such groups as Sunni Turkmens and Assyrian Christians (Makiya, 1998).

In 1933, Emir Faisal, the first king of Iraq, said: “there is still [...] no Iraqi people but unimaginable masses of human beings, devoid of patriotic idea imbued with religious traditions and absurdities, connected by no common tie, giving ear to devil, prone to anarchy, and perpetually ready to rebel against any government whatever” (Batatu, 1978). Her speech is still valid. Furthermore, according to Jalal Talebani and Masoud Barezani (2003): “Iraq was a state imposed upon its inhabitants, a country whose preservation has cost too many lives” (Talebani & Bazani, 2003); Three main political groups in Iraq are Shiites, who have the most population, Arab Sunnis

and Kurds. One minority governed others up to 2003 and the US attack. Until the collapse of Ba’ath Party, Sunni minority governed Shiites, Kurds and other minorities.

### 2.1. History of Iraq

Abbasid Kingdom was the founder of Sunni government and Shia suppressor. Many of the significant Shi figures during Abbasid Period who were in Baghdad (that was once Abbasid capital) and killed around it are now buried in religious places in Iraq (Haji Yousefi & Soltani Nejad, 2003). During the mentioned period, Shiites were rejected by the government. Furthermore, Kurds participated in several riots against Abbasid government in Abbasid period, but they were suppressed.

Having been transferred Iraq between the Safavids and the Ottomans; Iraq was finally governed by the Ottomans from the fourteenth century to the World War I. During the Ottoman Empire, Iraq was governed as three states, Mosul state in north, Baghdad state in center and Basra state in south. The Ottoman policy was based on rejecting Arabs and removing Shiites and other minorities such as Kurds from the political power structure. In fact, Iraq governors were either Turks or Sunni Arabs. Although Shiites were in majority, they were marginalized by the Ottoman government and Shiites were not even allowed to have representatives in parliament.

Table 1 shows the combination of Iraqi Council of Representatives “Meclis-i Mebusân” (Chamber of Deputies; lower house) in the Ottoman era, the first period of 1908 was as follows:

**Table 1:** the combination of Iraqi Council of Representatives “Meclis-i Mebusân” (Chamber of Deputies; lower house) in the Ottoman era, the first period of 1908(Quoted by Azzawi, 1955: vol. 8, pp. 165, 166)

Province		Religion-Sect
Baghdad	Esmaeil Haghi Baban	Sunni Kurd
	Al Hajj Ali Aladdin al-Alusi	Sunni Arab
	Sassoon Eskell	Jewish
Basra	Talib Pasha al-Naqib	Sunni Arab
	Ahmed Pasha al-Zuhairi	Sunni Arab
Mosul	Muhammad Ali Fazel	Sunni Arab
	Davoud Yousefani	Christen
Al Diwaniyah	Shaukat Rafat Bey	Sunni Turk
	Mustafa al-Vaez	Sunni Arab
Karbala	Alhaj Abdul Mahdi al-Hafiz	Shi Arab
Muntafiq	Rafat al-Sanvi	Sunni Kurd
	Khidr Lotfi	Sunni Turk
Amarah	Abdul Mohsin al-Saadoun	Sunni Arab
	Abdul Majid al-Shawi	Sunni Arab
Sulaimaniyah	Al Haj Mullah Said Kirkukly	Sunni Kurd
Kirkuk	Al Haj Mustafa Firdar	Sunni Turkmen
	Salih Pasha al- Neftchi	Sunni Turkmen

As it is observed, there is only one Shi in the second round of first Meclis-i Mebusân. The second period of Meclis-i Mebusân was the same and there was only one Shi in it. Other minorities such as Kurds were in constant struggle and riot with the Ottomans. Turks revolted against the Ottomans in 1847, 1849, 1878 and 1881 all of which were suppressed by Turks. Moreover, new actions and attempts were made to stabilize National Movement of Kurds in 1908-1910 (Haji Yousefi & Soltani Nejad, 2003). After the World War I, Iraq was under British mandate and kings selected by them governed Iraq until 1958. After a formal national government which was formed by British in 1920, Sunnis again governed other groups.

There was only one Shi and one Kurd in the first cabinet of Iraq, after 1920. Furthermore, there were 5 Shiite or Kurdish ministers from 1921 to 1932. Moreover, during kingdom period until 1958, prime minister, minister of finance, minister of the interior, the secretary of defense and foreign minister were all Sunnis (Azghandi & Karami, 2007). As a result, Shiites revolted against the central government which did not allow them to participate in affairs while it was against "Convent al-Shaab" document. Kurds also who were dissatisfied with the status quo and Britain that was not committed to Treaty of Sèvres (based on which Kurd regions in north of Mosul had the right of self-determination and could submit their independence request to League of Nations after one year) revolted against British-controlled Iraq which was suppressed by army. As David Corn (1993) wrote, "When the British incorporated the Kurdish lands of the former Ottoman Mosul Wilayet into the Iraqi state which they set up after World War I, they made what surely must be counted as one of history's greatest mistakes."

Kurds had relative self-determination during kingdom until 1958: since 1919 to 1958, eight riots took place in north of Iraq. Iraq gained independence in 1932 and Abdul Karim Qassim coup put an end to kingdom period in 1958. Pan-Arabism was started by elite Sunni Arabs in Iraq.

Although it was developed and progressed since 1932, Pan-Arabism soared in Saddam period. By development of Pan-Arabism, other ethnic and religious groups were gradually marginalized.

The government behaved them violently and Pan-Arabism thought was regarded as the major factor in the suppression and elimination of the mentioned groups; Although, such a process has been stopped at two points in Iraq history, once in Bakr Sidqi era in 1936-1937 and then in Abdul Karim Qassim Monarchy in 1958-1963 (Haji Yousefi & Soltani Nejad, 2003). Ba'ath party was the worst era for Shiites and Kurds. This party governed Shiite and other minorities violently during Saddam period. Only

5% of Iraqi generals were Shiite in Saddam period (Clawson, 2002).

Kurds also suffered from severe violence during Saddam government; Saddam destroyed 1500 villages in 1975 and he killed many civilians and Peshmerga and created a security zone (600 miles long) in Syria and Iran boundaries. Moreover, Kurds experienced brutal attacks to Halabja and Operation Anfal. During these operations took place in 1988, 300 villages were razed to the ground and 5.1 million people were homeless and 180000 people were killed (Yaldiz, 2004).

Although it was the last wars between central government and Kurds, Saddam evicted thousands of Kurds from strategic regions such as Kirkuk.

Iraqi government retreated from governing Kurd regions in October 1991 and Iraqi Kurdistan enjoyed the self-determination of two factors. Saddam had destroyed Iraqi civil society by killing and suppressing Shiites and Kurds under Pan-Arabism title. Arabic-making policy considered as the most issues of ideology and policy of Ba'ath party, stopped by collapse of Pan-Arabism Ba'ath party.

### 3.1. Iraq after fall of Saddam and Emergence of ISIS

Although the US motto was based on fighting with terrorism and establishing security and democracy in attack to Iraq, the first and the most important challenge in Iraq is its security now.

In other words, Iraq has been changed to the center of terrorism and democracy has been changed to tyranny of majority.

When the US attacked Iraq, government was completely changed and Sunni Arabs who were the most powerful group in Iraq and had many years of experience in governance fell to the lowest levels of power by fall of Saddam; many of them lost their power and position. Saddam fall caused Shiites to find opportunity to come back to power.

In other words, they found suitable positions in all political institutions. Iraqi interim administration was composed of 13 Shiites, 5 Sunni Arabs, 5 Sunni Kurds, 1 Christen and 1 Turkmen in 2003 (Dawisha, 2008).

It was a perspective of power formation in future of Iraq. In cabinet of Ibrahim al-Jaafari, 16 ministers were Shi, 8 Kurd, 6 Sunni Arabs, 1 Christen and 1 Turkmen in 2005.

Opposite to eras before Saddam that Sunni Arabs were in majority, they were in minority (among three major political groups in Iraq) this time. From the beginning, oppositions and violence from Sunnis lost their power started.

When the US attacked Iraq, Iraq became a nest for Al-Qaeda terrorists and their supporters who

believed that Iraq has been given from real Islam and denoted to atheist Shi by the US (Haji Yousefi & Soltani Nejad, 2003). Al-Qaeda leaders were settled in Sunni regions to resist against occupiers (Abbaszadeh Fath Abadi, 2010).

Suicide attacks and the US forces clash in Sunni regions indicate Sunni Arabs' dissatisfaction with collapse of Ba'ath party.

Those who related to Ba'ath party, especially those who has been marginalized after war as well as Islamic extremists and those who were connected to terrorist networks such as Al-Qaeda (Sunni identity and anti-Shiite violence was some part of their ideology) were in the center of Iraq violence.

These groups used Iraqis dissatisfaction especially residents of "Sunni Triangle" i.e. north and west of Baghdad, Mosul and Ramadi.

Therefore, they began to recruit after the US attack. It can be claimed that deep dissatisfaction with Iraqi Sunni Arabs after the US attack has its roots in the dominant role and privileged position they had in history after Islam, whether in Caliphs era or the Ottomans Empire, whether when they were under British mandate or during republic government before the US attack.

Other reasons such as leaving tens of thousands of military officers on street without a promise to pay compensation as well as prohibiting all Ba'athists from contributing in the reconstruction of Iraq (according to Articles 31, 36 and 39 of Iraq's Interim Constitution, main members of Ba'ath Party are not eligible to be a candidate for the National Assembly, presidential elections and premiership (Al-Zubaidi *et al.*, 2011) increased the probability of their participation and connection to extremists.

Bremer, Administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority of Iraq outlawed Ba'ath party in 2003 and dropped 100000 members (main members) of it from newly established state institutions and left 400000 soldiers in streets (Dawish Adeed, 2008).

Although in constitution "Saddamist Ba'ath in Iraq and its symbols" were only mentioned, in practice a major part of managers, clerks and other experts and specialists of Saddam government were dismissed (Ghanbarloo, 2007).

Although, parliament passed a law which allowed Saddam Hussein's former government officials to return public life, it wasn't very effective in people's life.

In other words, isolating Sunni Arabs in addition to Ba'athist-removing project caused many Sunni Arabs to get together with Ba'athists avenger and extremist groups and sabotage in the government affairs.

The US forces had most losses in Al Anbar Province. Therefore, having this issue in mind, it can be claimed that the appearance of ISIS in Iraq and Sunni Arab supports from it have not been much unexpected. In the interim parliamentary elections, most of Sunnis boycotted the election of 2005;

Sunni Arab's fear of marginalization by Shiites resulted in hold a conference on February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2005 in which 200 Sunni figures participated and they asked Shiite parties who had won the election not to marginalize them.

Iraqi constitution referendum was also faced with some problems in 2005;

Since Iraqi Sunnis were in opposition with it, constitutional law was a text written with clan-oriented biases and represented collusion of Shiites and Kurds against Iraqi Sunni Arabs (Al-Zubaidi, *et al.*, 2011).

The results of Iraqi constitution referendum had interesting results, the percentage of votes in regions where the majority said "no" to the Iraqi's constitution is very close to the percentage of regions where were easily occupied by ISIS before the attack of coalition forces.

**Table 2:** The results of Iraqi constitution referendum

Province	"Yes" Side (%)	"No" Side (%)	Province	"Yes" Side (%)	"No" Side (%)
Al Anbar	3/04	96/96	Maysan	97/79	2/21
Babylon	94/56	5/44	Muthanna	98/56	1/35
Baghdad	77/7	22/30	Najaf	95/82	4/18
Basra	96/2	3/98	Nineveh	44/92	55/08
Duhok	9/12	0/87	Al-Qādisiyyah	96/74	3/32
Diyala	51/2	48/73	Saladin	18/25	81/75
Erbil	99/36	0/64	Sulaymaniyah	98/96	1/04
Karbala	96/58	3/42	Dhi Qar	97/15	2/85
Kirkuk	62/91	37/9	Wasit	95/7	4/30

Total “Yes” Side Number: 78.5, Total “No” Side Number: 21.41. The statistics have been cited in “Iraq Seeks a Future” book. (Al-Zubaidi, Abbadi & Sa’dun, 2011)

As observed, ISIS could occupy regions where “No” votes were more than “Yes” votes, easily. In other words, it shows peoples’ dissatisfaction with the new Iraqi government proving the article hypothesis. Al-Askari Mosque bombing (which destroyed its golden dome) in Samarra in 2006 worsen the condition, religious disrupts were deepen and Iraq was driven toward a religious war. Furthermore, Shiites retaliated. Shiites living in Sunni regions and immigrated to Shiite regions and Sunnis living in Shiite regions, abandoned their homes and immigrated to Sunni regions.

As a result, most regions became single-religion regions. Premiership of Nouri al-Maliki caused Iraq to enter a severe political crisis. Security actions of the US changed Al-Qaeda into small guerrilla groups. Furthermore, the US supported, trained and gave military equipment to Al Anbar Salvation Council derived from Al Anbar Awakening Council and was composed of a number of heads and Sunni sheikhs of tribes formed to fight against Al-Qaeda in Al Anbar in September 2006. Awakening Council was very successful in fighting against extremist and terrorist groups. Awakening Councils were formed in Sunni regions.

The US was very effective in security of Iraq and could decrease threats very much. In fact, before withdrawal of US troops, neighboring countries were less involved in Iraqi government and affairs. Withdrawal of US troops created a security vacuum. In other words, Iraq was left to people whose civil society was very weak and they were not talented enough to establish democracy. Power was mostly in hands of one group or tribe. Democracy is an internal process;

It cannot be created with military force. Moreover, having violence experience during history and cultural discriminations and differentiations as well as having ethnic-religious belonging, made it hard to realize democracy in Iraq. Although having been given theoretical democracy points, societies like Iraq that have separate and different ethnic, religious and language belongings cannot realize democracy in practice. Identities in Iraq have been formed from one aspect such as religion or ethnicity. Elections are affected by ethnic interests. There is not any common national identity among Iraqis. Democracy resulted in extremism of ethnic and religious parties; most of parties only supported one ethnic or religious group. Furthermore, groups who had lost their position and power due to democracy, brought violence and war to Iraq.

Therefore, Sunni minorities were also against democracy. In fragmented societies like Iraq, democracy results in tyranny of the majority. Since Shiites formed more than 60% of population, democracy brought tyranny for them especially during Nouri al-Maliki premiership. Finally, democracy resulted in non-democratic results. According to Chris Sander: “There isn't a society in Iraq to turn into a democracy” (Fallows, 2002, 64).

Ethnic and sectarian interests dominate over national interests. Withdrawal of the US troops paved the way for Shiites to retaliate years of deprivation and oppression. On the other hand, Nouri al-Maliki government also behaved like a sectarian government. When the US troops left Iraq, violence increased and past dictatorships re-created and other groups were marginalized by Shiites this time.

The number of people executed in 2012 was almost doubled compared to 2011. Moreover, according to statistics achieved from ICPS, International Center for Prison Studies, (n.d.), the number of prisoners was 28954 in 2008 and 45172 in 2012 indicating an increase in violence and more political repression after withdrawal of the US troops. Maliki mostly assigned people close to him in governmental positions and he put many into jails under the excuse of anti-terrorism options.

He also put an end to the operations of Awakening Councils in Iraq and it was very effective in strengthening extremist groups, especially after the disease of Mr. Jalal Talabani (Kurd President of Iraq), who had created a balance between Shiite majority and other groups and it increased the conflicts between Iraqi Kurdistan and Maliki.

Kurds who supported the US in attack to Iraq, united with Sunnis against the central government because of fear of tyranny of the majority and being marginalized. Even when Tariq al-Hashimi’s arrest warrant was issued, he took refuge in Iraqi Kurdistan for some time, when his arrest warrant was issued, Iraqiya coalition gave up participation in cabinet resulted in more religious conflicts. When Maliki ordered to arrest Rafi al-Issawi’s (former finance minister and deputy prime minister) bodyguards and Ahmed al-Alwani (one of Sunni representatives in Iraqi Parliament), general protests started in Sunni provinces especially in Al-Anbar.

These conflicts then involved parliament and Iraqi’s cabinet. Therefore, Iraqi’s army used military force to suppress them. In the meanwhile, Maliki order to destroy protestors’ tents which made protestors angrier. Since Maliki’s government was not as strong as the US and could not provide military budget to stand against security threats and other groups who were completely dissatisfied with the status quo, no group even Kurds stood against ISIS

threats. All the above-mentioned facts paved the way for ISIS to find the situation they sought in Iraq and to be regarded as the savior of those especially Sunnis who were dissatisfied and disappointed with the status quo, because opposition with Shiites and Americans were considered as the common characteristics of Ba'ath Party, extremist groups and Sunni Arabs. Therefore, having a common goal, they united and ISIS used the situation.

Therefore, no group stood against ISIS troops when they occupied Sunni regions. ISIS was a combination of dissatisfied Sunni Arabs, residual of previous government especially Ba'ath and Al-Qaeda officers. Since they were familiar with security weaknesses of Iraq, they succeeded in disrupting security in Iraq. ISIS led by Abu Omar Baghdadi was formed in Iraq in October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

This group committed many terrorist operations since it was created and attracted more and more supporters and fans in Iraq among Sunni Arabs, gradually. Withdrawal of the US troops from Iraq created a security vacuum and ISIS used it. On the other hand, involvement of neighboring countries and tyranny of the central government as well as failure of democracy in Iraq caused Sunni Arabs to accompany with them. According to Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder (1995) "Democratizing states" are about twice as likely to fight wars in the decade after democratization as are states that remain autocracies.

## 2. Discussion

Therefore, regarding the above-mentioned fact, it can be concluded that ISIS was appeared and stayed in Iraq not because of foreign supports but because of such issues as marginalizing Sunnis from administration after the US attack to Iraq, early withdrawal of the US troops and people unprepared to establish democracy, all of which resulted in tyranny of the majority by withdrawal of the US troops and especially by Maliki. Arab Sunnis in Iraq who were the losers of the US attack to Iraq, after fall of Saddam stood against the central government. Armed resistance against the US troops in "Sunni Triangle", i.e. north and west of Baghdad, Mosul and Ramadi (Tikrit, Fallujah and Ramadi) was all due to the special situation people of the mentioned regions had during Ba'ath Party.

However, after fall of Saddam, most terrorist attacks were against Shiites who were the main winners of the US attack to Iraq. Groups who were against the US opposition in Iraq supported Al-Qaeda. Sunnis' fear of Shiites' retaliation and fall of Sunnis to the lowest levels of power after the US attack made them very angry. When the government was delivered to people who were not ready and talented enough to establish capacity, to society where one minority was

always supported more than others, dictatorship was again appeared in it. It also made dissatisfied Sunni Arabs looked for a third force to help them achieve their goals. Among all, ISIS used the situation and brought all dissatisfied Sunni Arabs together. Thus, it can be stated that internal conditions of Iraq was the main cause of ISIS emergence. Roots and factors of a crisis can help us solve it more easily.

Some issues can be studied in next articles are: the effectiveness of foreign countries support on strengthening or weakening ISIS, ways to fight against and eradicate ISIS, the effectiveness of religious ideology on Sunni Arabs support of ISIS, the effect of ISIS on security of countries in the region

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