



Conflict Dynamics and Prospects for Peacebuilding in Iraq: A Case Study of Post Saddam Era

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to understand the multidimensional dynamics of post-2003 Iraq and the conflict that engulfed it after the American intervention. It describes the violent struggles for power that ensued after Baathist rule in Iraq formulated due to sectarian divides, governance issues, alien involvement, and the emergence of violent radical factions. At the same time, this research seeks to analyze the nature and consequences of historically rooted grievances, the process of de-Ba'athification, and power voids that led to long-term persistent violence that balkanized the Iraqi society along sectarian lines and gave rise to extremist entities such as ISIS. These actors pose serious challenges not only to the affected state but to the entire regional and global security order. Furthermore, the research sheds light on peacebuilding interventions by both the local and international authorities including efforts at structural government system changes, reconciliation processes, and macroeconomic revitalization of the country. By utilizing a case study strategy, this work examines the success of chosen strategies at resolving violent conflict, identifying reasons why durable peace is not attainable. Evidence gathered from the study demonstrates that enduring peace in Iraq requires a profound resolution to the challenge of divided society which in contrast is absent in contemporary state-building policies. Vicky Culberston argues the thesis that a centralized, all-encompassing solution that integrates social, economic, and political change is the answer to enduring stability in Iraq.

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1. Introduction

The US-led coalition's offensive against Saddam in 2003 drastically Down the history lane, it was the time, Saddam Hussein's Totalitarian regime was due to sudden collapse. With the removal of the dictator, imperialistic rule afforded a brute possibility to reform democratically, however the consequences came with negative complexities than ever thought of. Instead of bringing peace, Iraq open its arms to a more complex state of violence, Political disarray and Sectarian war. Not only does it affect the citizens but also, the nation itself being an endeavor to create a new government went spiral. Hurdles after hurdles poured the remains of the Ba'athist regime where armed groups, sectarian factions and insurgents rather ruling started fighting for supremacy further formulating the chaos that continued for the years to come. To fully understand Iraq, is to look at it from so many angles. One of the most crucial ones being how bad the civil society has broken, create political and social divide while attempting to bridge the Sunni-Shia rift along with Kurdish nationalism. The Implementation of de-Ba'athification which aimed at dismissing the Ba'ath party military and government elites created a mess that Iraq is still trying to mend. This increased the likelihood of the emergence of radical groups like al-Qaeda in Iraq and later Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as they

tried to underline the conflicts to widen their scope of influence. Moreover, the foreign interveners, including the U.S. army and the neighboring countries, particularly Iran, have, to a great extent, simultaneously intensified and sought to resolve the strife (Majeed & Hossain, 2021).

The efforts for sustaining peace in Iraq are one of the most noteworthy of, and certainly one of the most difficult, actions taken with regard to post-war reconstruction. The address to the conflict by the international community and local actors showed focus on wide range of activities meant for the reconstruction of the country. These strategies included efforts to achieve national unity, socioeconomic development, and redress for the grievances experienced by the marginalized communities. Despite the deep exhaustion caused by the violence against civilians and political instability, the attempts to bring this peace were limited in their effectiveness. While some progress has been made towards creating greater stability, such as the defeat of ISIS and reconstruction of key pieces of infrastructure, the vision for lasting peace has yet to be achieved. This aims to analyze the conflict dynamics of Iraq during the post-Saddam period with a focus on the causes of instability and possibilities for peacebuilding in the country through the study of significant historical events, socio-economic, and political settings (Dowd, 2003).

Figure 1



By considering the country's history, its politics, and the foreign interventions, the study puts together Iraq's complicated puzzle of conflicts. In addition, it assesses the multifaceted peacebuilding initiatives and their respective successes and failures to discern what Iraq stands to gain or lose in the future. With this analysis, the aim of the research is to enrich the dialogue on what happens after a country fights a war and provide realistic recommendations regarding peacemaking efforts in Iraq and other countries that are comparable.

2. Results and Discussion

This study aims to analyze the post-Saddam conflict complexities in Iraq as well as consider the opportunities for peacebuilding after years of sectarian violence, insurgent activities, and foreign interference. As it is clear from the findings, there are deep-seated issues that bewilder the political, social, and economic situation in Iraq, and, therefore, the efforts of the peacebuilding process are futile. Nevertheless, unlike these barriers, there is the possibility of achieving sustainable peace if Iraq employs these strategies aimed at inclusiveness such as reconciliation, economic development, and reform governance.

2.1. Political Multiplicity and Ethnic Violence

One of the central findings of this research is the ongoing sectarian violence within Iraq that stands in the way of achieving national cohesion and stability. The collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 enabled the formation of a more cooperative government; however, the political arrangement which followed the period was characterized by increasing fragmentation on sectarian bases. The de-Ba'athification policy aimed at cleansing government institutions from Saddam's supporters has had an overwhelming negative impact on the Sunni

population by politically excluding them from the new system. Subsequently, this fostered a political vacuum that is now dominated by sectarian identity and has changed the political and security system of Iraq. After Saddam Hussein's fall, Iraq experienced intense political and ethnic violence, fueled by sectarian divisions between Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish groups. This instability worsened with the rise of extremist factions like ISIS, deepening the country's turmoil (Barnett, Eggleston, & Webber, 2003).

Figure 2



The multiplicity of politics was worsened by the emergence and growth of sectarian armed groups and the increasing control from external forces like Iran's for Shia factions and others has dangerously increased the fragmentation, the instability of Iraq's political environment, the country already shredded apart by civil wars and violence experienced political stasis and brutal suppression of multi-ethnic and sectarian representation. The growth of sectarian fission with lack of political ideologies deepened the social cleavages and rancor, and made genuine dialogue and retraction nearly impossible. In this sense, the study proposes that comprehensive peacebuilding efforts require the necessary step of moving beyond mere political representation towards the cultivation of a national identity. This can be done through the construction of institutions and policies that are designed to foster what communities feel is citizenship above tribal, ethnic, and sectarian identities, and which actively seek to redress the socio-political marginalization of disenfranchised Sunni, Kurdish and other minority groups. To build enduring peace in Iraq, there must be an ability to form cross-segmentary alliances and guarantee authentic political representation to all (Natali, Denise. 2007).

3. Increasing violence of militant extremists and insurgents

This finding also suggests a possible link between ethnic sectarian alienation violence exclusion leading to the violent activity of extremist groups in Iraq, particularly ISIS. Some findings suggest that ISIS's unprecedented ascendancy in Iraq, especially the capture of vast territories in 2014 was not merely due to a shambolic state of the military, but rather the culmination of many years of political ostracization. The combination of the Sunni community's discontentment with the Shiite-led central government, alongside the neglect of Sunnis post Saddam's rule in Iraq, was a precondition for the rise of radical ideologies. From the research findings, it can be claimed that ISIS took advantage of the frustration the Sunni community had towards the government and brandished itself as a guardian of Sunni interests against Shia suppression. With no other available options, the disenfranchised Sunni population became even more appealed to by the group after the government's failure to ensure safety, appropriate leadership, and employment, particularly in the regions that had been extensively ravaged due to sectarian violence (Int. Crisis group, 2014).

Although there was victory over ISIS in Iraq, which came with tremendous military achievements, the outcome shows that the rest of extremism, which is political marginalization, impoverishment, and ethnic conflict, continue to exist. The escalation and diffusion of

extremist tendencies in Iraq is often attributed to the existence of a collapsed governing authority as well as a divided country. Achieving peace in Iraq requires measures that go beyond military means and instead focus on the more complex causes of attacking violence. The research emphasizes the need to take a broad perspective when using strategies to prevent radical violence that should encapsulate the adoption of political change, the creation of integrative rule, and the social and economic steps that target the neglected population. By confronting these critical concerns, Iraq may hope to see a drop in extremist activity (Pugh, 2002).

4. Failure of Governance and Fragile Institutions

An important aspect of my research is the irrational system of Post-Saddam governance structures of Iraq which continue being weak, fragmented, and very open to corruption. Though there have been attempts to create democratic institutions in a post-Saddam Iraq, the political system continues to be mired in inefficiency, lack of accountability, and grossly entrenched sectarian politics. This form of inadequacy has been noticed particularly in the security sector of Iraq which has been unable to maintain law and order and in the judicial system that is regularly subverted by politics (Ahmed & Eahya, 2024). Research indicates that Iraqi political elites have concentrated on obtaining power for their particular sectarian groups instead of working towards building state institutions that are beneficial to citizens. This situation has resulted in a government that is ineffective in delivering services, maintaining security, and protecting citizens' rights. In addition, the public sector's numerous corrupt practices have exhausted the financial resources of the state, broken the trust of the people toward the government, and undermined their faith in the country. The analysis shows that building and reforming state governance institutions is the most basic precondition to achieve sustainable peace in Iraq. In order to reach durable stability, Iraq is to be assisted with systematic changes for the state institutions towards higher openness, responsibility, and more professionalism. Among these reforms, strengthening the judiciary, improving the performance of the security structures, and rendering civil service more inclusive and responsible should be a priority. Political Decentralization might need to be taken as a step to make sure that all areas of Iraq are represented in the decision making process (Russell, 2003).

5. Limited Success of Peacebuilding Initiatives

Post-Saddam Iraq has experienced what have been termed peacebuilding attempts, but these efforts are usually disunited and, at worst, produce no lasting constructive results. A number of national and international efforts have been aimed at providing aid, military intervention, and active or passive security coverage instead of holistic nation-building. Additionally, the lack of coordination among international stakeholders such as the U.S., the UN, and other non-governmental agencies has frequently brought about inefficient convergence of resources and overlap of activities. In addition, these initiatives have often failed to build peace through social, political, and economic transformations that are much more strategic (Pargeter, 2013). Changing these structures as well as focussing on infrastructure development or providing an institutional framework for elections does not adequately address the fundamental causes of civil strife in Iraq. In turn, this means that progress can be made but will, in fact, be limited and unsustainable. The study suggests moves towards the building of wider, integrated peace that, as well as vertically structural, includes governance and social peace. Attention should be paid to the root causes of the conflict and inter-group dialogues as well as the building of sustainable local capacities for peace should be greatly enhanced. Coordinating initiatives across all sectors is critical to developing appropriate responses to Iraq's multiethnic society while enabling the country to achieve sustainable peace (Uddin, 2022).

6. External and Internal Factors

The results of the analysis show how external and internal stakeholders influence the strategy Iraq adopts after Saddam. The investigation found that both American, Iranian, and Saudi Arabian engagement has deepened Iraq's political disorder. Although the American intervention in Iraq in 2003 did aid in deposing Saddam Hussein, it also created political chaos in the country, making it susceptible to external meddling. Iranian sponsorship of Shia militants, alongside Saudi support for Islamist Sunni groups, has deepened Iraq's sectarian strife. In the absence of rational political programs, Iraq's political fate has been dependent on the geopolitical interests of other countries. This has continuously placed Iraq into a compromising position where the country lacks control over its fundamental human and

territorial resources, making it less powerful and more fragmented (Omid & Emami, 2024). The analysis concludes that Iraq's enduring stability rests on how consolidation of power takes place internally, with sovereignty over political and security decisions being paramount. In addition, Iraq has to move towards a national identity beyond sectarian divisions while avoiding any outside manipulation of the country's foreign policy.

Actors in the region, most notably Iran and Saudi Arabia, ought to assist in delivering peace and stability to Iraq, as their participation in the country's internal politics does little more than deepen the divisions within the country. Challenges of Economic Reconstruction Economic reconstruction remains one of the most daunting challenges facing post conflict Iraq. The research indicates that while Iraq is among the largest producers of oil, there is such a dependence on oil revenues that not only does it make the economy prone to oil price changes, but it also stifles growth in other industries. Furthermore, the damage done to the infrastructure of Iraq over a long period of war and insurgency make it almost impossible to sustain economic growth. Coupled with high unemployment, widespread poverty, and rampant inflation, bringing about economic balance appears an impossible task for the country (Katzman, 2008). The study depicts economic imbalance in the country, especially in regions in poor states like Anbar and Nineveh which suffered from ISIS occupation, as a major looming threat. The inhabitants of these regions continue to live devoid of any necessary services let alone opportunities. If these economic inequalities are left untouched, the prospect of Iraq achieving peace becomes harder to accomplish. In order to achieve modern peacemaking concepts, the research brings to perspective the idea that Iraq ought to lower its reliance on oil and shift to structural economic growth, investment in education and job creation expanding infrastructure. Investments should also focus on fighting corruption and fairly distributing economic assets among Iraq's different parts. As a result, the economic reconstruction of the country should go along with the political and social changes in the country so that the society can become more holistic and developed (Ashwarya, 2017).

7. Possibilities for Constructing Peace and Stability

In The Long Term In spite of the numerous problems besetting Iraq, the results indicate there is hope for enduring peace. Yet, this will need work for a sustained period in peacebuilding which in turn requires all the relevant frameworks that established the conflict to be dealt with. The construction of encompassing functional political systems, rebuilding state institutions and geared towards fostering national reconciliation are all integral aspects of this (Agbebaku, Odion, & Odion, 2008). The study underscores the fact that peacebuilding in Iraq should be owned and led by Iraqis and everyone who lives in Iraq should have a stake. Foreign actors have a major contribution to make, but they need to enable Iraq to become more inclusive and accountable - not devise plans for them. Ultimately, the research asserts that the enduring peace of Iraq will emerge from the citizenry and leadership overcoming tribal lines, building trust among different communities and working towards a bigger purpose. This entails not only also a shift in culture toward a more tolerant, cooperative, and relativistic perspective.

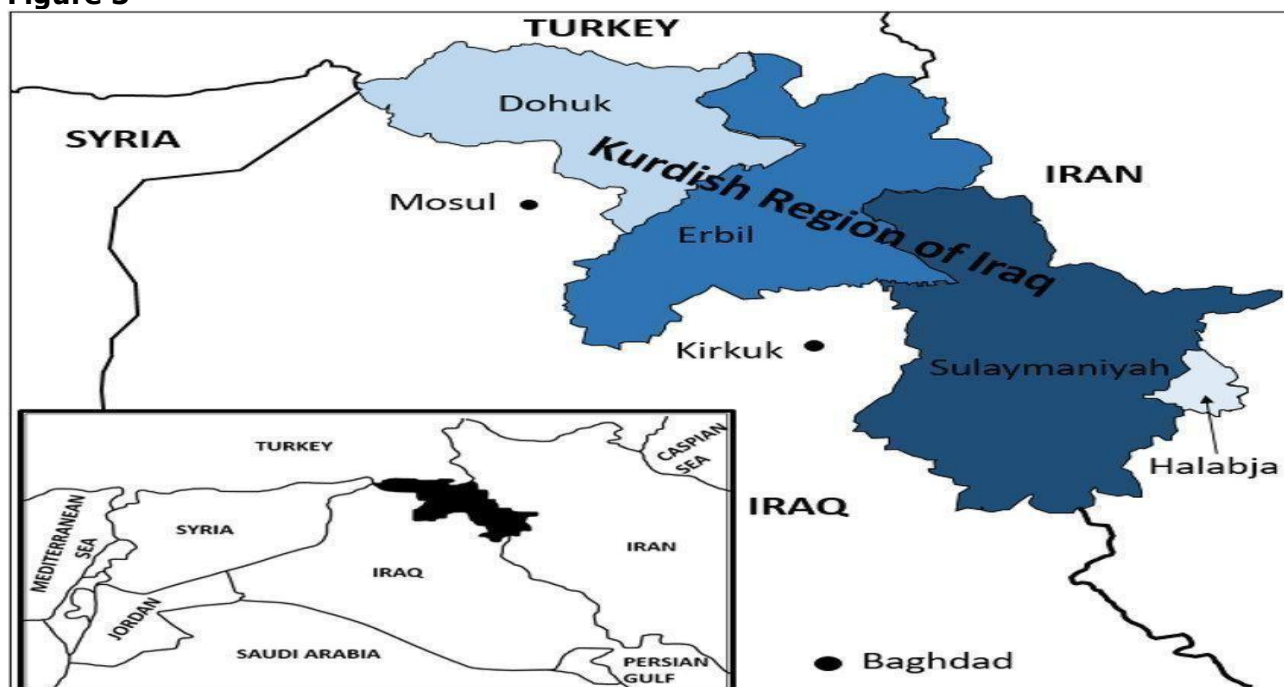
7.1. Kurdish After Saddam

Saddam Hussein's regime fell in 2003, and the Kurdish region in Northern Iraq is said to have advanced politically, economically, and socially. He Permanently damaged Iraq which allowed the Kurds to set up a semi-independent state, called the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). This autonomy further strengthened after 2003, when power was handed over to the new Iraqi government. The KRG was ruled by the KDP and PUK Parties who became influential politicians. The new constitution registered in 2005 accepted the Kurdish semi-independence where locals could manage their government and military, the Peshmerga, as well as their natural resources and oil. On the other hand, problems arose regarding the KRG and Baghdad deciding the distribution of oil money and control of land like Kirkuk. Due to its oil and gas resources, the Kurdistan region was able to boom in development. The KRG managed to make oil deals with foreign businessmen which helped bypass Baghdad, provoking anger over the ownership and distribution of Iraq's oil (Hamid, 2023).

While this economic boom took place, the Kurdistan region was still dependent on Baghdad for financial aid. Transfers from the public sector reinforced this dependency and softened the strain of political disputes. The Kurdish Peshmerga forces guarded the region and later became significantly important when fighting ISIS in 2014. This further emphasized their

role within Iraq's security. The 2017 referendum for Kurdish independence faced strong opposition from Baghdad. Even though the results overwhelmingly favored independence the Iraqi government did not approve and began taking back control over Kirkuk and other areas, severely straining the Kurds politically and economically (Navasardyan, 2023). The relationship between the KRG and the central government in Baghdad has been a blend of both cooperation and excessive tension. While the Kurds have had important positions within the Iraqi government, there has been persistent conflict regarding power sharing, distribution of oil revenue, and other disputed regions. In addition to these problems, the politics of the Kurds are also deeply impacted by neighboring countries such as Turkey and Iran which are currently opposing the movements due to having their own Kurdish population. In spite of all this, the KRG has sustained strong relations with important superpowers especially the US and continues to maintain their complex political status. Within the Kurdish region itself, there are issues like the political conflict between KDP and PUK, human rights violations, displaced people, gender issues, and so on. The future of the KRG as it seeks more self rule or independence will always be connected with its interaction with Baghdad, other countries in the area, and the rest of Iraq's stability. In covering post Saddam challenges, the Kurds have had and continue to have a part in influencing the peacebuilding efforts of Iraq by pursuing self-determination (Singh, 2024).

Figure 3



8. Conclusion

This research paper seeks to analyze the patterns of conflict in Iraq since the fall of Saddam and gauge the possibilities of peacebuilding for a nation that has suffered from decades of sectarian violence, insurgency, and foreign incursions. The findings underscore the Central to these challenges for Iraq is the damaging legacy of the aftermath of Saddam Hussein's rule where the country has undergone severe political, social, and economic turmoil. Iraq has achieved some level of deconstruction and stabilization in various regions, but there are high levels of fragmentation and violence. Ethnic and sectarian tensions, in addition to political fragmentation and violence, continue to block peacebuilding initiatives. The enduring problem of sectarianism made worse by a divided polity and the marginalization of certain sections of society, especially the Sunnis, has fostered an atmosphere of suspicion and hostility among the different ethnic and sectarian groups in Iraq. These hostilities have given rise to insurgent phenomena, particularly ISIS, who take advantage of the socio-political disintegration and security voids. The physically striking of ISIS was followed by an even more disastrous development. The root causes of extremism such as political marginalization, economic neglect, and ineffective state authority are dominant and mostly unresolved. Hence, the reality of peace is far from achievable without addressing the roots of such through inclusive political change.

Social integration and a sustained strategy towards balanced economic growth, development. However, the dysfunctionality of Iraq's governance institutions has been a major hindrance to peace. Lawlessness, inefficiency, and ethnic favoritism have corroded the state's capacity to maintain law and order, service the public, and stabilize the economy. The findings of this study suggest that Iraq's institutions need reconstruction in order for the state to deliver services and sustain peace. The political change should seek to form more robust and less corrupt institutions that guarantee responsiveness to all communities in Iraq. The research further shows how the attempts to build peace in Iraq have been on piecemeal fashion and short-term, fixing the symptoms rather than the causes of the problem. There has been an important role played by outsiders in Iraq, especially in humanitarian assistance and supportive to security, but the follow-up work has been totally absent as well as a large part of these structural causes of conflict. To be successful, peacebuilding must address the humanitarian situation, along with deeper political, social, and economic issues.

Even with these daunting obstacles, it is encouraging to see that research data does point towards a brighter future for Iraq. There are external and internal opportunities to foster peace, as long as the Iraqi political leadership, as well as the international community, focuses on implementing all-encompassing reforms. Moving forward, Iraq needs to promote acceptance of its differences by building a national identity and allowing all members of society fair representation across the political system. Additionally, urgent action is needed to enhance economic growth, reconstruct social and political institutions, and promote fairness in order to foster a truly egalitarian society. Ultimately, any externally proposed solution for Iraq must be paired with equally compelling local initiatives since achieving lasting peace is a two-sided commitment. Healing the wounds of Iraq will take a great deal of time- nothing less than full cooperation that attacks conflicts at their origin and includes all divides will enable the country to transition into a stable, peaceful, democratic, and prosperous state. The analysis demonstrates that irrespective of the overwhelming issues, the possibilities for peace are achievable as long as a political, social, and economic restructuring is done that guarantees Iraq's citizens a more peaceful, unified, and prosperous future.

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