

THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF IRAQ (2003-2015)

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ABSTRACT

The subject of this thesis is the political system of Iraq in years 2003–2015, which will be presented in three chapters describing different significant eras in the country's history. The first chapter will cover Iraq's history since its creation in 1921 until the end of Saddam Hussein's reign. The second chapter will recount Iraq's political and social situation under the American occupation. The third and last chapter will focus on years 2005–2014, particularly concentrating on the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki

Key words: **THE POLITICAL, SYSTEM OF IRAQ (2003–2015).**

النظام السياسي في العراق ٢٠١٥-٢٠٠٣

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المخلص

الموضوع البحث هذه تتناول النظام السياسي في العراق من ٢٠١٥/٢٠٠٣ الذي سيتم عرضه في ثلاث فصول الفصل الاول:- تاريخ العراق منذ تأسيس الدولة العراقية (المملكة العراقية) عام ١٩٢١ وحتى نهاية عهد صدام حسين الفصل الثاني:- وضع العراق السياسي والاجتماعي في ظل الاحتلال الأمريكي الفصل الثالث:- فيركز ع نظام السياسي من ٢٠٠٥ الى ٢٠١٤ وبالاخص على حكومة الرئيس الوزراء نوري المالكي

الكلمات المفتاحية: **النظام السياسي، العراق ٢٠١٥-٢٠٠٣**

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chapter will cover Iraq's history since its creation in 1921 until the end of Saddam Hussein's reign.

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Iraq has headlined the global media for many years, most recently due to the rise of IS Islamic State; also known as ISIL – Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant or ISIS – Islamic State of

Iraq and Syria; other abbreviations include Daesh from its Arabic name).

This has put Iraq in the eye of numerous international organizations, as its political disintegration is perceived as a serious

threat not only to the Middle East, but to other regions of the world as well. Due to a concern of

exporting islamic terrorism outside of Iraq, some Western countries decided to join the conflict and assist the troubled government in Baghdad.

This thesis has been based mostly on Polish– and English language dissertations available on the subject, with the exception of the last chapter covering the most recent events under the al–

Maliki government and the actions of IS. The lack of official publications on these subjects made

me turn to internet sources on the matters.

CHAPTER ONE

Birth of a modern nation and monarchy What we now know as Iraq war created after the First World War. Turkey, which had previously reigned over the region, capitulated and conceded the rights to Great Britain. This started a period of British occupation which lasted until 1932. However, the population was not

pleased over this fact, which lead to numerous attempts of overthrowing the British power. Also

new political movements started to form, either opting for a continued British rule, or a nationalist one, fighting to expel the occupant.

During the 1921 Cairo Conference the future of Iraq was also discussed. The British attempted to preserve their rule in the region, while at the same time to make Iraq seem an

independent state. Iraq became a constitutional monarchy with king Faisal Ibn Hussein, of the al –Hashemi dynasty, who was very loyal to the British at the time. However, the kingdom was greatly

diverse, both ethnically and religiously. The majority (about 75%) were Arabs, both Shia and Sunni muslims, the Kurds made up to 18% of the population, while the remaining 7% were the Persians,

Turkmen, Assyrian people, Jews and Yazidis.

Great Britain kept a close watch over Iraq's foreign and domestic policy, having guaranteed significant presence in, and influence over, the state's ministries and offices. The British instated

also a position of the High Commissioner in Iraq in the person of sir Henry Dobbs, further obtaining even more control over the country's affairs since 1923. During the early 1920's new

political forces entered the Iraqi scene, but still the main distinguisher between them was the approach to the British rule. The anti-UK parties organized protests and demonstrations, which led

to their delegatization and their leaders were sent to exile. Still, in July 1924, a constitution and

popular suffrage were passed.

Over the next years, yet again supporters and opponents of the British involvement shaped the political discourse. In 1930, Prime Minister Nuri as-Said entered into an Anglo-Iraqi treaty which granted the Brits

virtually unrestricted access to Iraq's infrastructure, rights to passage and

stationing of the British forces and control over the state's oil industry. The treaty was not positively received by the population and the anti-British fractions of politicians, which led to the dissolution of the parliament and a new election, in order to ratify the unpopular treaty. Finally, in late 1932, Iraq became an independent state and joined the League of Nations.

The 1930's were a tumultuous time in Iraq's history as well. The change on the throne, as

well as constant transitions of the government and appearance of new political forces, combined with social unrests stemming from ethnical and religious diversity, did not bode well for the future.

Beginning in 1934, modernization attempts were undertaken (social reforms, infrastructure, creation of banks) – but the person behind it all, Prime Minister Yasin al-Hashimi, who ruled the country with an iron fist, was soon overthrown by the army. This marked the first of many coups d'état, as well as opened the road for the military to have a decisive say in who would be ruling Iraq for the upcoming decades.

King Ghazi I, as advised by the army leaders, began to spread the ideas of nationalism and pan-arabism. His views were strictly anti-zionistic and he opposed the French involvement in Syria.

He rallied for annexation of Kuwait, all of which combined gained him huge support among the citizens. The UK expressed its concerns over the course of the policy, which in turn gained the king a backing from Germany. The king died in 1939 in still unresolved circumstances – some argue that it might have been a coup by Nuri as-Said.

In the wake of the Second World War, the anti-British sentiment grew simultaneously as the

Nazi Germany were viewed more and more amicably. After the war had broken out, Iraqipoliticians argued about the country's official standing in the conflict, the result being that the pro-

British government of Nuri as-Said broke diplomatic ties with Berlin in early September 1939, however due to the resistance from the military, no war on Germany was declared then.

In 1940, a pro-Nazi government came to power, and engaged with talks with both Germany and Italy. Surprisingly enough, the Nazis had good relationship with the Arabs, despite the fact that

the Aryan narrative put the Semitic people lower in the hierarchy than the Germans. After several months of a pro-Nazi sentiment, but also changes on the Prime Minister's position, Nuri as-Said came back to power and officially declared war on the Axis.

The post-war years saw signs of liberalization. New political parties were introduced, however no communist party was legalized, despite raising interest within the populace. The

relationship with the UK, up to then governed by the treaty of 1930, started to loosen and the

British army conceded their bases to Iraq and was to leave the country. Nonetheless, the British were to keep their monopoly over military supplies and trainings, which was not well received by the Iraqis and led to the resignation of the Prime Minister and the termination of the deal.

The 1950's saw even more social unrest. In 1952 workers and students engaged in protests in larger cities (known as the Intifadat Tishrin), but their attempt were suppressed by the police and army.

In 1955, Iraq and Turkey entered into the Baghdad Pact, and a year later were joined by the UK, Iran and Pakistan. The pact was negatively perceived by Egypt, whose leader Jamal Abd an-Naser renounced it as a sign of a pro-western support, instead of the Arabic countries focusing on the development and military cooperation between themselves. In spite of that, Iraq backed Egypt in 1957 Suez Crisis and broke diplomatic ties with France. New alliances among the Middle Eastern countries were formed, and the turmoil helped the forces plotting to overthrow the monarchy rise.

Mid-July 1958 yet another coup d'état took place, this time ending the era of the constitutional monarchy and starting the time of the Iraqi republic. The postulates were simple: to

create a republic, enact a constitution, introduce democracy, recognize the rights of minorities such as the Kurds, cooperate with other Arabic states, admit the Palestinians' right to their own land and battle down imperialism. Another postulates included backing down from earlier military pacts,

eradication of foreign military bases and several social reforms.

The first government, despite picturing itself as based on western democratic structures, did not in fact have separate legislature and executive branches, meaning that the leaders in fact made their own decisions without having to consult any other bodies. This in turn led to the worsening relationship with the Western world, and at the same time growing closer to the Socialist states.

Another round of purges in the army, police force and civil administration took place, but simultaneously social and industrial reforms were introduced. Attempts of negotiation with the British-owned Iraqi Petroleum Company were undertaken, but no consensus was reached

and so the Iraq National Oil Company was created, while the IPC's rights to drill were severely diminished.

During the years of the government of Abd Al-Karim Qasim, Iraq's relations with its

neighbors worsened, especially with Iran and Kuwait. Qasim opened up the subject of the annexation of Kuwait, which was strongly opposed by the UK and the Arab League. That fiasco put

Qasim in a very exposed position, and he was opposed by both the Ba'ath Party, as well as the

Kurds. In 1963 a coup led by the Ba'athists ousted Qasim and his associates who were then put on trial and sentenced to death.

1963 started a new era in Iraq's history. The ill-known Ba'ath Party, which actually had its roots in Syria where it was established nearly a decade earlier by a Christian leader Michel Aflak,

attempted to rise to power for the first time – and succeeded. The party's main ideals were unity, socialism and nationalism, it aimed to be a pan-arabic bloc and had its branches in countries such as

Jordan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. The supporters believed that the source of power should be the popular will of the citizens, even if reaching the goals would crave casualties and could only be

achieved in combat. Anti-colonialism, as well as stressing the importance of national ties, were among the chief values of the Ba'athists, and a non-marxist socialism, based on cooperation

between people (rather than the clash of classes) guided the movement.

In spite of the Ba'ath Party's overthrow of the previous government and filling the most prominent roles with its members (president, prime minister, vice-prime minister etc.), soon the

differences in approach to Iraq's policy surfaced, at the same time as the Kurds demanded the new government (which they helped establish) kept its promises. Not only the Kurdish rebellion cast a

shadow over the Ba'ath Party, but also the relations with Egypt came to a halt. The talks of uniting the two nations, with Iraq's president Abd as-Salam Arif being one of the fiercest advocates of the idea, ended abruptly after a confrontation between the Ba'athists and the supporters of Egypt's

Naser. On top of that, internal conflicts within the party ultimately led to its demise.

Years 1963–1968 saw many reforms, including a whole new constitution which gave the power to the president and limited the freedoms of political parties. Many institutions underwent

nationalization, but it did not stop the looming economic crisis. Nor the often changes in the Prime Minister's seat helped the situation of the Iraqis, and the turmoil led to the fall of Abd ar-Rahman

Arif in July 1968. The coup was led together by the Ba'athists and nationalists from the military, but the alliance did not last long. As a result of the subsequent upheaval, Saddam Hussein became the second most important person in the country, and then held the role of the General Secretary and was responsible for the secret police. Step by step his influence was growing, and conclusively he was the one who had the actual power.

The new lineup used methods of bloody repression against its opponents. They were after Naser's supporters, pro-Syrian Ba'athists and even communists. The persecution was supervised personally by President Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein. The situation with communists was quite delicate, since the ruling party wanted to ingratiate themselves with the USSR, which was supplying Iraq with both weapons and other form of aid. The persecution of the communists went on and off for several years, until finally in 1972–73 both the Ba'ath Party and the Iraqi Communist Party created a common National Patriotic Front.

The first of the temporary constitutions was enacted in 1968, where Islam was recognized as the official national religion, and the economy was to be of socialist character. In 1970 another constitution was published, which included a strive for socialism and guaranteed free healthcare, education and studies. The national duality of Iraq was recognized, and the Kurdish language became official (alongside Arabic) in the regions inhabited by the Kurds. Based on this constitution, for many years ahead Iraq became a country of only one party, ruled initially by al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein, and later only by the latter one.

One of the challenges of the new authority was the question of Kurdistan. Clashes between

the Kurds and the Iraqi army erupted several times in the 1970's. At the same time, the Iraqi government reached an agreement with Iran, based on which some concessions were made in exchange for the promise of Iran to not aid the Kurdish insurgents.

Later in the 1970's, a turn in the Iraqi foreign policy took place. Ties with the USSR severed over their engagement in Somalia, Ethiopia and Afghanistan, while Iraq entered into contracts with western countries such as France, from which they purchased weapons. A little later, Iraq's ambitions of being the leader of the Arab world became clear – especially while mediating with Egypt over the Camp David resolution, where Iraq offered Anwar as-Sadat material gains if only Egypt would withdraw from the settlement with Israel.

In the background, a conflict with Iran began to take shape. The persecution of the Shia

muslims, accused of favoring Iranian interests, commenced. Political arrests took place, repressions and death sentences followed, the government forbade the reading of the Quran over the radio and teaching of religion in schools – which was met by protests of the people living in the south. A fatwa forbidding joining the Ba'ath

Party was issued by a Shia Iraqi leader al-Hakim (succeeded by Muhammad Bakir as-Sadr, whom the authorities wanted to see dead), and even the later chief of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, dwelled in Iraq, but was then forced by Saddam Hussein to leave the country in 1978.

Years 1980–2003 were the era of Saddam Hussein's reign in Iraq. Highly influenced by his maternal uncle Khairallah Talfah, he quickly rose to prominent positions within the Ba'ath Party.

Saddam took over the power in 1979 extremely quickly: he announced that the party assigned him to become the commander of the army, prime minister, leader of the party and president in one person. Immediately his reign of terror began, as a showcase for any potential future opponents of the new president.

Then, in 1980, the war with Iran began, officially over the border dispute in Kurdistan, but there were other reasons too. Saddam feared that Khomeini would try to destabilize the internal situation of Iraq, which led to yet another round of repressions against the opposition, which in its turn caused Khomeini to call for fight the Iraqi authorities.

The war split the Arab world. Iraq was backed by Jordan, Saudi Arabia and other states around the Persian Gulf, who did not want to see the Islamic revolution spread. On the other side, Iran had the backing of Syria and Libya. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was divided over which side to take, with Yasser Arafat remaining neutral, but his associates supported the

Iraqis. The issue was that Iran was at that time an ally of the PLO, and they did not want to risk losing its backing. The war lasted for 8 years, during which both sides suffered high casualty levels and material losses. Both conventional and chemical weapons were used, the most infamous example being the chemical attack against the Kurds accused of supporting Iran in Halabja.

Eventually the fights ended in 1988, and a treaty was signed in 1990. Even though the war ended with a status quo, it was presented as a victory by the Iraqi propaganda.

After the war with Iran, Iraq had one of the biggest and most modern armies in the world,

but at the same time the country found itself in a deep economic crisis. Saddam Hussein did not want to demobilize thousands of young men who might then start to question his authority, so he searched for different solutions. Most of all he laid his hopes in the rising incomes from the oil industry, and the financial aid from the neighboring countries. The Iraqi propaganda claimed that all of the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf should participate in the costs of war, since due to Iraq's efforts fundamentalism was halted and did not spread over the entire region.

The area of most interest for Saddam was Kuwait, which had been successfully expanding its oil production, and whose emir was accused of lowering the prices of the material, in its turn

harming the economy of Iraq. Another straw was the ever questioned sovereignty of Kuwait, which had been perceived as an integral part of Iraq by many. However, the Kuwaiti emir did not give in,

and Saddam began preparations to a new war, hoping the world would remain oblivious to it. While the involvement (or at least neutrality) of the USSR was hoped for, the engagement of the other

countries came as an unexpected surprise. The invasion was condemned all over the world, even by most of the Arab states.

Sanctions against Iraq were put into place and the United Nations agreed to an intervention in order to protect Kuwait. Also, the USA felt it needed to guard their economic interests in the Persian Gulf. Owing to the invasion, Iraq controlled 20% of the world's oil supply, and it was

feared Iraq might make a move on Saudi Arabia (hence the American military was deployed there.)

In the meantime, Saddam Hussein offered his own solution to the Middle Eastern conflict.

The Iraqi army would leave Kuwait, if Israel agreed to withdraw from the territories occupied since the Syrians left Lebanon, a proposition he well knew would be dismissed. Simultaneously he entered into an agreement with Iran, while surviving a significant failure when both Washington and Moscow condemned the invasion. Saddam retaliated by imprisoning over fifteen thousand foreign citizens and used all diplomatic efforts to release them as a proof of solidarity of the world with

Iraq. In spite of all that, the Americans entered Iraq in mid-January 1991, and after a short campaign known as the Desert Storm, they defeated the Iraqi army and a truce was signed in late February.

The weak situation of the authorities was widely known and several different forces tried to use it in their favor. The Kurds rose up in the north, and the Shia muslims in the south. However,

the rebellion was not sufficiently well organized to threaten the government, and the Republican

Guard quickly pacified the revolting regions. As previously, severe repressions followed, causing many to flee their homes toward Iran and Turkey.

Since the Kuwaiti invasion, the international community tried to influence Saddam's regime with different types of sanctions. A UN embargo was introduced for the first time since the 1960's,

which showed that the attitudes toward Iraq changed (there were no serious international implications after the war with Iran). Foreign bank accounts were frozen, and both export and

import of goods were forbidden (medicines and in some cases, food, were the only exceptions). Dueo Iraq's infrastructure and geographical conditions, the sanctions seriously hit the state. The background of the sanctions differed by country, but they can be summarized with the will to

change Saddam's policy, including eradication of weapons of mass destruction, recognition of

Kuwait's sovereignty and perhaps most importantly, collapsing the regime in Iraq.

After the Gulf War, the country's humanitarian situation was catastrophic. Not only there were issues with access to food, but also the infrastructure was damaged due to heavy bombings.

The UN appealed to take steps aiming at relieving the harsh conditions so the sanctions were somewhat loosened, and the embargo on the export of oil was partially lifted. All the economic difficulties of that time were blamed by the regime on the evil West.

Another burning issue were the weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. United Nations Special Commission was created in 1991 on the basis of the UN Security Council Resolution 687. Their

task was to control, confiscate and destroy the weapons, but the Iraqis constantly obstructed the Commission's work. Valuable information was gained from the former regime-workers, who had

escaped abroad. In 1998 Saddam Hussein forced the inspectors to leave, which was met with the

USA and UK conducting Operation Desert Fox, in which they bombed objects where weapons of mass destruction were produced.

Contrary to the West's expectations, the economic difficulties did not weaken Saddam's rule.

There was simply no other force to threaten him, owing to the fact that he created a sort of a shadow country”, or in other words a network of regime associates, patrons and clients. The actual power was held by his loyal associates, stemming from the Sunni Muslims and competing for Saddam’s favors. Fear of repressions was also a powerful tool, nobody could feel safe as Saddam proved that he would not spare even the members of his own family, if doubts about their allegiance arose. Since the sanctions did not bring the expected results, by the late 1990’s the American Congress voted on a 100–million dollars aid for the Iraqi opposition. At the same time, the UNSCOM was replaced by the UNMOVIC, but the inspectors were denied access to the country. After George Bush got elected president and the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, a “war on terror” was declared. Iraq became one of the targets as Saddam (as the only head of state in the Arab world) did not condemn the actions of al-Qaeda. Iraq, along with Iran and North Korea, was dubbed the “Axis of Evil” and the invasion preparations commenced. The official reason was that Saddam still sat on weapons of mass destruction, and his reluctance to let the UN inspectors in only confirmed the doubts. A secret report presented to the Congress in late 2002 (which we now know contained many inaccuracies) greatly overestimated Iraq’s threat to the international community, but nonetheless led to signing of a bill allowing a military intervention in the Middle East. The UN announced then that Iraq had not been complying with its disarmament commitments, and in early 2003 a coalition of 49 countries, including Poland, decided that a war might be warranted.

Operation “Iraqi Freedom” began in March 2003, after Saddam Hussein ignored the ultimatum presented by George Bush to leave the country and allow the UN inspectors in. Less than three weeks later, the American soldiers entered Baghdad not having encountered any serious resistance on their way up. During the invasion, a looting on an unprecedented scale took place in ministries and other public buildings and offices, while the street crowds destroyed any symbols of the authority, particularly monuments of the fallen dictator. May 1st 2003 President Bush announced the end of the war.

CHAPTER TWO

Iraq’s reconstruction after the war with the USA Planning for reconstruction of Iraq began in Washington long before the invasion, but the ORHA’s task was not easy, as it had to maneuver between two different US visions of the Iraqi future, as well as had to take into account the IRDC, which consisted of the Iraqis living abroad. All the pressing points were discussed on two conferences (in An-Nasiriyah and Baghdad), however there was a strong discrepancy between the assumptions and goals to be achieved, and the reality of implementing the actual changes. On top of that, cultural clashes played a roll, with many Iraqis perceiving the ORHA and its leadership as unqualified or even offensive in their ways.

Since the ORHA proved unable to form a government, it was dissolved in May and the USA began a direct occupation of Iraq by establishing the Coalition Provisional Authority led by Paul Bremer, who did not have any relevant Middle East experience at the time. Nonetheless, based on

UN's resolution 1483 the UK and USA together were to temporarily govern Iraq, which was divided into two occupational zones.

Paul Bremer's decision to dissolve the Ba'ath Party and a subsequent comb-out of competent officials and clerks did not bring the expected results. To the contrary, it caused fear and threat among the Sunni Iraqis, who were the majority of the Ba'athists, but often had nothing to do with

Saddam Hussein's crimes. Another controversial decision of Bremer was a dissolution of the Iraqi army and other uniformed forces. For one of the most militarized societies of the time, this was a huge blow and left hundreds of thousands of people without a job in a country where unemployment had already reached 70%.

Spring and summer of 2003 was a tumultuous time in Iraq. The citizens continued to demand a representation in their legislative and executive branches, which combined with a growing resistance to the presence of the US army resulted in many clashes. Demonstrations were pacified brutally, and suicide bombings started to appear. The UN was also deemed a hostile organization and attacked several times, ultimately forcing the UN employees out of the country, and the remaining CPA and IGC workers kept themselves to the green zone only. The unrest got even bigger after the death of the Shia ayatollah Mohammad Baqir al-Hakim in a bombing in Najaf, who despite his anti-American rhetoric did express a will to cooperate with the occupants, and was held in high esteem by the Iraqi people.

Another influential ayatollah was Ali as-Sistani, who after the US invasion tried to distance himself from the Americans. He would speak to the Iraqi politicians, though. Sistani condemned the

occupation and called for the power to be passed back to the Iraqi people, but at the same time he stressed the need for peace in the country.

In January 2004, a bill that was intended as a temporary constitution passed. It outlined the process of designing a new, permanent constitution, and declared Iraq's system as federal, democratic, republican and pluralistic. Islam was to become the country's official religion, which worried the Americans who feared that radical islamism would gain a ground to grow on.

In 2004 the situation was far from stabilized. Bomb attacks were common, and caused many casualties among the Iraqi people. The underlying motivation of the Sunni terrorists was to elicit a Shia-Sunni war, which as a by-product would motivate the occupants to leave the country. One of the infamous Sunni insurgency leaders was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who claimed that the "real muslims" should rise against the Shia muslims, and whose organization was subordinated Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda. Another subject in the game of power were the embittered members of the delegalized Ba'ath Party, who had served their country before the war and had nothing to do with Saddam Hussein's crimes, and now had a hard time accepting the rule of the Shia majority. On top of it all, a rebellion erupted in western Iraq. Economic reasons, as well as support of Sunni clergy fueled the spirits of the masses. Freedom of speech helped spread the Wahhabi and Salafi movements as well as the content circulated by the Muslim Brotherhood, who before the invasion distanced themselves from politics, but now decided to join the war against the non-believers. Living conditions of the Iraqis worsened drastically. Not only were bombings common

everywhere, people were also targets of crimes, thefts, kidnappings and murders. Electricity and running water were scarce, sewage system was virtually non-existent and unemployment reached up to 60%. Corruption and abuse of power were frequent and there were no means to control or audit everything, which ended in massive amounts of aid money disappearing into thin air and shady contracts entered into with private entrepreneurs, usually benefitting American enterprises.

April of 2004 saw two serious crises: the coalition had to battle Shia militias known as the Mahdi Army, and at the same time combat the Sunni insurgents in Fallujah. The Mahdi Army, originating in Baghdad's poorest quarter called Sadr City, spread its influence to other cities of southern Iraq. The Mahdi Army claimed the need of ensuring the safety of the Shia neighborhoods, since the coalition was not able to secure that, and the radicalized Shiites even called for a jihad against the Americans.

In next months, the fights continued in, among others, Karbala, Najaf and Kut. The most infamous clashes took place in Fallujah, which ended with many dead on all sides of the combat.

During this dramatic times, the media heard about and saw the pictures of the ill treatment of Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison, which shook public opinion around the world.

In June 2004 an interim government was formed, led by a Shiite Ayad Allawi who had joined the Ba'ath Party in his youth, but later spent many years in the UK due to a conflict between him and Saddam Hussein. For the interim president, a Sunni Arab was to be elected, which was met with a fierce objection from the Kurds. In the end they accepted this solution in exchange for the

seats of the vice-president (one of two), vice-prime minister and minister of foreign affairs. Out of thirty five ministries only one was entrusted to an islamist in a true meaning of this word. Amicable relationships were forged anew with Jordan, the UAE, Egypt and Lebanon, all the while hostile moods raged throughout Iraq and more and more terrorist attempts took place, killing both Iraqis and Americans. In December 2005, a general election was held, and this time it was not boycotted by the Sunnis which had its outcome both in the official results, and in the overall peaceful election. 80% of the authorized to vote went to the polling stations. The Shiites won, with the Kurds taking the second place, and the Sunnis third. Surprisingly enough, even a secular party managed to land some seats in the parliament. Jalal Talabani remained the president, and Nouri al-Maliki became the new prime minister and stayed in this position until 2014.

CHAPTER THREE

The Islamic Dawa Party and other Shiite groups

Nouri al-Maliki was not a famed figure in the Iraqi politics before 2005. He fled the country in the 1970's and spent decades abroad in Syria and Iran, eventually returning to Iraq after the US invasion. His Islamic Dawa Party was created in 1957, as a reaction to the growing communist influence over the Iraqi people. One of the fiercest advocates of the party back then was Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, another member of the famous al-Sadr family, who despite facing some opposition argued that if muslims engaged in politics, they would be able to propagate islam and change society for the better.

After 1980 the Ba'ath Party repressed the Dawa members, many of whom chose to emigrate to the neighboring states. Influenced by the Islamic revolution ideology, they adopted a new policy of using combat to remove the regime in Iraq and turned to suicide bombings both within the country and abroad. Those members of the Dawa Party who had not left Iraq, kept to the underground activities and resurfaced after the fall of Saddam Hussein. Their selling point was that they had survived the Ba'athists' repressions overcoming significant losses, and their negative standing on the question of the American intervention. However, it is important to note that the Islamic Dawa Party was not the only Shiite organization competing for the support of the citizens.

The first cabinet of prime minister Nouri al-Maliki was composed of representatives of diverse political environments. It took long negotiations to form the government, and then the way it executed its power only deepened the issues rampaging the country – often the ministers formed a patronage system or even organized own paramilitary units.

February 2006 saw another wave of bloodshed. Sunni insurgents blew up a Shia mosque in the city of Samarra, which led to retaliation attacks on Sunni temples all over the country. Religious authorities on both sides appealed to stop the carnage in the name of Muslim unity, but the massacres continued nonetheless. Even the Sunni units were split, with some of them targeting the Americans, while the others attacked the common Shiites, who were not connected to the authorities in any way. On the opposing side, the Shia militias were more closely associated with respective Shia political groups. Militarization and mobilization advanced among all citizens ,

including the Kurds, fundamentalists, Turkmen, Assyrians and Yazidis. It is worth noting that in

spite of all the unrest, Kurdistan remained the only relatively peaceful region, allowing for many foreign investments to establish themselves there.

After the capture of Saddam Hussein he was put to trial. It was held in front of an Iraqi tribunal, but the USA had strong influence over it, spending around 75 million dollars on the proceedings. The judges were Iraqi citizens (whose impartiality was highly doubted as most of them suffered personal losses during Saddam Hussein's reign), and additionally they had foreign advisors, who were used by the Americans to manipulate the verdict. In November 2006 a sentence was passed, finding Saddam Hussein guilty of crimes against humanity (Dujail 1982, Halabja 1988) and sentenced to death. After the execution several suicide bombings occurred in Baghdad, and even though George W. Bush called it a milestone in building the Iraqi democracy, public opinion was divided with European countries condemning the death penalty, worried over the possibility of conflict escalation.

Consequently, the biggest challenge of Nouri al-Maliki's cabinet was to secure peace and safety in the country. After the Shia-Sunni conflict erupted, talks about the American withdrawal were postponed. Additional US soldiers were deployed to aid the struggling Iraqi forces unable to pacify the rebellion, but publicly al-Maliki presented an anti-American sentiment despite consulting with them on the efforts against al-Sadr supporters. A serious clash with the Sadrists occurred in

March 2008 in al-Basra, the combat had been initiated by the Iraqi forces prior to informing US

General David Petraeus, who then had no other choice but to join and help the Iraqi government,

eventually leading to the defeat of the Sadrists and al-Maliki using this victory in his propaganda.

During al-Maliki's time, it quickly became clear that the goal of building democracy in Iraq

would not be accomplished, as his way of ruling was far from the western standards, and in fact

quite similar to the one used by Saddam Hussein, based on patronage and family ties .The second general election was held in March 2010, and al-Maliki's party had to

acknowledge the victory of Ayad Allawi, which yet again led to prolonged coalition discussions.

The political crises only worsened the social conditions of the country, with skyrocketing unemployment rates and deteriorating public services.

Authoritarian aspirations of al-Maliki came

into the light when instead of nominating ministers to the resorts responsible for safety, he chose to

lead them himself. The other ministries were divided amongst Shiites, Sunnis and the Kurds.

Another difficult task facing the new al-Maliki's government were the preparations for the US Army withdrawal from Iraq. According to the Status of Forces Agreement, the American

soldiers were to leave Iraq by the end of 2011, and even though there were some doubts and worries over what might come after, Barack Obama ultimately upheld the decision, and entered a new

Strategic Framework Agreement which stipulated that American ministries would support their

Iraqi counterparts, and that the USA would remain the main supplier of the Iraqi army. Obama's decision was motivated by the popular demand back home, as well as the need to reduce the public debt, but with the benefit of hindsight it seems that the decision proved wrong.

After the American withdrawal, the political crisis got even more complicated. The prime minister used all available means to fight his opponents, including the imprisonment of Sunni vice-president Tariq al-Hashemi, who was one of his strongest adversaries. This event seriously

infringed the barely achieved settlement between the Shiites, Sunnites and Kurds. Bombings followed, parliamentary proceedings were boycotted by al-Hashemi's party, and Muqtada al-Sadr called for an early election.

The conflict between the Sunnites and the government escalated. Al-Maliki tried to remove other Sunni ministers, which caused the Sunnites to protest and demonstrate in several cities. Such clashes always had casualties, as each time they were suppressed by the Iraqi security forces. The conflict was exacerbated even more by the end of 2013, when the government did not hold back in its attempts to stifle its rivals, also including prominent politicians. In protest, forty-four Sunni members of parliament resigned, and the policemen in Fallujah and Ramadi left their stations.

Radicals pledging allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant slowly but steadily gained popularity among the Iraqis of the most distressed regions.

Iraq's internal situation was influenced by a war in Syria as well, which originated a few years back during the so called Arab Spring, a series of social protests throughout the Arab world.

Anti-government demonstrations in Syria began in 2011, but no negotiations were taken up and the protesters were brutally pacified. This only led to further radicalization of the Syrian opposition and yet another aggravation of the battle. Damascus regime was backed by Iran and Russia, while the rebels received support from the Sunni countries. The islamists's success in Syria encouraged them to expand into Iraq, especially to the Al-Anbar province, which was predominantly against the Baghdad authority.

The origins of ISIL stem back to the Iraqi-American war and the ensuing Sunni resistance against the US soldiers and the Shia government in Baghdad. ISIL is a modern organization, well equipped for the currently available means and media. Money is obtained from the supporters, but also from kidnappings and selling of antiques or works of art, and after gaining mark in Syria and Iraq, also from the oil industry. Due to the last fact, ISIL became the richest radical islamist organization in history. Some of the income was dedicated to provide public services and repair the infrastructure of the conquered territories, which was then used in ISIL's propaganda.

Prime minister al-Maliki lost control over the northern part of Iraq in 2014, after a series of ISIL victories and a declaration of creation of an islamic state in Fallujah, and further advancements into Mosul, Iraq's second largest city. Then the militants continued toward Saddam Hussein's hometown Tikrit. ISIL's forces were scarce, no more than 800 men, but the Iraqi army did not put up much resistance – to the contrary, they left their weapons behind and changed into civilian clothes. Hundreds of thousands of people fled their homes north, to Kurdistan.

Since 2010, ISIL was led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, a very mysterious figure whose picture was made publicly known only recently. His views were radicalizing since the 1990's, and after the American invasion he joined Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's group of militants. June 29 th 2014, al-Baghdadi announced creation of a caliphate on the conquered territories, and removed words "Iraq" and "Levant" from the name ISIL, from then on only to be called IS. He declared himself a caliph (caliph Ibrahim), and demanded that muslims all over the world obey him.

Judging by the media coverage alone, one could assume that the actions of IS were hugely popular in the islamic world, but it would be a significant overstatement. There have been many opponents even among other radical organizations, such as the Islamic Front in Syria, which claimed that IS was a harmful institution, creating divisions, and did not have the right to hold supremacy over muslims. There were however some smaller jihadi groups that joined the IS during its rise.

What shook the public opinion around the world – except the extreme brutality of IS distributed in the media – was the situation of the minorities, and specifically of the Yazidis, inhabiting north-eastern Iraq around the city of Sinjar. Their religion is of a syncretic character, combining elements of Christianity, Islam and Zoroastrianism. Throughout history, the Yazidis have

been persecuted many times, but after the US invasion their position became extremely grim. Al-

Qaeda called upon the muslims to kill the Yazidis, and in 2007 alone around 200 of them were

killed in bombings. However, after 2014, tens of thousands Yazidis and other minorities fled to Kurdistan. Some of them hid themselves on the Sinjar mountain, where they died of hunger and

exhaustion. Iraqi air forces tried to help them by distributing food in packages thrown out of

aircrafts, but it was insufficient. At the same time, IS massacred the Yazidis wherever they encountered them, and many Yazidi women were kidnapped and forced to marry IS militants.

During the IS offensive, negotiations concerning a creation of a new government took place in Baghdad. Al-Maliki tried to form a cabinet despite resistance from the society and even

opponents inside his own party, and he failed. Eventually the mission to form government was passed over to Haider al-Abadi of the Islamic Dawa Party.

Simultaneously, IS continued its bloody march and the western countries considered a military intervention from the air, while they were supplying the Kurds with arms and weapons. Not

only the local inhabitants fell victim to IS – in August 2014 the world media shown the execution of

an American journalist James Foley, and within the course of next weeks a British humanitarian aid

worker David Haines was killed in a similar way. Other groups targeted by IS included ex-

government associates and workers, as well as Shiites and religious minorities, but also the Sunnis

who refused to cooperate. Civilians were often used as live shields during clashes with the government's forces, and thousands of Iraqi soldiers were executed if captured by IS. Children as young as 12 years old were incorporated into IS ranks and taught how to fight and kill. In September 2014, Barack Obama declared a strategy of fighting IS. Air raids were to be used, and he conclusively excluded a possibility of sending ground troops to the IS territory. The Americans would continue arming the Kurdish Peshmergas, and other countries such as Australia and Canada joined the anti-IS coalition, while Turkey allowed to conduct the operation from its territory. The recent years saw many dramatic events in Iraq. Many of the inhabitants fell victim of genocide due to their religion or ethnicity, while thousands of others were forced to flee their homes and seek shelter abroad or in Kurdistan. The current course of events is a result of the issues that have plagued Iraq for decades, with the most tragic period being Saddam Hussein's reign during which he brutally dealt with all his opponents, real as well as imaginary, not to mention the long-lasting war with Iran that did not bring any gains, and cost thousands of lives on both sides.

A political transformation began in 2003, after the dictator was captured. Democratic general elections take place regularly, but the politicians cannot escape the seemingly incurable ethnic and religious conflict. On top of that, terrorists appeared in the country, who did not conduct any activity there during Saddam Hussein's time in office.

However the fight with IS will look and even once it has ended, it will not cure all the

Middle Eastern issues. The problems caused by the US invasion will not end, nor will the ancient

Shia–Sunni conflict. An additional challenge to be expected will be to meet the Kurdish

independence aspirations, awakened during the fights taking place in northern

Iraq.Bibliography

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