



مركز البيان للدراسات والتخطيط
Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies

Al Bayan Observatory



June 2023

A periodical bulletin to monitor Iraqi affairs in international think tanks

About the Center

Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies is an independent, nonprofit think tank based in Baghdad, Iraq. In addition to other issues, its primary mission is to offer an authentic perspective on public and foreign policy issues related to Iraq in particular and the Middle East region in general. BCPS pursues its vision by conducting autonomous analysis and proposing workable solutions for complex issues that concern the political and academic fields.

Note:

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AMERICAN THINK TANKS



Iraq Is Quietly Falling Apart Iran's Proxies Have Seized Power in Baghdad- and Are Gutting the State

Michael Knights

June 5, 2023

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<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/iran/iraq-quietly-falling-apart>

Iraq Is Quietly Falling Apart

Iran's Proxies Have Seized Power in
Baghdad—and Are Gutting the State

By Michael Knights June 5, 2023



Qais al-Khazali, leader of Asaib Ahl al-Haq, speaking in Baghdad, January 2022
Ahmed Saad / Reuters



Most-Read Articles

Russia's New Time of
Troubles

Michael Knights writes that “While Washington focuses on great power competition, Iran’s proxies have seized power in Baghdad and are gutting the state.” He concludes: “President Biden’s national security team sees the quiet Middle East as an end unto itself—including in Iraq. The White House believes that regional de-escalation is necessary to allow the United States to focus on its competition with China. But in Iraq, this approach promises to have long-term costs: the U.S. desire for calm is being exploited by Tehran’s allies to destabilize its politics.

Iraq may look calm but looks can be deceiving. The country is actually entering a uniquely dangerous period: Iran’s allies have achieved unprecedented control of Iraq’s parliament, judiciary, and the executive branch, and they are rapidly rigging the political system in their favor and looting the state of its resources.”

Michael Knights

June 5, 2023

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The Sky Is Not Falling in Iraq

Michael Rubin

June 14, 2023

1945

19fortyfive

<https://www.19fortyfive.com/2023/06/the-sky-is-not-falling-in-iraq/>

The Sky Is Not Falling In Iraq

In recent weeks, there have been a slew of analyses and articles, for the Washington Institute and in Foreign Affairs and the Economist, suggesting that Iranian-backed militias have captured Iraq. While the thesis and, in some cases the headlines are breathless, the alarmism is unwarranted.

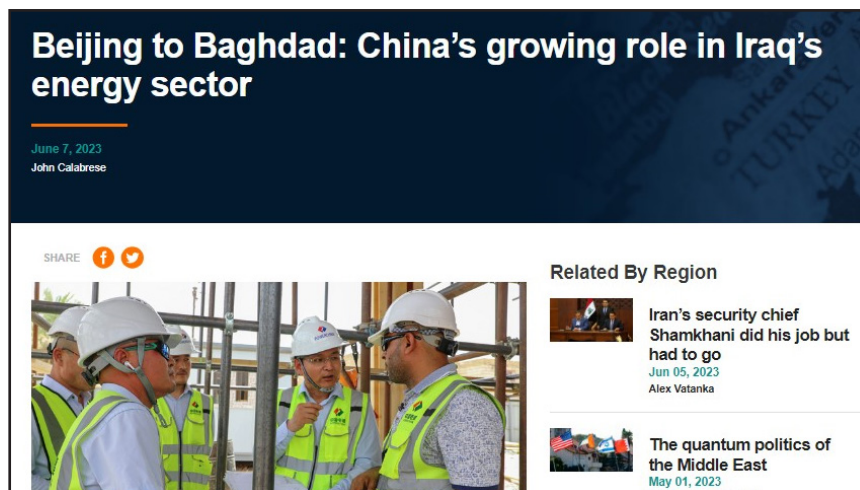


By Michael Rubin Published June 14, 2023



Referring to a slew of analyses and articles, for the Washington Institute and in Foreign Affairs and the Economist, suggesting that Iranian-backed militias have captured Iraq, Michael Rubin believes that “the headlines are breathless, the alarmism is unwarranted”. He writes: “The simple facts are these: Iraqis would be the first to acknowledge that the PMF are a problem. Most Iraqis advise addressing them with a scalpel rather than an axe. The West should support Iraq in its efforts. At the same time, however, it is important to recognize the special dynamics of Iraqi democracy. Prime Ministers seek to define their legacy. Some are content to stand on their record, but those who failed too often seek to redeem themselves by casting aspersions upon their successors, if not directly than by proxy. It is a deeply unpatriotic and counterproductive tactic that is bad for Iraq as few outside the country will differentiate between administrations or individuals.”

Beijing to Baghdad: China's growing role in Iraq's energy sector



John Calabrese

June 7, 2023



Middle
East
Institute

MIDDLE EAST INSTITUTE

<https://www.mei.edu/publications/beijing-baghdad-chinas-growing-role-iraqs-energy-sector>

John Calabrese, who teaches U.S. foreign policy at American University in Washington, DC, in this policy analysis has focused on the role that China is intended to play in the Iraq's energy sector. He concludes that "The principles guiding Prime Minister Sudani's administration and the limitations it faces in engaging Chinese and other commercial partners are set by the parties that back his premiership. They reflect the contentious politics and contradictory compromises that brought him to power — and that persist. under these circumstances, whether Sudani's administration will function any better than its predecessors or be fully able to seize on the oil revenue windfall to improve Iraqis' welfare instead of further enriching the ruling elite remains to be seen. So, too, does the extent to which the roots and branches of China's involvement in Iraq will grow deeper and longer."

Iraq: Political Infighting Blocking Reconstruction of Sinjar

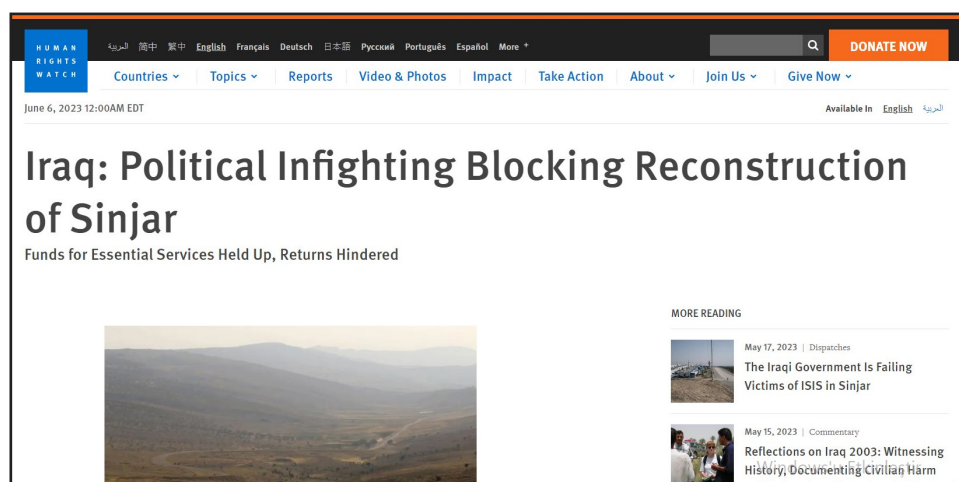
Funds for Essential Services Held Up, Returns Hindered

May 9, 2023

HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

<https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2023/06/06/iraq-political-infighting-blocking-reconstruction-sinjar>



The author(s) has/have focused on the procedure of reconstruction of Sinjar, north of Iraq. According to this paper, “the reconstruction of the Sinjar district in northern Iraq, which was heavily damaged in the fight against the Islamic State (ISIS), is being held up by a political dispute over its administration, Human Rights Watch said today.” Human Rights Watch interviewed dozens of Sinjaris living in displacement camps in Duhok governorate; three Sinjaris who had returned to Sinjar; officials of the Kurdistan and Baghdad governments; the former mayor of the Sinjar’s “self-administration”; the head of the Sinjar gen-

eral hospital; representatives of six civil society organizations; and two Western diplomats. After elaboration of the situation in Sinjar, it is concluded that: “International human rights law and the Iraqi Constitution guarantee citizens’ rights to health, education, housing, and an adequate standard of living. The right to an adequate standard of living includes everyone’s right to water and electricity, among others as Human Rights Watch has concluded. Iraq has ratified numerous human rights treaties that contain obligations related to these rights.”

May 9, 2023

The logo consists of a blue rectangular box with the words "HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH" written in white, uppercase, sans-serif font, stacked vertically in three lines.

HUMAN
RIGHTS
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<https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2023/06/06/iraq-political-infighting-blocking-reconstruction-sinjar>

How the international community can help Iraq on a path toward democratic stability

Sarkawt Shamsulddin

June 16, 2023



Atlantic Council

ATLANTIC COUNCIL

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/how-the-international-community-can-help-iraq-on-a-path-toward-democratic-stability/>



Sarkawt Shamsulddin, a nonresident fellow at the Atlantic Council’s Middle East Programs and was a member of the Iraqi Parliament from 2018 to 2021, has provided some suggestions to gain democratic stability in Iraq. For him, there should be a strategy to develop the country that “should first include investments in Iraqi youth, as they will ultimately shape the country’s future. The United States and European Union should specifically prioritize empowering Iraqi youth, developing their leadership abilities, and creating a sense of national unity. By investing in education, creating opportunities for civic participation, and providing platforms for dialogue and cooperation among the di-

verse communities within Iraq’s borders, international support could foster a new generation of democratic leaders that prioritize all Iraqis’ interests over individual interests. Additionally, the international community should increase its financial support for civil-society organizations in Iraq, as these play an instrumental role in reconciling ethnic divisions while promoting democratic principles among younger people.”

Sarkawt Shamsulddin

June 16, 2023



Atlantic Council

ATLANTIC COUNCIL

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/how-the-international-community-can-help-iraq-on-a-path-toward-democratic-stability/>

Conscription in Iraq: A Short-Lived Policy

Ranj Alaaldin

5 Jun 2023



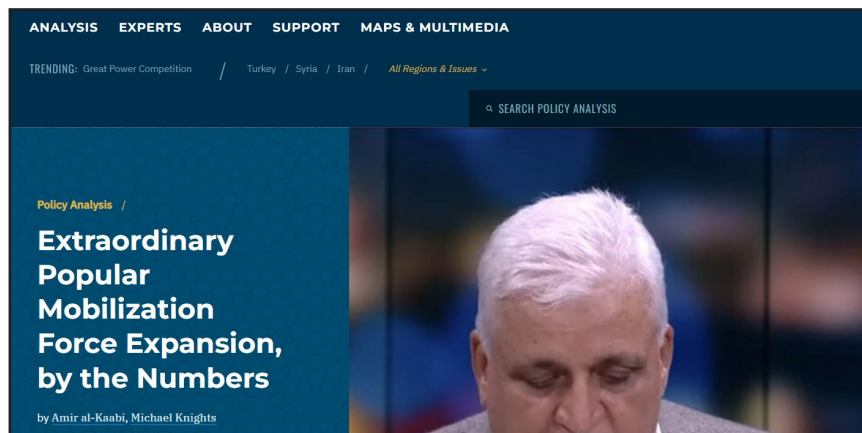
**Italian Institute For
International Political Studies**

<https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/conscription-in-iraq-a-short-lived-policy-130626>



Ranj Alaaldin, associate research fellow at ISPI, write about “Iraq’s plans to re-introduce military conscription triggered a combination of excitement, dismay and intrigue. Its proponents saw it as a way to rehabilitate military forces; its opponents as an unnecessary cost and risk”. For him, “Crucially, the PMF is not averse to challenging policies that enhance the influence and capabilities of its rivals, both politically and extra-judicially: its militias regularly threaten and assassinate officials and members of the judiciary who undermine their interests, and even went as far as carrying out an assassination attempt on former prime minister, Mustafā al-Kadhimi. Moreover, the organization is harnessing its political prominence to consolidate its position, undermine its rivals to present itself as the most powerful military force in the country. In other words, the PMF, for now and the foreseeable future, will have a powerful, if not decisive say over the future shape and contours of the security sector.”

Extraordinary Popular Mobilization Force Expansion, by the Numbers



Amir al-Kaabi and Michael Knights, as a part of the series “Militia Spotlight”, have provided a brief analysis about the Popular Mobilization Forces and have concluded that the number of these Forces has increased during the past month. They write that “The PMF is growing fast by every metric, from budget to authorized manpower to training and economic programs, though militia leaders seem wary of highlighting this expansion.” Quoting Faleh al-Fayyad’s announcement of the PMF Service and Retirement Law, they conclude that “Taken together, these developments suggest a near doubling of registered PMF fighters, the provision of long-term government benefits to these personnel, expansion of the PMF civil works and industrial base, and unprecedented intelligence-gathering arrangements without oversight. As Fayyad’s muddying of hiring numbers suggests, the PMF and the self-styled “resistance” are wary of being seen to expand too quickly, even against the backdrop of an unprecedented mega-budget. However, the breakneck speed of PMF expansion is impossible to hide.”

Amir al-Kaabi and Michael Knights

Jun 3, 2023



The Washington Institute for Near East
Policy

<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/ar/policy-analysis/zyadt-ghyr-adyt-fy-dyd-qwat-alhshd-alshby-balarqam>

Washington Keeps a Watchful Eye as the PMF Consolidates Its Dominance in Iraq

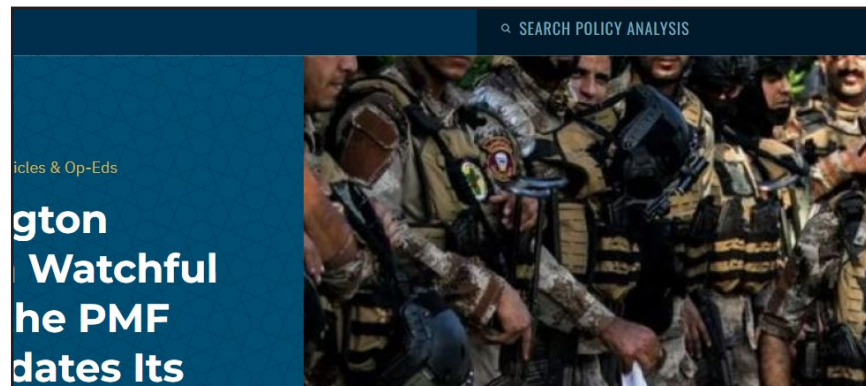
David Schenker

Jun 8, 2023



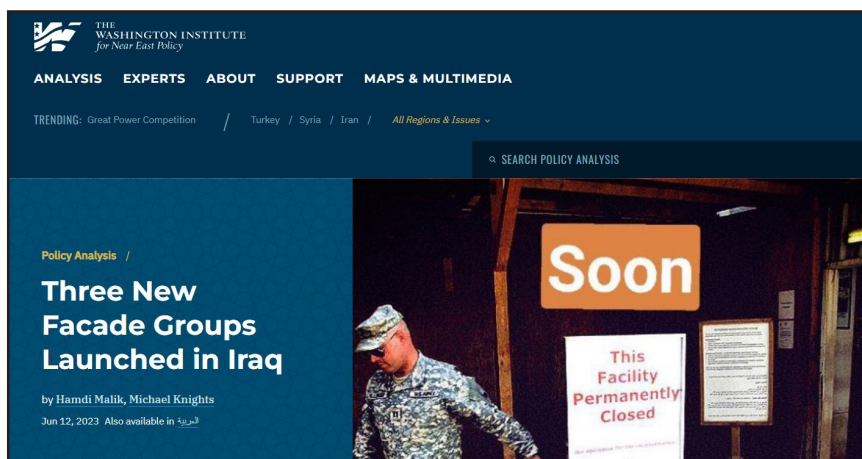
**The Washington Institute for
Near East Policy**

<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/ar/policy-analysis/washntn-turaqb-n-kthb-tzyz-qwat-alhshd-alshby-hymntha-fy-alraq>



David Schenker who is the Taube Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute and director of the Rubin Family Arab Politics Program and is the former US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs believes that “The Biden administration’s low-key, patient approach with Prime Minister Sudani has produced some positive results, but the lesson of Hezbollah and the Houthis is that Iranian proxies tend to cement their grip over a state when left unchecked.” Referring to the PMF expansion under Al Sudani, experts that PMF is targeting US forces in Iraq and Syria. Discussing US view of Al Sudani, he concludes that “Since Al Sudan’s election in October, the Biden administration has taken a low-key and patient approach with the premier that has borne some modest results. Regrettably, however, the lesson of Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen is that left unchecked, the Iranian proxy PMF will continue to grow and consolidate its dominance over Iraq.”

Three New Facade Groups Launched in Iraq



Hamdi Malik, an associate fellow with The Washington Institute and cofounder of its Militia Spotlight platform and Michael Knights, the Jill and Jay Bernstein Fellow of The Washington Institute, analyze Kataib al-Sabereen, Kataib Karbala and Kataib Saifollah, three new militant groups in Iraq. Mentioning that “Efforts are being made to create new brands for anti-American “resistance” on Iraqi soil, even as politically connected militias try to distance themselves from kinetic attacks on U.S. targets,” they conclude that “Since then, As-hab al-Kahf has differentiated the position of armed groups (fasail) from that of the Coordination Framework, the main political coalition for Iran-backed militias... Moreover, the largest Muqawama media outlets—such as Sabereen News, which used to strongly support new facade groups—have offered almost no support to the three new brands announced this month. This could indicate genuine segmentation of the muqawama—or it could be a disingenuous effort to portray groups such as Asaib Ahl al-Haq and Hoquq as nonviolent actors, which they are not.”

Hamdi Malik, Michael Knights

Jun 12, 2023



The Washington Institute for
Near East Policy

<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/ar/policy-analysis/atlaq-thlath-jmaat-wajht-jdydt-fy-iraq>

In Iraq, the Kurds Are Their Own Worst Enemy

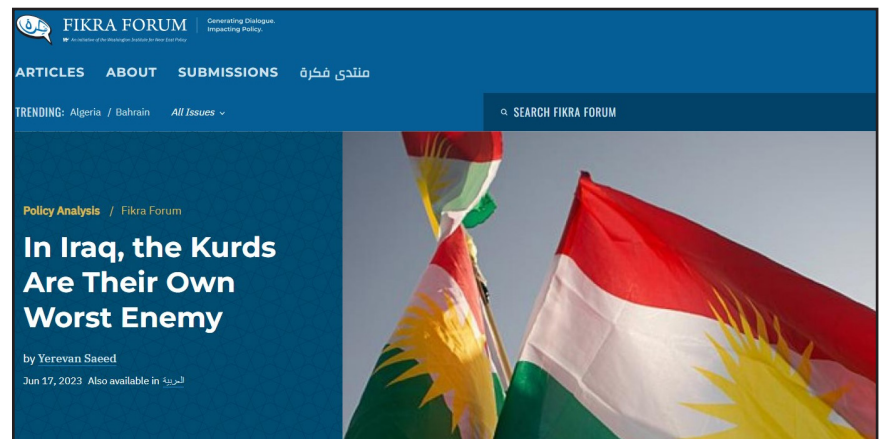
Yerevan Saeed

Jun 17, 2023



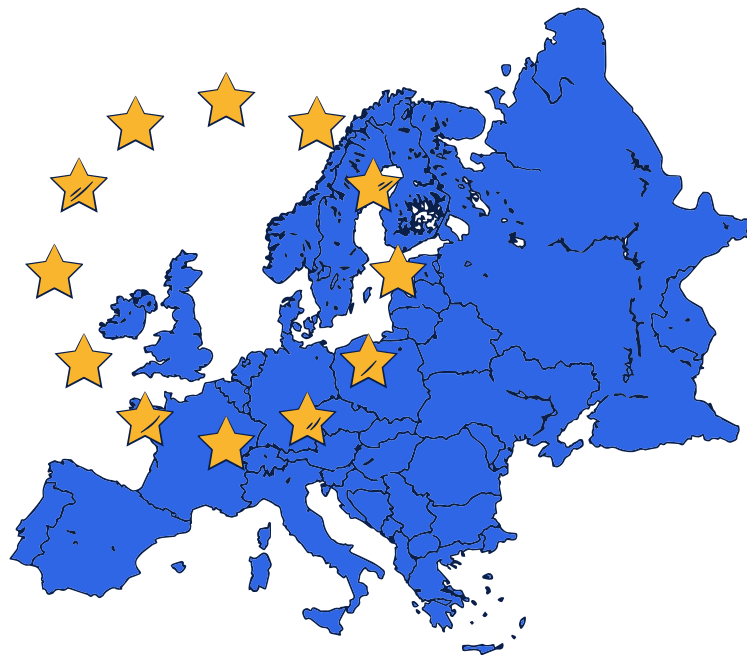
**The Washington Institute for
Near East Policy**

<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/ar/policy-analysis/fy-alaq-alakrad-hm-aldw-alaswa-lanfsh>



Yerevan Saeed, a research associate at the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington and a lecturer at the University of Kurdistan Hewler, in the analysis asserts that “Kurds were once referred to as kingmakers, a pillar of stability, and the most powerful force in the fight against ISIS. Now, the Kurdish Region of Iraq is crippled by ferocious partisanships, tribal politics, and internal splits.” Elaborating the Kurdish role in post-2003 Iraq, he refers to the aspects of Kurdish divisions under the surface, calls for a new election to restore public and legal legitimacy. He concludes: “While a fresh election cannot guarantee national unity, it can provide an opportunity to foster trust, encourage dialogue, and increase citizen participation. The election can also help build a sense of unity and shared purpose provided it is fair and clean. For this to happen, the political field in Kurdistan must be leveled through a new political pact backed by the KRG’s foreign patrons. This demands more American and European diplomatic engagement than ever before, despite their sense of diplomatic fatigue.”

EUROPEAN THINK TANKS



The Trouble with Halbousi: The Extraordinary Rise and Looming Fall of Iraq's Sunni Strongman

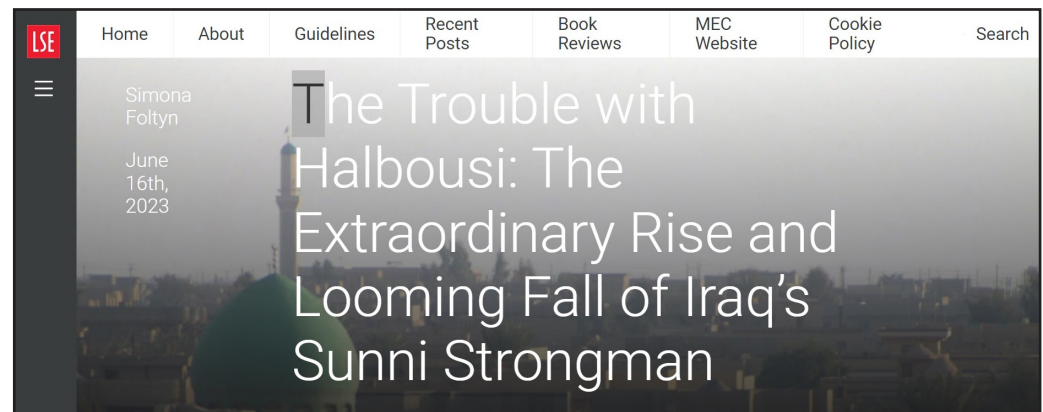
Simona Foltyn

June 16th, 2023



London School Of Economics

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2023/06/16/the-trouble-with-halbousi-the-extraordinary-rise-and-looming-fall-of-iraqs-sunni-strongman/>



Based on her interviews with the residents of north-west of Iraq including the politicians, activists and tribes' chiefs, Simona Foltyn analyzes the political life of Mohammed al-Halbousi, Iraq's Speaker of Parliament and asks "So how has Halbousi, aged only 42 and hailing from a small tribe, managed to build such a formidable political (and economic) empire in a relatively short time?" She elaborates the local crises in power in Anbar province that Halbousi benefited from and gain his current position. At the end, she writes: "Now, many Shi'a politicians feel Halbousi is too unreliable a partner. His decision last year to try to form a tripartite ruling alliance with Moqtada al-Sadr and Masoud Barzani was a red flag the Coordination Framework saw as an attempt to undermine Shi'a majority rule. Unless Halbousi strikes

a new deal that ensures his survival, his extraordinary rise as the most powerful Sunni politician in post-Saddam Hussein Iraq could be nearing the end.”

Simona Foltyn

June 16th, 2023



London School Of Economics

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2023/06/16/the-trouble-with-halbousi-the-extraordinary-rise-and-looming-fall-of-iraqs-sunni-strongman/>

Unrest in Sinjar: Iraq's Government has yet to Earn the Trust of the Yezidi Community

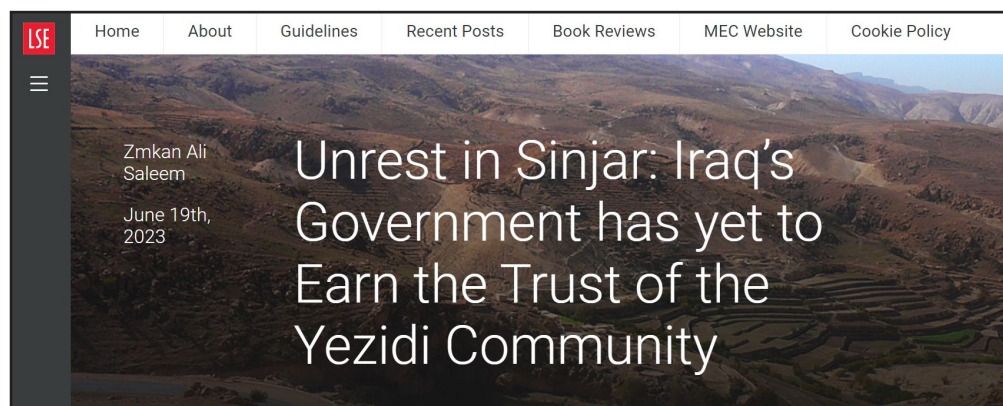
Zmkan Ali Saleem

June 19th, 2023



London School Of Economics

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2023/06/19/unrest-in-sinjar-iraqs-government-has-yet-to-earn-the-trust-of-the-yezidi-community/>



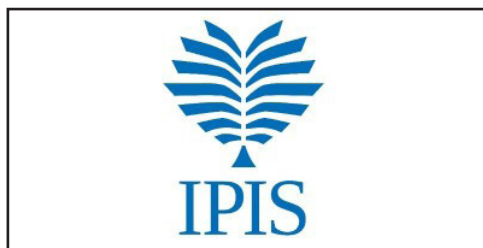
The authors elaborate that 4 May 2023: During a public event in Baghdad, Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Sudani announced his government's commitment to the full implementation of the Sinjar agreement, concluded in 2020 between the federal government in Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government, and aimed at stabilizing the contested district of Sinjar. Then by discussing different issues in the region especially camp living and presence of PKK in Sinjar, he concludes: "The problem of the PKK's influence in Sinjar is entangled with the geopolitical calculations of powerful national and regional actors, namely Iran and its allies among the pro-PMF factions in Iraq, who Sudani has little leverage over. A better method for Sudani to dislodge Yezidis from the interests of external actors is to create stakes for the members of the community in the stability of Sinjar."

IRANIAN THINK TANKS



Adjustment and amendment of the election law and its consequences in Iraq

Seyyed Mohammad Reza Rouhani



Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS)

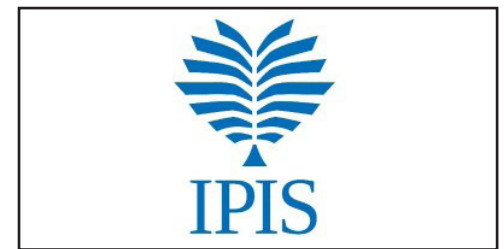
<https://www.ipis.ir/portal/subjectview/720545>



Seyyed Mohammad Reza Rouhani, an Iranian political commentator, writes at the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) of Iran’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, about the chances and challenges of amendment of the election law and its consequences in Iraq. He believes that with the change of the previous law and the return to the implementation of the Saint Lego law, “once again the big parties including Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds will be able to win the majority of seats in the parliament and narrow and limit the field for independent figures and small parties. In this way, the achievements of activists and civil movements who succeeded in changing the election law in order to achieve their goals by using the atmosphere created by the demonstrations and protests in 2018 and 2019 and the help and pressure of

foreign countries have been lost.” He concludes that “due to Moqtada Sadr’s resignation from politics for a year, the power and role of political parties and groups in the coordination framework will be further enhanced.”

Seyyed Mohammad Reza Rouhani

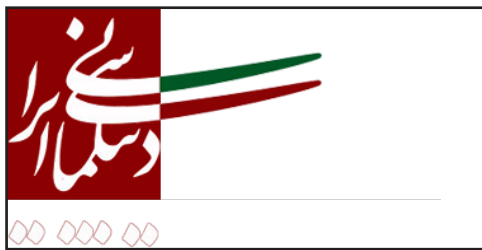


**Institute for Political and
International Studies (IPIS)**

[https://www.ipis.ir/portal/
subjectview/720545](https://www.ipis.ir/portal/subjectview/720545)

Weakness in Iran-Iraq Cultural Interactions

Seyyed Ali Mousavi Khalkhali



IRANIAN DIPLOMACY

<https://tinyurl.com/25o32gh7>



Seyyed Ali Mousavi Khalkhali, writes at Iranian Diplomacy, a major Iranian website for the international relations and inclined to the reformist faction of power in Iran, that “in spite of the many cultural commonalities and frequent visits between Iran and Iraq especially during the last two decades, the cultural cooperation between Iran and Iraq is very low and weak. Iranian cinema is not known in Iraq and few people know about Iranian art. He continues: “With the announcement of the defeat of ISIS by Iran, anti-Iranian activities began in Iraq. This time, Western NGOs, especially American ones, created an anti-Shia atmosphere in order to break the Shia hegemony and weaken Iran’s influence in Iraq. Therefore, they spread hatred among ordinary Iraqi citizens, and while exaggerating Iraq’s service and social deficiencies, they tried to point the finger of blame at Iraqi Shiite politicians and their main supporter Iran... we did not witness any noteworthy cultural activities from Iranian cultural communities to neutralize these enmities.”

America's goals of creating artificial intelligence centers in the Kurdistan region of Iraq



Hormoz Jafari, the head of international affairs of the Science and Technology college of Sharif University of Tehran, in a conversation with the website of the Strategic Council on Foreign Relations of Iran, stated that America, while being concerned about the presence of China in the technological fields of the Middle East, is trying to enter this market and meet the demands of these countries, especially its allies and partners, including Iraqi Kurdistan, to reduce the level of influence and monopoly of Chinese technological companies. Suggested that “Iran, respecting the considerations of Iraqi national sovereignty, should take the lead in meeting the technological needs of the Kurdistan Region and form strategic interactions in this area,” he states that “regarding

Hormoz Jafari



**Strategic Council on
Foreign Relations**

<https://tinyurl.com/272mrft4>

Hormoz Jafari

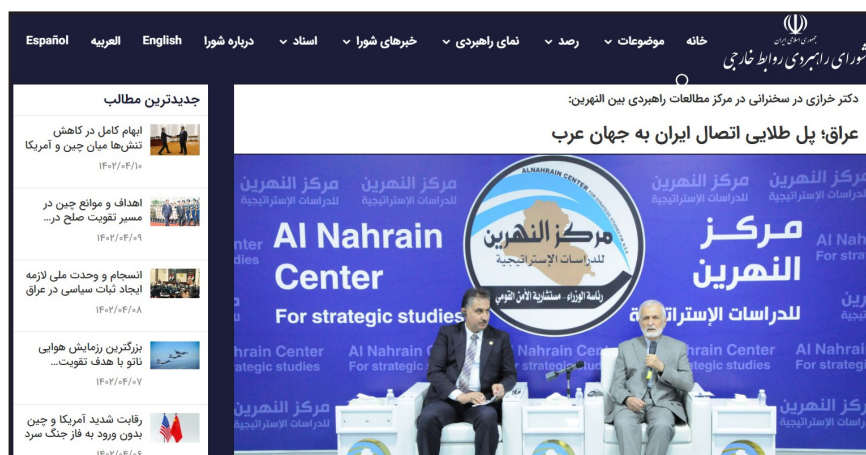


**Strategic Council on
Foreign Relations**

<https://tinyurl.com/272mrf4>

the possibility of security exploitation by the US against neighboring countries, especially Iran, through the creation of this artificial intelligence center ... technological issues know no borders and actors try to meet their needs as much as they can.” At the end, the concludes that “Turkey feels a lot of danger regarding the Kurds and sees its national security under serious threat. But Iran does not feel such a threat towards the Kurds, and by the way, there is a very high capacity for Iran to strengthen its power of maneuver and acting at the regional level by using the Kurds’ role.”

Iraq; The golden bridge connecting Iran to the Arab world



Kamal Kharazi, an Iranian reformist politician and diplomat who was the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1997 to 2005 and now leads the Iranian Strategic Council on Foreign Relations, in his recent visit to Iraq, called this country “the golden bridge connecting Iran to the Arab world”. Referring to the deep historical, cultural, religious and civilizational commonalities between Iran and Iraq, he explained the fields of cooperation between the two countries and considered the growth and development of the two countries of Iran and Iraq in the same direction and said that the strategic cooperation of the two countries in the political, economic, scientific and cultural fields will also contribute to the peace and stability of the region. In response to a question from one of the audiences, Kharazi considered the Israel “in its weakest historical condition and said that the regime’s attempt to normalize relations with the countries of the region is actually to get out of the blockade imposed by the resistance movement.”

Kamal Kharrazi



**Strategic Council on
Foreign Relations**

<https://tinyurl.com/29qfvrgc>

TURKISH THINK TANKS



Is the KDP Isolated?



Bilgay Duman, coordinator of Iraqi studies at Turkish Ankara-based Center for Middle Eastern Studies, writes that “recently, Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (IKRG) politics has been going through quite turbulent days. First, the Iraqi Federal Supreme Court’s decision that the KRG Parliament is not valid, and then the discussions on the budget put the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in a difficult position. However, this situation is not limited to today.” After elaboration of the situation at the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, he concludes: “PUK is trying to break its power by isolating the KDP... PUK is trying to evaluate every factor, including the use of structures outside of Iraq, that could trump the KDP while doing this. However, when the PUK tries to corner the KDP, it makes itself even more dependent and disorganized... While this situation hinders the steps taken to singularize the administrative structure in the KRG especially after 2003, it may also cause the KRG’s progress so far to evolve backwards.”

Bilgay Duman

23.06.2023



ORSAM (Center for Middle Eastern Studies)

<https://orsam.org.tr/tr/kdp-yalnizlastiriliyor-mu/>

Center For Middle Eastern Studies & Presidency For Turks Abroad And Related Communities

Feyzullah Tuna Aygün

12.05.2023



ORSAM (Center for Middle Eastern Studies)

https://www.orsam.org.tr/tr/arama/?hucre_1=Irak%27ta%20T%C3%BCrk%20Varl%C4%B1%C4%9F%C4%B1&hucre_2=Irak%27ta%20T%C3%BCrk%20Varl%C4%B1%C4%9F%C4%B1

Irak'ta Türk Varlığı



Ankara-based Center for Middle Eastern Studies and the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities of the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, have jointly published a report on the aspect of the Turkmens presence in Iraq. This report includes data about these aspects of the Iraqi Turkmens: The Turkmen Settlements, The Social Structure of The Turkmens, The Religious and Cultural Structure of the Turkmens, The Educational Status of the Turkmens, The Economic Status of the Turkmens, The Social and Political Organization of the Turkmens, Turkmen Political Organizations, Media Outlets, Turkmens in Iraqi Politics, Situation of the Post-ISIS Turkmen Regions, Turkmen Migration and Turkmen Civil Society Organizations in Turkey.