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# ISIS and its impact on Iraq an overview

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**Aymen Abdulkareem Al-Faisal**

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**Al-Bayan Center Studies Series**

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**Since 2014**

# ISIS and its impact on Iraq: an overview

Aymen Abdulkareem Al-Faisal\*

## **Summary:**

This study aims at identifying the most significant adverse effects of the emergence of the terrorist group “ISIS” and its impact on the Iraqi society, its various communities and religious groups. This research discerns the means of interaction and counter-interaction between this “outsider” organization and the other components of the social fabric. We will discuss as well in this study the potential positive aspects of the organization’s emergence on the Iraqi scene.

## **Introduction**

Since the formation of the “Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant” or “ISIS” in 2013, Iraq has become the preferred arena for the group’s militants. Despite the fact that the group’s expansion in Iraq subsided recently and in spite of Iraq’s victory over the group in 2017, the group’s remnants still have high hopes of surviving and expanding in Iraqi territories, even if their hopes are unfounded given the recent developments in the Iraqi scene, which confirm the eventuality of the blood thirsty group’s disappearance in Iraq at least. Hence, the need for serious thought into the upcoming phase, following the group’s

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departure and elimination, and the active involvement in monitoring the various negative effects and aspects it had on all Iraqis, regardless of their groups, classes and affiliations.

Thus, this study focuses mainly on observing the most significant adverse effects of the group's presence and impact on Iraqis, since its inception up until our present day. Identifying these adverse effects is of a great importance, as an inevitable first step towards confronting them, assessing the extent of the schisms they introduced in the Iraqi society and working subsequently on treating some of them or saving what could be saved.

Herein lays the importance of this study, in its thorough contribution in identifying the elements of ISIS's threat whose effects are still inherent or visible in the Iraqi social fabric; this is perhaps the real reason for such a study.

Since it is virtually impossible to count on the good will of terrorist blood thirsty groups – especially ISIS – in benefitting or advancing the societies they infiltrate – the Iraqi society included – a hypothesis is advanced by this study: the presence of the blood thirsty terrorist group ISIS on Iraqi territories did not only have negative impacts but positive aspects as well; through the possibility of investing in ISIS withdrawal from Iraq to better improve the Iraqi scene as a whole.

**Study axes:**

- **First Axis: ISIS's stance toward the segments of Iraqi society.**
- **Second Axis: Aspects of the adverse effects of ISIS in the Iraqi society.**
- **Third Axis: The positive effects of ISIS in Iraq...fantasy or reality?**
- **Forth Axis: The possibility of investing in ISIS's withdrawal from Iraq...a distinct vision.**
- **Results.**
- **Recommendations.**

## **First Axis**

### **ISIS's stance toward the segments of Iraqi society**

If we closely study the rise of the terrorist group ISIS in Iraq, we become convinced that this emergence was neither abnormal nor surprising, as much as it was a phenomenon to which the nature of the Iraqi disordered political and field scene contributed at the time of the creation of the group. And despite the various conflicting and contradictory rumors and estimations made over the motives and reasons leading to the group's appearance on the Iraqi scene, in addition to the motives and reasons leading to the creation of the group in the first place; it is well-known that the group emerged in the post-US led invasion Iraq.

There was an Iraqi popular desire in particular and an Arab urge in general to exact revenge against the US army for invading Iraq, regardless of their stance on Saddam Hussein's policies in ruling Iraq, whether they approve or oppose them. It constituted the common ground that the group managed to exploit e.g. to build on the nationalistic and religious emotions shared by Iraqis, which allowed the group to play an active role in the flaming Iraqi scene.

In truth, it cannot be determined that in the early days of the terrorist group, ISIS had expansionist intentions in Iraq as was the case as soon as the group managed to tighten its field and military grip on the country<sup>1</sup>.

At its beginning, the group was established on a traditional religious ideology at the heart of which was fighting the infidels, and driving them out of the land of pan-Arabism and Islam. This ideology, supported by Al-Qaeda is in fact considered to be the inspirational example for all jihadists at the outset of the US invasion of Iraq and the 9/11 events. In addition to that, there is the convergence of the ambiguous and contradictory policies and the sectarian conflicts and precarious social and economic conditions in the Iraqi society. All of the above mentioned factors converged to set the scene for this group's rise enabling it to become actively embedded in the Iraqi society and going beyond Iraq's geography and expanding through it. An overview of ISIS expansion in Iraq may perhaps confirm the veracity of this hypothesis.

ISIS adopted a name more consistent with the religious ideology attracting supporters and loyalists, which is (the Islamic State in Iraq), and began to leave Al-Qaeda's shadow gradually. ISIS exploited the events of the Syrian crisis to expand the group's mission and increase its influence outside of Iraq, through the alliance with the emerging Al-

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1. Some differentiate between ISIS under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, and ISIS under Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, since Al-Zarqawi's ISIS was restricted to Iraq and its allegiance lay with Al-Qaeda, while Al-Baghdadi's ISIS expanded outside of Iraq, combatting Al-Qaeda and Al-Nusra. Al-Zarqawi's ISIS is much more established than Al-Baghdadi's group which emerged during the final years of the mandate of Nuri Al-Maliki in 2014, and the announced alliance between the two groups did not materialize, but remained limited to the names they share (See: <http://www.al-tagheer.com/art32769.html> )

Nusra Front at the end of 2011 in Syria. It then adopted the name ISIS as proof of this alliance, and also as an alternative to Al-Nusra Front and the Islamic State in Iraq.

In the midst of this major expansion of the group in Iraq and Syria, the idea of the Islamic Caliphate grew and was adopted as an objective by the group in almost all of its slogans and names. Looking into the aspects of the Iraqi scene since the emergence of ISIS and the rise of the security, political, military and economic threat the group imposes, it becomes apparent that the conditions were conducive and favorable at all levels to this outsider group giving ISIS the power to paralyze the troubled Iraqi state. At the time, Iraq was suffering at all levels from inordinate weaknesses and turmoil, administrative disarray and poor planning, which degenerated following the advent of Nuri al-Maliki to the political and public scene as prime minister in 2006. Al-Maliki “did not improve the management of intra-sectarian relations in Iraq”<sup>2</sup>. The sufferings of the Iraqi society became more evident and hindered the paths of coexistence and security in the country to the extent that political partners felt targeted due to the strong considerations given to quotas, sectarianism and exclusion based on religious and belief related considerations, these conditions “served ISIS well, and the group found a massive, supportive and sympathetic popular base or at the very least, a base that stood idle before the group and its move to control

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2. See: Hareth Hassan, How ISIS returned to Iraq? Report published by the Palestinian newspaper Al-Manar, the website, on 9/7/2015. Date of the visit, 11/8/2017 (set date according to internet sources), available on: <http://www.manar.com/page-25326-ar.html>



the Sunni areas<sup>3</sup>. The situation was well exploited by ISIS; it invested in Sunnis negative perception of Shias. This resulted in a number of demonstrations and protests in various Sunni regions, which were met by the Iraqi government in the worst possible ways by the use of force and violence. The violent response sparked anger and triggered a strong Sunni desire to respond by taking up arms and supporting any sympathetic force in the face of the government and the violent policies of the Iraqi state. ISIS symbolized this force, and it infiltrated into the Sunni areas, after the crisis and its conditions led to a great security vacuum. Sunnis welcomed the group, a gesture that the group took advantage of to establish its presence in Iraqi territories and wholly isolate and detach the Sunni Iraqi regions. The weak influence of Iraqi forces in those areas, as well as the logistical and military support that the organization received with many loyal fighters joining its ranks through Syria, facilitated the group's move.

In light of all of these factors, the group managed to control the city of Mosul, in addition to Al-Ghazalni military compound, one of the largest military camps packed with weapons, equipment and ammunition, which used to be the biggest American base before the US army left the country. With all of these weapons at the group's disposal, ISIS managed to recruit thousands of Mosul residents in its ranks, and then expand and impose its field control on various regions of Iraq in

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3 . See Meeran Hussein: Sectarianism, Armed Sunnis and ISIS in Iraq; Al Maktab Al Arabe Lilmaaref 2015, Egypt. Excerpts of the book published on Google Books, pages: 99-100, available on: <https://books.google.com.eg>, with the possibility to search the title.

the South, East and West. The group managed as well to control some Kurdish regions and other areas close to the Syrian border. A significant move that allowed the group at the end to establish its presence in Iraq, after which its leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi declared the Islamic Caliphate, and the worst scenario for the group's atrocities in Iraq and Syria began.

### **ISIS and the Iraqi society:**

When assessing ISIS stance towards the Iraqi society, this study discovered that the group's ideology in dealing with the racial, sectarian, and religious diversity in Iraq was exceptionally bloody; the group did not exclude anyone from its attacks and massacres, including Sunnis that represented the category fostering its militants during its creation and expansion, despite the fact that the group declared time and time again that it came to save them from the Shia majority Iraqi government's unjust brutality.

### **First: ISIS and Shias in Iraq:**

After establishing its field control in Iraq, ISIS tried to target the Shia majority in the country, systematically and deliberately, which may be considered a form of genocide of this component of the Iraqi society. The group launched mass killing campaigns against Shia communities by targeting the residents on a daily, weekly and monthly basis in sacred cities and neighborhoods, leaving behind a high death toll and a large number of wounded Iraqis. The Camp Speicher massacre, during

which more than one thousand victims<sup>4</sup> from the Shia soldiers with the Army and Air Force, were separated from their colleagues, tortured and killed in cold blood, is one of the most ruthless massacres in ISIS history of brutality against Iraq's Shias<sup>5</sup>.

### **Second: ISIS and Sunnis in Iraq:**

The stance of ISIS toward Iraq's Sunnis was nothing short of the embodiment of ideological, strategic and human deceit. The group, throughout the stages of its development, did not cease to exploit them as an ideological leverage in all of its battles and schemes, exploiting and neglecting them whenever it's suitable. The greatest proof of such is perhaps the group's claim that it entered Iraq to protect the Sunni community and Sunnis. Nonetheless, its brutal actions, repressive and blood thirsty practices proved the contrary: the group did not protect Iraq's Sunnis, but rather rendered them the enemy of other sects and components of Iraq, on top of which the Shias, against whom ISIS committed numerous atrocious massacres.

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4. According to some statistics, more than 1907 Iraqi Shia perished in the Camp Speicher Massacre, in addition a larger number of victims following numerous explosions. This includes the death of 15 people in an explosion in the City of Al-Kazimiya in July 2016, 30 people in an attack targeting an Iraqi shrine in the town of Al-Balad, North of Baghdad during the same month, 65 people in a truck explosion in the Shia city of Al-Sadr in May 2016, and 324 other people in the explosion in Al-Karrada Al-Sharqiya in July 2016. According to the statistics, the number of Shia orphans increases by 200 monthly: See:

<http://annabaa.org/arabic/reports7700>

5. Ranj Alaaldin, The Isis campaign against Iraq's Shia Muslims is not politics. It's genocide. An article published on Brookings Institute's website, on Thursday, January 5, 2017. Available in Arabic on:

<https://www.brookings.edu/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jan/05/isis-iraq-shia-muslims-jihadis-atrocities>

The group's nefarious intentions against Sunnis came to light after announcing the Document of the City (Wathiqat Al-Madina) on June 12<sup>th</sup> 2014, which encompassed 16 articles dictating the group's extremist instructions for the residents in regions under its control. The group began to commit its heinous crimes against Sunnis and religious minorities in Mosul, Saladin, Al-Anbar, Al-Huwaija and other regions.

In northern Baghdad, specifically in Al-Heet, West of Al-Anbar, the group committed a horrific massacre, and targeted more than 500 of the Sunni Al Bu Nimr clan for refusing to submit to the group's control<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand, ISIS brutality against Sunnis became apparent in the group's stance on "the creation of the Awakening Councils"<sup>7</sup> in the Sunni areas, a formation expert in altering the military and political balance of power through confrontations with terrorist groups. ISIS targeted all members of the Awakening Councils in Iraq and abroad.

### **Third: ISIS and Iraq's Christians:**

Human Rights Watch reports reveal that ISIS adopted various practices and systematic measures while handling Iraq's Christians, including their exclusion from government positions, the imposition of taxes and tributes called (Jizyah) and other various approaches. Since ISIS occupation of Mosul in June 2014, the group ordered all Christians to convert to Islam, pay Jizyah or leave Mosul, calling them crusaders.

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6. Surura Abdul Wahed Qader, A brief study of ISIS. Published on the Kurdish website NRT on 1/8/2016, available on: <http://www.nrttv.com/ar/birura-details.aspx?Jimare=2291>

7. Al Sahawat Councils are Sunni factions established in 2006/2007 during the mandate of PM Nuri Al-Maliki, with the encouragement of the Bush administration in Al-Anbar province to eliminate Al-Qaeda militants in the province, following Iraq's official forces' failure in confronting them.

ISIS kidnapped as well two nuns and three Christian orphans as part of a group of other minorities' captives, in addition to the confiscation of several buildings belonging to the Chaldean Catholic Diocese and the Orthodox Assyrian Diocese, while it destroyed several edifices and religious relics, including a statue of Virgin Mary. The group additionally confiscated Christian houses, writing on their doors the letter (N) in Arabic, referring to Nasara or Christians, in addition to the expression (properties of the Islamic State). These actions forced the majority of Mosul's Christian families to flee the city, and gave ISIS an exploitative opportunity to steal the gold, jewelry and precious belongings of these fleeing families at the search checkpoints<sup>8</sup>.

#### **Fourth: ISIS and the rest of Iraq's religious sects <sup>9</sup>:**

ISIS perception of the rest of Iraq's minorities and religious sects did not differ from the way they treated Christians, Sunnis and Shias. More than 200 thousand Yizidis in the towns of Tel Qasab, Siba Shekhdar, Kherzark, Karazir, Sinjar, Tal Banat, Hardan, Zurafa, Khan Sour, Dohula, Kohbel, and Snouni) were stranded on August 2, 2014, on what came to be known as the Black Night. The Yizidis were surrounded for 10 days by ISIS forces that came from the South and East of Sinjar.

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8. Human Rights Watch's report, June 2014, available on: <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2014/07/19/254575>

9. Iraq is considered one of the most important countries in the Middle East, home of a large number of religious, ethnic and nationalist minorities for millennia. They are believed to be the descendants of the aboriginal population of Mesopotamia, such as (Christians, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Armenians, Syriacs, Yizidis, Yarsanis, Sabian Mandaeans, Shabak, Turkmen, **blacks**, few Zoroastrians, and previously Jews). Their presence stretches back to the beginning of history, spreading in the North, Center and South of Iraq. For more:

<http://www.nrttv.com/ar/birura-details.aspx?Jimare=2291>

At the end of this siege, more than 5000 people perished while more than 7000 people mainly women and children were kidnapped. All the while, ISIS's ferocious attack on Iraqi minorities did not cease. Almost five days after the displacement, enslavement and murder of Yizidis, the group launched another attack from the East and North of Mosul which resulted in the displacement of almost 300 thousand people from the Shabak, Christian, Yizidi, Hamadani, and Yarsani minorities towards Erbil and Duhok, while the group occupied their regions and villages. In all, the actions led to major changes whether on the demographic level of Iraqi minorities or in terms of their reality.<sup>10</sup>.

#### **Fifth: ISIS and Iraq's political parties:**

After the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, the political situation in Iraq moved towards the political encirclement of the Baath clans or clans of similar tendencies, by forbidding them constitutionally from founding any political parties. Previously, the convergence between Sunni Arabs and Saddam Hussein hindered all Sunni attempts to establish parties active in the political arena<sup>11</sup>. Thus, Iraq does not have new Sunni parties in the political sense, except for the Iraqi Islamic Party, an old established party still active today <sup>12</sup>.

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10. Surura Abdul Wahed Qader, A brief study of ISIS. Ibid.

11. Meeran Hussein: Sectarianism, Armed Sunnis and ISIS in Iraq, Al Maktab Al Arabe Lilmaaref 2015, Egypt. Excerpts of the book published on Google Books, available on: <https://books.google.com.eg>

12. This party was established during the mandate of President Abdel Karim Kassem by (the Muslim Brotherhood) in Iraq under the name the Iraqi Islamic Party, headed by Naaman Abdel Razzaq Al-Samurai as a political front for the Muslim Brotherhood. The party then submitted its documents to the Ministry of Interior; the submitted request however was rejected by the constitutional commission, which submitted the documents to the Iraqi Court of Cassation which allowed the establishment of the Iraqi Islamic Party in 1960. Ten months later, the security forces froze the party's activities which then turned to secret work as of that date. In the early 1990s, the party

Moreover, one could mention the Association of Muslim Scholars, “which is not a traditional party but a religious institution active in the political arena. The association was established directly after the war and was known as one of the forces opposing foreign presence”<sup>13</sup>, in addition to other various groups and marginal Sunni entities that do not match the criteria of a political party. As for Shia parties, they are headed by the three parties controlling the Iraqi state and its institutions, which are the Islamic Dawa Party, the Sadrist Movement, and the Islamic Supreme Council.

It is possible to conclude the general stance of these parties in confronting ISIS as follows:

- **Sunni parties:** the stances of the Sunni political blocs represented by the Iraqi Islamic Party, the Association of Muslim Scholars, and other Sunni groups and entities, were characterized by the lack of clear political or strategic vision regarding the blood thirsty and ideological presence of ISIS in Iraqi territories; then these blocs were reluctant and totally absent from supporting the Sunni community and taking part in their war against this group that invaded their villages, cities and regions, which made the community lose faith

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reemerged again, this time in Britain where it published its newspaper, Dar As-Salam, and elected Iyad al-Samara'i Secretary General. The party later reappeared publicly on the Iraqi scene in 2003, under the leadership of Mohsen Abdel Hamid, Tariq al-Hashimi, followed by Osama Al-Tikriti and currently Rashid Al-Azzawi; for more:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraqi\\_Islamic\\_Party](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraqi_Islamic_Party)

13. See: Likaa Makki, A map of Iraq's political forces, Al-Jazeera report on 7/4/2005, available on: <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:x0ov2H0sLXMJ:www.aljazeera.net/specialfiles/pages/9e115e70-fedb-466b-8ca7-2f14163fcc51+&cd=4&hl=ar&ct=clnk&gl=eg>

in these parties<sup>14</sup>, especially with the absence of a political block regrouping the Sunni forces in Iraq, as is the case with the Shia political powers regrouping everyone in the National Iraqi Alliance<sup>15</sup>.

- **Shia parties:** despite their political majority in the legislative and executive powers, Shia political parties are often accused of being amongst the reasons behind ISIS ability to enter Iraq and control its cities, due to the apparent inability of these parties when it comes to establishing a state project that lifts Iraqis from corruption and sectarianism. In spite of these parties' stability and seriousness in confronting and combatting ISIS – unlike the Sunni position – they failed to act other than randomly in the military confrontation against the group, especially with the lack of a unified leadership for the confrontation. It also seemed like some were looking for their private interests and not the general interests of the Iraqi state<sup>16</sup>.

When looking closer at the repercussions of ISIS surprising control of the Iraqi scene on the Sunni and Shia political parties in Iraq, it is possible to detect the following:

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14. Mithaq Minahi Al-Issawi, Iraqi Political Parties; Between the absence of the Role of the State and Reforms Support, Al-Furat Center for Development and Strategic Studies, dates are unavailable, without further information, available on:

<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:P7ZKxJ2dJkJ:www.fcdrs.com/includes/download.php%3Ftype%3Darticle%26aid%3D278+&cd=30&hl=ar&ct=clnk&gl=eg> <http://www.fcdrs.com/includes/download.php?type=article&aid=278>

15. See: Nasser Chadid, Sunni Iraqi Parties: Similarities of Contents and Efforts Scattered, Al-Jazeera Net Report, on 21/1/2017, available on: [www.aljazeera.net](http://www.aljazeera.net), with the research in the mentioned title.

16. See: Mithaq Minahi Al-Issawi, Ibid.



- The arrival of ISIS to Iraqi cities in 2014 led to a complete collapse of the entire political alliances that resulted from the 2013 April election of Iraqi provincial councils which were supposed to remain cohesive until the 2017 elections. However, it appeared that more than 40 political entities, the majority of which were Shias, had a desire to enter the provincial councils' elections in 2017 on the one side and the 2018 Iraqi parliament's elections on the other side.
- At the level of the Shia component – especially the National Alliance representative of the biggest Shia forces in Iraq – the expansion of ISIS in Iraqi regions and provinces caused violent and severe political differences and conflicts. Former PM Nouri Al-Maliki, leader of the “State of Law Coalition”, formed by three major Shia blocks – the Islamic Virtue Party, Al-Ahrar Bloc of the Sadrist Movement and the National Wisdom Party headed by Ammar Al-Hakim – was accused of enabling this murderous organization to increase its influence in the country to an extent where it paved the way for some emerging Shia blocs, such as the Popular Mobilization Forces, to achieve great influence and presence at the expense of the three main parties (Al-Dawa, the Islamic Supreme Council, and the Sadrist Movement) in the frame of combatting ISIS especially in Baghdad and South of Iraq; regions in which the blocs managed to drive out ISIS.

- On another hand, the political influence of ISIS became evident at the level of Kurdish alliances. For when ISIS infiltrated the disputed regions in Northern Iraq in Al-Dustour, it weakened the previously believed strong alliance between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by Masoud Barzani, president of Kurdistan region and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). This was due to the interference of Western and other actors targeting this alliance, that were capable of fuelling the conflict through logistic balances related to arming groups. This led to making the two cities of Sulaymaniyah and Erbil fall under the rule of two different parties; and pushed Kurd officials to call for the separation of the two cities and going back to the pre-2003 situation.
- As for the Sunni parties, ISIS caused great damage to the Sunni cities and regions while these parties were unable to provide a mechanism capable of protecting the regions and their Sunni population. It later led to the parties' isolation from their supporters, in addition to their confusion as a result of their leaders' search for uncalculated alliances, some of them with Shias and Kurds, while other alliances laid with foreign powers and asking for support, depending on the developments of ISIS occupation of Iraqi cities. Sunni parties also participated in a heated conflict amongst themselves, seeking political influence and interests. For example, the Islamic Party is fighting with the United Alliance over power in Mosul, in addition to Ayad

Allawi's Iraqi National Accord and Jamal Al-Karboli's National Movement for Development and Reform or Al-Hal (the Solution) over influence in Al-Anbar. It is also battling the National Party and the Iraqi National Dialogue Front for influence in Saladin<sup>17</sup>.

## **The second axis**

### **The negative effects of ISIS on Iraqi society**

There is no doubt that the infiltration of terrorist organizations into any society has many negative effects on the security, stability and structure of this society. We can observe the most important of these negative effects through the following points:

(1) **Political Impact:** When ISIS took control of almost a third of Iraq shortly after it entered Mosul, the Iraqi political situation was incoherent for many reasons, among which were the most influencing the policies of the Iraqi Prime Minister at the time, Nouri Al-Maliki, whose results were the prevalence of administrative corruption; and devoting sectarianism. Therefore, the negative effects of the entry of ISIS to Iraq were significant for the political scene. The first of these effects is the absence of the concept of the Iraqi state, in exchange for strengthening the image of ISIS as an indomitable force, as the Iraqi government was politically encircled by ISIS's great control over the course of affairs in the country to the

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17. Mustafa Habib, ISIS deepened Sunni politicians' differences in Iraq. Articles published on the Arab/German website Niqash, in 3/5/2017, available on: <http://www.niqash.org/ar/articles/politics/5569/>

degree that the Iraqi political scene seemed to be totally collapsing. The second of these effects is arranging the Iraqi arena for more foreign interference of many countries, including the United States of America, Iran and all armed jihadist factions, as well as the Syrian window that has had negative effects on the Iraqi political reality since the beginning of the Syrian war, and that is because of the presence of ISIS on both scenes at the same time. As for the third effect, it is represented by the intruder organization's employment of the data of the flabby Iraqi reality on the level of corruption of some political parties in the Iraqi institutions in its favor; including its mutual dealing with some of the members of the military and Sunni and Shiite parties who facilitated the organization's entry and control of Iraqi provinces and their armories, which has led them all to invest in the deteriorating Iraqi case for their own benefit at the expense of the overall political reality of the country.

(2) **The economic impact:** ISIS has caused great costs to the Iraqi economy. Since its entry and control of Iraqi lands and governorates, the country's economic indicators are declining for the worse. The growth of the Iraqi economy decreased from 5.9% in 2013 to 2.7% in October 2014, and this decline continues to indicate a negative growth rate of (-1.2) during 2015, according to the statistics of the International Monetary Fund. The military expansion of the organization has crippled the Iraqi economy, especially in Mosul after the organization has looted banks, obstructing all investment

projects and freezing the private and governmental sectors. This led the country to witness the increase of inflation rates from 1.95 in 2013 to 6.2% in 2015, and of poverty rate from 19% to 30%, especially with the decline in the Iraqi oil production ceiling from 12 million barrels per day to below 2.9 million barrels per day during 2014/2015. This is due to the fact that terrorist groups affiliated with the organization controlled 13 oil fields, and sold the oil by about 75% below the international price by \$ 17 per barrel. In addition, the organization's adopted a large smuggling movement of oil from Kirkuk and Mosul to Turkey and Iran consisting of 60 tankers per day, which generated almost four million dollars a day in the organization. This has costed the Iraqi public budget a heavy loss, especially in light of the drop in the price of the oil barrel from \$ 120/barrel to less than \$ 30. This has introduced Iraq into a severe and stifling financial crisis that threatened its national security. In general, the scale of damage resulting from ISIS' economic crimes in Iraq exceeds the current estimates, and their repercussions will last for several years, which affects the future of future generations.

- (3) **The security and military impact:** The success of the terrorist organization ISIS in penetrating the Iraqi state in a large sector of its cities and regions is the greatest evidence of the sluggishness and fragility of the security situation before it left the country and ruined everything related to security and intelligence in Iraq. It practiced many specific operations in several Iraqi governorates, starting by

the capital Baghdad, in addition to ISIS management of a large-scale smuggling movement across Iraqi borders, which means that the organization will maintain its intelligence presence for a long time and will not end with its official departure. In addition to the outcome of the security breaches of this organization at the level of Iraqi society, the number of dead and wounded both in quantity and quality has become large and difficult to count. This will continue to have a lasting impact and security concern among the Iraqi public. The scale of the bloody crimes committed by the organization and announced through its media machine has turned an Iraqi generation into experts in crime-making and promoting. This will cause the Iraqi community to continuously suffer from security, unless there is an encirclement plan to deal with such a problem.

- (4) **Social impact:** the effects of ISIS at the Iraqi level were violent and shocking. The excessive behavior of this organization in the use of violence and killing according to unprecedented barbaric methods led to a violent and destructive tremor in the Iraqi social fabric, and its areas and elements can be observed and monitored in the following:
- Further consolidating the state of division and sectarian conflict at the level of the ruling political framework. This deepened the wounds of societal dispersion in all spheres of life in Iraq.

- Subduing all fundamental transformations in Iraqi social reality which have been taking shape since 2003 to anarchic pressure was one of its consequences. This opened the door to tampering with the system of customs, values, ways of coexistence and ways of thinking, and even subjecting Iraqi society as a whole to a process of forced renewal with unsafe consequences, in its construction, its composition, and its directions.
- Directing the Iraqi way of life towards dealing with a culture of extremism and violence in more brutal and bloody ways; which opened the mindset of the Iraqi citizens towards people from outside the border to get them out of this state of oppression. This is considered a major rift in the national structure and the affiliation of these citizens, where the political system bears the responsibility.

### **The third axis**

#### **ISIS's Positive Effects in Iraq ... Illusion or Reality?**

Despite the devastating effects and bloody massacres caused by the terrorist organization on Iraqi soil, careful and specific interpretation leads us to a number of positive aspects arising from the mere existence of this organization and its presence in the Iraqi scene as a whole. They are positive aspects that such a bloody and brutal organization did not work to achieve, but they came in unpredictably; even rather in terms where many decision-makers in the Iraqi state do not count, and those positive aspects can be monitored in the following points:

(1) **Disruption of political corruption:** As a result of ISIS entering Iraq, a set of internal and external pressures resulted in changing the features of the Iraqi political scene for the better. Iraqi politics got rid of the sectarian policy that prevailed before 2014, especially since “the rift between the components and spectra in Iraq was very large and cannot be hidden.” Hence, the positive event, due to these pressures, was holding of the legislative elections that resulted in the selection of new people who had no prior executive role in politics. Thus, this was considered a major blow to the major political blocs. Moreover, ISIS entrance projected that the Iraqi military institution suffers from a major defect, which is represented in the weakness of the national identity, and the decline in values due to the great sectarian heritage in the country. In addition, it revealed the corruption of political recruitment of the armies and the regular security forces. Perhaps among the positive results in this context is what can be called the first step towards reforming the Iraqi military establishment, which was represented in the decision of former Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi to rely entirely on the Iraqi army to confront ISIS and expel it from the country, and “his refusal to invite any foreign forces to move inside Iraq.”

Another positive change in the political and parties' landscape in Iraq that was affected by the entry of ISIS is destabilizing the political monopoly of the main ruling parties in Iraq, as new blocs parties and political forces have emerged on the scene due to their successful role



in combating ISIS and its removal from Mosul. Those are the blocs and forces where the majority of which were able, through new alliances, to transcend sectarian and religious dimensions and considerations in order to shed the light on corruption and monopolization of the main ruling parties at the expense of the public interest of Iraqis. ISIS has created a new political reality, which quickly resulted in the expulsion of many Iraqi officials from their positions in exchange for the emergence of others, as well as the emergence of new political alliances in line with the reality imposed by the ISIS's new political map of the country. Within the framework of this political map, it was necessary for Iraq to reformulate its foreign policies, whose conditions worsened after 2003. Thus, the Iraqi political scene opened up to new regional dimensions with the Gulf region, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Turkey; which created some balance in foreign relations in which Iranian influence had the largest share before that.

**(2) Supporting the Iraqi affiliation and rejecting sectarianism:**

Although the apparent fact that the terrorist organization ISIS acted to disperse the Iraqi people and their minorities – which actually happened – this was a valid reason to unite the Iraqis against it. As “Iraqis of different religions, creeds, and nationalities are united by a single identity: the identity of the homeland and the return of internally displaced people, migrants and refugees in exile and asylum.” Therefore, the presence of the terrorist organization represented a common distress for groups and minorities of different

ethnic and religious backgrounds; considering that they were facing a common enemy that oppressed and undermined their security and stability. The success of the experience of popular cohesion at the level of Sunnis, Shiites, Kurds and others in defeating the organization in Mosul in 2017 has demonstrated – beyond a reasonable doubt – that the Iraqi sects have benefited well from the common tribulation that they were exposed to. “The fight against ISIS imposed on Iraqis the necessity of cohesion in confronting it, which represents a precedent that deserves attention in this country that has suffered from sectarian conflicts for decades.”

- (3) **Narrowing the party rift:** The Iraqi crisis with ISIS resulted in the start of a careful sorting movement within the institutions of the Iraqi state to exclude influential private and personal interests. Among those included in this movement are members of Sunni and Shia parties and forces. This led to the emergence of a state of balanced engagement among all Iraqi parties, regardless of their orientation, with all Iraqi issues and components within these parties and forces as well as outside. This situation is expected to appear in the future effectively; this means that the gap between the partisan differences between Iraqi parties will start to shrink and fade.

## **Fourth Axis**

### **The possibility of investing the exit of ISIS from Iraq ...**

#### **A special vision**

Through what was mentioned in the axes of this study, we have clarified the features of the situation that the Iraqi society was exposed to in all its sectors and segments and the events and fluctuations that led to the recent exit of the defeated organization from Iraq. This means the readiness of the Iraqi scene and its openness to several scenarios, including achieving security and stability, and then proceeding towards a more spacious and prosperous Iraqi horizon. This also includes the wish to not return to the bitter political conflict between the forces, blocs and parties in the country according to considerations of quotas and sectarianism. Therefore, the Iraqis are fully convinced of the imperative of radical change in Iraq during the next stage of history of this ancient country, and then they regard the necessity of the real forces of change in Iraq to invest in the exit of ISIS from the country through the following measures:

- \* Exploiting the state of popular cohesion witnessed by Iraq due to eliminating the organization, in order to issue a comprehensive national document that sets the first and future features of a fair participation between sects and ethnicities in national decision-making internally and externally. This may necessarily entail lifting

Iraqi sovereignty from the majority of families and neighborhood countries, according to strict mechanisms.

- \* Employ the state of common rapprochement that prevailed recently between the Federal Central Government in Baghdad on the one hand and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq on the other hand, in finding a fair formula on practical terms, in which regions and territories can obtain their rights from the budget of the Iraqi state according to the legal and constitutional foundations. This takes place especially with the great role that those regions have played in liberating Iraqi regions and governorates from the terrorist organization.
- \* Promoting the popular Iraqi anger towards security breaches and repeated armed confrontations between Iraqi security forces and some outlawed elements that aim at destabilizing the country during the upcoming electoral entitlements. This study considers these electoral entitlements as a milestone in the political and popular history of Iraq. It is a subject of great ambition among all forces and blocs, and emerging parties in Iraq, through which they intend to relieve the country from advocates of quotas and sectarianism. On the other hand, the study looks at any violations of these electoral entitlements by the outlaw elements and militias, as a consequence of which these entitlements are corrupted, as they are the back of the political future of Iraq.

- \* Rationing the situations of the war on terrorism and its mechanisms in a way that prevents them from being used and employed by influential figures in the Iraqi state to achieve special purposes that are far from securing the state and Iraqi people with a serious attempt to restore the actual composition of the Iraqi army on neutral national foundations that ensure the dissolution of sectarian differences among its elements and individuals. At the same time, it prevents conflicting sectarian components in Iraq from monopolizing with its pillars and brigades. Rather, it allows a conscious merging of the components and segments of Iraqi society, including the PMF and other Iraqis. Undoubtedly, reaching an advanced stage in this framework depends on the ability of the Iraqi ruling institutions to grant confidence and eliminate misunderstandings during the formation, preparation and integration stages, as well as ensuring that the elements of the military establishment that are merged and are able to deal with all segments of Iraqi society without discrimination or favoritism, in addition, to working under the umbrella of the military sovereignty of the Iraqi state and not others.
- \* Not to be quickly involved in responding to advocates working to establish new Iraqi regions and governorates, particularly in the phase of liberation from ISIS, since the fragmentation and regionalization at the present time open a wide door of dispersal and conflict among the residents of different Iraqi regions. The most important of these is paying attention to issues of restoring the reconstruction of cities

and destroyed areas, issues of reviving the Iraqi economy, and controlling internal and border security.

- \* Promote the development in the structure of newly emerging political blocs and forces in Iraq in terms of their insistence on crystallizing entities and highly coherent alliances in order to achieve justice, equality, political, economic and social integrity in the country by supporting electoral neutrality and integrity to come out with new partisan, political, and tribal components, and then use that to launch honest parliamentary institutions for the Iraqi segments. This guarantees the Iraqi state a strong resistance wall in the face of foreign and international ambitions towards Iraq and its people.

## **Results**

According to the above axes and particles of this study, the most important results can be observed in the following:

- The expansion of ISIS in Iraqi cities and regions was not previously planned by this organization at the time of its first formation after 2003 with the desire of the Iraqi and Arab public to take revenge from the American army. However, this expansion came due to the development of field factors on the Iraqi scene, in particular the prevalence of general discontent among Iraqi components in the western and northern regions.

- The strategic ideology pursued by ISIS has grown – in many of its features and pillars – to take advantage of the downfalls of opponents, and to exploit negative field and institutional data that the Iraqi state suffers from. Besides, the religious ideology of the organization has not distinguished in terms of barbaric, bloody, and destructive treatment between the Sunni component on the one hand, and the rest of the other religious and ethnic components that are contrary to the religious belief declared by the organization on the other hand. Indeed, this confirms that ISIS is far from any religious Islamic or non-Islamic ideologies, and that its declaration of the caliphate state was only a veil behind which the organization disguised and aimed to keep pace with the broad polarization of the Sunni component in Iraq, in Syria, and in the Muslim world.
- The bloody massacres of the organization did not exclude any segment of the Iraqi society, and the most horrible massacres were against the Yazidi community, along with the sects of the Sunni component that the organization claimed it entered Iraq to protect. In addition, the targeting of the Shia component by ISIS amounts to the level of genocide according to International law.
- The Sunni and Shia parties in Iraq lacked the strategic vision that would enable them to provide optimal political support to confront ISIS and its expansion in the Iraqi interior. This clearly expressed the nature of the dispersion at the partisan level, which strongly contributed to ISIS being able to tamper with the political map in Iraq.

- The ways in which the Iraqi society deals with ISIS and its mechanisms varied according to the capabilities available to these groups, between anticipation, caution, acquiescence, engagement, loyalty, clash, and armed confrontation. In general, the Iraqi segments shared the organization's oppression and exposure to its strict barbarism, as well as making effort to counter it.
- ISIS's entry into Iraq has devastating negative effects on several levels, including political, economic, social, religious, cultural, security, and military. Despite all these negative effects, the organization has parallel and unintended consequences in losing the Iraqi arena and the emergence of new leaders at the political level, whom are expected to renew and support the future of Iraq. Moreover, the oppression and bloodiness of ISIS helped in increasing the Iraqi cohesion, the rapprochement of races and sects due to the common distress.
- Investing in ISIS' exit from Iraq to achieve the optimal formulation of the features of the Iraqi national scene is possible, with the condition of adherence to political neutrality, national integrity, and collective sincerity in confying corruption, and empowering Iraqi sovereignty and law.



## Recommendations

This study decides a set of brief and main recommendations as follows:

- Launch a comprehensive review of the structure of the military and the Iraqi army in accordance with national formulations apart from quotas and sectarianism, while providing everyone with an opportunity to shine under the military sovereignty of the Iraqi state and serve the flag.
- Providing maximum protection for the local elections in the governorates and with them the parliamentary elections. Moreover, providing an opportunity for electoral integrity to prevail, as it is the guarantor of the comprehensive and desired change in this country.
- Accelerate achieving a comprehensive economic balance, through which the Iraqi state can be in charge of the displaced minorities, support reconstruction, exercise national sovereignty, restore damaged infrastructure at the hands of ISIS terrorist elements, and return the displaced to their areas.
- Giving the chance for civil society and human rights organizations to work on the psychological rehabilitation and social integration of the displaced Iraqi groups dislocated by the bloodshed of ISIS oppression, while giving Iraqi women adequate attention in this context, in addition to the work of these institutions and associations to expose the roots of rampant corruption in multiple Iraqi sectors.

- Circulating slogans of joint national action in the Iraqi street, while synchronizing this with serious practical activities that incorporate the practical application of these slogans. Moreover, assigning this to the emerging political, social and economic forces and blocs, being the most enthusiastic and sincere, and the least involved in favoritism and corruption.
- Give full priority to cleansing all Iraqi cities, governorates, and regions from the remnants of ISIS, while obliging the Iraqi forces of different affiliations and tendencies to be moderate and intentional in those practices resulting from this purification, especially the members of the Popular Mobilization Forces in the former areas of ISIS. In addition, hold the offenders accountable in a clear and public manner, as well as adopting the principles of conscious transitional justice in liberated cities.
- Rejecting the forms of fragmentation and division of Iraqi regions, governorates, and cities – at least in the current stage – while finding a formula for a quick and fair consensus that guarantees the equitable distribution of rights and wealth according to the legal provisions of the general budget of the Iraqi state and the federal government.