

Iraq — From Failed Nation-State to Binational State?

Ofra Bengio

In his book on ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim, published in 1969, Uriel Dann stated: “There is no ‘Iraqi nation,’ nor is there a tradition of cooperation to cement the various communities.” Nor, he further asserted, was there an Iraqi political entity with a tradition of independent existence, since Iraq’s borders had been shaped by foreign powers, and for the sake of foreign interests. Years of centralized government did not reinforce the feeling of “Iraqiness,” neither during the British mandate (1920–1932), nor during the period of formal independence.¹ Today, 85 years after the creation of the Iraqi state, the question arises whether Dann’s analysis is still valid, or whether political changes have brought about the need to review these basic premises.²

From the very foundation of the state, Iraqi rulers have had to contend with existential problems regarding its territorial integrity, the shaping of its national identity, the division of power and resources among Iraq’s various components, and the state’s ability to achieve internal cohesion, which is crucial to its performance as a more or less cohesive entity in the internal and external arenas.

Though questions of this kind have preoccupied numerous other states built on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, the Iraqi case is set apart by the fact that, instead of these problems decreasing with the passage of time, they have become ever more acute. Their intensity can be seen both in the political discourse and in political action. During the years 1923–1925, for instance, King Faysal I struggled to incorporate the province of Mosul, and its Kurdish majority, into the framework of the Iraqi state, contending that this region constituted an

integral part of Iraq, and that the latter could not exist as a state without it — a region which was, in King Faysal's words, "like the head to the body."³ The premise behind this argument was the need to offset the Shi'i majority by bringing the Sunni Kurds into the Iraqi state, so as to reinforce the status of the Sunni Arab rulers. This, more than anything else, clearly shows that the Sunni fear of being a minority has been deeply rooted in the Iraqi experience since the very foundation of the state. In later years, the same king expressed deep frustration, almost bordering on despair, regarding the possibility of consolidating an Iraqi people and developing supracommunal national loyalties that would constitute the basis for an Iraqi nation-state. In his famous memorandum, formulated in 1932 on the eve of the end of the British mandate, he wrote the following summation of his ten-year rule in Iraq: "In my opinion, and I say this with sorrow, an Iraqi people does not yet exist. Rather, there are throngs of human beings lacking any national consciousness or sense of unity; they are sunk in superstitions and religious traditions, harken to evil, are inclined to anarchy and always prepared to rise up against any government whatsoever."⁴ The king stressed the great weakness of the Sunni rulers who were forced to rule over the Kurds, most of whom were ignorant and who sought to secede from the state, as well as over an equally ignorant Shi'i majority, which opposed the Sunni government because of profound feelings of discrimination. In his memorandum King Faysal also warned against tribal loyalties that severely handicapped the process of state- and nation-building.⁵ Today, nearly eighty years later, King Faysal's prescient perception seems more valid than ever.

Unlike King Faysal I, who used moderation to build a nation-state, while taking into consideration the complex mosaic of Iraqi society, Saddam Husayn, having risen to power forty years later, resorted to extreme violence and brutality. Despite the fact that — at least in the first decade of the Ba'thi regime — the Iraqi state radiated strength, determination, and even a certain cohesion, beneath the surface great rifts were opening, which even Saddam Husayn himself could not ignore. Thus, like a prophet of doom, he warned of the danger of Iraq splitting into three parts. On one occasion, he compared Iraq to a great ship, shared by Arabs and Kurds, and warned that he would not allow a hole to be drilled in the ship's bottom, lest it might sink. On another occasion, he warned of the dangers of separatism and factionalism, and

promised to combat them by any means at his disposal, “even by the sword.”⁶ These two examples reflected the extent to which the geographic-political unit called Iraq had yet to become a coherent, consolidated national entity, and the extent to which the threat of its dismemberment still loomed large.

The British Heritage

What are the roots of these problems, and in what ways have Iraq’s rulers tried to contend with them? Some have squarely put the blame on the heterogeneity of Iraqi society. In reality, heterogeneity is not a cause in itself, as has often been proved elsewhere, but the way it is dealt with. In the Iraqi case, the British architects of the state envisioned a nation-state drawing its inspiration from the European model. They totally disregarded the needs, characteristics, and composition of the local population. As an outcome of mistaken conceptions and short-sighted decisions, the state that was created was based on the anomaly of a hegemonic Sunni minority seeking to impose its rule and its vision on a Shi’i majority and a Kurdish minority almost equal in size to the Sunni Arabs, thus alienating the Shi’is and the Kurds from the outset.⁷ This led to what Andreas Wimmer diagnosed as the problem of all societies and states in which a similar pattern of exclusivist nationalism — or, in other words, persisting ethnic conflicts — exists. According to Wimmer, when elites are not prepared to include the state’s entire population into the dominant nation representing the state, those who thereby become “minorities” are excluded from the benefits of political modernity and do not feel inclined to “embrace the project of nation-building through assimilation.”⁸ This in turn leads the technocrats to rely on terror to control the population, which alienates the “minorities” even further. According to Wimmer, at the end of this process, the polity is compartmentalized into a series of ethnic groups, whose members see themselves as separate communities, each of which shares a common political fate and destiny. In other words, what transpires is social isolation and political fragmentation along ethnic lines.

The relations between the ruling Iraqi elite and the Shi’is, on the one hand, and between the ruling Iraqi elite and the Kurds, on the other,

was entirely different; the result, however, was similar, namely the alienation of both groups. With regard to the Shi'is, the British and their Sunni protégés continued the discriminatory, exclusivist policy that had been applied by the Ottomans. The Ottoman *millet* system, which granted special status to minorities, did not include the Shi'is, but only non-Muslim communities. In this manner, the Shi'is, who were Muslims by religion but did not belong to mainstream Sunni Islam, were hurt twice. They did not share the privileges enjoyed by religious minorities like the Jews or the Christians, but neither were they integrated into the government, nor were they included in the Ottoman political domain.⁹ In the modern, democratic state that the British sought to build on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, the British could have changed this pattern. However, although the *millet* system had died out long before the gradual British conquest of Iraq (1914–1918), the British did not see fit to change the status of the Shi'is. Many considerations motivated the British to exclude the Shi'is from power, and to assign it to the Sunni Arabs. These included the perception that the Sunnis would be dependent on the British and submissive to them on account of their demographic weakness (about 20% of the population), the need to satisfy Sunni Arab players in the new political arena developing in the region, and finally, the fear of Shi'i rebelliousness, such as the British had experienced at first hand, both in the 1920 rebellion, led by Shi'i religious and tribal leaders, and in the Shi'i resistance to the new political order that the British were planning to establish in Iraq. Thus, punishing the Shi'is was an additional dimension of British policy.

As for the Kurds, the picture was much more complex. For seven years, from the end of British conquest in 1918 until 1925, the policy of the British designers of the state's borders and structure fluctuated with regard to the status of the Kurds in the province of Mosul. Promises of autonomy and self-government were replaced by suggestions of British control or even of a British Mandate in the area. The final result was the annexation of the province to the Iraqi state. Britain's fickle policy reflected contradictory interests between policymakers in London and in the Middle East. British officials who operated in the Kurdish region, and supported or encouraged Kurdish aspirations for some kind of autonomy, were in opposition to British officials in Iraq, Cairo, and London who favored annexation of the province of Mosul to the Iraqi state. The latter sought to ensure British control over a region with huge

potential oil resources, to respond to pressures by the Sunni Arab elite who wanted to keep the area within the territory of Iraq, to thwart Turkey's claims to the area, while using the Kurds as a whip over the Baghdad government so that it would remain compliant. Though the Kurds emerged from this battle in an inferior position, this period was formative in that it laid the foundations for the development of a separate and distinct Kurdish group-identity.

The British policy, of "divide and rule," differed from French policy in Lebanon, which could be coined "distribute and rule" — indeed, from the beginning the French deliberately distributed power amongst Lebanon's communities according to their relative proportion in the population. Although there were many flaws in the French system and in the way it was applied, and while it did not necessarily advance the development of a cohesive identity in Lebanon, it nevertheless reduced the feelings of deprivation, alienation, and exclusion as was the case among the Shi'is and Kurds in Iraq throughout modern history. Added to the difficulty caused by the absence of a formula for an equitable division of power in Iraq, another dimension could be discerned, unlike in the Lebanese case. While in Lebanon, heterogeneity was based on religious diversity, Iraqi society was divided along both religious and ethnic lines. The new Iraqi state thus set out in the 1920s with a very shaky structure.

It goes without saying that the Sunni elite adopted and even perfected a new political order that benefited them. The Sunni elite allowed only for opportunistic, short-sighted considerations, keeping power in their own hands, while holding back and repressing any force that might weaken their hegemony and impair their worldview. The systematic exclusion of the Shi'is from power had grave consequences for the state and for various regimes. Indeed, for a period of some fifty years, from the suppression of the Shi'i revolts in the mid-1930s, until 1991, the Shi'is seemed to have resigned themselves to their inferior status as a demographic majority functioning as a political minority. The price of this illusory quiet, however, was ongoing social ferment, a chronic lack of stability, and the persistent prevalence of tribal, religious, and communal ties at the expense of national ties to Iraq as a whole. As for the Kurds, annexing them to the Iraqi state brought about sporadic revolts, which intensified over time, and harmed the strength and staying power of every regime, be it royal or republican, civilian or military. As

a result, a strong Iraqi national identity — as in the cherished ideal of a nation-state — never developed.

Competing National Allegiances

One of Iraq's central problems was the fact that it has been plagued, at different times and to different extents, by competing national allegiances or identities: Iraqi territorial nationalism, pan-Arab nationalism, and Kurdish nationalism. The existence of one territorial framework for nearly a century has led to the development of an Iraqi local patriotism that distinguished Iraq from the neighboring states. It did not, however, blur the primordial identities and ties within Iraq. Nor did it reinforce Iraq's internal cohesion.

Why, and how, were these competing national ties fostered? How did these ties affect internal political and social processes in the country? Paradoxically, both Iraqi nationalism and the competing pan-Arab nationalism were promoted by these very same Sunni rulers, who thus delayed the solidification of both. Nurturing territorial nationalism is considered almost a natural instinct of all elites in new states from the moment they take over the reins of power. But in the Iraqi case, the fostering of Iraqi nationalism was not pursued systematically or consistently. Iraqi nationalism was more a reaction to internal and external threats, and less a result of deep faith and identification of the population. During the British Mandate for instance, there was a rise in the intensity of the Iraqi nationalist discourse. At that time, political parties — such as the National Independence Party (*hizb al-istiqlal al-watani*), the Popular Party (*hizb al-sha'b*) or the Party of Awakening (*hizb al-nahda*) — were all active. Their chief struggle was directed against the Mandate. When the latter ended in 1932, they left the political arena; as a result, the Iraqi nationalist discourse became more muted. During the Iran-Iraq war (1980–1988) another attempt was made to strengthen Iraqi nationalism. Two Iraqi personalities were particularly identified with this Iraqi nationalist trend. The first was Bakr Sidqi, who initiated the first *coup d'état* in Iraq in 1936, but was overthrown less than a year later. The second was 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, who also rose to power in a military coup (in July 1958) and held power for less than five years.¹⁰ But the Iraqi territorial nationalism that they

tried to foster did not strike roots. As a rough generalization, one might say that Iraq's other rulers vacillated between the two forms of nationalism. Faysal, Nuri al-Sa'id, 'Abd al-Salam 'Arif, Saddam Husayn, and others, all tried to foster both Iraqi and pan-Arab ties simultaneously, or at different times.

What need would be served by fostering a competing, pan-Arab nationalism? The Sunni rulers, who felt themselves hemmed in by the Kurds in the north and the Shi'is in the south, sought to achieve strategic depth in their Sunni Arab hinterland. King Faysal I spoke openly about the fear of being trapped between the Shi'is and the Kurds; he warned of the danger of an uprising by both Shi'is and Kurds and of the the central government's incompetence and inability to contend with rebellions, even more so should they occur simultaneously.¹¹ The need to foster a pan-Arab identity was especially strong in Iraq, because the state bordered on two non-Arab states, Turkey and Iran, and because, if threatened, Iraq would need to enlist the support of the Arab world.¹² Another major consideration was to bolster Iraq's influence in the Middle East through pan-Arab sloganeering. One must of course bear in mind that dealing with pan-Arab issues, like the Palestine question, was also meant to respond to internal pressures from the new Iraqi middle class, the *effendiyya*.¹³ In any case, wavering over this double set of ties — the Iraqi-territorial and the pan-Arab — significantly delayed the effective strengthening of both.

Complicating matters further was the fact that alongside these two competing visions was a third vision, namely that of Kurdish nationalism. While the golden era of the Abbasid empire in the ninth century constituted the formative memory of the Arab nationalist movement, that of the Kurds was the era of the semi-independent principalities in the territory of Iraqi Kurdistan and beyond, from the sixteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century. Another formative memory for the Kurds was the period between 1918 and 1925, when the fate of the region was frequently recast on account of Britain's fickle policy — alternating between promises of independence and of turning the Kurdish region into part of Iraq. Generally speaking, the Kurdish vision, like the Arab nationalist one, was also based on the concept of territorial nationalism, in the Kurdish case around the nucleus of the historic *vilayet* of Mosul.

But the development of the Kurdish national movement was much

slower than that of their Arab Iraqi competitors. Various internal and external factors account for this delay including strong tribal ties, harsh geographic, topographical, and political conditions, and, most importantly, the endorsement by Britain of the Iraqi national vision, and its backing of the various Iraqi regimes, when the latter attempted to prevent the growth of a competing narrative.¹⁴ Until the late 1950s, the Baghdad governments seemed to believe in their ability to dissolve the unique Kurdish identity into the Iraqi melting pot — if need be, by military means. Since the Qasim revolution in 1958, however, it became increasingly clear that sporadic Kurdish rebellions had transformed into a national movement, backed by a Kurdish party, which proclaimed the fulfillment of the Kurdish national vision as its goal. From then on the clash between the three visions, or the three sets of national bonds, was inevitable. In this context, it is worth pointing out that the parallel existence of three national identities caused inner contradictions, a lack of inner cohesion, collisions of ideas, and a situation in which each of the identities became weak and flawed. Another rather peculiar, yet noteworthy, point is that the Shi'is were the only ones who clearly felt an Iraqi national bond of loyalty.¹⁵ To be sure, not a few among them advocated Pan-Arabism, but on the whole they felt most comfortable with the first vision.

Gradual Disintegration and the Role of the Ba'th

Under the Ba'thi regime, which ruled for 35 years (1968–2003), social, political, and ideological processes increased the internal rifts in the state and prepared the ground for what is happening in Iraq today. Ba'thi ideology laid the groundwork for the dichotomy between Iraqi territorial nationalism and pan-Arabism. True, other rulers preceding the Ba'th had also advocated pan-Arabism, but in the case of the Ba'th, a one-party regime for the first time adopted pan-Arabism as its credo, seeking to impose its conception by force on all parts of Iraqi society. The Ba'th's long hold on power exacerbated the tensions between the regime and the Shi'is and Kurds, who felt threatened by the pan-Arab concept, and who feared that their unique identity, whether religious or ethnic, would be swallowed up in the great pan-Arab expanse. It was true that the

Ba‘th was further than any other Iraqi regime from achieving the ideal of pan-Arab unity and even did much to alienate other Arab regimes. But this did not matter much to those who felt the ideological discourse hanging over their heads like a sword of Damocles.

The wars initiated by Ba‘thi Iraq against Iran in 1980, and against Kuwait in 1990, intensified the confusion and inner contradictions on the issue of identity. While the Ba‘th continued to adhere to pan-Arabism as a tool for mobilizing Arab support, it also needed to foster Iraqi territorial nationalism in order to mobilize domestic support for its wars. However, in the final analysis, it failed miserably. Neither concept became the credo of all Iraqis, nor did they increase loyalty to the regime that had fostered them. The wars and the sanctions imposed on Iraq after the occupation of Kuwait — sanctions which continued until the fall of the Ba‘thi regime in 2003 — had destructive effects, not only on Iraqi national cohesion, but also on the measure of cohesion that held the state together as a unit. The weakening of the center — i.e. Baghdad as the governmental, political, geographical, and economic center of power (henceforth referred to as “the center”) — and the beginning of the state’s disintegration were foreshadowed at the beginning of the 1990s, immediately after the end of the First Gulf War in February 1991. The Shi‘i and Kurdish uprisings in the spring of 1991 shook the foundations of the regime. Though the Ba‘th succeeded in overcoming the uprisings, they signified that the ethnic and communal-sectarian loyalties would eventually prevail in the long term. The violent suppression of the Shi‘i uprising transformed the Ba‘th into enemy number one of the Shi‘is. However, as long as the Ba‘th remained in power, they could not do much beyond setting up underground resistance inside Iraqi Kurdistan, or outside Iraq. The Kurdish uprising symbolized the beginning of “disengagement” from the state, which was reinforced with the implementation of a *de facto* autonomy in the Kurdish region, lasting until the war in 2003.

The weakening of the central government also led to the strengthening of tribal and religious loyalties. Initially, the Ba‘thi regime — with its secular, pan-Arab, socialist ideology — attempted to suppress these tribal and religious loyalties. However, over time, and on account of the many social and economic challenges that confronted it, the regime sought to manipulate these loyalties for its own benefit, and as a means to suppress the opposition. During the Iran-Iraq War,

for example, Saddam Husayn began demonstrating religiosity in public and encouraging rote learning of the Qur'an. This public show of religiosity continued until Husayn's fall from power. Even when he stood trial at the end of 2005, he appeared in the courtroom with a copy of the Qur'an. Needless to say, the Ba'th's resort to religion attests to the bankruptcy of its secular doctrine, on the one hand, and to the upsurge of covert Islamic movements, on the other, a trend that had been suppressed by the regime for many years. A similar process occurred with respect to the renewed upsurge of tribalism, actually two kinds of tribalism: the one operated by the government with the purpose of fostering tribal forces within the ruling elite; the other an authentic social tribalism, aimed at preserving its power in the face of aggressive intervention by the central government.¹⁶ One way or the other, they both signified the strengthening of sub-national and supranational identities, and thereby undermined the regime's resilience, the cohesion of the state, and Iraqi national identity.

The Collapse of the Old Order: a Crisis of Identity

In 1993, a decade before the Second Gulf War, Rand Corporation published a study by Graham Fuller entitled "Iraq in the Next Decade: Will Iraq Survive Until 2002?"¹⁷ The study, which turned out to be prophetic, warned that the continued existence of Iraq as a unitary state under the Ba'thi regime was in jeopardy; indeed, Iraq's ongoing problems had become much more acute because of rigid, violent Ba'thi rule, two wars initiated by the regime, genocide committed against the Kurds, and the merciless suppression of the Shi'i majority. In Fuller's words: "Ironically, it may in fact only be external intervention that could now possibly save the unity of Iraq, since continuation of the present Ba'thi regime is surely rendering the deep ethnic and religious differences inside Iraq permanent and virtually irreconcilable."¹⁸ Let us now examine what has happened in Iraq since the last war, and to what extent outside intervention has preserved Iraq's unity and prevented a rift that had seemed inevitable.

Following the political earthquake that hit Iraq in the wake of the 2003 war, we may clearly distinguish between continuities and rifts in

social, political and religious developments that had either been stirring beneath the surface or had existed openly under the Ba‘th regime. The major breaking points were the collapse of central authority, the leap of the Shi‘is into the center of the political arena, and the marginalization of the Sunnis. By contrast, the continuities were represented by an unprecedented upsurge of Islamic forces, by the rise of tribalism, by various centrifugal forces — with all that this entails with regard to the strengthening of sub-national identities — and by the development of the Kurdish autonomous zone into a de facto state.¹⁹ The latter actually transformed the geographical entity of Iraq into a binational state — part Iraqi Arab, part Kurdish.

Even four years after the occupation, Baghdad has not succeeded in restoring the strong, stable governmental center which had prevailed for generations under previous rulers, especially under the Ba‘th regime. Under the Ba‘th, not only was Baghdad, the capital, attracting much of the state’s population, but it also overshadowed the two other large and important cities of Iraq, Basra and Mosul, through its power, its social and political weight, and its centralized policies. However, as a result of various developments after the war, Baghdad ceased functioning as a generally accepted center of authority. The reasons for Baghdad’s loss of hegemonic status are manifold. Among other things, one may mention the rapid collapse of the Ba‘th regime, which left behind an ongoing state of chaos; the inability of the Americans and of the new Iraqi rulers to stabilize the situation and give a minimal sense of security to the inhabitants of the center; the Shi‘i-Sunni struggle for primacy, which by its very nature focused on Baghdad, and thereby impaired the center’s ability to govern; the strengthening of sectarian and local interests that erode the center’s resilience; and the proliferation of new elites that take shelter in the “Green Zone” maintained by the Americans, thus signalling the fragility of their status and their inability to function independently, or to demonstrate leadership. All of these factors add up to atomization, to the rise in power of peripheral forces, and to the government’s inability to create internal cohesion.

Another development, harmful to the internal cohesion of Iraq, and thus increasing the social and political cleavages within, is the strengthening of religious ties, embodied, on the one hand, by the rise in power of political Islam, and, on the other, by the reinforcement of communal and ethnic loyalties, demonstrated by the rise in power of

groups representing these trends. This rise was highlighted in the elections that took place in December 2005. The elections ended in an impressive victory of the religious parties and demonstrated the weakness of their secular counterparts. For example, the Shi'i religious groups, which had joined forces on a common list, *al-i'tilaf al-'Iraqi al-muwahad*, gained 41.2% of the votes, whereas the Sunni Islamic group, *jabhat al-tawafuq al-'Iraqiyya*, received 15.1% of the votes. At the same time, the Sunni secularist group, *jabhat al-hiwar al-watani*, received only 4.1%, while a joint Sunni-Shi'i list, *al-hizb al-watani*, gained less than 8% of the votes. In contrast, 21.7% of the votes went to the Kurdish coalition, *al-tahaluf al-Kurdi*. Various other religious or ethnic parties, such as the Kurdish Islamic Union and the Turkoman, Assyrian, and Yazidi Kurdish lists, shared 5.1% of the votes.²⁰

The Rise of Political Islam

The rise in power of political Islam is not unique to Iraq. It has occurred on an axis of time and space throughout the whole region, from Iran to Egypt, and from Morocco to Saudi Arabia. In Iraq, however, it has a double or quadruple significance. The rise of political Islam in Iraq constitutes a slap in the face of the very idea of democratization, which the Americans seek to impose from the outside by military means. It also ridicules the notion of transforming this country into a model for the states of the region. The crushing failure of the secular parties proves that holding elections, despite the backing of the United States and its allies, is no guarantee that the values of liberalism and democracy have in fact been internalized and absorbed by society. Moreover, the strong attraction of the religious parties illustrates strengthening supranational ties that are detrimental both to democracy and to the growth of an all-Iraqi national loyalty. Another problem, which has become much more complex as a result of the reinforcement of religious ties in the population, is the widening religious chasm between Shi'is and Sunnis.

Until the Second Gulf War, Arabism was presumed to be the glue unifying Shi'is and Sunnis, that is when the internal struggles in Iraq were chiefly national, namely between the Iraqi Arabs and the Kurds. However, since the war, the center of gravity of these struggles has shifted to the inter-religious arena, i.e. between Shi'is and Sunnis —

partly because the heavy repression the clerics and the flock of both currents of Islam had been subjected to was removed all at once, so that they could act freely and reinforce the religious identity of both. What were the factors that brought about this change and increased the hostility between Shi'is and Sunnis? By and large, the repercussions of the past, both distant and recent, suddenly came into the open with the break-up of the Ba'thi state structure.²¹ Above all, however, the quick, far-reaching events of the last three years have served as the main catalyst for these tensions.

The Sunnis, who have been dispossessed of all their key positions and have been pushed aside politically by the new kingmakers, the Americans, saw themselves as the principal victims of the war. However, they vented their sense of grievance on the Shi'is rather than on the Kurds. The Kurds, whose principal home is in the high, inaccessible mountains, and who had maintained autonomy for more than a decade, were viewed as a strong force that could not be crushed easily, as preceding Iraqi governments learned to their cost in the not too distant past. In addition, since religious ties have slightly pushed aside national ties in recent years, it is possible that the Sunni Arabs — who after the war were increasingly under the leadership of Islamic religious parties — reached a common language with the Kurds, who are also overwhelmingly Sunni. And finally, the Shi'is were viewed both as more vulnerable than the Kurds and at the same time as potentially much more threatening to the Sunnis.

The vulnerability of the Shi'is also derived from their lack of experience as a political collective in the Iraqi political arena, from the fact that geographically they were relatively accessible since they were located in the Mesopotamian plain in direct territorial continuum or mixed with the Sunnis, and because they were rather isolated outside Iraq. Even their American patrons were suspicious of their political intentions and strategy. Moreover, the sudden transformation of the Shi'i majority into the ruling political majority, their cooperation with the occupying forces, the desire and ability of the Shi'is to set Iraq's social and political agenda, and finally the strengthening of the ties between the Iraqi Shi'is and Shi'i Iran — the military, ideological, and political rival of Iraq under Sunni leadership — all transformed the Shi'is into the most threatening opponent of the Arab Sunnis.

One of the chief bones of contention between Sunnis and Shi'is was

the identity and character that the state should assume, and the kind of regime that should be established in Iraq. The Sunnis spoke of a government of national unity (*wataniyya*) that would comprise all components of the Iraqi population.²² Positions would be distributed according to merit rather than communal, ethnic, or religious origin. Conversely, the Shi'is sought to set up a government of the Shi'i majority, in which key posts would be in their hands and in those of their Kurdish partners, whom they favored over the Arab Sunnis in any coalition.²³

Nevertheless, despite their numerical strength and their natural partnership with the Kurds, they were under heavy pressure from the Americans to set up a national unity government and to bring in the Sunnis, in order to remove the sting of Sunni opposition to the Americans in particular, and to the new Iraq in general. Another central issue was that of federalism. The constitution, which was approved in October 2005, adopted the idea of federalism as a solution for the future structure of the state. In fact it thereby foreclosed the idea of a nation-state, which had been the founding concept of the modern state of Iraq. The Sunnis rejected the idea of a federation and agreed to participate in the vote on the constitution, only on condition that this issue would be reconsidered by the parliament that would take office after the elections. In this context, it is interesting to note that the Sunnis felt much more comfortable accepting the idea of a federation between the Kurdish north and the rest of the country, while they totally rejected the possibility that this arrangement would also apply to the Shi'i region, or to any part of it.

Sunni animosity to the Shi'is was significantly reinforced by al-Qa'ida agents, who transformed Iraq into their central base after the war in Afghanistan. It is they who gave birth to a wave of terrorist attacks unprecedented in the modern history of Iraq, against Shi'i leaders, the Shi'i rank and file, and Shi'i holy places.²⁴ This wave of attacks has continued intermittently since the war, and peaked with bombing of the mosque in Samarra' on 22 February 2006. Samarra' is one of the four holy cities of the Shi'is in Iraq (the other three are Najaf, Karbala and Qazimayn); its Golden Mosque, mausoleum of the tenth Imam, 'Ali al-Hadi, and of his son, the eleventh Imam, Hasan al-'Askari, was damaged during that attack.²⁵ In the eyes of the Shi'is, imams are gifted with a touch of divinity; they are infallible (*ma'sum min al-khata'*), they fulfill

the role of political leaders and teachers of religious law, and faith in them is akin to faith in Allah and Muhammad.²⁶ Hence, the deep shock when the mosque was damaged. Until then, the policy of restraint advocated by the greatest Shi'i religious leaders, led by Ayatollah 'Ali al-Sistani, had produced a relatively moderate Shi'i response to the various terrorist attacks. Although there had already been occasional strikes at Sunni mosques and even murders of Sunni religious leaders, after the attack against such an important Shi'i shrine, the dams of restraint burst. Sistani and other Shi'i religious leaders urged the Iraqi people to protest peacefully, but their appeal failed to calm the masses.²⁷ Violent demonstrations took place in most Iraqi cities. Many Sunni mosques were attacked and Sunni imams were murdered in a very short space of time. Only the imposition of a few days of curfew on Baghdad succeeded in calming tempers.²⁸

On the surface, religious and political leaders on both sides demonstrated unity and Iraqi national solidarity, while assigning the guilt for what was happening to outsiders. But under this cover, another more ominous discourse took place, in which harsh mutual accusations were made, stirring up civil war, *fitna ta'ifiyya*, between Sunnis and Shi'is. One Sunni leader, 'Adnan al-Dulaymi, for instance, claimed that the terrorist attack on the Sunni mosques had been planned *before* the attack in Samarra' as part of a campaign of vengeance against Sunnis.²⁹ Further, the appeal of Shi'i ayatollahs for quiet demonstrations in protest against the attack on the mosque was interpreted by the Sunnis as giving permission to strike at their holy places. Sistani's warning that if the security forces could not protect the Shi'i holy places, "then the believers would be capable of doing so with the help of Allah," was also understood as veiled incitement against Sunnis.³⁰

The escalation of Shi'i-Sunni animosity reinforced the supranational religious ties of both sides and made it much more difficult to build an Iraqi national identity. The presence in Iraq of foreign "occupiers," which might in different circumstances have led to some sort of national cohesion on the basis of a negative common denominator, i.e. the common struggle against a non-Muslim Christian enemy, did not hold in this case.³¹ This is because the Shi'is (as well as the Kurds) continued to view the Americans as their allies against the Arab Sunnis, and as the only guarantee for the existence and institutionalization of a political revolution that enabled them to rise to power for the first time in

centuries. While on the whole the Sunnis portrayed the removal of the occupiers as the embodiment of Iraqi patriotism, the Shi'is viewed keeping them in Iraq as a no less patriotic endeavor since their presence was likely to preserve the territorial integrity and unity of Iraq.³²

Establishing a de facto Kurdish State and its Implications

Although terrorism and the Shi'i-Sunni struggle grab the headlines in the regional and international media, it is precisely the quiet developments in the Kurdish region that are worthy of special attention in the context of the question of building an Iraqi nation and of its internal cohesion. While the Arab part of Iraq is undergoing an acute identity crisis and is finding it difficult to stabilize itself between its two chief components — Shi'i and Sunni — the Kurdish region presents a contrasting picture.

It is characterized by its relative stability, by its ability to act as mediator and to hold the balance between Shi'is and Sunnis. It plays a key role in the central government in Baghdad, and most importantly, it is developing a Kurdish national identity and adopting Kurdish symbols of independence that distinguish it from the Arab region of Iraq. Although there seems to be an obvious contradiction between the role of the Kurds in the government at the center and their role in the Kurdish region, they have nevertheless succeeded in finding a middle ground, acting simultaneously on both planes, without the one affecting the other.

One possible explanation for this unique phenomenon can be found in the experience of the Kurds ever since the Gulf War in 1991. The de facto autonomy that the Kurds achieved as a consequence of the failed policy of Saddam Husayn after that war laid the groundwork for quasi-independent Kurdish state-institutions. These included setting up a Kurdish parliament following relatively free elections; establishing a Kurdish government, detached from the central government in Baghdad; maintaining and reinforcing the Kurdish military force, the irregular *Peshmerga*; as well as the development of an autonomous or semi-autonomous economy, and the creation of Kurdish national symbols of identity, such as a Kurdish anthem and flag.³³

This formative period, however, also had its negative aspects, the most serious of which was the internal war — from 1994 to 1996 — between the Kurdistan Democratic Party, led by Mas‘ud Barzani, and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, led by Jalal Talabani. One of the gravest consequences of this war was the division of Iraqi Kurdistan into two spheres of influence, one headed by Barzani, the other by Talabani, which led to a rift in the population, and a waste of resources that were few to begin with. Nevertheless, the process may have actually been a necessary stage towards the consolidation of the Kurdish national movement and of an autonomous Kurdish region. Indeed, since the end of that internal war, relations between the two rival groups improved to such an extent that there was now greater cohesion and unity of purpose than at any time in the past.³⁴ All these factors came into play during and after the 2003 war.

While the 1991 war cut the Kurds off from the center, the 2003 war brought them closer, transforming them into an important force in reshaping the state. It would be no distortion to say that the Kurds, who have become the balancing and mediating force for all parts of the population, have dislodged the Sunni Arabs from their primacy and their historic role. Paradoxically, they are today the force that most clearly expresses Iraqi statehood. What enabled them to attain this status was the relative unity of their ranks, which they displayed during the 2003 war and thereafter. Their participation in the war and the vital aid they extended to the Americans made them trustworthy allies, who could be relied upon and who were worth cultivating. Their adherence to secularism has enabled them to rise above the ever-expanding Shi‘i and Sunni religious confrontation; as did the political wisdom they have displayed at critical moments in recent years.

The leading role of the Kurds in the central government in Baghdad was apparent in different realms, the most outstanding of which were the key positions they held in government, including the post of president by Talabani since April 2005, and the role of foreign minister by Khoshiyar Zibari since the establishment of the first Iraqi government in September 2003.³⁵ Another role, of symbolic rather than practical importance, was that of the first two chief justices in Saddam Husayn’s trial, who were Kurds. Of late, the Kurds have also excelled as internal mediators. When differences of opinion occurred regarding the constitution, the elections or the make-up of the government, it was

the Kurds who tried to resolve the disputes.³⁶ For example, after the December 2005 elections, Shi'i and Sunni leaders came to the Kurdish region in order to hold talks on setting up a new government. This led Talabani to declare that, "The Kurds are fulfilling a true national (*watani*) role for the sake of preserving the unity of the state as a democratic, pluralistic, and unified Iraq, and not as was claimed after the fall of the previous regime, that the Kurds would turn towards separatism."³⁷

Simultaneously with their display of Iraqi patriotism and loyalty to the state, the Kurds continued to develop a separate Kurdish national identity in the Kurdish region, based on independent state institutions. The constitution that was approved in October 2005 speaks of a federal arrangement between the Kurdish region and the other regions. Yet in practice, a quasi-state structure, rather than a more limited federative one, has developed in the Kurdish region.³⁸ In an impromptu Kurdish referendum, held in Kurdistan on the eve of the elections, the majority voted for Kurdish independence.³⁹ A Kurdish intellectual, Kamal Mazhar Ahmad, pointed out that the prevalent view among the Kurds was that their leadership had not insisted firmly enough on demands for self-determination, and that these leaders were therefore "encountering many difficulties in the attempt to reconcile between the conflicting goals" of the central government and of the Kurds. In other words, the Kurdish leadership was more moderate and willing to compromise than the Kurdish public because it understood the many constraints it faced, and the damage which provocative proclamations and extreme demands might cause.⁴⁰ At the same time, whether because of internal pressure or because it recognized the historic opportunity, the Kurdish leadership was taking important steps towards the building of a Kurdish state. According to a journalist who recently visited the region, there was nothing in the Kurdish region that could attest to its being part of the state of Iraq.⁴¹

The process of reconciliation between the two rival factions, of Barzani and Talabani, formed the cornerstone for strengthening Kurdish internal cohesion. This process, which began in the late 1990s and in which outside players, including the United States have taken part, has been slow and drawn-out. One important facet of this process is that, since the beginning of the 2003 war, the Kurds have been able to present a relatively united front — both in the Kurdish region itself, and vis-à-vis the center and various international players. This has enabled them

to extend their autonomous activities. For instance, the Kurds held separate elections for a Kurdish parliament, which is absolutely independent of the central government. They also have their own constitution and president, Mas'ud Barzani -the first Kurdish leader ever to have been elected president. Meanwhile, there is now one government, representing both historic rival factions and acting under one leadership. This unity has also been displayed in symbolic matters such as the flag. During the period of intense rivalry, each faction had adopted a distinct flag of its own, a yellow flag for the Barzanis and a green one for the Talabanis. Since the reconciliation, one flag has been used, namely the Kurdish flag, which was already flown in the 1940s.

The Kurds refuse to fly the Iraqi flag that had been in use under Saddam Husayn, who, as they explained, had perpetrated genocide against the Kurds.⁴² Another, no less significant matter is that the Kurds continue to maintain separate delegations of their own, abroad. They have set up a bureau that deals with foreign affairs, but in order not to antagonize their partners in Baghdad, they do not explicitly call it such. After all, the existence of a separate foreign ministry implies a clear intention to move toward independence.

The Kurds are also seeking to attain economic independence. While reconstruction of the economy and infrastructure in the Arab part of Iraq has been brought to a halt, and is constantly deteriorating, development has been accelerated in the Kurdish region. For the first time in their history, the Kurds now have two functioning airfields, which were built in a rather short time; namely the airfields in Irbil and Sulaymaniyya. These two airfields have enabled the Kurds to overcome, their continued dependence on the center, a consequence of their lack of access to the sea, and are also expanding their foreign ties in an unprecedented fashion. The relatively quiet Kurdish region is attracting many entrepreneurs who seek to invest in the area. For instance, oil drilling is already going on in the Zakho district in the north, and there are eight companies who want to drill in the Kurdish region.⁴³ Four refineries are being set up, two near Irbil and two near Sulaymaniyya. Among the foreign companies active in Iraq, 84 are Turkish, and 30 Iranian — in addition to Chinese, Malaysian, Lebanese, Gulf-Arab, American, European, and Australian companies.⁴⁴ The Kurdish cities are undergoing accelerated development, which includes the erection of high-rise buildings, up-to-date supermarkets, sports centers, and

banks, as well as an American university in Sulaymaniyya.⁴⁵ The Kurdish drive for economic independence has been expressed in their relentless struggle to include the oil-rich district of Kirkuk in the zone under Kurdish rule. Kirkuk, which has always been the major bone of contention between the various Iraqi regimes and the Kurds, is now a problem that might rip apart the alliance between the Shi'is and the Kurds.⁴⁶ The outgoing Shi'i prime minister, al-Ja'afari, took a firm stand on this issue, which moved the Kurds to demand his replacement by another Shi'i candidate.⁴⁷

Another way of reinforcing Kurdish identity is by means of language, culture, and education. The temporary constitution gave a significant achievement to the Kurds in that it recognized Kurdish as an official language, alongside Arabic.⁴⁸ Not everyone in Iraq was happy with this. One article remarked: "On what foundation did the legislators base themselves when they set the Kurdish language on the same level as Arabic? That is, with the mother tongue that the inhabitants of Iraq in their various communities and components have been speaking since the dawn of Islam?"⁴⁹ Despite these protests, the Kurdish language has become the official language at all levels of the Kurdish educational system, to such an extent that a new Kurdish generation is now growing up with no knowledge of Arabic at all. Likewise, the Kurdish media have enjoyed unprecedented prosperity. Many newspapers, periodicals, radio and television stations, and broadcasting satellites have mushroomed.⁵⁰ All of these contribute to the diffusion and strengthening of the Kurdish language, both in spoken and written form. If it is indeed true that language is one of the pillars of modern nationalism, then the Kurds in Iraq are marching rapidly in that direction. The general picture that emerges is of an Iraq that no longer functions as a unitary state, but as two units — attached together by the Kurds at this moment in time.

Pandora's Box — and What Comes Next?

The Sunnis in Iraq, and in the Arab world in general, customarily accuse the United States of raising the demon of sectarianism and of bringing about the carving up of Iraq through a war that it has forced on Iraq and through the mistaken policy it has implemented there since the occupation. In reality, the United States did not create a Pandora's

box, but rather received it as an inheritance from the British. The United States merely helped opening it, thus allowing the problems that had been kept bottled up for decades to erupt in full force. One way or the other, external forces that were of tremendous import for the creation of the state of Iraq in the 1920s and for its political structure at the beginning of the present century, will continue to play a significant role in the future development of Iraq. It seems that the internal actors must thus conduct a double struggle or dialogue — both among themselves and with outside actors. The latter include not only the United States and its allies — which control Iraq today — but also regional forces, including the whole of the Arab world, which fears two parallel processes: on the one hand Kurdish separatism, and on the other hand the Shi'i takeover of the state, concurrent with the Sunni Arabs being pushed aside. Other influential regional powers are Turkey, which fears that Kurdish separatism may spill over into its territory, and Iran, which seeks to expand its sphere of influence within Iraq.

In light of these developments, Iraqis once again confront, as they did at the beginning of Iraq's statehood, fateful decisions relating to the construction of an Iraqi nation — the relations between the various components of Iraqi society, the state's character and orientation, its territorial integrity, and whether it will be a unitary or federal state, or whether it will disintegrate into three parts and thereby restore the situation as it had been in the late Ottoman Empire, when the country was divided into three *vilayets*. One thing is now clear, namely that after the last war, when all the cards were reshuffled, the vision of a nation-state has finally gone bankrupt in Iraq. Instead, there now exists a constantly accelerating trend toward transforming Iraq into a binational state. No internal forces can prevent this development, and as for outsiders, the question remains open.

NOTES

1. Uriel Dann, *Iraq Under Qassem* (Israel Universities Press, 1969), pp. 1, 6–7.
2. For other such interpretations see, Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (University of California Press, 2005).

3. Cecil J. Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs* (Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 398.
4. The memorandum appeared in 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani, *Ta'rikh al-Wizarat al-'Iraqiyya*, part 3 (Sidon: Al-'Urfan Press, 1939), pp.189–195.
5. Echoes of these, Faysal's last words are found in the Iraqi sociologist 'Ali al-Wardi's *Lamahat ijtimaiyya 'an ta'rikh al-'Iraq al-hadith*, vol. 1 (Baghdad: al-Arshad Press, 1969), pp. 17–23.
6. Ofra Bengio, *Saddam's Iraq* (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center, 1996), p. 151 [Hebrew]. This image of Iraq as a “ship for everyone”, and for which all must take responsibility, has become a commonplace image in post-Saddam Iraq. See: *Al-Jazeera*, 19 January 2006, on the program “ma wara' al-khabar.”
7. After the collapse of the old order and the Sunni Arabs' loss of power, a discourse developed among them, which opposed the basic assumption that held that the Shi'is in Iraq made up the majority of the population. In his book, Taha al-Dulaymi claims that this is a falsehood that Shi'i propaganda has been spreading for decades. According to al-Dulaymi, the Sunnis represent 53% of the population, the Shi'is 43% and the minorities 4%. *Al-Bayan*, November-December 2005.
8. Andreas Wimmer, *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflict* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 194.
9. On the *millet* system, see Kemal Karpat, “The Ottoman Ethnic and Confessional Legacy in the Middle East”, in Milton J. Esman and Itamar Rabinovich (eds.), *Ethnicity, Pluralism, and the State in the Middle East* (Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 35–53. The non-Muslim minorities had religious autonomy.
10. After the Ba'ath was overthrown in 2003, an attempt was made to rehabilitate Qasim and his political approach. Among other things, a monthly allocation was granted to his family and a statue was erected in his memory as a sign of respect, “for one of the nationalist (*wataniyya*) personalities who sacrificed their lives for Iraq,” *Al-Ahali*, 15 February 2006.
11. Hasani, *op. cit.*
12. In Syria, which borders on two non-Arab states, similar considerations are apparently at work.
13. See the analysis of Michael Eppel, “The Elite, the Effendiyya, and the Growth of Nationalism and Pan-Arabism in Hashemite Iraq, 1921–1958”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 30 (1998), pp. 227–250.
14. On the role played by Britain on the Kurdish issue in Iraq, McDowall wrote: “Kurdish leaders may have been guilty of political incompetence, but Britain has been guilty of betrayal. It wittingly abandoned the Kurds to

an Arab government intent upon evading these pledges [for autonomy]". David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 3rd edition (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004) p.171.

15. An article that discusses the position of the Shi'is after the war claims that they had no specific Shi'i project, but rather adopted the Iraqi nationalist (*watani*) project. *Al-Siyasa al-Duwaliyya*, (October 2005), p. 64. At the same time, it should be noted that after the last war, voices accusing the Shi'is of being connected to Iran and of being disloyal to the Iraqi state increased among Sunni Iraqis and among Arab leaders. The Egyptian president, Husni Mubarak, for example, made such a statement at the beginning of April 2006, *Al-'Arabiyya*, 8 April 2006.
16. On tribalism in Iraq, see Faleh Abdul Jabar, *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East* (London: Saqi, 2003), pp. 165–201.
17. Graham E. Fuller, *Iraq in the Next Decade: Will Iraq Survive Until 2002?* (Santa Monica: Rand, 1993).
18. *Ibid.*, p. V.
19. In an article entitled, "The Return of the Age of Iraqi Tribalism," Hashim Hasan says that after the war, the Americans and the British granted favors to the tribes and jobs to Iraqi politicians and in this way, reinforced the power of the tribes, and tribalism. This harmed "the nationalist [*watani*] project." *Al-Watan al-'Arabi*, 16 September 2005.
20. *The Economist*, 28 January 2006.
21. According to Salah al-Mukhtar, a leading journalist during the Ba'th regime, Saddam Husayn set up a secret organization made up of senior personnel of the party, the army, and the intelligence services as early as 2001. In fact, they were the ones who led the resistance after the war. Al-Mukhtar also argues that the Islamic army, *al-Jaysh al-Islami* [which perpetrates terrorist attacks against Shi'is] forms part of the same secret organization. He attributed marginal importance to the activities of al-Qa'ida in Iraq, saying that most actions are performed by what he called the National [*watani*] Army. *Al-Watan al-'Arabi*, 30 December 2005.
22. One of the leaders of *jabhat al-tawafuq al-'Iraqiyya* said that his party "expects to be part of a national government including all the Iraqi parties," *Al-Ahali*, 15 February 2006.
23. One should mention, however, that this partnership — which has been going on for about four years since the war — might encounter problems against the background of religious and ethnic differences between Kurds and Shi'is, while between Kurds and Sunnis there is only an ethnic distinction.

24. A new study shows that the bulk of terrorist attacks were perpetrated by Iraqis. Thus, out of 8,000 people suspected of being insurgents who were captured by the Americans, only 127 carried foreign passports. *The Economist*, 4 February 2006.
25. The mainstream of the Shi'is is that of the *Ithna 'Ashariyya*, that is those who believe in the twelve imams, the first of whom was the Imam 'Ali with whom the split began between Sunnis and Shi'is, and the last of whom is al-Imam al-Mahdi, the hidden Imam, whose return they await.
26. About the Imam, see, S.H. Nasr, "Ithna 'Ashariyya", *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. 2.
27. Radio Dijla, 23 February 2006.
28. The Sunnis spoke of more than 150 mosques. According to the *Washington Post*, more than 1,300 persons were killed within less than a week, but Prime Minister Ja'fari spoke of 379 killed, a number that is considerable in itself, *Washington Post*, 28 February, 1 March 2006.
29. *New York Times*, 23 February 2006.
30. Radio Dijla, 23 February 2006.
31. Such was the formative event of "The Great Iraqi Revolution" against the British in 1920, when Shi'is and Sunnis cooperated against the foreign conqueror.
32. Personalities belonging to the Sunni *salafiyya* trend protested vehemently against Shi'i cooperation with the Americans, and justified the violence as a necessity for defending Islam against "The Crusader-Jewish-Shi'i (*rafida*) plot," in Meir Litvak, "Anti-Shi'i polemics in modern Salafi literature" (unpublished essay). It should be noted, however, that the escalation in the mutual attacks between Sunnis and Shi'is has caused some Sunnis to look to the Americans as their ultimate protectors against Shi'i attacks.
33. For a discussion of this period, see: Gareth R. V. Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan: Political Development and Emergent Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
34. The residue of the past, however, has not disappeared altogether, and a concealed competition continues between the two camps, but does not disrupt the presentation of a united Kurdish front vis-à-vis the Center.
35. It is noteworthy that, unlike the Ba'th regime, the powers of the president are far fewer than those of the prime minister in the new governmental structure.
36. At the same time, one ought to recall that the Kurds were the ones who began to challenge Ja'fari's candidacy to serve as prime minister after the December 2005 elections. The main reasons for this was Ja'fari's stepping on President Talabani's toes and the question of Kirkuk.
37. *Al-Ushbu' al-'Arabi*, 9 January 2006.

38. Qobat Talabani, Jalal Talabani's son and the Kurdistan delegate in the United States, said that federalism is the minimum that Kurds would agree to. *Al-Hawadith*, 9 September 2005. On another occasion, he said that Iraq would never again be a unitary state.
39. According to *al-Hawadith*, 9 September 2005, 95% of the Kurds were in favor of separation (*infisal*).
40. *Al-Watan al-'Arabi*, 30 December 2005.
41. *Al-Hayat*, 12 March 2006.
42. Barzani was more outspoken than others about this decision. See, *al-Mada*, 4 September 2006. Another justification he gave was that the constitution had stipulated the introduction of a new flag; this had not been acted upon yet.
43. In September 2006, the Kurdish government threatened separation from the state if it was not given a free hand in signing agreements of its own with companies willing to drill in the Kurdish area. *Al-Zaman*, 23 October 2006.
44. *Ibid*.
45. The foundation was laid in 2005. *Al-Mada*, 13 December 2005.
46. It is claimed that between the years 1991 and 2003, the Ba'th regime exiled 300,000 Kurds from the Kirkuk area and promulgated a law forbidding teaching of the Kurdish language in this area in order to Arabize it and pull out the rug from under Kurdish demands for including the Kirkuk area in their autonomous zone. *Al-Siyasa al-Duwaliyya*, October 2005, p. 73.
47. Sa'di Ahmad Bira, a member of the political bureau of the Kurdistan Patriotic Party, accused Ja'fari of trying to erase the term federation from the oath to be taken by members of parliament, in order to make things more difficult for Talabani, and prevent the inclusion of Kirkuk in the Kurdish region. *Al-Jazeera Television*, 2 March 2006. Pressure by the Kurds, exerted jointly with the Sunni and secularist parties, bore fruit and Ja'fari was replaced by Jawad al-Maliki, who was also on the United Shi'i List.
48. Article 3 in the Constitution provides that "Arabic is the official language, and together with it is the Kurdish language in the Kurdistan Region (*iqlim*)."
Al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabi, September 2005.
49. Daham Muhammad al-'Azzawi, "Al-Ihtilal al-Amriki wa-mustaqbal al-mas'ala al-Kurdiyya fi al-'Iraq," *Shu'un 'Arabiyya* (Winter, 2005), p. 188.
50. The Kurdish Ministry of Culture alone publishes 16 periodicals. *Al-Hayat*, 12 March 2006.