



Iraq's 2014 elections: A prelude to the country's partition?

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Abstract

Iraq is currently experiencing profound socio-political and security crises. This paper examines the April 2014 parliamentary elections, and the subsequent political brinkmanship over the appointment of Iraq's Speaker of Parliament, its President and its yet to be determined Prime Minister. It argues that the elections have exposed the depth of internal divisions and the inability of state institutions to project and deliver, both symbolically and practically, an inclusive future for all Iraqis. Iraq has been beset by profound issues of poor governance, sectarian polarisation and spiralling violence. Whilst Nouri al-Maliki's power-seeking ambitions and behaviour bear significant responsibility for these internal dynamics, this paper contends that the post-2003 institutional arrangements and ensuing ethnic and group dynamics have also played a role. More recently, the rapidly changing regional environment has substantially impacted on Iraq's internal divisions and narratives of grievances, fear and estrangement. The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, as well as other Sunni insurgent groups, have capitalised on its weakened and divided political terrain. In addition, their significant advances within Iraq's national territory have further polarised the country's elite and heightened the power dynamics between the Shia, the Sunni and the Kurdish political groupings. As domestic and external actors continue to manoeuvre for the position of Prime Minister, Iraq's future very much remains in the balance. Whether or not it remains a unitary state, and however de-centralised it may become, the plight of its communities continues.

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1. Introduction

The parliamentary elections of 30 April 2014 should have been a significant milestone for Iraq, as the first elections organised by the Iraqi government since the withdrawal of the American forces in 2011. However, already overshadowed by an increasingly brutal cycle of violence and bloodshed spreading through parts of Iraq, the rapid and crushing loss of Mosul on 10 June and the subsequent fall of Tikrit on 11 June, at the hands of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (IS) and other Sunni insurgents, considerably undermined their significance and further polarised Iraq's political life.¹

As such, far from the 2003 US-led promises of engineering democratisation, peace and stability in Iraq and beyond, the country is instead caught in the midst of tumultuous and rapidly changing domestic and regional circumstances. The issues facing Iraq are manifold and inter-related. The Shia, the Sunni and the Kurdish political groupings are all profoundly divided between and within themselves. In addition, the conflict in Syria is having significant ramifications for both Iraq and the wider regional balance of power. These various developments are all raising pressing questions as to its future trajectory.

Examining the April parliamentary elections and their subsequent political developments thus provide an insight into the main internal and external dynamics that have been polarising various key groupings within Iraq and which are likely to continue to shape present and future brinkmanship in the country.

To this end, this article first provides an overview of Iraq's socio-political dynamics since the 2003 overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, with a particular focus on Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's ruling strategy since he first came to power in 2006. Whilst he continuously exploited sectarian tensions and increased his own personal power, at the great cost of

¹ The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), also known as the Islamic State of Iraq in the Levant (ISIL), is an al-Qaeda inspired group led by Iraqi Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Formed in April 2013, it is now controlling a swathe of territory from Aleppo in Syria to the outskirts of Baghdad. ISIS was publically disavowed by Al Qaeda leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri, in February 2014. On 30 June, ISIS changed its name to Islamic State (IS), claiming that it had established a caliphate in the region.

alienating Iraq's Sunni Arabs and the Kurds, it is also evident that Sunni alienation and Kurdish constitutional claims are a by-product of the post-2003 institutional arrangements and ensuing ethnic and group dynamics. After setting the general context within which the parliamentary election took place, this article turns to examining its main characteristics and consequences to this day. It concludes that the developments since June, more than the election results and the current issue over the identity of the future Prime Minister of Iraq, are considerably more challenging for Iraq's near- to long-term trajectory.

2. Background

Independent since 1932 and ruled from 1979 to 2003 by the Baathist regime of iron-fist President Saddam Hussein, Iraq was significantly isolated from the international community since the First Gulf War (1990-1991). It nevertheless remained a country with regional significance, mainly as a result of its population size, ethnic and religious profiles and oil reserves (Dodge, 2012: 23-24). Today, Iraq has a population of over 30 million people with a plurality of ethnic (mainly Arab 75%-80% and Kurdish 15%-20%) and religious affiliations (mainly Shia 60%-65% and Sunni 32%-37%). With a majority Shia population, Iraq also sits between the Arab-majority Sunni regions of the Middle East and Iran's overwhelmingly Shia majority. In addition, Iraq has the fifth largest proven crude oil reserves in the world, thus making it a key geopolitical player.

Over ten years after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, and three years since the withdrawal of American forces, Iraq remains a profoundly divided country beset by a multiplicity of issues and tensions. Two were particularly prominent during the 2014 elections: sectarian polarisation and violence (Al-Qarawee, 2014; International Crisis Group, 2014; Visser, 2014).² They can be significantly attributed to the post-2003 institutional settlement, the Maliki government's ruling strategy within this constitutional context, and the effects of both in a rapidly deteriorating regional environment due to the Syrian crisis.

² Other prominent issues currently facing Iraq include corruption and poor infrastructure and services. These largely feed into sectarian tensions and the spiralling of violence.

2.1 Sectarian polarisation

The constitutional arrangements that structured Iraqi politics in the aftermath of the toppling of President Saddam Hussein's two-decade long Baathist regime significantly instrumentalised ethno-sectarian identifications and increased sectarian tensions. In effect, they more or less turned the tribal and sectarian loyalties which the political structure had rested upon 'upside down'.

Whilst Sunni Arab President Saddam Hussein had largely invested in Sunni Arab allegiances to strengthen his power, the latter found themselves quickly homogenised, marginalised and confined to a minority status in the post-2003 new ethnic and sectarian-based system, which was to be dominated by Shias and Kurds.³ Feelings of exclusion, discrimination and injustice ran deep amongst Iraq's Sunni Arabs; partly explaining their hostility towards the new political order and the decision of many to join armed resistance. As succinctly analysed by the International Crisis Group (2013: 5):

... the community remained trapped in a cyclical pattern of participation in/withdrawal from state politics, struggling to define the terms of their involvement as well as their role and identity in today's Iraq. The post-2003 political system was designed in ways that automatically confined Sunni Arabs to a minority status they were hard-pressed to accept, particularly after having invested in national and pan-Arab frames of reference for decades. Feeling deprived of a state they never fully owned but to which they at least could relate, they were asked to embrace an alien communal agenda.

³ In its August 2013 report, the International Crisis Group (2013: 4-5) is careful to clarify that Iraq's Sunni Arabs are 'a heterogeneous, plural community, spread over provinces that – with the exception of Anbar – encompass several confessional and ethnic groups.' In the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq and ousting of Saddam Hussein's regime, however, Iraq's Sunni Arabs were often stigmatised as Baathists or terrorists. The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), the transitional government established by the US and its coalition partners, held significant responsibility for this development. Its de-Baathification policies banned members of Saddam Hussein's regime from government positions and led to the disbandment of the Iraqi army and security services. In so doing, the CPA 'essentially treated Sunni Arabs as representatives of an oppressive state structure in need of dismantling.' (International Crisis Group, 2013: 7).

Furthermore, Prime Minister al-Maliki himself has played a significant role in further entrenching the sectarian-based system and exacerbating the absence of a truly Iraqi national narrative. Selected as Prime Minister in 2006, he rapidly consolidated his grip on power by building the 'Malikiyoun' and placing it at the centre of a powerful network of influence and patronage.⁴ This 'shadow state' has allowed him to centralise and strengthen the power of the Office of the Prime Minister. This strategy became increasingly evident during his second term (2010-2014) when he strongly increased his unilateral approach and made a mockery of several institutions.⁵ Indeed, he failed to implement the 2010 Erbil Agreement which would have required him to relinquish his hold on key ministries. In so doing, he neglected the key demands of the Sunni Arabs and Kurds on power-sharing within the state institutions.⁶ Instead, al-Maliki filled positions with his loyalists, unilaterally augmented his own personal powers by taking the role of commander in chief of the armed forces, Defence Minister and Interior Minister, and openly sought to break any political opposition to his centralised leadership. To this day, Iraq's institutions are significantly politicised, corrupt and ineffective (International Crisis Group, 2014: 3-4).

Furthermore, despite his repeated attempts to position himself as a strong and unifying leader, Prime Minister al-Maliki has time and time again implemented a divide-and-rule strategy, which has significantly alienated the Kurds and increased the grievances and sense of marginalisation of Iraq's Sunni Arabs. His opponents have repeatedly condemned the seeming political trajectory of Iraq towards an autocratic single-sect regime. They have also taken issue with the serious abuses committed by the Iraqi army, 'including torture, indiscriminate roundups of Sunnis and demands of bribes to release detainees.' (Arango and Gordon, 2014). As Matthews notes, Prime Minister al-Maliki has justified excessive use of

⁴ Toby Dodge (2012, 2013: 245) contends that, during the period 2006 to 2008, Prime Minister al-Maliki built up a small, cohesive group of functionaries, the Malikiyoun, from his own party Da'wa and a patronage network of personal or family relations.

⁵ In the 2010 parliamentary elections, Prime Minister al-Maliki's State of Law coalition won 89 seats. The Iraqyya alliance of Iyad Allawi, for its part, gained 91 seats. Iraqyya, however, failed to form a government and it is with the support of Iran and the US that al-Maliki was able to secure a second term in office.

⁶ The Erbil Agreement was brokered by Massoud Barzani, the President of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. It aimed at limiting Prime Minister al-Maliki's powers and ability to increase his institutional leverage. In particular, the agreement stipulated that the Ministries of Defence and the Interior should not be run by politicians aligned with the Prime Minister. For more information, see Dodge, 2013: 247 and Stansfield, 2013: 271-272.

security forces, including arbitrary arrests and torture, on the grounds that he is fighting a war against terror. However, he has systematically failed to classify Shia violence as terror (Matthews, 2014). In sum, Prime Minister al-Maliki sacrificed urgent political reforms, failed to deliver much needed services throughout the country, widened feelings of disenfranchisement and discrimination and, ultimately, increased internal polarisation.

2.2 Violence within Iraq

Iraq is also beset by an issue of pervasive and escalating violence. According to the United Nations, Iraq's death toll in 2013 was the highest since 2008 with nearly 9,000 people killed (United Nations Iraq, 2014). Within the first six months of 2014, at least 5,576 civilians were killed and another 11,665 were wounded. Another 1.2 million people were internally displaced (United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, 2014). The pace of civilian deaths and internally displaced persons was rising prior to the elections and increased further still since the fall of Mosul. As such, the 2014 elections took place at a time of spiralling violence in the country, albeit with some areas more targeted than others.

Overall, since 2003, Iraqi politics has been shaped by the relative absence of national discourses and more by issues of destructive governance and cyclical violence. Neither the constitutional arrangements nor al-Maliki's ruling strategy have outlined a unifying vision for Iraq. As the International Crisis Group (2014: 3) contends, it is within this context that one can understand how 'large portions of Iraq [could] be conquered, thousands of security forces routed, the capital endangered and foreign intervention required due to an insurgency whose numbers pale in the face of one of the largest security apparatus in the world'.⁷ IS and the loose coalition of Sunni insurgents respectively capitalised on, or emerged from, the policy failures of the Iraqi government.⁸ In late 2013-early 2014, the government's brutal clearing of protest camps near Ramadi and its fierce attempts to regain

⁷ For more information on the profile of the various Sunni insurgent groups which have been fighting the Shia dominated regime of Prime Minister al-Maliki, see: Bengali, 2014 and Matthews, 2014.

⁸ The rapid fall of Mosul on 10 June 2014 exposed the weaknesses of the supposedly highly US-trained and equipped Iraqi military. It also brought to the fore issues of poor governance and extreme fatigue within the Iraqi army. The ferocity of the battles, the never-ending cycle of violence, and the lack of organisation, all reportedly played major roles in the mass withdrawal of the Iraqi army and local security forces from Mosul. For more information, see: Fahim and Al-Salhy, 2014 and Niqash, 2014.

control of Fallujah deepened Sunni Arabs' resentment against the regime. Their alienation and sense of neglect had created a seeming 'marriage of convenience' between IS and Fallujah insurgents against Baghdad's central authorities and its army (International Crisis Group, 2014: 150).

2.3 The Syrian conflict: polarising sectarian tensions, increasing violent conflicts within Iraq

Iraq's threefold-challenges of poor governance, sectarian tensions and violence are not just inter-related. They are also finding new roots and amplifying dynamics in the context of intensifying regional polarisation. The Syrian conflict, now in its third year, is often thought to pit the Alawite-dominated regime of President Bashar al-Assad, with its Shia Iran and Hezbollah allies, against a multi-form Sunni-led insurgency, more or less backed by Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the Gulf monarchies. These regional fractures have also had significant domestic consequences for Iraq, not least because they have further divided its own political scene.

On the one hand, Iraq's Sunni Arabs have accused the al-Maliki government of tacitly supporting, if not directly cooperating with, the Syrian regime and its two Shia-dominated allies; thus adding to their grievances against a regime they perceive as Shia sectarian, directed from Tehran and discriminating against Sunnis.

On the other hand, the Syrian conflict has had direct security repercussions within Iraq. Indeed, as much as the borders between Iran and Iraq may be used as a conduit for material aid shipping from Iran to Damascus, the frontiers between Syria and Iraq are proving particularly porous. IS is currently operating in a broad swathe of territory in eastern Syria and western Iraq; thus making a mockery of their territorial sovereignty. In a statement on its Twitter account, IS declared that it had taken Mosul as part of a plan 'to conquer the entire state and cleanse it from the apostates', vowing to press on to Baghdad and the holy Shia cities of Karbala and Najaf.⁹ Their territorial advances, behaviours and statements have

⁹ For more information on the political significance of the fall of Mosul, see: Murphy, 2014 and Sly and Ramadan, 2014.

escalated sectarian tensions within Iraq. On 11 June, one day after the fall of Mosul, the Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, the leader of the once powerful Mahdi Army militia, called for the creation of a new security force to protect Shia holy sites from IS and Sunni insurgency exactions (Morris and Sly, 2014). Other prominent Shia clerics have issued similar calls, often advocating unity among the Shias to join the government's armed struggle against IS. Similarly, the Iranian government, highly concerned with the ongoing developments, called for 'a strong and coordinated response' to the crisis and has stepped up its support to Baghdad (Dehghanpisheh, 2014).

3. Elections

The April 2014 parliamentary elections were the first elections to be organised by the Iraqi government since the end of the US military operations in mid-December 2011. Iraqis had, however, voted several times since the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime.¹⁰

Due to the precarious context of spiralling violence, the elections did not take place in the whole country and heavy security was put in place.¹¹ Despite this precarious situation, electoral officials reported that 62% of the 22 million eligible voters cast their ballot; thus showing a similar turnout as in the 2010 parliamentary elections. 276 political entities and 9,000 candidates contested the 328 seats in the Council of Representatives. Two points are noteworthy on the profile and agenda of the main candidates.

First, most of them focused less on national programmes than promises and benefits for their own individual communities. As such, 'campaigns were built largely on politicking,

¹⁰ In October 2005, Iraqis approved a Constitution in a national referendum and elected, in December 2005, a 275-member Council of Representatives (COR). The COR approved most cabinet ministers in May 2006, which marked the transition to Iraq's first constitutional government since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime. In January 2009 and April 2013, Iraq held elections for provincial councils in most governorates. Iraq also held a national legislative election in March 2010, this time choosing 325 legislators in an expanded COR. After nine months of deadlock, the COR approved a new government in December 2010.

¹¹ Voting did not take place in large areas of the Sunni majority province of Anbar due to fierce clashes between the Iraqi army and the Sunni insurgents. On 1 April 2014, Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) confirmed that, while balloting would take place in north-western Anbar in areas such as Rawa, Ana and in some parts of Ramadi, there would be no voting in the city of Fallujah, which comprises one third of the population of Anbar. In the areas where balloting took place, heavy security was in place, especially in Baghdad. In addition, a national holiday and a curfew were organised so as to enable the security forces to organise themselves.

rather than detailed manifestos' (Gulf States Newsletter, 2014). Prime Minister al-Maliki, for example, promoted Shia solidarity and strongly blamed his domestic opponents for Iraq's political stalemate and the Sunni-led multi-form insurgency for exacerbating violence within the country (Hasan, 2014). Tellingly, when casting his ballot, al-Maliki called upon the eligible voters 'to head in large numbers to the ballot boxes to send a message of deterrence and a slap to the face of terrorism.' Identity politics and sectarian differences thus took centre stage as the candidates focused more on mobilising their respective constituencies than bridging the gap between them (Al-Qarawee, 2014). Little collective sense of citizenship exists as 'political relations have increasingly been dominated by the idea of communal representation as opposed to citizens' representation' (Al-Qarawee, 2014).

Second, the Shia, Sunni and Kurdish groups were divided amongst themselves which highlights an important heterogeneity of ideology, interests and strategy. The Shias, for example, split in three: Prime Minister al-Maliki and his State of Law coalition; Ammar al-Hakim and his Citizen bloc; and the Sadrists who ran the Freeborns bloc. The Sunnis were similarly divided in three main blocs: the Mutahidoun Coalition for Reform led by the Speaker of Parliament, Osama al-Nujaifi, former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi's Wataniya list, and Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq's Arabiya Coalition. For the first time, the main Kurdish lists ran separately and included the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), the Gorran (Change) movement and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Thus, whilst sectarian differences are profound in Iraq, Shia, Sunni and Kurdish groups are also prone to factional divides and rivalries. As Visser (2014) notes, these divisions represent a major difference with the first post-Saddam Hussein parliamentary elections of December 2005. Then, most of the major Shia parties had joined the United Iraqi Alliance, an umbrella group. The Kurdish parties had come together under the Kurdistan Alliance whilst the Sunnis also had their own coalition. Importantly, their respective coalitions had already started to break up in the 2010 elections (Visser, 2014). As such, the April 2014 elections were very much in line with previous political dynamics.

4. Results

Prime Minister al-Maliki's State of Law coalition, which was widely seen as the front-runner in the polls, secured 92 of the 328 seats in the Council of Representatives. In general, the election results showed an outright Shia majority with a total of 181 seats. Whereas in 2010 the Sunni Arab-Shia secular coalition had won 101 seats, those two groups only secured 76 seats. The Kurdish parties, for their part, won 62 seats.¹²

These results have two main implications. First, al-Maliki's bloc gained almost three times as many seats as its closest competitors, the Sadrist movement, which gained only 34 seats. This indicates that al-Maliki, and his allies, managed to appeal to a large sway of voters. Second, al-Maliki fell short of the 165 seats required for a majority. He, therefore, needs to approach other groups in order to secure a broader majority coalition inside parliament to form a new government.

Since the proclamation of the parliamentary election results, the process of forming a new government has faced several challenges. First, the first Iraqi Parliament sessions of 1 and 8 July were unsuccessful and the new Speaker of Parliament and President were not elected until 15 July and 24 July respectively.¹³ In line with the informal power-sharing agreement in place since 2003, the new Speaker of Parliament, Salim al-Jabouri, is a Sunni and the President, Fouad Massoum, a Kurd. The future Prime Minister is expected to be a Shia. Second, Massoum must now identify the individual who will first attempt to form a new government coalition. Al-Maliki, who has been acting as the caretaker Prime Minister since the elections, insists on being named in light of his election results. On 23 July, Iraq's Federal Supreme Court also ruled that his State of Law bloc had the legal right to go first.

His determination to be conducted for a third term, however, is facing significant internal and external resistance. Indeed, whilst Iraq's Sunni Arabs and the Kurds have largely opposed his candidature from the onset, former Shia political allies are also calling on him to

¹² For more information on the election results, see: BBC News, 2014a and Sowell, 2014.

¹³ According to the Iraqi constitution, once the parliamentary election results are certified, the Speaker of Parliament must be named. After this, MPs have a maximum of two weeks to choose a President and two Vice-Presidents and then a month to select the Prime Minister.

step aside. These include domestic actors, including Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraq's most influential Shia cleric, Iranian General Ghasem al-Soleimani, a key actor in the organisation of the resistance to IS and a long-time supporter of al-Maliki, and US President Obama.¹⁴ Al-Maliki's critics tend to view him as too divisive to form an inclusive government which would win support from all communities. So far, however, and despite his increasing inability to establish common ground and reach compromises with old and new allies, al-Maliki is refusing to step aside.

5. Implications

As the election results came out, several analysts argued that a repeat of the 2010 political impasse, where it took nearly 10 months to assemble a new government, would only exacerbate Iraq's profound threats to its stability and security. As such, they recommended the rapid formation of a new 'effective and representative government' (Aldouri, 2014) which would review the Iraqi constitution, especially the rules regulating power-sharing agreements and the management of the oil and gas sector (Al-Qarawee, 2014). The rapid and crushing falls of Mosul and Tikrit, the continuous advances of IS within Iraqi territory and the deepening stalemate with al-Maliki, all make this development unlikely. Regardless of the results of the political brinkmanship currently at play, three key observations can be made in light of the developments that have been taking place since 10 June.

First, the spillover effects stemming from Syria's multi-level conflicts are continuing to polarise the Middle East region along Sunni versus Shia axes of competition. They are also continuing to penetrate Iraq and heighten tensions on an already profoundly divided political terrain. As such, several analysts, including Stansfield (2014a and 2014b) and Matthews (2014), suggest that power within Iraq, should the country maintain its integrity, is becoming less centralised and more regionalised: Kurds in the north, a largely Shia area in

¹⁴ Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani rarely involves himself in politics. He, however, issued a call to take up arms against Sunni insurgents on 13 June, shortly after the fall of Mosul and Tikrit. On 11 July, he also urged Iraqi leaders to refrain from using sectarian rhetoric (Salman and Mahmoud, 2014). More recently, on 1 August, his spokesman asked Iraqi politicians not to make themselves 'an obstacle in achieving national consensus' as the deadline looms for selecting the next Prime Minister.

the centre and Sunnis in the west. This is a new reality which policy-makers, both within and outside Iraq, will need to adjust to.

Second, and very much in line with the previous point, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Iraq's central government have entered a new stage in their relations since the Kurdish forces, known as the peshmerga, took full control of the northern oil city of Kirkuk on 12 June (BBC News, 2014b). Since January 2014, the two have been locked in bitter disputes over the constitutional oil-sharing agreements and the KRG's decision to export oil independently from Baghdad. The KRG, in an attempt to secure as much autonomy as possible from Iraq since 2003, has pursued a highly active energy policy (Stansfield, 2013: 226-227 and 273-274). It has also tremendously developed its institutions; acting in stately fashion or, as Denise Natali (2010) argues, as a 'quasi state' - a political entity with large internal sovereignty but no external sovereignty.

Within this context, the significance of the developments in Kirkuk are twofold. First, whilst Kirkuk has long been at the heart of a dispute between Baghdad and Erbil, there is now a distinct possibility that the KRG will seek to incorporate Kirkuk into its autonomous region.¹⁵ This would allow the KRG to significantly increase its access to oil resources. Already, the KRG has moved to link the Kirkuk oil field into the infrastructure that is sending Kurdish crude to Turkey (Stansfield, 2014b). Second, the KRG may attempt to use Kirkuk and its resistance to IS as a political bargaining chip in the oil negotiations with the central government. If, however, Iraq disintegrates or the KRG decides to opt for independence, it will have no choice but to stand as an energy exporter in its own right. Its oil-rich and largely under-exploited reserves are located in a relatively stable area which could increasingly attract external partners. In the short-term, however, tensions between the KRG and al-Maliki have widened, with the latter accusing the Kurds of allowing Erbil to be used as a base for IS and other Sunni insurgents (Rubin, 2014). Furthermore, Kurdish oil, if sold in the international market, is currently unlikely to bring enough revenues to pay for the KRG

¹⁵ Following the Gulf War, the Kurdish autonomous region to the north of Kirkuk gained *de facto* independence. After the 2003 US invasion, it became a region in a federal Iraq. Kirkuk was not part of this region and its status was left to a referendum that should have been carried out by the end of December 2007. Erbil and Baghdad have, however, been locked into a dispute over the implementation of Article 140 of the constitution which seeks the normalisation of Kirkuk's multi-ethnic population.

salaries, equip the security forces accordingly, and provide for the increasing numbers of refugees from Syria and internally displaced persons from Iraq.

The first two developments cast much shadow over the future political trajectory of Iraq as a state, however de-centralised it may become. The third observation points to the continuous human suffering within Iraq. Since 10 June, IS has been killing, abducting and menacing religious and ethnic minorities in and around Mosul (Human Rights Watch, 2014a). All Christians were ordered to convert to Islam, pay a tax or leave Mosul by 19 July; leading to the mass departure of historical Christian communities in the area. Over 500,000 Iraqis have reportedly fled Mosul with many others abandoning their home to escape the ever-expanding areas of conflict. Iraq's Yazidi minority are also suffering a similar plight (BBC News, 2014c). Tens of thousands of Iraqis are now moving to hastily built refugee camps, thus raising the spectre of a looming humanitarian crisis. In addition, Iraqi security forces have launched indiscriminate air strikes in an attempt to retake areas controlled by IS and other Sunni armed groups (Human Rights Watch, 2014b). Human rights abuses against civilians have thus been committed by all sides. For over 10 years, Iraqis have had to live under conditions of insecurity and never-ending threats of exposure to violence. Besides the potential inclination to search for tribal, ethnic and religious in-group cohesion and comfort, one also has to wonder what the effects and legacies of these conflicts may be for generations of Iraqi citizens.

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