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THE DEEPENING SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CRISES IN POST-SADDAM IRAQ

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ABSTRACT:

The US-led "Operation Iraqi Freedom" which began on 19 March 2003 to remove Saddam from power, changed the entire history of Iraq.The US invasionwas set to change the status quo of Iraq and it opened the Pandora's Box of socio-economic and political crises in Iraq. The major objectives claimed by the US while invading Iraq and after were: to remove Saddam from power, to unearth the Iraq's possession of Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD), and to establish democratic form of government. While it succeeded in removing the Ba'thist regime of Saddam, but at the same time it failed to find WMD in Iraq. Further, the US is also wary of claiming that Iraq has become a democratic state because today Iraq is far from real democracy. One of the major reasons behind this was that many of Iraqi intellectuals and secular middle class fled the country, who could have played a major role in forming an inclusive government.The case of Iraq in unfolding its political transition and regime change has been very different from other countries.

KEYWORDS: *Operation Iraqi Freedom , socio-economic and political crises.*

NEW IRAQ AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CRISES

The vision for the creation of post-Saddam 'New Iraq' was ironically "developed within the US administration"[1] which was based on the "concept of military victory" of US by removing Saddam and creating a space, which could be filled by "Western style democracy"[2] in the interest of US. For the Iraqis, the phrase 'New Iraq' used after the post-invasion period by the occupying power is nothing but a "cruel euphemism for death and destruction".[3] Whereas, for US and its leadership, the expression 'New Iraq' was based on the false belief of making Iraq as a first democratic state in the region, the US not only wanted to topple Saddam (once a close ally), but wanted it to provide secure oil and to create new business opportunities for the US multinational corporations.[4]

The Bush administration while 'erasing' Iraq, set about a "revisionist project" which involved the dismantling of Iraqi socio-economic infrastructure and then to open the door for their own companies in accessing the Iraqi natural resources. [5] The whole process of deconstruction as well as reconstruction of Iraq was a pre-planned move of the US as a part of military operation, in which major

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[1]Sultan Barakat, "Post-Saddam Iraq: Deconstructing a Regime, Reconstructing a Nation",*Third World Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 4/5, 2005, p. 576.

[2] For details see ibid., p. 577.

[3]See Otterman, Hil and Wilson, *Erasing Iraq: The Human costs of carnage,* (London: Pluto Press, 2010),p. 5.

[4] For further details see ibid., p. 5

[5] See Otterman, Hil and Wilson, *Erasing Iraq: The Human costs of carnage,* p. 10.

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US companies were awarded contracts to "complete showcase infrastructure projects".[6] However, the US plan to reconstruct the Iraqi state failed because "no thought was made to legitimacy and social reconstruction"[7] and thus the country soon was shattered into bits and pieces with only one uniting factor, which was their stance against the US-led occupation. The first governing authority of the US to work for the Iraq was General Jay Garner who failed miserably to deal with the war chaos thus had to be replaced within one month. In lieu, presidential envoy Bremer took the charge to govern Iraq and the first thing he did was the dissolution of Iraqi army, majority of whom belonged to the Iraqi Ba'th party, creating unemployment for many peoples form Ba'th as well as other parties. His other measure came in the form of 'de-Ba'thification' causing major hurdles for the Ba'thist who until then was part of ruling elites. In January 2008, the parliament abrogated the 'de-Ba'thification' law, but in its place came the, Justice and Accountability Law which raised many concerns among the Sunnis.[8]

Right after the occupation, Larry Diamond wrote about "What went wrong in Iraq", and he argued that, apart from occupying Iraq with a "relatively light force, hubris and ideology", the Coalition provisional Authority (CPA) should have deployed more military police who could work in the maintenance of peace and civil reconstruction; more soldiers should have been posted on Syrian and Iranian border who could stop the "flow of terrorists, Iranian intelligence agents, money and weapons"; US could have brought in more participation from the international community and countries in administrating the country in the context that they invaded Iraq without UN authorization; more troops should have been sent by the Bush administration when the insurgency and looting of the country was at its peak.[9] He further argued that the failure to intercept and tackle the militias and failure to provide security to the people led to the disorder and therefore, it was "insecurity [which] drove the political occupation into a physical and psychological bunker".[10] It was apparent that the US failed to come out with an effective political strategy for Iraqis after the occupation which was clearly reflected in the scenario which took place in Iraq. Iraq went through different phases; first on the edge of war, then under the assault of external forces, and finally through ruins because of the damage caused by the invasion.

Another major development after the occupation was the strengthening of religious ties by the rise of political Islam on one hand and the reinforcement of ethnic and communal loyalties on the other.[11] Both the trends proved harmful to the inclusiveness structure of the state which was already on the brink of collapse.

The destruction of the "Iraq's property, namely its museums, archaeological sites, and ancient libraries", turned out to be "the deepest hidden tragedies of the 2003 invasion."[12] The nation which is known as the 'cradle of civilizations' was destroyed beyond imagination.Because of the invasion, within two years, the Iraqi state moved from a rogue, problematic state to a collapsed state.[13]Another major policy that Bremer formulated was his "plans for privatization of Iraq's economy"[14] insisting that "everybody knows we cannot wait until there is an elected government here to start economic reform"[15] and thus invited the western companies to invest and make profits in Iraq.US did succeed in removing Saddam from power, but this was overshadowed by its inadequate planning in post-war (re)construction and its failure to fill up the power vacuum created to build a democratic state. The

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[6]See Barakat, "Post-Saddam Iraq: Deconstructing a Regime, Reconstructing a Nation", p. 577.

[7]See Otterman, Hil and Wilson, *Erasing Iraq: The Human costs of carnage,* p. 10.

[8]See International Crisis Group, "Make or Break: Iraq's Sunnis and the State", *Middle East Report,* no. 144, 2013.

[9]See Larry Diamond, "What went wrong in Iraq", *Foreign Affairs*, Sept. – Oct., vol. 83, no. 5, 2004.

[10]For further details see ibid.

[11]See Ofra Bengio, "Iraq— From Failed Nation-State to Binational State?",in Asher Susser (eds.)*Challenges to the Cohesion of the Arab State*, (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center, 2008), pp. 69-70.

[12] SeeOtterman, Hil and Wilson, *Erasing Iraq: The Human costs of carnage,*pp. 183-84.

[13] For details see Dodge, "Iraqi Transitions: From Regime Change to State Collapse".

[14] See Rick Fawn, "The Iraq War: Unfolding and Unfinished", in Fawn and Hinnebusch (eds.)*The Iraq war: Causes and Consequences,*(New Delhi: Viva Books Private Limited, 2007), p. 9

[15] For details see ibid., p. 9.

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Iraqi people also took to street and protest the government over its poor daily service like electricity supply, corruption, poor economic development and many other issues.[16]The events of violence and looting that followed weeks after Saddam's removal failed to mark the success of removal of Saddam from power.

CREATION OF 'SECURITY VACUUM'

The first and most dangerous outcome after the removal of Saddam from power was the security vacuum. In the absence of proper regime or ruler to govern over state, the country remained with chaos and disorder from March 2003 up to early 2007. Without adequate forces to maintain law and order, "Iraq descended into a Hobbesian state of nature, a war of all against all."[17] From kidnapping to revenge killings, rampant looting and burglary, the country went through a most disastrous phase with sectarian and ethnic cards being used by the outsiders as well as their native leaders to promote and fulfill their interests. The absence of leader and security personnel to look after the country led to the killings of people from one sect\ethnic to others pushing the country to the brink of ethnic and sectarian cleansing.

The security vacuum went a long way to undermine the US supremacy as it helped "turn criminal violence and looting into an organized and politically motivated insurgency."[18] Different insurgents groups and parties came out with their own agenda to strike against each other, be it remnants of Ba'th party or Shia and Sunni radicals. The Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), a Shiite militant group, operating form Iran since the 1980s, re-entered Iraq immediately after the US occupation.[19] Likewise, Sunni affiliated groups like al-Qaeda also entered Iraq to wage war against the US and to attack their counterpart Shiites. The matter of lawlessness of the state was made worse by the Coalition force because of their inability and lack of interest to use their security for the general population or cultural institutions.[20] It was argued by some that the chaos that followed after the invasion appeared "almost deliberate"[21] action on the part of coalition force because, "the violence in Iraq is not solely an issue of security, but also one of governance and credibility."[22]

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF SHIITES

The year 2003 was a landmark for the political empowerment of Shiites and other minority political forces like Kurds, filling the central arena of politics and moving out from the suppression of Sunni-led Saddam regime. Most Shiites appeared to welcome the fall of Ba'thist regime which ruled Iraq for many decades and thus they took the US invasion in a positive way. The Shiites, thus, saw the occupation force and downfall of the Saddam regime as an opportunity to assert their power after remaining marginalized under the Saddam's regime for more than three decades. In other words, Shiites as well as Kurds saw the ousting of Saddam as a "form of liberation"; in contrast, Sunnis saw it as an "attack on their power, resources and identity".[23]There were also many, who were against external power coming to their country and keeping them under the occupation. In the aftermath of the invasion,

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[16] SeeAdeed Dawisha, "Post Occupation Iraq: The Brittleness of Political Institutions", *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*, Middle East Program Occasional Paper Series, p. 6 [Online: web] Accessed on 05 December 2014, URL:
http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Post%20Occupation%20Iraq%20FINAL.pdfand International Crisis Group, "Deja Vu All Over Again? Iraq's Escalating Political Crisis", *Middle East Report*, No: 126, 2012.

[17] See Kenneth M. Pollack, "The Fall and Rise and Fall of Iraq", *Middle East Memo*, no. 29, 2013, p. 3.

[18] Toby Dodge, "War and Resistance in Iraq: From regime change to collapsed state" in Rick Fawn and Raymond Hinnebusch(eds.)*The Iraq War: Causes and Consequences,* (New Delhi:Viva Books Private Limited, 2007),p. 214.

[19] See Pollack, "The Fall and Rise and Fall of Iraq", p. 3.

[20] See James Defronzo, *The Iraq War: Origins and Consequences,* (Indiana University: Westview Press, 2010),p. 159.

[21]Quoted in Defronzo, *The Iraq War: Origins and Consequences*, p. 159.

[22]See Barakat, "Post-Saddam Iraq: Deconstructing a Regime, Reconstructing a Nation", p. 579.

[23]See Mahmoud Monshipouri, "Occupation, Sectarianism, and Identity Politics in Iraq"in *Muslims in Global Politics: Identities, Interests and Human Rights*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

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the US was hopeful that the Shiites would rally to support the US because of the oppression that they had suffered under Saddam's regime, but Shiite, on the other hand, showed extreme caution in its support to the occupation force.[24] The internal divisions among the Shiite groups hindered the unity in Iraqi Shiites. There were leaders and political organizations who wanted to have strong ties with the US, while others wanted to institutionalize an Iranian form of government based on clergy. In contrast to secular Shiite leaders like Ahmed Chalabi and Ayad Allawi, there were Iranian-backed organization like Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and Dawa Party, which were against Saddam as well as coalition force.

The regime change in 2003 provided Shiites the platform to shed its political minority status and to form the government in the later years with their demographic dynamics. The position and role of the Shiite community has emerged as a critical factor in the unfolding of events in post-Saddam Iraq.

ALIENATION OF SUNNIS AND RISE OF INSURGENCY

With the demise of the Ba'th party, not only the Sunnis were outlawed with their leadership, but it totally reshuffled their role in the new Iraqi state and many of them were not ready to accept the new reality of being disassociated them from the ruling regime. The sudden deprivation of power, party, role, and income led them to make a rearrangement of their existence in Iraqi community. The process required the Sunnis to go through "recognition and the often painful acceptance of the new imposed reality"[25] and it created a sense of alienation among the Sunnis leading them to embrace arms and insurgency.Sunnis under Saddam had enjoyed a relatively well status and privileges as compared to Shiites who were very often suppressed by the Ba'th regime. In a way, the predicament of Sunnis begun in 2003 and the problem remains even today as no single government after 2003 had succeeded in forming an inclusive state.

In stark contrast to Shiites, Sunnis started feeling more insecure and vulnerable because, "having lost the status of political dominance, they were left with the status of persecuted minority, worried about retributions and revenge."[26]In this context of alienation, "they embraced the Salafists, waged a guerrilla campaign to try to evict the Americans and formed militias to battle the Shi'a."[27]

Not long after the occupation by the US, there was insurgency from Sunnis, especially in those areas where there was strong Sunni foothold like Fallujah, where demonstrations were held to express their resentment against the US and the coalition force. The insurgents included Ba'thist sympathizers of Saddam, foreign Islamist fighters like members of al Qaeda, Sunni extremists and there were also few others who lacked political-ideological motivations.[28]On the other hand, it has been also asserted that it was the Sunni unrest which coupled with the US withdrawal in 2011 that created a "political space" for violent Sunni insurgency to revive which had been weakened by the US from 2003-2011.[29] The Sunni insurgency was grounded in both communal as well as ideological considerations: Salafi jihadists found a common ground with ex-Ba'thist and other nationalist and Islamist groups in fighting against both foreign occupation and the new authorities.[30] One of the strong insurgents groups formed in April 2013 was the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (commonly known by the acronym ISIS) was an al-Qaeda

[24] WA Terrill, "Nationalism, Sectarianism, and the Future of the U.S. Presence in Post-Saddam Iraq", *Strategic Studies Institute*, 2003,p. 13, [Online: web] Accessed on 28 December 2014, URL: http://www.iwar.org.uk/news-archive/iraq/postsadm.pdfp. 19.

[25] Ronen Zeidel, "A harsh readjustment: the Sunnis and the political process in contemporary Iraq", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, March, vol. 12, no. 1, 2008, p. 40.

[26] For further details see ibid., p. 45.

[27] For further details see Pollack, "The Fall and Rise and Fall of Iraq", p. 4.

[28]Michael Eisenstadt and Jeffrey White, "Assessing Iraq's Sunni Arab insurgency".*The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Policy Focus: 50, 2005.

[29] See Kenneth Katzman, "Iraq: Politics, Governance, and Human Rights", *CRS Report for Congress*, Order no: RS21968, 2012.

[30]See harith Hasan Al-Qarawee, "Iraq's sectarian crisis: A legacy of Exclusion", *Carnegie Middle East Centre*, 23 April,p. 11.

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breakaway faction. The group represented itself as a "transitional movement" which does not recognise borders and it seeks to establish an Islamist Sunni state.[31]

REVIVAL OF ETHNO-NATIONALISM AMONG KURDS:

The reaction or response of the Iraqi people and groups to the occupation varied as some welcomed the move, while many rejected it. As stated earlier, the Kurds in the North welcomed the coalition force and supported it. The Kurds were more concerned about the autonomy that they enjoyed from 1992 until 2003 and were determined to maintain their status quo. The Kurds experienced less violence among the three major groups and were also able to develop comparatively better as they were protected by the coalition force. During the invasion period, Kurds run their autonomous status as a free government by establishing their own army and flag and also signed oil deal with international oil companies by their own.

With the defeat of Iraq in 1999 war, a no fly zone was created in Kurdish area and it led to the creation of Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). With the creation of Kurdistan until the downfall of Saddam in 2003, "an entire Kurdish generation was raised under a Kurdish-run administration and learned to speak only Kurdish, not Arabic."[32] In the post-Saddam Iraq, insurgency has made Iraq into a "dangerous place" but the Kurds in the north of Iraq "served as a relatively peaceful haven" and "Kurdish nationalism as the staunchest supporter of the United States".[33] Therefore, during the constitution making, US have helped Kurds in getting "an enormous power over their future in Iraq."[34]

CONCLUSION:

More than 13 years after the fall of Saddam's regime and the ostensible attempt by the US in establishing democracy in Iraq, the country's socio-economic and political crises has reached a new height, the tensions and violence between the three major communities continue to threaten the stability of Iraq and its' fragile democracy. The democratically elected representatives of the country had failed to build an inclusive system and Iraq failed to become what US tried to make as "model of democracy in the West Asian region." We can say that Iraq today remains divided and there is need for great changes in the country's socio-economic and political status quo, and in fact a major review of the current political system which is based on identity politics.

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[31] For further details see Al-Qarawee, "Iraq's sectarian crisis: A legacy of Exclusion", p. 11.

[32]Michael M. Gunter, "The Contemporary Roots of Kurdish Nationalism in Iraq", *Kufa Review*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2013, p. 42

[33]Ibid., p. 43.

[34]For further details see ibid., p. 43.

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