

What holds Iraq Together?

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Iraq is a state that was created by including two different major nations and two different major Arab ethnic religious groups plus several smaller ones. The Iraqi state was created as a result of the national interests of the colonial and regional powers, not because of the free union between the different national and ethnic groups. This is especially true with regard to the Kurds, who were pushed into Iraq without any respect for their national interest.

Annexing the southern part of Kurdistan into Iraq was an important step demanded by the "denial concept" that was created by the Lausanne treaty in June 1923. In other words, Kurdish freedom and the creation of their own independent state were forbidden after the Lausanne treaty. Instead, the denial policy toward the Kurdish freedom demand took place. Western powers have supported this denial policy and the occupying countries' national interests since that time.

In brief, the denial concept, as it has paralyzed the dream for Kurdish freedom, is a regional and international plot against the Kurdistan people that began in the early 20th century. Besides other non-democratic big powers, western countries, especially the UK, contributed to keep this anti-Kurdish concept strong until our present day.

The Americans with their allies toppled the dictator Saddam Hussein, and claimed a "democratization" program for the country. They agreed not to touch the sovereignty of the country and the status quo of the situation as regards the Kurdish freedom demand. They would preserve state integrity and allow a sort of a "federal system" instead of partition. They are about to repeat the same mistake as the British did in the early 1920's. In other words the denial concept is still in effect, even after much change in international politics and minority rights of self-determination, and despite the last 80 years of ongoing Arab-Kurd conflict as escalated to ethnic cleansing and genocide against the Kurds. Another international imposition, especially on the Kurds, is a fact, especially considering that the Kurdish population's preference for partition from Iraq according to an informal referendum of January 2005.

The constitutional agreement among Iraqi group leaders that "many lack support or do not have stable support from their ethnic mass," includes contradiction, uncertainty and ambiguity. Ratification of the permanent constitution was questionable. The domination of conservatism and Islamic ideas in the agreement makes state neutrality toward different ethnic groups impossible and undermines individual freedom.

The union of the ethnic groups is not voluntary. Voluntary participation and common aspirations, the foundation of any free union, does not exist in Iraq. The whole democratization process is surrounded by many puzzles and raise serious questions. In short, there are many black holes in the "democratization" process and the Americans are still refusing to face the reality of the ethnic situation in Iraq.

Iraq's current situation (daily violence, terror attacks, sectarian and ethnic killings) shows the Iraqi ethnic division in a very brutal manner. This and the ongoing daily killing of ordinary innocent people due to their ethnic origins give rise to serious questions about Iraq's existence as a unified state. In the past Iraq was held together by force, and the future Iraq seems to have the same destiny, if the aim is to keep integrity unharmed.

It is worth mentioning, that there are several analysts and experts who advise the partition of Iraq as the only realistic solution to the Iraqi ethnic situation. The problem is that they are, ironically, powerless in their proposal due to the lack of ground support by the Iraqi ethnic leaders and the big powers involved in the Iraqi issue. The partition of Iraq would probably solve the old ethnic conflicts of Iraq, and seriously challenge the denial concept regarding Kurdish regional freedom. This is not in the interest of the occupier regional states and the big powers in the name of regional stability (regional stability has hardly been a fact).

Nevertheless, the cause and reasons which keep Iraq's intact are old ones and paradoxically still in control as they are preserved by the regional countries, big powers, Kurdish leaders and Arabs.

The regional countries occupying Kurdistan do anything in their power to prevent any form of Kurdish freedom, as it would (in one way or another) affect the internal Kurdish issue and probably threatening their integrity. In other words, Kurdish freedom is against their national interests; thus, their national interests are based upon the denial concept.

Big powers and western "democratic" countries have supported this situation, used the Kurds for their interests, betrayed the Kurds several times, accepted the oppression of the Kurds, and closed their eyes even in case of ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Regional occupier countries (Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria), especially Turkey and Iran since the partition of Kurdistan, have followed containment, utilization, and deterrence politics concerning Kurdish freedom movements. They had threatened and still threaten Kurds with invasion should they gain independence. The regional states have been successful in this policy. Big powers do what is in the regional countries' national interest in relation to the Kurdish question. The Kurdish movement generally falls into these utilization and deterrence policy traps. In the south and east of Kurdistan major Kurdish political parties dropped the demand for independence and followed a strategy that demands a sort of autonomy since the WWII. However, this strategic change in Kurdish political demand did not change the occupiers' assimilation and oppression policies. Not only that, the regional states tried to cleanse out the Kurds as a different national community, as we have witnessed for instance in the form of Arabization, ethnic cleansing, and Anfal genocide in Iraq.

As regards Iraq, Kurdish leaders followed this autonomy strategy without any success. Since adopting this autonomy demand and accepting the occupier's sovereignty over Kurdistan, they created a political culture which is based on: a false brotherhood with an Arab majority; argumentation against Kurdish independence; dependency; adjustment to the oppressor's politics; attempts to weaken the elements of secession; attempts to minimize the ethnic difference, pro Arab steps; and so on. Kurdish parties did what the occupier states wanted, thus they begun to

repeat the occupiers' deterrence melody. All of this weakened Kurdish nationalism as well Kurdish individual national identity.

Kurdish leaders, in their fight for freedom, have used a classic and sometimes irrational fight without a clear strategy. They cooperated with occupier countries against other occupier states and sometimes against other Kurdish movements too. So, yes, they betrayed the Kurdish nation by fighting each other and several times by cooperating with the occupiers against other Kurdish freedom movements. Kurds still are suffering under their non-democratic one party rule, corruption, and division. In general they are a failure.

Now even the Kurdish issue is a just case in the demand for self-determination, and in spite of the fact that 98 percent of Kurdish population wishes for independence, Kurdish leaders still insist on Iraq's integrity and non-partition politic. Besides their non-partition typical tradition, they have promised USA and its allies, the regional countries, and the Arab majority of Iraq that they will not secede. In other word they are still following the autonomy strategy with all its false and negative steps as mentioned before. They made agreements on this basis, and now it is hardly possible for them to run away from those political agreements. Nevertheless, they do not believe in partition as usual. Even in the constitutional agreement with the Arabs they accepted an agreement that did not include the right of self-determination.

The political changes that have occurred since 1991 (and especially after Saddam's fall) have made those failed leaders powerful again. Now in addition to the military control and the political power over the divided Kurdistan, the leaders have big personal economic interests in the new political situation and take no step that might harm their personal interests unless the Americans give them the green light.

Arabs in Iraq, consisting of a Shiite majority and a Sunni minority, had been in conflict since the death of the Muslim prophet Mohammed. Under the Ottomans the Sunnis were powerful, and they oppressed the Shiites. This tradition continued under British rule and afterwards until the withdrawal of the Baath regime in April 2003. Arab nationalism, which is strong among Sunnis and have its affect on Shiites too, made their leaders believe in Arab unity as well in Iraqi integrity. The reality is that there is hardly Arab unity in Iraq. The current sectarian and ethnic mass killings show a serious gap between Sunnis and Shiites. They have different political interests and aspirations. However, they will not face the reality of their ethnic situation; they continue to believe in Iraq's integrity and in Arab unity. Thus, they refuse partition ideas.

The ethnic group leaders' non-partition policy makes partition very complicated, even though the country's unity is perhaps no longer there, and despite the fact that partition could possibly enable durable stability and peace among the ethnic groups. The three major groups are caught by their past political beliefs in different ways. The most ironic one is the Kurdish leader's insistence on a non-partition strategy, even though this is not the desire of Kurdish people, and even though the Kurds will not remain in Iraq in the long run.

The partition of old Yugoslavia did cause ethnic wars in the short run, but now peace is the reality in the region. Secessions of several nations from Russia did not bring disaster to the region; on the contrary, the new states live peacefully as new neighbors.

The partition of Iraq is the relevant solution for the political crises; three new states are not a disaster, but a realistic solution for old bloody ethnic conflicts. This in particular would be a step in the right direction toward the solution of the Kurdish

question. In other words, the century-old denial concept must be dissolved forever and replaced by acceptance and openness.